

# Norm Stockton 09-23-11

Contributed by Gil Escalera  
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1.

Hello Norm! Thanks for sharing some time with us. I know a lot of folks are currently familiar with you as Lincoln Brewster's bass player, however you are a man of many hats: solo artist, composer, sideman, recording sessionist, educator, clinician, producer, and consumer of mass amounts of sushi!

Musically, how do you describe yourself?

Thank you for your interest!

Musically, I do wear a bunch of different hats, but I honestly wouldn't want it any other way.

The variety keeps things interesting, fun and challenging for me. When asked about it, I usually refer to myself as "bassist/clinician/solo artist". I probably should start including the "mass quantities of sushi" thing, though. :^)

2.

Take us to the beginning. Where did your musical world start, and where did the bass come in?

I started playing bass when I was about 15. Aside from some "compulsory" piano lessons I endured as a kid, I was never musically-inclined beyond enjoying listening to records. At 15, I was really into the Beatles and ended up removing a few strings from an old acoustic guitar gathering dust in the corner of our house. Within a few weeks, I went out and bought my first bass. I was completely committed from then on.

3.  
I know you have family back in Japan and we wanted to let you know that our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Japan following the tragedies brought on by the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear reactor issues. How is your family doing?

Thanks for asking; yes, it's been a really heartbreaking situation. Being ½ Japanese and having been born & raised there for 13 years, it hit very close to home. Thankfully, all of my family are ok. There is one aunt from whom we haven't heard yet, but we hadn't really been in touch with her for years prior to that; so we're optimistic that she's alright. Your prayers for the people of Japan are certainly appreciated though, as the situation there is still far from restored. Thousands of folks are still homeless and experiencing great hardship.

4.  
Whom do you consider to be your musical influences and inspirations?

I have so many, and a lot of them aren't bass players. A partial list would be Paul McCartney, Marcus Miller, Sting, Coldplay, Jonatha Brooke, Miles Davis, Victor Wooten, Sarah MacLachlan, Imogen Heap, John Patitucci, Michael Manring, Etienne Mbappe, Nickel Creek, Bela Fleck; and many more! I'm influenced & inspired on a certain level by every good music I hear.

5.  
So if you weren't playing the bass; what would you be doing?

Since we're just imagining, I will say financially independent and retired, spending all of my time sailing, hanging with my family, and throwing large sums of money at good causes around the world!  
Yeah...something like that.  
:^)

6.  
You're main axe is your MTD 535 and you're currently using a MTD J5 live; not to mention you also use a MTD 735 on your CD's. Why MTD? What can you tell us about these basses that gravitates you to them?

Since acquiring my first MTD back in 1997, I have been a huge fan of these basses. In addition to building some of the finest instruments I've ever encountered, Michael Tobias is also a great guy and has been supportive of me since the very beginning. As for the basses themselves, they are really well-built, play amazingly, have tone for days, and are functional works of art. People who play them are usually fiercely loyal for all of those reasons.

7.  
What is your current rig? Why did you choose it?

I use a Gallien-Krueger 1001RB head with any combination of Neo cabs (112, 212 and/or 115). I've been an enthusiastic fan of GK for the past 7 years. Fantastic gear, amazing tone, tons of headroom, great value...they do an incredible job. They've also been really supportive.

8.  
One last gear question...pedals. I see you are now endorsing Aguilar effects pedals. How often do you use effects? Which ones do you use?

I used to use

effect pedals a lot, but had gradually phased them out (no pun intended!). When I started working with Lincoln, we found that a SansAmp worked well for that style of music. About a year ago, my friend Adam Nitti was telling me about his Aguilar pedals and I decided to give them a try. I've been using their TLC Compressor & Tone Hammer for the past year and really love them. I do still occasionally use the SansAmp as well, depending upon the specific needs.

9.

A lot of folks think of you as a church bassist or Christian musician. Yet your Grooving for Heaven series of instructional DVD's have attracted bassists of all walks and genres as well as accolades from some industry giants. What is it about these DVD's that transcends the stereotype?

The first two Grooving volumes were definitely intended to be a resource for church bassists, but most of the musical factors & considerations are common to ensemble bass playing in any context. The interesting thing is that I really try not to make as much of a distinction between the two when I'm playing. Guys like John Patitucci and Abe Laboriel serve as great examples to me of this: regardless of the gig context, they're bringing all they are to that place&hellip;recognizing where their gifting came from and sharing their talents to the glory of God.

10.

Do you have a set practice routine? What's it like?

I desperately want to have a set practice routine, but am embarrassed to admit that I don't at the moment. The ironic thing about being a vocational musician is that I have less time than ever to woodshed: the ancillary aspects of music (emails, phone calls, booking flights/hotels/car rentals, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) can take so much time. Plus I really want to be present for my family when I'm not on the road.

That said, as was the case with many of my musical colleagues, there was a season of intense & concentrated woodshedding earlier in my playing experience. For several years, I was practicing 3-6 hours a day.

Nowadays, when I do get time to shed, I divide my time between reading, transcribing/harmonic

analysis, technique and working on my timekeeping.

11.

Your song "The Race" off your debut CD *Pondering The Sushi* was chosen as a track [#9] for the compilation CD *Bass-Talk 7, Lords Of The Bass*. You appear on this CD along with such notables as Jeff Berlin, Marcus Miller, Tom Kennedy and Ray Riendeau to name a few. How did that come about?

It was an honor to be included in that roster &ndash; though I&rsquo;m not sure I consider myself a &ldquo;lord of the bass&rdquo; (ha) &ndash; I am a big fan of a lot of guys on that project. I actually don&rsquo;t recall the specifics of how that came together! Somehow the owner of that label in Germany (Bert Gerech) and I got in touch and that tune was selected for the CD.

12. Your

latest CD, *Tea In The Typhoon*, features the talents of Gregg Bissonette, John Patitucci, Sachi Patitucci, Lincoln Brewster, Michael Manring, Etienne Mbappe and others. What was it like having these talented individuals on your CD?

Amazing, humbling and inspiring. What was particularly great was how committed to the music each of those players were: there was zero weirdness or &ldquo;diva&rdquo; vibe, and 100% dedication to making the tunes what they needed to be.

From the perspective of being the composer on this project, it&rsquo;s difficult to describe how gratifying & fulfilling it was to hear those tunes come to life in the hands of all of the phenomenal musicians involved.

13.

With Lincoln Brewster you get to play more rock style music; however on your CD&rsquo;s you run the gamut stylistically with contemporary jazz, funk, Latin, classical, fusion, West African, etc. Is there a style that you find particularly challenging or just plain out fun to play?

I love it all; the variety is one of my favorite things about being a musician! Honestly, I feel like the more I explore music, the more I realize I don't know. I will be a student of music for the rest of my life. That said, my comfort zone is definitely in the funk/r&b world.

14.

There are a slew of portable digital recorders available today. These little marvels make recording thoughts, ideas, rehearsals, etc. really easy and convenient. Do you utilize any? And if so, which ones and how?

During the writing and preproduction stage, I always keep a small portable recorder handy to use as a musical notepad. Early in this process for the Typhoon project, I got a Boss Micro BR, and it was fantastic. It is a handheld 4-track digital recorder with a great-sounding built-in stereo mic, onboard drum machine, ¼" input to plug my bass into, and a slew of other features. I used it both for cataloging tune ideas as well as experimenting with parts & arrangements. Super helpful.

15.

Being on the road as much as you are, you get to indulge in a lot of different foods. What is Norm's favorite road food/cuisine?

Awesome. :^) I must admit that I love this aspect of travel! Both my wife and I are quite passionate about food and watch Food Network all the time. It's also great that Lincoln is similarly a fan of amazing cuisine, so we always eat well on the road! I'm a big fan of Japanese food, as well as Italian, Mexican, or anything done well. I love going to the place all the locals go and eating the local favorite.

16.

You have a definite presence on Twitter and Facebook. Has this had an impact with 'connecting' with your audience? Staying connected with family while on the road?

Candidly, I got

pulled into Facebook & Twitter kicking & screaming! I felt that I already had too many things on my plate and this would just add to the task list. But I must say that it's been great. It has allowed me to (virtually!) bring folks along when I'm on the road, involve them in the process when I'm working on various projects, and basically help fans (don't like using that word but you know what I mean!) feel connected. I occasionally use it for family, but that tends to involve more texting and phone calls.

17.

What's the last hour like before you go onstage? How do you prepare? Any routines, habits, quirky nuances?

Heavy drug use,

mostly. Just kidding. :^) Once I'm all set up, tuned up, line checked and everything's technically dialed in, I like to warm up, do some stretches, talk through any particulars for the evening, pray and hydrate. The latter is something I used to not give much thought to, but after a recent episode where my forearm knotted up during a gig, it has become a primary consideration. I'll usually grab a Gatorade and banana from the green room.

18.

So, on and off the road, what does Norm Stockton do when he just chills? Who do you chill with or hang with when you do?

I have an

incredible family, and spending time with them is at the top of the list. I've also been into sailing since I was a kid, so will try to get some time on the water.

19.

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

Nothing I'm embarrassed to mention! :^) I do have a playlist called "Norm's Chill" that is entirely made up of melancholy pieces from a wide spectrum of artists. I love it. I definitely enjoy lots of bombastic music, but there's something about a mellow, well-written, sparsely-arranged, emotively-conveyed tune that does it for me. You can probably hear that side of me coming out on my CDs with tunes like "Roxanne" and "Sunday Bloody Sunday".

20.  
Thank you for your time Norm. You're an inspiration to us all. As a departing thought, what's the strongest piece of advice you would offer someone (child or adult) just starting out on bass today?

Thank YOU for your kind words & interest!

Advice-wise, I'd say this: develop a passion for the groove.

Once you develop a passion for the groove, there's no longer any such thing as a "boring" bass line: it's all about beat placement, time feel, note duration, phrasing, etc. It will be the most fun you can have as a bassist, plus other musicians will love playing with you.

In this day and age of YouTube, it's easy to get a distorted view of things: almost every clip of me is of the solo-oriented stuff because that's what folks focus on. They don't realize that I only play that way a few minutes a night! The VAST majority of the time, I'm playing foundational, ensemble-oriented grooves and serving the song. And I LOVE it.

So, yes&hellip;GROOVE! :^) Hope to see you on the road&hellip;

A Bad Ass thank you to member Gil Escalera and Norm Stockton

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