

ROBBY TAKAC

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Grounding the Goo Goo Dolls

Bassist Robby Takac has been a fundamental part of the Goo Goo Dolls for 19 years, appearing on every album from 1987’s *First Release* to the band’s latest smash, *Gutterflower*. Robby spoke with us recently during a brief break from his latest project: producing bands for his own label, Good Charamel.

How has playing in a trio affected your bass style?

When you’re playing bass in a trio, you’ve always got your finger, your toe, or your nose in a dike, trying to keep the musical holes plugged. You learn to use the bass as a percussive instrument, as something that contributes to the whole. But then when you go into the studio, you become more of a bass player, as opposed to a guy that’s part of a common sound. In the early days, I’d ask the producer, “How am I supposed to do this live?” And the answer was generally, “I don’t care!” So you learn to treat a record and a live performance as two different things. Once you understand that difference, it’s easier to go in and make records without feeling constrained about the types of things you can do live.

The Goo Goo Dolls’ sound has gotten tighter and cleaner over the years. Was that a deliberate decision, or did it just evolve over time?

I guess it’s a little bit of both. You just want to make records that feel like you’ve expanded your sound a bit. On our last album we tried to be heavier than we’ve ever been, as well as experimenting with space as much as possible. There’s some major thickness on this last record, which might have been missing a bit from the one before that.

How are you getting your tones these days?

I tend to rely 90% on a direct signal. We have an amp set up, but usually just use it for top-end and dirtiness. Most of the solid low-end comes from the direct-in box. I get a really great low-end growl out of the combination of the DI and playing with a pick.

How do you set the controls on the bass?

For live shows, I put everything in full blast. I had my tech remove all the knobs except for the volume, because I never change those settings. When I do, it’s a drastic mistake—my soundman’s like, “What the hell’s going on?”



Speaking of tone, what are your impressions of the Yamaha bass you’ve been touring with?

I love it! I really enjoy playing this guitar. I’ve actually got two: the Yamaha BB3000MA, which is the Michael Anthony signature bass, and then the BB1000MA, which is a bolt-on version of the same model. I went to a drag race with [Van Halen bassist] Michael Anthony, and he said, “Dude, I’ve got these basses coming out.” So he sent me one, and I was like, “Wow, this is a great bass!” So my touring situation on this last trip was incredible. The basses held up really well, and they sound amazing. They make me play a bit more musically than some other guitars—my notes ring a little more clearly.

Some bass players don’t like referring to their basses as guitars, but you don’t seem to have an attitude about that.

[Laughs.] Oh man, I don’t have much of an attitude about anything! When I was a kid I played the guitar, and there weren’t any bass players around, so I sort of ended up playing the bass by default.

Did you have any bass role models growing up?

Well, I was a KISS kid, and I liked Gene Simmons, but I don’t know if I liked him because he played the bass. Mostly I liked him because he was the God of Thunder! And growing up in Buffalo, NY, I’d watch what Billy Sheehan was doing, since he was from there, too. As bass players I don’t think we could be more stylistically different, but watching his career made me realize there were possibilities outside our mutual hometown.

What inspired you to start your own label?

I became partners with the guys at a recording studio back in Buffalo where I used to intern, and I thought, “I might as well come to town, record a few bands, and see what’s going on here these days.” And I found about ten bands that absolutely blew my socks off! There are so many good bands concentrated in that area right now, and there hasn’t been much of an outlet for them. So I put a label together and signed three of them. Who knows, this may just be the start of something!