

Soap Box

Stimulating Voices From The Bass Community

By [David Santos](#) | April 2007

...I began playing the bass for survival. I have never had another form of employment. I have played in many different settings, from roaring coliseums to playing in the icy subway stations of NYC with a hat out for spare change. I am recorded on a regular basis in major studios in LA, NYC and Nashville, and I tour the world with various world renowned artists, yet I often record on a cheap handheld cassette deck in a dirty little rehearsal room in some back alley. I'll play a blues gig for \$50 after having driven for 3 hours and then turn around and drive back, barely making it home, practically falling asleep at the wheel. I will record a demo for a friend for free or angrily demand double scale from the manager of a successful artist. I practice a lot. I listen to music incessantly. I love James Brown and Ray Charles. I play a lot of rock & roll and I love it. The louder the better. I eat a lot of fast food because I'm always late for some musical job. I want to change that but I never do. Wait, there's the drive thru. I have trouble with my relationships with those I love because I'm always thinking about music and narcissistically focused on my own pursuits, therefore many who don't really know me and even some that love me think I am weird. I am frightened yet extremely confident, sometimes at the same time, especially on a big gig or session. It's an odd paradox. I was very nervous the first night I played with Billy Joel because the crowd was so loud and the band was kickin' ass, but then a week later I was bored with all of it. I love old basses but I love new ones too. I love to play simple but I also love soloing, even though I pretend that I don't! I love music created by black people the most. I have bad time but people I play with say I have incredible time, but I fool them somehow. It's an illusion or something. And what's really weird is that in some odd cases I actually rush. Very strange! Yeah, my time sucks. I spend all my money on musical shit and end up waking up stressed out in the middle of the night saying to myself repeatedly for hours, "I will never do that again," and then the next morning after my coffee I am looking for my next bass or piece of gear to buy! I love the energy of being a New York City musician. The way you play when you live there is very invigorating and edgy. If you haven't done it we can't really even discuss it, can we? LA is a lot "rougher" a scene than I ever imagined. That place is tough, man! The players are great out there. I loved the days when I had only one badass bass. Now I use cartage on sessions and I send over like ten basses. I love them all, though. But I loved the one bass days. It was a Jazz Bass with a preamp in it. What a nasty bass. People dug the sound, too. The gig bag was all funky and dirty and stained on the bottom from the subway floor, pizza grease, and coffee. I think it made the bass sound better somehow. Then one day the sound wasn't as cool anymore for some reason. How does that happen? What is that? I don't like it when people talk to me a lot on sessions. Especially when they are in real close proximity to me while I'm thinking. A Jamaican guy on Bleeker Street was playing guitar one time and I stopped to watch him. He looked up and and said, "Your presence disturbs me." I said "I understand," and I threw a buck in his case and moved on. I respect musicians. Musicians deserve respect. They have chosen a tough life. It's a fun life but it can be a real tough life. I miss my family. I had to leave them to become successful in the business. I could have stayed there but I needed to move to NYC. I knew that I belonged there. It was "the" place to play. Miles was there. He died, though. Marcus Miller was there. He left, though. Levin, Anthony Jackson, Hiram, Mike Stern, Andy Newmark, a lotta guys that I dug at the time. Will Lee was there. I loved Will when I was comin' up. A lotta young guys don't know how bad Will Lee is. I brag to my good friends about what a good reader I am, but I get lost on every chart I ever read at least once. My ear is good enough that I bullshit my way through it until I find my place, and many times nobody hears it. Many times they do, though. It's ok to get lost, though. I like that lost feeling actually for a little while. I did a major record a few months back and they wiped my tracks when I left. It bummed me out when I heard about it. I'm a survivor. I hate taking other guys' gigs, but I have to do it sometimes. It's the nature of the business. I hate when I have a great gig and another great gig comes along. There's this horrible moment when you have to choose. It's awful. I know you know what I'm talkin' about. I used to play slap bass a lot. Now I honestly can't remember the last time I played like that. I used to actually bleed all over my bass. I love that. The pain is worth it. Seeing that blood and blister fluid. It's like a battle wound or something. *"Me big warrior, me bleed..."*

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