

Rhodes Ahead

Rachel Rhodes defeats the paradigm with an evolved bass philosophy

Bass guitar became a passion for me at around the age of 11, but I started on string instruments at three with the violin. Then I moved on to cello and guitar at nine or 10. I also played alto sax a bit. Soon after I started playing guitar, I began playing only the lowest four strings, because I just loved playing bass-lines.

I was always drawn to the sound of the bass, whether it was James Jamerson, Paul McCartney, 'Duck' Dunn, 'Family Man' Barrett, Chuck Rainey, Tina Weymouth or Stevie Wonder's left hand. That said, my decision to stop playing guitar and focus on electric bass was entirely John Entwistle's fault. I liked his balance of thundering drive with sweet melodic lines, especially on *Quadrophenia*. I understood that I could take concepts from all the instruments I had studied and put them on this one instrument with the added bonus of playing bass lines in the right register.

To convince my parents to get me a bass guitar, I asked my dad what his favourite bass-line was. He gave me a tape of 'Israelites' by Desmond Dekker and the Aces. I ran upstairs and learned it on my classical guitar, then worked up the nerve to play it for him about 30 minutes later. Enter my 1971 Fender Precision with severe buckle rash. I played that Precision with three different bands (at least!) through high school, and often supported singer-songwriters around Austin, Texas, where I grew up.

At 17, I was diagnosed with a rare cancer. Due to complications after multiple surgeries and radiation treatment, playing bass became excruciatingly painful and I stopped. So that I wouldn't lose touch with music, I continued to sing professionally,

GEAR

Basses | Elrick Gold Series custom e-volution fretless six-string, Dunlop Super Bright Stainless Steel flatwounds, GruvGear DuoStrap, Fretwraps
Effects | EHX Micro POG, Way Huge Ring Worm, Montreal Assembly Count To 5, MXR Bass Distortion, Strymon Mobius, Strymon TimeLine, Strymon BigSky, Pigtronix Infinity
Amps | Aguilar TH 350/SL 112

which came naturally as both my parents were singers. A series of hyper-realistic dreams got me back into playing electric bass about six years ago. My subconscious finally got the message through!

In my return to bass, Steve Lawson and Rich Brown encouraged me to jump in

“A SERIES OF HYPER-REALISTIC DREAMS GOT ME BACK INTO PLAYING”

and record, perform and be fearless. Both continue to be important mentors to me. Gary Willis, who's my main teacher now, is patiently helping me reconnect to my voice so I can say what I want on the instrument.

I started getting into solo bass in 2016. I did a few small solo gigs in Paris in 2017, and also released a solo bass EP, *Lighter Later*, available on Bandcamp and elsewhere. I have also put out an album of

synthesised modular synth tunes called *Bleeps And Bloops: improvised soundtracks for vintage video games from a parallel universe*. But I do play well with others! Non-solo projects are also afoot.

To me, the secret to playing bass well is to listen and serve the song. Listen to all types of music, listen to the people you're playing with, listen to what you just played. And if you're composing or improvising, don't wait for permission to express yourself. If you can't say exactly what you want, learn how. Don't give up until what you play matches what you want to say.

I'm definitely on Team Elrick. I play a six-string Gold Series custom fretless from Elrick Basses. It's my favourite bass so far – so easy to play. It's all about options, and it just feels like home to me, but it would be pretty much impossible for me to play any bass without my GruvGear DuoStrap. That thing's a lifesaver.

No matter what happens, the notes on your fingerboard are right where you left them yesterday. And they'll be there tomorrow, too. ■

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