

Bob Babbitt 04-27-07

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- When I think Bob Babbitt • I immediately think: sunburst Fender P bass with rosewood fingerboard, LaBella flats and a sponge mute under the strings. What's your main gig/session bass these days?

I have been using a custom made Bass that a bass player friend of mine from Detroit made for me. His name is Ed Toad • Goetz. I call it the Toad Killer • Bass! The woods are from Africa and South America, all of the parts are gold. It is a passive bass, has the combo precision and jazz pickups, separate volume control for each pickup, tone control, a creative new muting system, and at the present time with Elixir strings it sounds awesome! I have been using it in the studios and live on the Funk Brother shows. Also used it on new live DVD Funk Brothers Live in Orlando • Also, for some projects in the studio I have used my Fender 66/67 Precision with the Labella Flat Wounds (medium gauge with the homemade sponge mute under the strings). This is the same Bass that I used when I recorded at Motown and on the Standing in the Shadows of Motown • film...recently I used it on the new Joe Cocker CD. It seems that there are more and more producers gravitating to the roots, traditional Fender bass sound.

- You began your musical training in classical music on URB. I see that you did some URB work in 2006. How much URB sessions do you typically do a year? Any live URB gigs/

The upright bass was my first love of the music world! The early years I studied classical music and benefited greatly from learning how to read. Because of being extremely busy playing the Electric Bass at times the upright bass would sit in a corner and I would not touch it for months at a time. You need to play the upright everyday, even if for only 15/20 minutes. About 5/6 years ago I started playing the upright on sessions and did a couple of live club gigs. Without a doubt I renewed my love affair with my Upright Bass and have recently done a couple of new CD's playing it on several of the songs. One of the CD's, Canadian Artist Roxanne Potvin, was nominated for a Juno Award (Similar to Grammy) At present I am not doing any live gigs but if the opportunity to play live comes along I would be interested. The upright stays in my bedroom, when I awake or go to bed I play it as much as possible.

- You're a 4 string kind of guy, but you have played with 5 string basses. I've seen you on the Lakland website sporting their 4-94 and 55-94 basses. What other basses do you currently own?

- 4 string custom Toad Killer Bass,

- The Fender Precision 4 string (Used at Motown Detroit Studios and on the Standing in the Shadows of Motown Film),

- 58 Fender (Blonde 4 string) Used on many recordings New York/Philadelphia/Elton John, currently in the new Musicians Hall of Fame in Nashville,

- Late 60's Fender Jazz bass converted to a sitar bass,

- Fender 4 string bass (Made in Mexico) special made Motown Bass that I played on American Idol and the Motown 45 show, (Bass has pictures of Motown Artist and 45 logo hand painted on it with Funk Brothers signatures on the

back),

- Kramer 4 String (Early & 80's Pioneer Model),
- Lakland 4 and Lakland 5 String,
- Two Carvin 5 strings and a Carvin fretless,
- Carl Thompson Piccolo Bass Mid 70's 4 string,
- Hagstrom 8 string,
- P Fretschner upright bass (About 100 years old).
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Arsenal of bass's include my

- In that same vein what basses do you take to a session? Do you take anything else besides basses? And if so what and why?

I usually take the custom 4 string or the mid 60's Fender, sometimes both, if I need any lower notes I tune down the E String. The 4 strings sound so good that I would rather tune down than take a 5 string to the studio. However I am rehearsing at home with my Lakland 5 and someday hope to start using it or a new Toad Killer 5 string, on sessions and live. The producer will usually tell me if they may need the upright bass...I also take my rig which consist of ADL 1000 Anthony DeMario Compressor/Limiter, Sans Amp, Boss tuner and sometimes if I do not use the ADL 1000 I use a Gene Lawson direct box. I am also now experimenting with the Phil Jones Bass Buddy. At times I may also run a line into a live amp and record the live amp sound along with the direct sound. On the new Joe Cocker CD, along with the direct sound we also recorded the live sound from a Sunn bass amp that the producer/engineer suggested. Great Sound! I feel that you need to carry a rig to insure that you get your sound that you feel comfortable with. It does not necessarily have to be a lot of equipment.

- What is your current live rig?

I love the Phil Jones Bass Amps. I do have one but can not travel with it all of the time and need to rent Amps. My first choice is the Phil Jones but if I can not get one I have been having luck with GK or Hartke amp and One 15 •+Two 10 • Hartke or Ampeg speakers. I also use my Sans Amp.

- Your first #1 was Flamingo Express • with the Royaltones, correct? What was that like for you back then and can you

still play it on demand today?

The Royaltone record Flamingo Express • was in fact the first Top 10 record that I played on. Not sure if it was #1? It was one of the highlights of my career to not only hear the record on radio but for it to go into the Top 10! To say I could play on demand any one of the records that I have played on would be a lie. There may be certain parts of the records that I would be able to play on demand but to make it through the entire record I would definitely have to listen to it first.

- You've played on more than 200 top 40 songs; in 2004 you received a Life Time Achievement Grammy along with your fellow Funk Brothers, and you're HUGE and extremely diverse discography reads like a Who's Who • in music. Are there any particular songs that YOU feel say - Now that's Bob Babbitt! •

You know that you are your own worst critic when it comes to talking about your performance on a song. There are some songs that when I listen I say to myself I could have played more or less or wish that I may have played something else, but then there are the songs when I say to myself Yes, I love it! • The ones that stand out for me and that I feel say Now that's Bob Babbitt • are Edwin Starr's Agent Double 00 Soul • (The first Black Artist that I played for that the song became a #1 R&B and crossed over to the Pop Top 10 charts). The Capitols Cool Jerk •, Stevie Wonder Signed, Sealed Delivered •--- Bass Solo from the Dennis Coffey song Scorpio •, Diana Ross Touch Me In the Morning •, Gladys Knight and the Pips Midnight Train to Georgia •, Robert Palmer Every Kind of People •, Spinners Rubberband Man", Elton John's Mamma Can't Buy You Love •. There are more hits that I really feel great about and there are also songs that were singles and Album cuts that were not hits, but I felt the Bass performances were definitely Bob Babbitt. •

- I love your book Bob Babbitt Awareness Guide: for Bass Players and all Fellow Musicians • [available from Amazon.com]. It's a must read in my opinion. What drove you to write this book at this time?

I had been thinking about writing a bass instruction book with transcripts and exercises, etc., but knowing that there were so many books with that format already out there I felt that the bass world really didn't need another instruction book. After many days and nights of putting my mind in high gear and strongly weighing the different options that I could write about I realized that in order to pursue their musical career many of the younger musicians and the musicians coming out of music schools, as well as the ones that were still trying to get their foot in the door, regardless of what instrument they played, really had no idea of what to expect or how to deal with what they would encounter when they Hit the Streets • As a result the Bob Babbitt Awareness Guide •

- You've recently worked on some very cool projects “ Sass Jordan (Get What You Give), Laurie Webb of Lollievox (What You Gonna Do Child) and co-producing, co-writing and playing bass with Whitney Wolanin which produced a #7 hit GOOD • and a #9 hit It Takes Two • just to name a few. How do you compare these with your earlier work with Motown?

All of the artists you mentioned that I have recently worked with are very talented and their expectations for their music is very high. My contribution to their music as a bass player or producer is no different than it was with my earlier days regardless who the artist is. It is now, and always was 1000%, as if it was my own personal project. As far as comparing with earlier Motown work; The Detroit Motown days were a combination of great musicians, songs, singers, producers and arrangers and studio engineered sounds that recorded some of the most creative trend setting music in the history of the music business...The impact of that music is still to this day felt and heard around the world. If I personally can help the artist that I play/produce for now today to make their music a success there is no reason that their music can not have an impact on the people and that they can be the future trend setters.

- Being on the road as much as you are do you get to indulge in a lot of different foods. So what's your favorite road food/cuisine?

- Fish and chips and Indian food in England,
- The best Italian food, especially pasta and tiramisu dessert in Italy and Sicily,
- reindeer, ox, and whale in Norway along with the greatest salmon in the world,
- vienerschnitzel in Vienna,
- bratwurst in Germany,
- chocolate and ice cream in Switzerland,
- bread and pastries in France,
- sauerkraut and pork, in Prague, Czechoslovakia, that a vegetarian in the group could not resist after listening to everyone else saying how good it was,
- great steaks, chicken, and ribs in Texas, Phoenix, and Kansas City,
- Thai and Japanese food in Hawaii,
- Chinese in San Francisco,
- seafood and clam chowder in Boston,
- pizza and hot dogs in New York,
- apple pie in the state of Washington,
- cheese in Wisconsin,
- shish kabob in Dearborn, Michigan,

- steak burritos in Chicago,

- Buffalo at the Atlanta Ted's Montana Grill,

- Most common: oatmeal and raisins, bananas, strawberries and brown sugar, sandwiches, extra Turkey with cheese, lettuce, tomatoes, with extra Mayo, chicken breast, fish or steak, mixed veggies, salad, pasta, I love the Japanese sushi bars! blueberry bear claws,

- Drinks, Diet Coke/Pepsi, water.

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- Do you have set routines you go through to get ready for a session, or do you prepare differently for each role?

Outside of the times that I would jog/walk or lift weights at home or at a gym there is no special routine with the exception of going to bed early to get enough rest to be alert. Also making sure that the producer may want to have me bring my Fender (Motown) bass, upright bass, or another one of my bass's. One of the main things that I always had done was to dress differently, depending on who the session is for. Now I just wear something that I feel comfortable in. There are some exercises I do to stretch my fingers and loosen up my wrist and hands. I mention this in my Awareness Guide...

- With your busy schedule do you still keep to a practice regiment? What does it consist of and at what frequency?

First of all in my bedroom there is a 5 string on a stand next to my bed. I can sit on the bed and pick it up before I go to sleep or as soon as I awake. I had mentioned this in an earlier answer that also in the bedroom I have my upright bass there, and like the 5 string, every night I go to bed and when I wake up in the morning I have the option of playing either one. I strongly feel that if your instrument is the first and last thing you see before you go to sleep and when you first wake up you will pick it up and play/practice it more. And I do! I also love to watch sports on TV, and for years I have been turning the sound down, taking one of my Bass's and play/practice while sitting watching the game. I do not even need an amp and there have been times when I will be playing for hours while the games are on. Recently, I have decided to take bass lessons again to study and learn more about the contemporary techniques as well as getting into to more Scale study, harmony, and theory.

- You played on the 1982 Deniece Williams hit It's Gonna Take A Miracle. • The melody and progression of that song is reminiscent of another era that you helped shape. Was that bass line a 'play as written' line or did you have input with it?

That Deniece Williams recording was for one of the most prolific and successful producers/arranger/writer/keyboardist in the history of the music business, Thom Bell. When I first started working with Thom he showed me one of his Bass charts and explained to me that the bass lines that he had written out on the chart that did not have a chord above the bar was what he wanted to hear. If there were chords above the bar then you had the option of changing or adding/subtracting notes. Usually his Bass Lines were, and felt so great, that I would just play what he had written. As far as the bass line from the Deniece Williams recording 'Gonna' Take a Miracle • from what I remember, the bass part was written out and there may have been a few notes changed.

- You've had an opportunity to play with some great drummers like fellow Funk Brothers Richard Pistol • Allen and Uriel Jones, as well as Andrew Smith, Chester Thompson, Ed Greene and Stephen Gadd just to name a few. Are there any drummers that you really look forward to working with?

Just recently I had the fortune of working with three of my all-time favorite drummers that for years I wanted to work with, Jim Keltner, James Gadson and Steve Ferrone!! I did the new Joe Cocker CD in Los Angeles, Jim Keltner and James Gadson were the drummers that were on the record. On one of the songs they both played! It was an awesome experience for me to work with them. Then not too long ago I played a concert with Tom Petty drummer, Steve Ferrone. I had done several sessions with Steve in New York in the 80's but had not worked with him for almost 25 years. The two rehearsal days and the concert playing with Steve were incredible. What stands out the most for me was that it seemed like from the first downbeat I had played with all three of them that we had played together constantly over the last 25 year period....To work again with them would be great. One of main subjects that I mention many times in my Awareness Guide is that as a Bass player you must not only feel good and be tight together with the drummer, but to develop a spiritual connection with all the musicians you play with, especially the drummer. With the Funk Brothers I have been blessed to play with Uriel, Pistol, and Benny Benjamin and the young genius Andrew Smith. When we do live shows now Uriel is still there and I want to mention that to this day I still really look forward to working with Uriel and our fabulous second drummer, Spider Webb, an amazing talent. I still look forward to working with Ed Greene who I have been doing sessions with over the last 10 years. Also recently after only a few times since the middle ˜80's I worked with Charles Collins, and I have worked with Steve Jordan, and Steve Gadd in the past but definitely look forward to the possibility of working with the three of them again. I know that Charles Collins and I have a few projects coming up together. I have never worked with John (JR) Robinson or Vinnie Colaiuta, but I would love too.

- You've had an opportunity to play all over the world and many diverse musical styles (i.e. ethnic, cultural, etc.). What musical styles do you find challenging?

For me the one style that has always been a challenge to me is jazz. There are times when I feel like there is so much to learn and so many ways to express your self that it is a never ending learning process. The one aspect of music that I hear from the jazz musicians that I listen to is that I have a problem if it does not feel good to me or I think there are too many notes being played or scales that are not in context with the composition they are playing. When I experience that I tend to turn my back and walk away from that. In my Awareness Guide I mention that there are a lot of players who may actually rave and talk about these types of musicians but it could be that they themselves are not aware of what they are listening to and get caught up in the moment. I really believe that if you listen to the proven greats of jazz then you can appreciate the heart and soul of it much more. I also find the music of the Middle East, African, Afro Cuban, South American and European countries very interesting and challenging. Especially the different rhythms, time changes, the quarter note scales and melodies. To listen and explore the different musical cultures is not only a challenge but extremely fascinating!

- So what does Bob Babbitt do when he just chills? • Who do you chill with or hang with when you do?

When I take care of all my business/phone calls for the day I may drive to a park that is close by my home and just read the paper. At times I pull my seat back and fall asleep in my car while parked under the shade of the trees. I take the dog for a walk at night or in the park in the day and lay out in the sun. I love to sit on the front porch or under my tin roof over the patio and watch and listen to the rain, and the howling wind blowing on the wind chimes and hearing their melodies to write songs to, that's one of my most special chill times. Then there are the days when I have nothing to do and usually sleep late, get up and go to eat lunch, read the paper, and go to the YMCA to work out and swim. I love the feeling I get after working out. I'll go to lunch/dinner and hang with a lot of different people. Usually with them for a couple of hours and the biggest percentage of the conversation is about music or politics. Sushi restaurant is my favorite hang. Love watching Sports on TV, football Go Steelers! • and basketball are my favorites, Especially watching on my 65 • HD TV! I have a hot tub which is a great place to chill out in the hot water. Have not been on a vacation for 3 or 4 years now but I love chillin' on an island. I have been on an island with my wife several times but would love to experience just once being by myself totally away from the family, friend's, cell phone, and the music business. Hopefully that will be soon!!

- In April you'll be doing a lot of dates in Canada. What else is on the calendar for you this year?

The Funk Brothers have shows booked in Canada and the US through September and then a possibility of a Europe/Scandinavian tour in the fall. Also Australian/New Zealand Tour in the works. Motown arranger Paul Rieser is arranging a Motown Music Tribute Tour with Funk Brothers, guest artist, and a Symphony Orchestra in Europe. Also, talk of Thom Bell live performance/recording with Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra doing his original hit songs. I was Thom's Bass player when I moved to the East Coast from late '73 to '85. Several recording projects at home in Nashville. New Funk Brother recording with several guest artists that will be produced by Steve Jordan. self produced Funk Brother recording with our own Vocalist. All of this could very well go into 2008.

- When the Funk Brothers won their second Grammy for the night for Best Traditional R&B Song What's Going On • featuring Chaka Kahn, us bass players take pride in the fact that Bob Babbitt was handed the Grammy and gave the acceptance speech! Yeah! What was that like?

First of all the fact that Joe Hunter and myself got to the area late where the Funk Brothers were sitting, there was only one seat left and Joe sat there. I had to sit on the side section which put me closer to the stage stairway. When the announcement was made that we were the winners I immediately got up and started to walk toward the stage forgetting that the others were a little behind me. As a result I was the first one on the stage. The host of the show was holding the Grammy in his hand and as I walked closer to him he reached out and handed it to me. At that second the only word I could think to say was Duh •??? I turned around to see that the rest of the Funk's were now just coming up the steps. In a somewhat confused state of shock I noticed the microphone stand at center stage right in front of me. My first reaction was to hand off the Grammy to one of the Funk's and run off the stage, but instead I kind of crawled up to the microphone and started to thank the people for this award. I don't have any idea why I said what I said, but my own daughter said to me after the show that she could not believe that her father was speaking to everyone in such an eloquent fashion. It was a moment in my life that I will cherish for the rest of my life.

- What's currently on your iPod? Any guilty pleasures?

I have just recently entered the world of the iPod and I love it! So far I downloaded a couple of my solo projects, new Funk Brother live recording, A new Philly does Motown /Motown does Philly CD, and a variety of classic R&B and Pop songs. New Joe Cocker CD and some of the new contemporary artists that I like are next to be downloaded. No particular musical pleasures to feel guilty about. I do have some Larry the Cable Guy • downloaded on my iPod. Outside of the music and comedy I guess you can say that chocolate ice cream, blueberry bear claws, Subways or Quiznos are without a doubt my Guilty Pleasures •

- Thank you for your time Bob. You're an inspiration to us all. What advice do you have for the members at BadAssBassPlayers.com?

A lot of Bass players email me and ask how to get a start in the music business? There are several areas, New York, Los Angeles, and Nashville being the major music cities that you may have to make a move to if you are not already in one of them. If you feel that you need to go to another city to pursue your music, don't think or listen to any negative comments, JUST DO IT, Satisfy You're Soul. Make friends with as many musicians as possible. Don't burn any bridges, you may have to cross back over them and that may be where you met the ones that can recommend you to someone to work for. Always keep a smile on your face, be reliable and keep your ego in check and your feet on the ground. Practice, Practice, Practice. Once again the main reason for the Bob Babbitt Awareness Guide is to make you aware of the obstacles, to help you make it through the tense situations you may encounter, how to get along with the people in the music world and to keep focused with a relaxed loose feeling and make your music flow from your heart.

A Bad Ass thank you to Bob Babbitt and also to member Gil Escalera for compiling the questions. For the latest on Bob, please visit www.bobbabbitt.com

