

the BassCafe

Gear Talk with Maurizio Caduto - M Uber Basses

This month's Gear Talk features Maurizio Caduto, builder of Maurizio Uber Basses. Uber Basses feature a unique approach to the traditional 'headless' bass, bolt-on necks and quality craftsmanship that rivals higher end 'boutique' basses.



TBC: Maurizio, thanks for visiting with The Bass Café.

MC: Glad to meet you, Neil! And thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to talk about my basses on The Bass Cafe'.

TBC: For our readers who are not familiar with you and Maurizio Über Basses, give us a little background on yourself and your company.

MC: I have been a bassist since I was a teenager. I started off by playing the usual gigs and doing some studio recording. I was trained in classic guitar and reading music was easy back then. I wish I could say the same now. Anyway, over time I have been lucky enough to own many great basses. Being able to play well built basses is a great advantage. They teach you how to be a better player and if you observe them closely you'll get a sense of how design addresses issues - or ignores them.

I started building basses after many years working in the image and filming industry. My profession, as well as being a semi professional bassist, has ultimately shaped what Maurizio Über Basses are.

Müb is a small shop, two people really. The three current models are, the Über-Jay, the Über-M and the Über-Groove. They all share the same design approach, but each with its own very distinct individuality and purpose. Jay is a tribute to the timeless Jazz bass yet radically different, being smaller, slimmer, thinner, much lighter and with a lot of ergonomic scoops and contours. The M revolves around the Stingray's single pick up placement and is fretless at heart with its very deep neck pocket for extra sustain and articulation. Finally, the Groove is the model for extreme custom specs, ERB, extra long fretboards and pretty much anything that comes to mind.

TBC: We spotlighted two of your basses on our Facebook page and the consistent comments were how beautiful your instruments are.



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MC: That is wonderful. I am truly humbled every time someone specifically mentions the aesthetic of my basses because I have come to appreciate how elusive and precious beauty is. Even though I am a devotee of the form and function philosophy, I dedicate a lot of time for every single bass in search of that beauty hiding within. But beauty must reach out otherwise it's just personal taste. That is why when others see it too, I feel that I have achieved my objective. So, thank you so much for mentioning it. It means a lot to me.

TBC: What inspired you to begin building basses?

MC: Like many other bassists, I too had my own signature bass sitting on a rack deep inside my heart. But I did not want to build one unless I had something original to say. I mean, with all the great basses out there, why bother, right? So, over time, I started putting together all my little observations, ideas, idiosyncrasies.

Eventually I landed on something that seemed worth pursuing. That is, a very light bass, neutrally balanced and with a very stiff neck. Three qualities that do not like each other much when the target is a bass that weighs below 7lbs.

Many will probably agree that neck dive in a bass is the worst thing ever. The conventional ways to counter that have never fully appealed to me. Say, a heavier body fixes this by getting you a heavier bass. Or, an upper horn lengthened to correct neck dive shifts the fretboard backward, negatively affecting ergonomics. Other basses fall into the opposite flaw - a quasi upright position - and that doesn't seem much better than a neck dive to me. We, as bassists, have always adjusted. That's human nature. But a bass should sit right where its player wants it to. Period. A bass that is feather light and yet stays strapped exactly where you want it to be is the bass I wanted.

Next, I took steps to learn the craft and test my ideas. There were many challenges, especially designing parts that were not readily available. Eventually I was ready and when Über got the thumbs up from the toughest judges out there - that is, band mates and sound engineers - I knew I had something that wasn't just a flight of fancy. And so here we are, watching the Müb project take a life of its own.

TBC: Your instruments have a very unique design. While 'headless' per se, all basses feature a traditional looking headstock. What is the science behind this design?

MC: I have always believed in the headless system and how it addresses tuning reliability and overall balance. Its Achilles heel, if you wish, lies in the looks. Aside from the inspired original Steinberger design, a headless neck





juxtaposed with a traditionally shaped body almost always strikes me as a bit contrived. This is probably why headless basses do not dominate the market after all these years in spite of all their qualities. Therefore I decided that if I wanted to build a bass it had to harmonize headless functionality with classic form.

A tuner-less headstock design is not new. But I did not want to just build a traditional bass with tuners at the bridge. I wanted to start from there and see where it took me.

The fact is, with a lighter headstock, neck dive ceases to be a problem. That opens up huge opportunities. I can build a very light body and a stiff neck loaded with dense and heavy woods in quantities otherwise prohibitive on traditional basses. I'd still end up with a 6 to 7lb or less bass and no neck dive.

This chain of thoughts also made me focus on the importance of weight distribution. In other words, how heavy or light a bass feels. So I tweaked my design to lower the center of gravity towards the body of the player. The bass feels lighter than its actual weight would suggest and stays at the angle the player sets it to - neutrally balanced. That takes care of the functional aspect.

This same starting point generated an holistic aesthetic approach. With no risk of neck dives the body can be thinner, slimmer, deeply contoured and sport all the scoops and recesses a player's style might require. With tuners out of the way I can shape a headstock like a little sculpture. Ergonomic and aesthetic become the defining parameters.

TBC: Many up and coming builders are choosing bolt-on necks as opposed to neck-through, slowly changing the perception that all quality basses are neck-through. What has influenced your decision to build bolt-on instruments.

MC: Over the years I have progressively chosen to play bolt on basses over neck through. I guess it boils down to liking more attack than sustain. That was a good trade off for me. So I suppose that building bolt-on became a natural choice. To add to that, my bolt on necks go all the way to the first pick up. That increases attack and sustain. The Über-M, with a neck that runs all the way to the bridge p-up has incredible sustain - the tuner's LED holds still for such a long time that you might think it is broken, lol!

TBC: Are the 4-string bridges equipped for drop-D tuning?

MC: Not at the moment. But being a fully custom shop we can design for it.

TBC: Do you maintain any stock for immediate order and delivery or focus on custom orders only?

MC: For now we are focusing on custom orders. When we plan a new batch of builds, we try to allocate two for stock. Unfortunately, or rather fortunately, so far the orders have completely absorbed our quite limited production. We want each bass to have its very own character. It is often said that a great bass is great in any genre. I respectfully feel that a great bass should be at ease in any musical context



but it must excel in the preferred genre of its owner. That requires to look at each bass as one of a kind and that is very time consuming.

Plus, I am working on new models and ideas - a single cut, which I am trying hard to make look original; and an ERB which will fully showcase the capabilities of the Über design. A 7 stringer that weighs less than 7lbs is a bass I would be very happy to play. Anyway, we are looking into ways to increase the output without straying from the vision of form+function+beauty. I am sure that in a near future we will be able to do that.

TBC: Now, the question that everyone who has seen a Maurizio Über-Bass wants to ask, how to I order my own?

MC: We have decided not to have a website for now, so I cannot answer with usual "Go to www..." There will be one eventually but today direct contact and immediacy of social networks are a more engaging media. Müb is on Facebook and Twitter (who isn't, right?). The links are www.facebook.com/uberjay.basses and www.twitter.com/uberjay456. Or simply one can email me at maucaduto@yahoo.com.

TBC: Any advice for players thinking of building their own basses?

MC: Building your own bass is a wonderful, rewarding and potentially frustrating experience. To minimize the frustration, my humble advice is, ask yourself why you want to build one. If it's just because you cannot afford that gorgeous XYZ boutique bass and are aiming for a cheaper option, you will be disappointed. Building a bass with all your dream specs will likely cost you more than buying a good factory bass off the shelf or a great second hand.

If instead you really want to enjoy the pleasure of building your own bass and accept the inevitable little flaws of your first attempt, then go for it. Buy books, become a member of a forum - Luthier Corner on Talkbass, for instance, is a great place to meet builders of all levels. Learn. Accept the fact that your perfect bass is probably a few builds away and have fun. Use the best wood and parts you can afford. There's little point in devoting time and money if in the end cheap hardware lets you down. Cheap knock offs are very expensive in the long run.

But the most important achievement of all is that, building a bass will make you a better bassist regardless of how good the build turns out. I highly recommend it. And if one are really serious about it, the best advise I can give is - find a luthier who would take you in and teach you the ropes. I was fortunate to have found my mentor, Jeffrey Yong, an internationally recognized master luthier whose acoustic guitars are masterpieces. I have been training with him for years and, even though I build solid bodied instruments, his insight on the acoustic properties of woods has been eye opening and fascinating. There is no substitute for experience.

Thank you Neil and thank you to everyone who made it reading this far, LOL!

TBC: Maurizio, this has been our pleasure!