

# Fowl Player

MICHAEL ANTHONY RETURNS WITH CHICKENFOOT

MICHAEL ANTHONY FANS WERE STUNNED in 2007 when the bassist parted ways with Van Halen, the group he'd anchored for more than 30 years. But they didn't have long to grieve: In 2009 Anthony returned with Chickenfoot, a new band featuring guitar wiz Joe Satriani, Red Hot Chili Peppers drummer Chad Smith, and vocalist Sammy Hagar, another Van Halen vet. Chickenfoot's self-titled debut went gold, and the quartet toured extensively, thrilling audiences with their rough-edged sound and unpretentious spirit.

For now, Chickenfoot is roosting quietly while its members tend to other musical commitments—but the participants are already thinking about a second album and tour. We recently spoke to Anthony about his exciting new group.





#### IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU'RE HAVING FUN.

Yes! There's nothing better than getting up onstage and having fun with your buddies. You know, if you attain a lot of success—whether it's in sports, in a band like Van Halen, or anything else—it becomes a big corporate thing, and you sometimes lose sight of why you're doing it in the first place. But being in Chickenfoot is like being in my first band again.

#### WAS IT DIFFICULT ADOPTING YOUR STYLE TO SUIT THE NEW GROUP? FOR EXAMPLE, JOE SATRIANI'S TONES TEND TO BE A LOT LEANER THAN EDDIE VAN HALEN'S, WHICH REALLY EXPOSES THE BASS.

Yeah, Eddie's guitar is so big and fat across the whole spectrum that it can be hard to find a niche for the bass. In Chickenfoot, it's like a breath of fresh air how easily everything gels. And Chad is such an outside-the-box drummer. He never keeps a completely straight beat—he's always throwing in little accents. It gives me a kick in the butt! So obviously, playing with Joe and Chad inspires me to play differently.

#### FOR EXAMPLE?

Well, in the later years with Van Halen, I felt locked into things Eddie told me to play, like, "Just do a sixteenth-note treading part." In Chickenfoot, nobody put any rules or restrictions on anyone else. Everyone just knew when to do what they needed to do. It made the whole album very spontaneous—practically a jam record. And that translates onto the stage. It's fresh and new every single night.

**"To fit into the tonal range of Van Halen, I used to have to bring six or seven amps and ten or fifteen basses. But I did the whole Chickenfoot album with one amp and a couple of my Yamaha BB basses."**

#### YOUR TONES ARE VERY SIMPLE AND DIRECT.

I just kept it straight—I didn't even take an effects rack on the tour. I swear, to fit into the tonal range of Van Halen, I used to have to bring six or seven amps and ten or fifteen basses. But I did the whole Chickenfoot album with one amp and a couple of my Yamaha BB basses.

#### YOUR SIGNATURE MODEL?

Yes, and a new BB model [*BB2024*] that Yamaha is about to come out with. It's not a signature model, though a bunch of us endorsees R&D'ed it. It has a bolt-on neck with this new anchoring system that really gives it the tonal quality of a neck-through model. They also have a new way of assembling the woods that makes it a more solid unit. Plus, it's a string-through-body design, which really helps out guys like me who sometime tune down to *E<sub>b</sub>*.

#### ANY OTHER ESSENTIAL GEAR?

No, that was it. Andy Johns, the producer, just set up one mic about four feet away from the cabinet, like Led Zeppelin and the Beatles used to do. We combined that with the direct sound, and that was it. Sometimes less is more. I just went between playing with my fingers and playing with a pick, depending on whether or not I needed a little more attack.

#### DO YOU VARY YOUR PICKUP SETTINGS MUCH?

Sometimes. Well, I never use the rear pickup on its own, because it's a little thin. For the most part, I just flip it to the neck pickup and turn everything up, though I sometimes use both pickups if I want a slightly less ballsy sound. By the way, all my basses have passive electronics. I've had nothing but problems with active electronics—they're always overdriving my wireless units and stuff like that. I'd rather take a good-sounding passive bass, crank the amp, and let the amp do its work.

#### SO WILL THERE BE ANOTHER CHICKENFOOT ALBUM?

Yes. You know, we would jam before every show, with Chad on his little practice kit. We started recording the jams, and there were a lot of great ideas floating around there. Now we have to wait for Chad, who's recording a new Chili Peppers album. But we are definitely going to do it again, because it's something very special!