

Essential Innovation

PRODUCTS THAT CHANGED JAZZ
BASS FOREVER

by Ed Friedland

While the essence of jazz bass playing is the creative voice the individual player expresses through the instrument, equipment does play a vital role. In many cases, the development of bass technology was a response to new musical demands on players; in other cases, it was the cause of these demands. Each of the following products was chosen for its impact on acoustic and electric jazz bassists.

LAYING IT DOWN, PICKING IT UP

In 1946, Everett Hull developed the first pickup for upright bass, the Amplified Peg. Consisting of a microphone mounted inside the bass as part of the endpin, the “Ampeg” gave bassists a fighting chance on a loud bandstand. Finally freed from the “felt but not heard” syndrome, many musical developments in bass playing soon followed.

INVENTING ELECTRICITY

While the effect of the **Fender** bass on pop music is evident, its roots in jazz go all the way back to its inception in 1951. Bandleader Lionel Hampton was the first jazz artist to see the potential of the Fender Precision, acquiring one for his bassist Roy Johnson, who was later replaced by Monk Montgomery. As an energetic showman, Hamp undoubtedly appreciated the drive and punch of the electric bass in the rhythm



STEVEN PARKER

▲ Stanley Clarke and his trusty Alembic

GIG BAG

New DVD and CD Sets from JodyJazz
by Evan Haga

The first thought that comes to mind when watching *In the Funk Zone With George Garzone*, a new two-DVD set from saxophone and clarinet mouthpiece manufacturer JodyJazz, Inc., is how far jazz instructional videos have come. No community college soundstage and crackling audio here: This lesson and performance program—over two and a half hours total running time—was beautifully shot (in HD) and recorded at one of the best-sounding studios in New York, Systems Two.

That audiophile-worthy presentation and a series of expertly funky performances featuring saxophonist Garzone with a band you'd be lucky to catch in a club—guitarist Mike Stern, bassist John Patitucci, keyboardist Rollins Ross and drummer Kenwood Dennard, plus, on one burning shuffle, JodyJazz's Jody Espina—push disc one beyond instruction: Any jazz person, even a non-musician, could appreciate it. But Garzone's lessons, also on the first disc, are the main attraction, and deservedly so. Burrowing into the basics, Garzone explains the pocket and how to find it before beginning his dissertation on using the minor pentatonic scale in groove-based contexts. He progresses his discussion gradually and logically, through 101 exercises, arpeggios, instruction on time and how to push tastefully against the tonal center, and more. Practical application is essential to the saxophonist; he seems determined to demonstrate how what sound like clinical exercises at first

become real music through rhythmic variation and interplay, and throughout there are opportunities to play along with Ross' Rhodes accompaniment and trade phrases with Garzone. The second disc includes extensive E-book PDFs for C, B-flat, E-flat and bass clef instruments; band interviews; and video play-alongs that allow users to solo for the duration of the track or trade choruses with Garzone and Stern.

Such musical conversation is the focus of *Tradin' With the Greats*, two double-CD sets also from JodyJazz. Like *Funk Zone*, both editions, George Garzone and Kenny Werner, were recorded at Systems Two and feature critic-approved recording artists you might not expect to cut play-alongs, performing with some of their go-to personnel. Garzone is joined by pianist Mulgrew Miller, bassist John Lockwood and drummer Bob Gullotti; Werner's band includes guitarist Chris Crocco, bassist Johannes Weidenmueller and drummer Ross Pederson. Each set offers a solid cross section of standards and two or three original tunes, and each is cleverly divided: Disc one finds the players in trading mode, playing dynamically and conversationally against the air, like an actor in front of a green screen; disc two contains standard play-along comping. Lead sheets for the whole band are included via PDFs on disc two (no melodies for the standards, though), so get ready to sit in. Or don't: These sound good enough for car listening.

www.jodyjazz.com



section, and it traveled much easier than the doghouse. In 1960, Fender introduced the Jazz Bass, and the name clearly signals the intended market. The slimmer neck, and dual pickups gave the Jazz a more articulate voice—a quality that particularly shone through in the hands of Jaco Pastorius.

STRING THEORIES

One of the biggest changes for upright bassists was the switch from gut to steel strings. Gut's lower tension allowed for higher action and more acoustic volume, a prime concern in the days before amplification. The thump, fast decay and organic richness of gut are characterized by the tone of Paul Chambers. Steel strings produce more growl and sustain, allow for lower action to facilitate playing in thumb position, and have a smoother bowed tone—exemplified by the sound of players like Ron Carter and Eddie Gomez. While not the first brand of steel string available, **Thomastik** Spirocores are undoubtedly the most used string in jazz, having dominated the market since the 1960s. Their spiral steel core responds well to pizzicato technique, producing a big fundamental and plenty of sustain.

Up until the early 1960s, all electric bass strings were of the flatwound variety. The dark and somewhat thumpy tone provided solid accompaniment, but as bassists began to step into the foreground, they needed a string that could carve its own path through the mix. Players like Stanley Clarke, Jaco Pastorius and Larry Graham each contributed greatly to the musical development of the bass, and roundwound strings played a significant part in their tonal evolution. The **Rotosound** RS66 Swing Bass Strings were the first string of their kind, and bass tone has never been the same since.

MINI-BRUTE FORCE

Decades ago, upright bassists had to make due with amps designed for electric bass or even guitar. But after consulting with the legendary Ray Brown, the folks at **Polytone** introduced the Mini-brute line of solid-state amps in 1968. Small and powerful with a focused tone, the Polytone became the new standard for upright bass amplification.

FUSION FAVORITE

While the **Alembic** company's origins are intertwined with the halcyon days of the San Francisco rock scene, when emerging bass superstar Stanley Clarke started playing one of their basses, the instrument gained a reputation as the ultimate ax for jazz-rock fusion. Alembic's sophisticated electronics and artistic woodcraft laid the groundwork for hundreds of custom builders that followed. **JT**

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