

MARCO
MENDOZA

ALL
BASSES
COVERED

"I guess I'm a chameleon of sorts," muses session bassist Marco Mendoza. "I've always been that way. I started in rock 'n' roll and expanded into jazz. Along the way I did lots of Latin, Brazilian, and reggae. It's cool that I get to put on so many different hats."

Some hats! Mendoza has played with Ted Nugent, Whitesnake, Al Jarreau, Ozzy Osbourne, Blue Murder, and many other artists. He's even worked with Thin Lizzy, subbing for the late Phil Lynott.

According to Mendoza, his work starts before the session: "When you're recording, it's important to know what you're getting yourself into and come prepared. It's like being a carpenter—if you're going to frame the side of a building, you know what tools to bring. If you're going to lay bricks, you bring something else. When I put on the rock 'n' roll hat, I know I'm going to bring a four-string bass and probably use a pick. For pop gigs, I bring a five-string so I can go to the low Ds, Cs, and Bs, plus a fretless and an acoustic bass so I can be as versatile as possible."

Furthermore, says Marco, different gigs demand different attitudes: "When I go into a quartet setup, I know there's going to be a certain amount of freedom in the bass chair. But if it's a quintet with keyboard and two guitars, my job is more about locking in with the drums and keeping the bottom heavy, groovy, and fat."

Mendoza says his favorite playing style is fingerstyle fretless. "For my money, fretless can be a little more expressive than

fretted bass. I dig the fact that four guys can grab the same fretless bass and sound totally different, more so than with frets. I understand that certain genres of music need a fretted sound, but I like to think I excel a little more on the fretless."

Yet some of Mendoza's best-known work was performed with a pick on four-string fretted bass. "On rock sessions, I end up playing with a pick 90-percent of the time, mainly because that's what the guitar players want. Most rock guitarists have either worked with bass players who used a pick, or they've recorded a lot of the bass tracks themselves using a pick. They appreciate the attack of a pick—the clarity, the ping—especially live. Ted Nugent was that way. So was the Thin Lizzy project. Given the opportunity, I'd rather play with my fingers, but I've learned to do both and jump between them."

Mendoza is a longtime fan of Yamaha basses. "They've always built some of the best stuff out there," he says. "The basses are so well put together, and they're great for recording and live work. Lately I've been using a couple of their TRB series basses: a five-string fretless and a four-string fretted with passive electronics. That's what I used on the last Thin Lizzy run, and everyone was digging it, from my tech to the front-of-house mixer. They're beautiful basses, and I'm really happy with them."

More than once, Marco has replaced a well-loved player in an established band. How does he compromise between playing the parts audiences expect and being his own man?

"Somehow," says Marco, "I can stay loyal to the recordings, but also bring something of my own to the table. The secret is to own the parts, even if you're reproducing a classic part that everyone knows. When I first started playing with Thin Lizzy, I watched Phil Lynott's videos. I studied his attack on the strings. I copied his style as closely as I could. But after a while, I started to own the parts for myself. If you don't own the music for

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