

Oteil Burbridge 06-05-07

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- How did you come by your first bass, what was it, and who/what made you want it?

It was a Guild B-302. I saw it in a Bee Gees video! It actually was a really good bass in retrospect. I had been playing on this copy of a Hofner and it was so difficult to play. I needed something better if my technique was going to progress. Later I got a Fender Jazz for my 17th birthday and that was what I consider my first bass cause I knew more about basses by then.

- Were there any particular teachers that really helped fan that early flame?

My brother is really the only one. I didn't have any teachers on the bass. Kofi taught me so much about harmony though and that was a really important, formative time for me. I'll always be so grateful to Kofi for helping me to understand higher harmony.

- When did you first know for sure you wanted to be a musician, and what was your first full time gig? The one you actually paid, or tried to pay, those bills with? After I saw Weather Report at Constitution Hall in Washington D.C. that did it. It was the band with Jaco, Erskine, and Robert Thomas Jr. I still dream of getting a chance to be the bassist in that same line up! My first gig was with a top 40 cover band in Virginia Beach called The Squares. What a great band that was. Billy Drummond was the drummer in that band. He's now a very well known jazz drummer in New York.

- You are originally from the DC area, how did you wind up in Georgia?

It was actually through some guys that helped me get the Virginia Beach gig. The south seemed like a foreign country to me but I really needed a gig so I just went for it. That's the first time I really starved. Whew, that was tough. That's how I first met Jeff Sipe and Jimmy Herring. Little did I know what that would lead to.

- How did you originally connect with Col. Bruce Hampton and The Aquarium Rescue Unit?

On top of starving, I wasn't really having any fun playing. I guess music was my only religion at that point but it wasn't strong enough to heal me. Jeff Sipe suggested that I meet this guy Col. Bruce because that was where all the frustrated musicians went to get their joy back. I had no idea what a crazy man he was. Even though I was warned there's really know way to be prepared for the reality! It was EXACTLY what I needed!

- What was the writing process like with such a large, diverse, group of exceptional players?

We did mostly covers or old tunes of Bruce's but Matt Mundy and I wrote a few new things for the band. I really just tried

to make sure that The Col. could hear a basic I-IV-V through the chord movements. It was difficult but fun. As long as he could hear a simple melody through the chord changes he was fine. we could really do anything style wise that we wanted. It could be Latin, Funk, Blues, whatever. We used to do old Delta blues tunes bluegrass style and old bluegrass tunes in a funk style. It was wide open.

- So much has changed since that first H.O.R.D.E. tour as far as the visibility of the new jazz and jam scenes, do you think broadcast radio will ever catch up to the large fan base for the live shows and CDs?

No. Thank God for satellite radio.

- The bonus video for The Family Secret has some great footage of the fun had during the recording sessions for the album. Since you still work with most of that band, what can you tell us about what the other Peacemakers are up to when you are off working with the Allman Brothers?

They all freelance with a number of different groups in Birmingham, Atlanta, and probably Nashville too. They also have a trio that they do gigs with that's basically the Peacemakers without me. I went to see it the other night and was totally blown away. All these guys are going to be famous one day.

- I know there are several other Paul Henson fans at badassbassplayers so I have to ask, what is he up to these days, and what has it been like taking over the lead vocal role in The Peacemakers?

I'd really rather not talk about that other than to say that it has been a big fear of mine to overcome. I was always too scared to sing lead because I used to compare my vocal skills to people like Stevie Wonder or Aretha Franklin instead of Mick Jagger or Bob Dylan. Now I realize that I'm somewhere in the middle. Hey I still wish that I was Raoul Midon but you can't have everything. I'm getting better at it all the time and it's really fun. I didn't want to miss out on playing the bass but I didn't count on the new things that I would get enjoyment out of. It's been really fun.

- 1999's Stranger's Hand • album with Howard Levy, Jerry Goodman, and Steve Smith, was an amazing mix of musical voices. Any other multiple collaboration projects planned?

I'm really trying hard to keep the extra curricular stuff to a minimum. I did do one CD with this great guitarist named Scott Sawyer. It's called "Go There". My brother Kofi played on it and a great drummer named Kenny Soule. These guys are really amazing. I usually don't have or make time for other projects but this one was so cool I had to do it. It turned out really great too. That CD is out now so GO GET IT.

- Speaking of your many side projects, like Frogwings and Surrender To The Air, you've also done some work with T. Lavitz of the Dixie Dregs (for you readers, if you can find a copy of Gossip •, grab it! They are quite scarce). How did that come about?

Actually that was so long ago I don't really remember! It was probably through Jimmy Herring I guess!

- Are there any set routines you go through to get ready for a gig/session, or do you prepare differently for each role?

Not really. I just try to not eat too much before a gig and I usually have a glass of wine for the nerves. I really hate the studio and try to avoid it as much as possible. The Go There sessions was the first time I really had lots of fun in the studio.

- Do you bring anything to a recording session beyond basses?

Not really.

- What is your current main bass, and is there an all time favorite that you just have to have around?

It depends on what the situation is. My favorite with the Allman Bros. is my '63 P-Bass. I also have a super sweet '64 Jazz bass that I love to use with them. With my band I use mostly my Fodera or my Modulus six strings.

- Continuing with the obligatory gear questions, what is your current live rig?

I have an Epifani bass rig for each band. With the Allman Brothers I use a 600 watt head pushing three 4x10 cabinets. With the Peacemakers I have an 1800 watt head pushing a 2x10 and a single 15. I also use an envelope filter by MXR and a Boss OC-2 Octave divider.

- The Allman Brothers keep you on the road a large part of the year, what do you do to keep from going stir crazy with all that time on the tour bus?

I read a ton and we watch tons of DVD's. Especially stand up comedy, documentaries, etc. Warren and Derek are amazing about finding historical footage of musicians that most people don't really know or care about.

- Along those same lines, what's your favorite road food/local delicacy? Anything you just can't wait to tour near again?

I love Indian and Thai food. It doesn't really matter where. Some of the best Indian food I ever had was in Nebraska! Obviously Manhattan is the best all around for eating though. If you're in Alabama there's gas stations out in the country that have the best fried chicken and fried fish on earth. Obviously if you're in Louisiana you're gonna get the best cajun food.

- From guilty food to guilty music, anything you are embarrassed to have in your collection/iPod?

I'm not embarrassed of anything I like. I don't give a shit what people think about me! I love to watch the Golden Girls! I have for years. Sofia kills me! I love disco. It was great for the bass guitar. Chic was amazing. Bernard Edwards is the shit I don't care what anybody thinks.

- With all the touring you've done over the years, what's been your favorite venue to play in? What place has that perfect combo of size/sound/vibe?

I love small theaters in general. I don't really have a favorite. Everybody always talks about Red Rocks but I'd rather see a show there than play one. I always have a hard time breathing and its cold most of the time. Its a magical place but as far as work goes.....

- With all the Instant Live • technology out there, any plans to release some Peacemakers shows on CD or for download?

I would love to do that. no one seems to be really interested in doing that right now though. When we're bigger I guess all that will come.

A Bad Ass thank you to Oteil Burbridge and also to member Steven T. Winston "Bigfatbass" for compiling the questions. For the latest on Oteil, please visit Oteil Burbridge