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My opinion is that each and every Fender Jazz Bass he plays, as well as any other brand or model of instrument, has a tone that results from a specific combination of these many factors.

Dave Wilson by e-mail

REMEMBER THE TITANS

BASS PLAYER hit a high note when it paid tribute to the incredible talent of the late Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen [July '05]. Instead of just listening to rock all the time, listening



Is it the player, the wood, or the pickups:
Tim Commerford contemplates his tone at San Francisco's Warfield.

to jazz has kept me well rounded. Listening to pianist Oscar Peterson introduced me to Pedersen, a bass player that any bass player can appreciate, regardless of what music they prefer. I also suggest the Roy Eldridge 4's *Montreux 1977* [Pablo/Original Jazz Classics] live recording as a wonderful example of Pedersen's playing ability.

Brett Warmelis by e-mail

I have to express my strong disappointment about the June and July issues. It started at the end of April, when I received the news that within ten days three major bass icons had died: Percy Heath, Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen, and Jimmy Woode. To my disappointment I did not see any write-ups in the June issue. After the cover stories on John Entwistle's and Ray Brown's passing [September and October '02] I did expect at least Percy Heath and Niels-Henning would be on the July cover. Instead you had two pages written up about these famous bass players, with Richard Johnston jumping in to write a few lines rather than a member of your Advisory Board. These stories did not adequately give the acclaim these jazz giants deserve. Your responsibility to the younger generation was to fully explain their contribution to jazz as we know it today.

Christian Fabian by e-mail

Thanks for your concern, Christian. For the record, all three musicians died after our June issue was at press. Further, we asked former BP Editor-in-Chief Richard Johnston to write the obituaries for Pedersen and Heath because he had previously written interview features on both players and was the best journalist for the job. We think he prepared fantastic tributes to these important players. We had already committed to our July cover story, but it is our opinion that the best way to educate the widest audience about players like Pedersen, Heath, and Woode is to have a cover that will attract the most readers.

CORRECT

I want to apologize to Dave Porter, as my previous letter accused him of a mistake he didn't really commit. Imagine my chagrin when I went back and discovered that his letter said Geddy Lee's bass was a '70s Jazz, not a '70 as I had misread.

Kyle Maloney Dublin, OH

BP

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Fonzie Plays It Cool

**STEFAN LESSARD
SHOWS HIS STREET
SMARTS WITH THE
DAVE MATTHEWS BAND**

BY BRIAN FOX

STEFAN LESSARD MIGHT HAVE GROWN UP IN THE SCHOLARLY college town of Charlottesville, but the University of Virginia isn't where he got his education. For the past 15 years, Lessard has developed under the tutelage of his bandmates in the Dave Matthews Band. The "Doogie Howser" of the band, Stefan was only 16 when he enrolled in DMB University. Since then, he and his bandmates have released 13 multi-platinum albums and thrilled millions of rap fans with their free-wheeling, jam-heavy live performances.

As a teen, Lessard took music study seriously, playing upright bass in youth orchestras and jazz combos. But when the time came to take it to the streets with charismatic singer-songwriter Matthews, Stefan jumped at the chance. "I developed everything I have from being in this band," Lessard says. "I'd had only a bit of instruction before I was thrown in, and ever since then I've been trying to keep up."

Amid an international tour, and just a few days after the band's performance at Philadelphia's Live 8 concert, Stefan—or Fonzie, as he's nicknamed—sat down to talk about the band's new album *Stand Up*, how he works with producers, and what it's like to play alongside singer/guitarist Matthews, drummer Carter Beauford, and touring keyboardist Butch Taylor, the core players in one of the most successful pop bands in history.

YOU'VE GOTTEN YOUR MUSICAL education on the road. Do you ever wish you had pursued formal study?

Sometimes, because I still battle with technique. When I was studying upright, it was all about technique. But when you're young and playing with a band, you're more concerned with just making it through the set, getting the notes and timing right. On electric, I concentrated more on playing in the pocket. Even now,

PHOTOGRAPH BY GREG HESSLER



CURRENTLY SPINNING

Queens Of The Stone Age, *Lullabies to Paralyze* [Inter-scope]

"I was bummed out when the band fired [bassist] Nick Oliveri, but Josh Homme is an amazing songwriter, and they've made a great record. I've also been listening to [Josh Homme side project] Desert Sessions. I like A Perfect Circle, because the sonic levels of their albums are perfect. I've also been listening to a lot of hip-hop, like Dr. Dre and Eminem."

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

With The Dave Matthews Band (all on RCA)

Studio Stand Up; *Busted Stuff*; *Everyday*; *Before These Crowded Streets*; *Crash*; *Under the Table and Dreaming*; *Remember Two Things*.

Live The Gorge; *The Central Park Concert*; *Live at Folsom Field, Boulder, Colorado*; *Live in Chicago 12-19-98*; *Listener Supported*; *Live at Red Rocks 8.15.95*.



when I see pictures of myself playing, my hands look tense. I just think, I'm playing with some of the greatest musicians on Earth—I can't be playing like that! But you can't look back, because if I had spent all my time studying, I might have missed this whole boat. I might overthink everything, and miss the organic simplicity of what is happening.

How are you making the transition from the studio to the stage as you take Stand Up out on the road?

We're beginning to play more from our hearts than from our minds. When you play from your heart, you're not holding on to anything from the past—you're just going with the present and the future, which are more important. *Stand Up* sounds great, but the record is a moment in history that's already been captured.

The new songs are starting to evolve so they're different from the album. You strive for that, but you can't push too hard; if you try to make a song totally different, it sounds contrived. We rehearse them the way they were on the album, and then we just let them go. A lot of it comes from eye contact onstage. I watch Butch, because Carter, Butch, and I are holding everything down. Dave might not be aware of where we're going to go, but if Butch leans over and calls out a chord change, as long as we come down together, it works out.

How long does it take to get to the heart of a song?

Sometimes it can take a few years. I'm still not totally comfortable with some tunes we've been playing for ten years or more. Then we have years when a certain song is feeling really good, but then if we don't play it for a while, we have to ... not re-learn, but re-feel it.

What are some examples of changes you've made to the new songs?

"Louisiana Bayou" is one that's starting to develop its own live identity. On the record, it ends with an A major fadeout, but during one rehearsal, Dave started playing a minor pentatonic lick as we finished the song. I caught on, and I started playing the lick along with him. Now that's how we end that jam. Once the song itself has ended, it's up to me to figure out the

best way to get into that lick.

"Dreamgirl" is another example. The song is in E, but when our producer Mark Batson came out to see one of our shows, he suggested going to D at the end. It sounded great when we tried it, so now we vamp on D, and then swell back to E. That's something that came about pretty recently. At the end of that song I normally play roots with Butch, but for a while I started playing the lick from Carole King's "It's Too Late," transposed down a 4th.

With other songs, like "American Baby," I've been sticking close to what I played on the record, and I'm just starting to figure out where I can go from there. I think everyone is—that's sort of what we do.

Stand Up was mixed differently than past albums, with a lot of low end.

I've always had a problem wanting to hear more low end on our records, so I'm all for boosting the bass frequencies. For me, even though the album is bassy, it's very clean. The drums and bass are tight, but they still retain some looseness. And I like going with a different sound in general with albums, because I think it helps freshen things up.

Do you prefer a consistent bass tone throughout a record, or do you like each track to sound different?

I'm not picky. If a producer says, "I want to try something, you might not like the sound, but I have an idea," great. I'm all for being given something that'll stretch my ability. If a producer wants me to play with a pick, I'll do it. But live, I know what I want. [See Gear, page 44.]

You've worked with several producers through the years. How have their approaches differed?

With Steve Lillywhite, who produced *Under the Table and Dreaming*, *Crash*, and *Before These Crowded Streets*, we'd rehearse, do pre-production, and then record all together. He'd get track drums, guitars, and scratch vocals, and then I'd do all my bass tracks at once. For *Everyday*, Glen Ballard was more song oriented. He'd finish each song, and then I'd come in and do a few bass tracks each night. And he had charts written out.

What was it like playing lines written by someone else?



WEB EXCLUSIVE



DMB recorded *Stand Up* at Haunted Hollow, a studio the band built outside Charlottesville. To read what Stefan had to say about the studio, check out www.bassplayer.com.

STEFAN LESSARD

When I first played them, I thought they didn't sound like me at all, because on albums like *Crash* I felt my playing was more fluid. With *Everyday* the bass was what I see as pop bass. But it was great, because that's what I wanted to sound like.

What do you mean by "pop bass"?

Like a bass line from a Quincy Jones record, or like what you'd hear from a boy band. Or Kelly Clarkson, because Glen actually writes for her—that's the way I felt on *Everyday*. I was learning to play more poppy

bass lines. Peter Gabriel is another good example of the style.

It was something I hadn't really been able to tackle before. It wasn't as organic as what I was used to. At the same time, I was psyched. Learning the lines was a lot of fun, and when I'd throw in my own ideas, Glen was open to them. The end of "The Space Between" was something I came up with, and there are lots of other bits and pieces. It was great not being on my own—I had someone guiding me through the songs. With Lillywhite, I was

NS Double Bass

FLEA-BASSING

Stefan Lessard's stage signal starts with one of the Modulus basses he's using on tour: a black Flea Bass 4-string, a black Flea Bass 5-string (a custom job with a 35" scale), or a fretless Quantum 5-string. Stefan also occasionally plays a silver sparkle Flea Bass 4-string. Eric Porter, DMB's bass and violin tech, installed Shure U4D-JB wireless transmitters inside each instrument. "I routed out the back of each bass to make room for the batteries," Eric says, "and installed a switch on each to turn on both the wireless and the onboard preamp." The signals from the wireless receivers run to a Rane SM26B mixer. "Stefan uses the Rane to adjust his levels on-the-fly if he feels one bass is louder than the others," Eric says. The signals then go to a Whirlwind Multi Selector Switcher, which Stefan uses to activate the bass he wants to play. From there, it travels through a Countryman DI to a Whirlwind AB Box connected to a Korg DTR-1 tuner. All rack gear is plugged into a Furman PL-8 power conditioner.

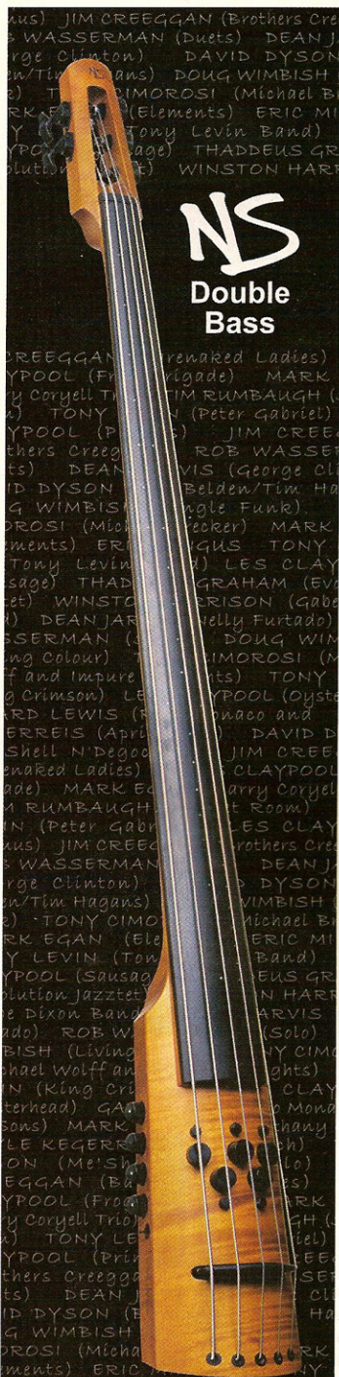
Then come Stefan's effect pedals. "I'm not much of a tech head, but I'm great with gadgets," he says. "I've started using an Ampeg Sub Blaster [SCP-OCT Bass Octave] for soloing. It's cool because it's expanding my view of what I can do during a solo. For the longest time I was playing high, fusion-y fretless solos, but recently I've been rethinking solos, trying to go lower. The octaver gives me some nice options." Stefan also uses a Boss GT6B multi-effect unit and an Eventide GTR-7000 Ultra-Harmonizer (with a Rocktron MIDI pedal controller) for chorus, flanging, and distortion effects. "I've been experimenting with different guitar presets on the Eventide," he says. "I mainly use two distortion presets from there, Devil Distortion and Evil Distortion. Devil Distortion has a lot of reverb, and it really screams. I use that for the beginning of 'What You Are,' where I play a slide solo with lots of distortion. It's a strange sound, but it's cool."

For amplification, Stefan recently switched from a patchwork of power amps and preamps—one for each bass—to a more straightforward, all-Ampeg

setup. It starts with an Ampeg SVT-2PRO head, which powers two Ampeg 8x10 cabinets. The 2PRO's slave unit runs to an SVT-4PRO head connected to an Ampeg 2x15 cabinet. "I've joined the camp of players who love Ampeg SVTs. It has the sound I want—bassy but with some treble, and enough mids to cut through. I use in-ear monitors, so the cabinets are there so I can feel the air moving behind me. For years, I used to stand right in front of my rig, but everyone kept telling me, 'The sound waves are going right over your head.' Last year I moved downstage, and this year I moved down even further. It's amazing how I can still feel that rig behind me."

"Stefan likes much more low end than some of the other artists I've worked with," says Eric, who has teched for Les Claypool with Primus and Eric Avery with Jane's Addiction. "I think that comes from his background playing upright."

"Recently I've been using more treble," Stefan offers. "I used to listen to a lot of dub and reggae, so I'd always turn down the treble and boost the bass so I'd get the big, fat bass rumble. Now I like the EQ curve to start high in the bass, dip a little in the mids, and then come back around midway on the treble so that when I hit harmonics, I can hear them. And I like the bass to have a little attack. With my Warwick basses, I'd turn the treble way down, because the highs are really responsive. But the Modulus basses are so bass-heavy that I can play with the treble knob and keep the sound I want. I like to really be able to dig in, but sometimes when you dig in too hard, you lose low end. If you really pop it with low action, the sound deadens. So I have my strings raised a little bit." For this tour, Stefan has been using Thomastik-Infeld Power Bass strings, gauged .045-.125. "I was using DR Lo-Rider strings for a while—I really liked their grunginess, but I just fell in love with the Thomastiks when Eric suggested I try them. They're bright, but they don't lose any low end. Eric's been dealing with basses much longer than I have, so if something comes up that he thinks I might like, he throws it my way."



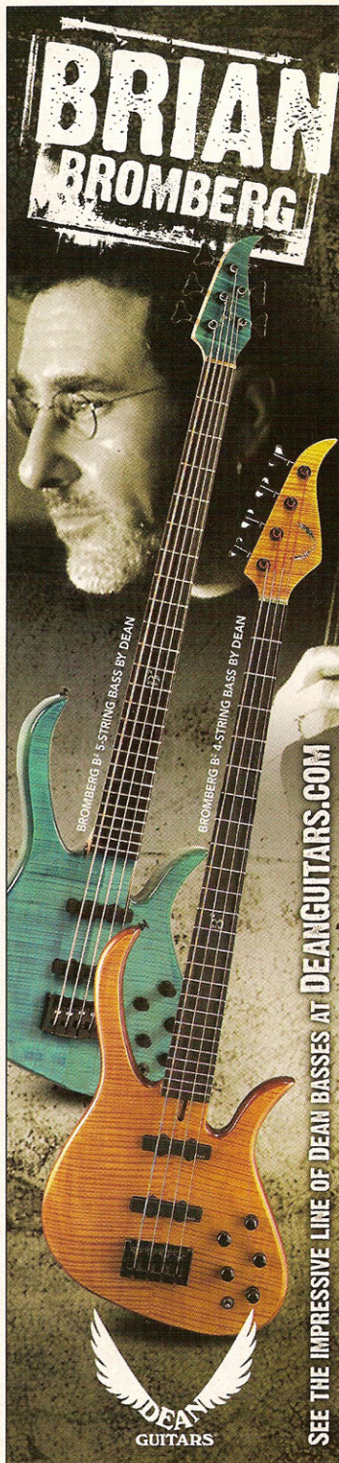
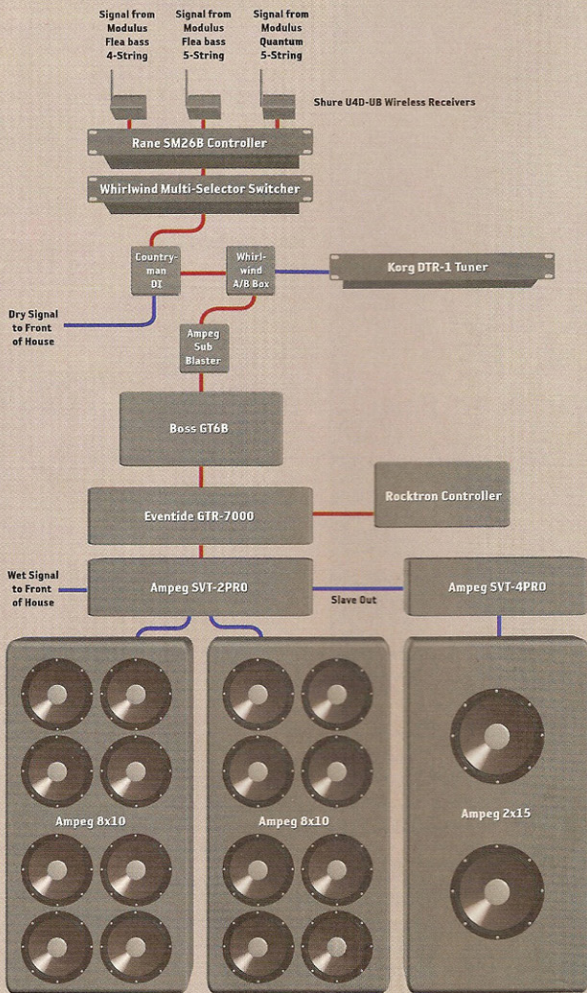
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definitely more on my own. I came up with bass lines, and he'd just tell me if he liked them or not.

On *Stand Up*, Mark Batson taught me a lot about bass in hip-hop—he'd show me by playing keyboard with the kind of feel he wanted. I listened to hip-hop when I was growing up, but now I have a better understanding of what the bass is doing, and how it's not just haphazard. Like the groove on "Dreamgirl"—I would never have thought to just sit there on the E while the piano goes to A.

What music first inspired your playing?

I used to listen to a lot of English reggae like Pato Banton, Steel Pulse, and Burning Spear, and Jamaican reggae like Bob Marley and Peter Tosh. That was my big thing growing up. I wanted to be like Sly and Robbie: Carter and Fonzie. Reggae was my emphasis outside of jazz, which I viewed as the music to study. I've always tried to broaden what I listen to. Dave and I used to sit and listen to Bartók and Vivaldi, picking out the cool things. Dave would say, "This Vivaldi



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BORDERS.

STEFAN LESSARD



From left: Saxophonist LeRoi Moore, Dave Matthews, Carter Beauford, Stefan Lessard, violinist Boyd Tinsley

POP UP THE JAM

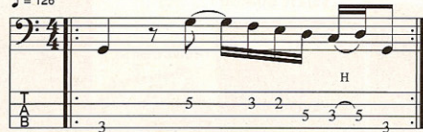
THE DAVE MATTHEWS BAND'S JAM-saturated live performances involve extended solos and breakdown sections, but on record, the band gets straight to the point with hooky pop music. *Stand Up* is no exception. "Stand Up (For It)" is built on the one-bar lick shown in Ex. 1, which sounds like a nod to guitar-driven African pop music. After his authoritative downbeat on *one*, Stefan Lessard rests

on *two* but jumps back in on the "and" of *two*, holding the *G* across the downbeat of *three*. He then starts the descending *G* Mixolydian lick. Except for the hammer-on from *C* to *D* in beat *four*, Stefan plucks every note.

Starting with two bars of Stefan's final notes in the chorus, Ex. 2 shows his verse line from "American Baby." From bar 3 through bar 6, Stefan doubles Dave's guitar,

Ex. 1

Afro-funk **G7**
♩ = 126



STEFANLESSARD

piece sounds like a rock song right here.”

I love players like Stanley Clarke, and I studied that when I was younger, but I like to hear bass as part of the support system. That's why I love Sly and Robbie—because they did their thing, but it was always supportive. Not to take anything away from people like Jaco—I'll give him his props; he was a genius, and his was a tragic story. His fingers had a story to tell and he decided to tell it through the bass. That's amazing, but that's just not where I'm coming from.

Do you still play upright?

Yeah, I have one at home, and I play when I can. I would love to bring it back out. But I put it down because I don't think I could play this type of music on upright.

Do you still read music?

I enjoy reading—that's why I loved making *Everyday*, because I was reading Glen's charts. But I'm not going to front and pretend like I read well. There are so many different things to practice—do I practice reading, fingering, scales, or writing? The great thing

about reading music is that I can get more ideas from it—things that aren't coming from inside me. And sometimes I feel dry inside and I need something new. Just the other day, I was reading through a Jimmy Haslip book about harmony. It was cool, because even though I knew everything I was looking at, it was great to revisit. It gassed me up for the show, and I went out feeling a little smarter. That's the thing—even now I still need that. I have a book on harmony, one on harmonics, and then just a general “bass bible” with every type of scale imaginable.

With harmony, Butch is a great help, because I can see where he's playing all the notes on keyboard. And Butch is a really smart guy—just talking with him makes you feel smarter.

What advice would you give to a bassist trying to become a better player?

If something feels right, don't be afraid to try it, and keep on doing it. If you don't follow through with what you're feeling, you might be missing out on something great. **BP**

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DMB drummer Carter Beauford is one of popular music's tightest, most intricate players. Stefan reveals the key to grooving with this drumkit powerhouse.

The trick to playing with Carter is in trusting your inner rhythm and timing. Whenever I start doubting, I find myself falling. But if you trust what your *one* is, you can follow him. That took me years to develop. I'm just beginning to feel like I've got my time down, and he can throw me anything. It's great, because now I can actually hear what he's doing—everything he's saying. A lot of our drum solos happen with Dave, Butch, and me playing along, so I struggle to keep a constant, because he's playing off-time so much. The more I feel comfortable with my own style and my own ability, the more fun it is to play with him.

I have a lot of kick, hi-hat, and snare in my live mix—especially kick, because I want to lock in with that to make the kick and bass sound like one. But I also try to connect with Dave's guitar and vocal melodies, so I'm not just playing the root.

but while Dave then repeats the four-bar phrase, Stefan plows onward with a contrapuntal line in bars 7 through 9, meeting up with Dave in beat two of bar 9. "That whole part is like a finger exercise," Lessard says. "When I learned it in the studio, Mark wanted me to record it right away. But my fingering was all messed up, because I was following what Dave was playing on

guitar, where you can stretch farther. After I thought the line through a little more, I realized that I could play most of it in the same position." Keep your 1st finger on the 7th fret, but reach down to grab the C#'s in bars 4, 6, 8, and 10. For best positioning, shift back to the D on bar 6's beat three, and again on the one of bar 9.

Ex. 2

Rock
♩ = 121

G Bm A

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 2 2 2 2 5 5 5 5 10 10 9 7 7 9 7 9 6 7 6 10 10 9 7 7 9 7

H PO H H PO H

6 7 6 7 9 6 7 9 6 7 9 6 7 9 6 7 9

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