

CHRIS MINH DOKY

THE LANGUAGE OF LOW-END



“The Silent Bass feels exactly like my upright.”



Bassist Chris Minh Doky is bilingual: he's equally fluent on upright and electric.

The son of a Danish pop singer and a Vietnamese doctor, Doky grew up in Denmark and France, but moved to New York City as a young adult in hopes of tapping into the city's vibrant jazz scene. Those hopes came true—he's worked with such artists as Mike Stern, Randy Brecker, Ryuichi Sakamoto, and his brother, pianist Niels Lan Doky. He's also recorded several fine solo albums.

“GROWING UP SPEAKING TWO LANGUAGES IS ANALOGOUS TO THE WAY I approach music,” says Doky. “I've always loved music, especially East Coast U.S. music and the traditional folk songs of Scandinavia. To me, music really is a language, no matter what the style. Jazz, funk, whatever—they're all just dialects within the global language of music.”

There's a definite Nordic accent to Doky's bass work. “There's a very strong Danish tradition where the bass is like a lead instrument,” he notes. “It's part of the whole lyrical tradition of Scandinavian music, which is very song-oriented. When I play a solo or a melody, I actually try to ‘sing’ those lines. But when I comp behind someone else, the groove factor is from the U.S. Both those sides are equally important to me.”

Because he's skilled on both electric and upright, Doky has been able to span genres in a way that many bass players might find challenging. “Jazz is certainly closest to my heart, because there's so much improvisation,” he says. “But I also tend to get called for a lot of recordings for electric funk stuff.”

Doky has played Yamaha electric basses for close to a decade, including his current BB series five-string. “I had tried a lot of other five-strings, but none of them felt right,” he says. “But with the Yamaha, I felt at home right away. On a lot of other five-strings, it feels like the strings are too close together. But with this instrument, the distance between the strings feels very much like playing a four-string. The neck has a very four-string feel—it's not some wide, aircraft-carrier thing. Basically, it's not hard to play, like some five-strings are.”

Does Chris ever find it difficult to shift gears between electric and upright? “Well,” he says, “the only time it gets hard is when I've been on the road playing upright with Michael Brecker for a couple of weeks, get home, and have to turn

around and go out for a week playing electric with Mike Stern. It does take a second to get my head around it! Upright and electric bass really are two different instruments. They just happen to be tuned the same.”

Doky is a recent convert to Yamaha's Silent Bass. “Don't get me wrong,” he says. “I love my acoustic bass. But there are a lot of live situations where the audience isn't actually hearing the big acoustic chamber of the bass anyway, especially when there's a lot of other stuff going on onstage. In these situations, it's overkill to lug around a huge upright bass. That's where the Silent Bass comes in. It answers all my needs. For one thing, it feels exactly like my acoustic upright. That's important to me, because I don't want to have to learn a third instrument. When Yamaha designed it, they basically just started with an acoustic bass shell, and then cut out all the parts that didn't touch your body. So the feel of a genuine upright is really there. They also did a really good job with the sound. When you play through a PA, it's pretty close to an acoustic, even when you're playing solo. The Silent Bass gets a lot closer to the sound of an acoustic than any of the other instruments out there.”

And these days, says Doky, there are more reasons than ever to appreciate the Silent Bass's portability. “It's getting really hard to travel with an acoustic bass. The airlines are getting really tough with the overweight and oversize restrictions.”

The Silent Bass is featured on Chris's upcoming album. “It's kind of a funky instrumental electronica record,” he says. “I've always loved beats and electronics as well as live drums. Musically speaking, I don't think either one is above the other—they're just two different ways of looking at a groove.” For more info, check out www.doky.com.