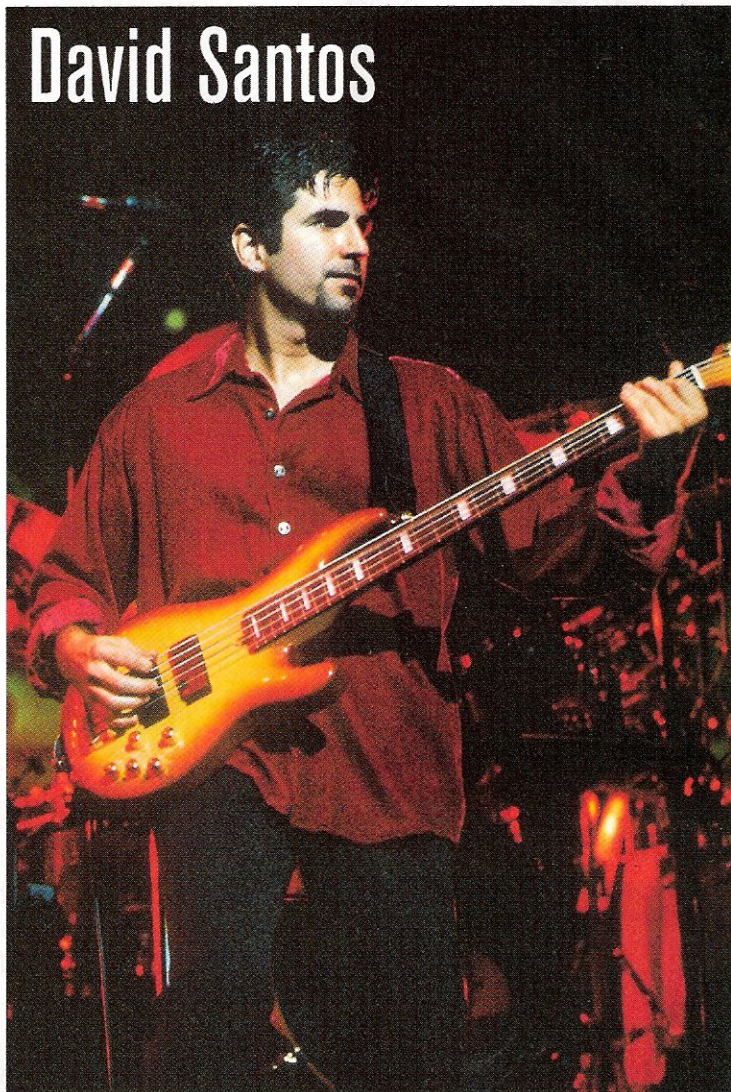




Billy Joel's David Santos

On Blending With A Keyboardist's Left Hand



Every experienced bassist has been in David Santos's position—having to contend with a keyboard player's left hand as it muscles into your frequency range. But in David's case the left hand belongs to Billy Joel, whose piano-conceived bass lines play an integral, Bach-style role in his platinum-selling compositions. Here's David's take on co-existing with the Piano Man's south paw and sharing the low end in general.

"I have a dual role with Billy—I'm an extension of his left hand, and I also drive the band in tandem with drummer Liberty DeVito. Billy has me double his bass lines a lot of the time, and my Yamaha BBN5A 5-string rounds out the bottom of his low notes nicely. But that often means playing challenging octave figures like those in 'Italian Restaurant' [Ex. 1], 'My Life' [Ex. 2], and 'Stiletto' [Ex. 3]. Left-hand octaves are a favorite of pianists, so I recommend practicing them with a metronome. Try to get that piano-style bounce with strong, even, legato notes."

When Joel's left hand is especially active, Santos plays very simply or even lays out. "On the other hand, Billy sometimes pounds out basic quarter-notes or half-notes [Ex. 4], so I find ways to add rhythmic motion and contrast [Examples 5–7]. As for harmony, I try to anticipate Billy's left-hand movement from chord to chord. Is he moving compositionally, diatonically, or using chromatic passing tones? This helps me decide whether to play along with him or move in the opposite direction. Billy uses a lot of 3rds and other non-root tones in his left hand, so I'm open to harmonizing with a root in the upper register—or even below

Nashville's David Santos has spent the last few years touring with Billy Joel. His previous credits include tours and recordings with Tommy James & the Shondells, Phoebe Snow, Patti Austin, and Rodney Crowell.

Ex. 1

♩ = 98 G7

Ex. 2

♩ = 130 D7 C7 F7