



No 18 February 2004

Home

Guestbook

Back issues

Advertising

Contact

Garry Goodman

Has He Created a Whole New Way of Doing Things?



One of the by-products

or effects of doing this magazine has had on me this past few years is that I have developed a strong hunger to find people who are actually doing

something different, something innovative. Meeting that wish has not been easy. The Slap Technique is on 90% of all CD's we receive. As is the Yngwie Effect, with 6000 notes a minute, and of course the ever popular 'Look How Very Smokin' I Am Syndrome'.

It is an old argument, stretching back to Paganini and beyond, I am sure. The pursuit for blinding technique and speed has throttled compositional skills. Attention and effort in trying to outplay everybody else, crowded out just plain fine song writing.

And then along comes Garry Goodman. Has this gentleman perhaps developed a new way of doing things? Garry has a different way of playing bass that combines left hand tapping with

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right hand tapping harmonics in an unusual fashion. The end result is different enough to take a serious look. Is the end effect of this technique the next step in the evolution of bass playing?



Bass Inside: Would you say there are similarities between the touchstyle method of playing employed by players of the Chapman Stick and what you have developed here with Percussive Harmonics? If not, how is it different and how has it been adapted to the very different layout of the bass in comparison to the Stick itself?

Garry: The technique I've developed is really nothing like the touch-style I would use on a Chapman Stick. Let's start with touch-style playing. When you play a stick, you are not really 'tapping' as you would tap someone on the shoulder. It is more of a 'touching with pressure' similar to the way a pianist plays.

Your fingertips are spending more time depressing the string than attacking the note. Originally, Emmett Chapman introduced the Stick technique using the index, middle and ring fingers of each hand to touch the strings. For myself, I found using all four fingers and occasionally my thumbs easier.

My technique, Percussive Harmonics, is more like striking a xylophone with mallets. The technique involves chording or playing melody notes with one hand on the fretboard and the other one striking harmonics. I evolved the technique so I can play any note or chord in harmonics and at the same time play the fundamental notes along with them.

In the 1970's I purchased a book entitled 'Harmonics for Electric Bass' by Adam Novick. This book had diagrams for all the open harmonics found on a four-string bass — the kind of harmonics Jaco Pastorius played on 'Portrait of Tracy'. With open harmonics, the number of chords that can be played is somewhat limited. Percussive Harmonics does not rely on open strings.

Therefore, any chord or note that can be played with the fretboard hand can be matched with an appropriate harmonic with the other hand. Using Percussive Harmonics, in combination with touch-style playing and traditional plucking, gives me more options as a

player.

The original stick was a stereo instrument. There were five melody strings tuned in fourths on the lower half of the fretboard. There were also five bass strings tuned in fifths beginning with a low B string in the centre of the fretboard ascending to the highest string, which is where the low string usually is on a bass guitar. After about six months of wrestling with this configuration, I began to restring my Stick to be similar to a present-day 9-string bass.

Bass Inside: So the Stick was somewhat pivotal in your steps towards this technique?

Garry: Not exactly. I had been playing bass guitar with one hand and electric guitar with the other when a friend, who happened to be Emmett Chapman's next-door neighbour, told me about the Stick. After purchasing a stick and playing it, I had a clearer concept of how to approach touch-style playing on a single fretboard. However, the Percussive Harmonics is something that evolved from playing a Fender Bass VI and a Gibson EB6.

Can you tell us a bit about why you decided to translate that style onto electric bass?

I had already been applying touch-style to electric bass when I learned about the Stick. The unusual tuning of the Stick at that time was uncomfortable for me, and so I transferred what I had developed on the Stick back to the electric bass again.

Did you have to make special physical accommodations on the bass to achieve Percussive Harmonics?

After playing the Stick, I did everything I could to get my action as low as possible on the bass guitar without buzzing and still maintain enough space so I could play traditional bass guitar styles. This led to finding the right gauge of strings, adding onboard electronics and pre-amps and lots of experimenting.

Was this development in playing styles part of the fascination that was developing in you for basses with many more than 4-strings? Not a whole pile of 5 or more stringed basses back in 75, although you were tangling with the Fender VI way way back in

'64. You must have been one of a very few!



Although Percussive Harmonics works great on 4-string bass, I found that a 6-string bass with an added low B string, like the one on the Stick, was the best vehicle for the technique.

In 1964, I began learning how to play on an electric 6-string bass almost as a fluke. My Dad took me to a music store to buy me my first electric guitar. We were looking at a cabinet filled with used

electric guitars when the clerk asked, "Which one do you want?" I picked out the one with longest neck, thinking that was more what grown-ups would play. The clerk said, "That is a bass. Do you want to look at 4-string basses?" And I replied, "No, I want THAT ONE with 6-strings!"

Would you say that it was your drive for composing strong melodic lines for bass that was a strong consideration in motivating you to take the path of instruments with 6 or more strings?

I think as a composer in terms of music first, then I determine which instrument would best interpret that particular composition. I wrote the tune 'Kona Blend' (that is on the demo CD) initially for piano and then transferred the exact piano part to 7-string bass guitar. I wanted to perform that piece personally and piano is not my forte (pun intended).

You see, as a composer/bassist, I wanted access to the same range that a composer/pianist has, so that I could play my own compositions. I had my 7-string bass built so I could have a bass guitar with 4 1/2 octaves. This was the first step in achieving my goal of having the range of a piano, while maintaining a functional bass guitar. Some compositions such as 'Can I Keep This Dream?' were composed to utilize my 7-string bass to its fullest potential.

On that light note, again, I suspect that more than once you were told by guitarists to “Just calm down and play the bass the way it was ‘supposed’ to be played”?

More than once, I did hear “You have more strings than I do!” from guitarists. In the 80’s, when I was using my 7-string bass exclusively for professional engagements, such as conventions, corporate functions and recording sessions, I played the notes that were written on the charts. I don’t believe anyone could tell I was playing a 7-string bass. However, when given the chance to solo, rather than simply playing lead guitar on a bass, I took care to establish a unique sound by applying concepts I’d created (i.e. Percussive Harmonics) that would justify the existence of a 7-string bass, without invading the guitar player’s domain.

With this technique and the 11-string, you are able to embrace tonally, using the 7, 9 and 11 string, areas that the ‘proper’ bassplayer (wry tone intended) couldn’t and often wouldn’t ever venture into. To put a finer point on things, you “don’t need no stinking guitar player!” Or keyboardist!

As a composer wanting to perform my own music, I desired the same freedom a pianist has. A pianist plays the bass line, chord accompaniment, and melody simultaneously. On the music you refer to, I am playing with guitarist David Nielsen, who at times is playing a single note melody on his classical guitar.

I have combined elements that help me create a very rhythmic groove with a strong bass line, chord accompaniment, and a full-range sound similar to that of a piano or mallet instrument. I have been told by some musicians who have heard these recordings of the duo, that they had trouble distinguishing who was playing what.

On these compositions, David and I have worked out parts that intertwine and give the illusion, at times, that there is a third guitarist playing. When I play 9-and 11-string bass guitars, I actually do perform solo gigs and play pieces such as 'One Note Samba' the same way a pianist would. For me, this is real freedom as a bassist. David Nielsen is a brilliant classical guitarist who can play hours of classical guitar literature, jazz, etc. I strive to do the same with bass guitar, but applying my own bass

techniques. It's an ongoing process.

Now, with fretboards of the sheer width of the 11-string pictured in this interview, the question comes to mind. Do you have to guard against muscle, joint or ligament injury? Not to be funny here, but the width presented gives both hands a tremendous amount of work area to cover! And in turn unique forms of stress.

I think that where I have to guard against joint and ligament injury is when I have to haul those 140 lb. speaker cabinets around! When Michael Tobias made my 7-string bass for me (1987), I wanted it to be very similar in size and weight to my Fender Bass VI. Consequently, that bass is very easy to play. When you look at the Adler 11-string, keep in mind that the neck is very thin.

The bass only weighs 15 lbs. and it is actually quite comfortable to play. The work area may seem like it is a lot to cover, but doing so is much easier than it looks.



The 11-string, the first of its kind, was conceived and crafted by luthier Mike Adler. He used mahogany for the body with a koa top and maple on the fretboard. The back has purple heart stringers running the full length of the bass. For an instrument that encompasses a 6-octave range, fifteen pounds isn't all that bad. Mike does make some basses from special lightweight woods. One of his 4-strings weighs only five pounds.

Can you tell us about the tonal range of the strings? And of course, where on earth do you get strings for these monsters?!

This is the fun part! The lowest string is C#00 (17 Hz). This string was conceived and actualised by Chicago-based bassist, Jauqo III-X. When he told me about the string, I was hopeful. I had questions about whether or not it would be functional and audible.

It is both.

So the tuning of the bass is low C#, F#, B, E, A, D, G, C, F, Bb, Eb (half-step below the regular guitar high E string). Jauqo had the string made at S.I.T. As I understand it, they were very open-minded about making this string. I prefer a .009 for the Bb string and a .007 for the Eb string, which I get from Bowan Brothers Guitars here in California. For the 7-string, 9-string and the .20 F string on the 11-string, I use GHS Bassboomers.

Do you need any special speaker configuration to cover this tremendous range, for example, subwoofers, complex crossovers, bass and guitar or keyboard amplification?

This is a never-ending process for me. I performed at the recent NAMM show with the Adler 11-string bass. I went over to the Basson booth and showed the bass to Victor Basson. He plugged me into a Basson 4 x 10 cabinet with a switchable Piezo horn. The speakers have 200 oz. magnets.

I believe the specs for the low end of the speakers are 27 Hz. I was amazed at how clear and big a sound I got through those speakers when I played the low F# and C# strings. The gauge of the low C# string is a .185 and the combination of that string, Mike Adler's bass, and the Villex pickups going through the Basson 4 x 10 was incredible! I haven't put the final configuration of amps and speakers together, as of yet.

On most of my basses, I've added an onboard 18-volt pre-amp and parametric EQ made by Jim Williams of Audio Upgrades. Jim's pre-amp has a 20-db boost/cut with a sweepable EQ from 20 Hz to 20 K. On my Tobias 7-string, my Fender Bass VI and even on my Hofner Beatle Bass, I've had Jim install his pre-amps that allow a strong output from the bass and that balances the levels of the strings.

On the 11-string, the Villex pickups are very sensitive and Mike Adler has added a 9-volt pre-amp that boosts and cuts bass, mids and highs. William Villex makes some incredible pickups.

With any new technique, the question comes to mind: Will you be working on promoting the style of playing itself, say perhaps, with an instructional video and or book?

Percussive Harmonics has been an ongoing process for me since the early 1970's. It does have an unusual sound and I think bassists need to hear the technique used on recordings and be aware of what they are listening to. I can count on one hand the number of bassists (you included) that have expressed an interest in learning this technique.

When you listen to 'Haleakala', you can really hear how Percussive Harmonics creates an afro-Cuban-like tumbao and chordal groove that is very percussive and you can also hear that the single-note harmonic bass solo has a very unique and funky sound. When players actually "see" the technique in use, they seem to be more responsive to it. So perhaps for that reason, a video is a good idea. An instructional package with book and video is in the works.

You mention that you are well on the way to producing master tapes of the recording you sent me. When are you aiming to have a final product, an album itself, out there in the wild and woolly world of album marketing?

I have two projects underway. The first is the Nielsen/Goodman Project, which is the music you've been listening to. This is just a duo, with perhaps some percussion added, that is based on a jazz concept. We play the tune through once and then improvise through the chord changes and come back to the tune again at the end. We are planning on recording masters over the next few months. David and I have written five compositions each for this CD.

The second project also involves guitarist David Nielsen, this time playing electric guitar, in a fusion-style quartet called 'Jasmine' with Matt Davis on keyboards and David Demeter on drums and percussion. This quartet, which began in 1977, features compositions by all four members. This project is also slated for recording sometime this year.

Will you be doing the promoting of the album from a website, an independent label or are you going to approach the 'big guys' on this one?

In the year 2000, the duo was in the process of signing a

recording contract with a small label called Black Diamond Records. Unfortunately, they folded before negotiations were completed. We'd love to find a record label that could really get behind what we're doing. We've gotten great radio test markets results on the tunes you've heard.

If interest supports, would you take the album on tour?

We've had great response from all demographics. So I feel there is an international audience that would appreciate hearing our music live.

You mention the technique itself can be used on basses of any number of strings. But that you find that for yourself it works best on no less than 6 or 7 strings. Why is that?

I like to play music with 6 and 7-part chords. In order to play a chord such as C Maj. 13 (+11), you need more than four strings in order to hear all 7 notes in the chord. On the CD you have, the tune 'Angelita' has a number of 6 and 7-note chords played in harmonics and I definitely need at least 6, if not 7 strings to get that sound. I can play Percussive Harmonic chords on a 4-string and they sound good. However, when you have 5, 6 or 7 part chords and a bass line all being played at the same time, having 7+ strings is a must.

You have said that some of the radio show hosts in LA really thought the idea of a 7 string was unusual and novel. Have you had similar interest with the 11-string?

Keep in mind that the radio personalities making these comments did so in the 80's and early 90's. Back then a number of musicians and luthiers were still laughing at my 7-string. The Adler 11-string made its public debut in January and so it is very new and I haven't had a chance to really expose the bass, other than at the recent NAMM show.

Again, on a lighter note, with the 11-string, it does begs the question...what's next and is there a limit? If so, what would dictate that limit in your opinion?

What's next is that my concept for bass guitars or fretted string

instruments tuned in fourths encompasses having as many notes as physics will permit in order get as close to the range of a grand piano as possible. It is not a question of having 7, 8, 9, 10 or 11 strings, but rather a question of how they are utilized. Therefore, the limit is based on the laws of physics.

Getting strings made that previously did not exist, such as Jauqo's low C# string, is one of the main concerns in building a master fretboard instrument. Playability is also a concern. As you can see with the 11-string, how much wider can a fretboard get and still be playable? I have already altered the way I play on the 11-string in order to maximize its playability. I probably won't rest until I can play septitone progression #921 from 'Slonimsky's Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns' on a fretted string instrument. This is the equal division of 7 octaves into 6 parts.

You have done a lot of jingle work, television and some movies. Do you plan upon continuing and developing that even more so?

Composing and producing music in that capacity utilizes another aspect of my musical skills. Most of the time, I am required to also take on an administrative role. The music is often the last part of the process. I usually only have a couple of hours to compose and record the product before it is shipped off to the client. In order to do this, I've come to rely on computers and software. I will continue to pursue this aspect, but my real passion is composing for and performing with the bass guitar.

Can you encapsulate, in a paragraph or so, what you are looking to achieve here in this music?

My thinking, in having a 7-string bass built, was to have a member of the bass guitar family that would be used and played in a different way. It wasn't a question of adding one more string to a 6-string bass, but rather of having 4 1/2 octaves in which to express Percussive Harmonics.

I feel instrumental music has the power to communicate on a more abstract and emotional level that transcends lyrics. I have been told by a number of people who have listened to the very same tracks as you, that this music has a powerful and uplifting effect on them. I developed Percussive Harmonics so I would have an original vehicle to perform compositions that can

influence and transform the listener into another realm or frame of mind. So the technique is subservient to the thought or emotion that it evokes. My goal is to continue the evolution of the bass guitar and how it is used to its fullest potential.



Listen to [Mark & Brian show](#) taken from his demo CD (download [RealPlayer](#)). Garry Goodman currently has no website of his own.



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