

# MUSIC FOR THE LOVE OF IT

## Double Bass by Jason Karpf

Adolescence and music are a powerful mix—nine parts hormones to hopefully one part theory, technique and other such noble topics. I lived the experience as a beginning electric bass player in the late seventies. Thirty years later, my teenage son, Brian, has picked up the instrument. So has his middle-aged dad, all over again.

Brian began his musical journey when his friends formed a band and needed someone on bass. I don't have scientific proof that most bassists arise from such vacancies, but after a similar call from my pals in 1977, I was soon plucking a spindly Fender Precision knockoff. I was careful to give Brian his proverbial space as he started playing bass. This was his time, his choices, his music. He didn't need some guy with gray temples and a bald spot jumping up to show him "hot licks." Besides, I had hardly played in the past two decades. My musical authority sat in the back of the closet with my ax.

I encouraged Brian when he began lessons with Mike Bear, an excellent private teacher. I knew that a strong relationship with a knowledgeable instructor was vital. During my early playing, I had received invaluable music and life lessons from my private teacher, Christopher Roberts, a bassist/composer who eventually earned a doctorate from Juilliard. My wife, Ann, presented her stepson with a check to help with lesson fees and Brian was on his way, ready to assume bass duties in his friends' band.

But Brian wasn't satisfied having me watch from the sidelines. He asked me to help him review exercises from his lessons. His preferred musical style is "death metal," a sub-genre that makes

Black Sabbath and Metallica sound mainstream. He gave me a primer, playing a CD compilation of his favorite artists. I gave back an honest critique of the songs I heard, pointing out the bands that I felt had the most inventive compositions and arrangements.

Brian asked what I felt was the most important thing for a new bass player to do. I replied that the first priority is to get a good sound out of the instrument. A whole note played well is an accomplishment. Young musicians pursue showy riffs often at the expense of intonation and basic technique. I told Brian that I learned this personally when I had recorded myself playing solo long ago. The tape had not lied: my pizzicato was painful to hear as I had thwacked the strings, desperate for power and volume. Brian faces similar challenges as he competes with his able drummer's dual bass drum pedal. A smooth, supple attack on the strings will ultimately deliver the punchiest tone.

My mini-lessons and jam sessions with Brian were having unforeseen effects. My old calluses resurfaced (better than the rookie blood blisters of '77). My trusty G&L L-1000 bass permanently left its closet exile. And my son and I acquired an automatic source for quality time—playing, discussing and listening to music. YouTube has become a jukebox and teaching aid. I run clips of funk legends like Larry Graham and Louis Johnson for Brian. In turn, he shows me videos of younger bass masters such as Les Claypool and Martin Mendez. We then dissect the bass lines we've watched and heard.

Brian and I share one more musical

trait—a healthy love of performance. We were both able to express this during one recent weekend. Brian's band was opening act at the Ventura Theatre, a glorious, old movie palace converted into a cavernous rock club. I took my seat in the "parents section" (well away from the mosh pit) and cheered on the lads. For being the newest musician in the group, Brian more than held his own, keeping a tight groove with his bandmates, moving to the lip of the stage to engage the crowd.

Two days later, it was my turn in a setting that had its own brand of energy. I sat in with the praise band at our church, Newbury Park First Christian. There are two regular bass players in the ensemble; my addition in the rotation helps free up their schedules. The sound is contemporary Christian, a melding of pop, rock, country and gospel led by Worship Pastor Doug Baird. It was the first time I had played with an organized band or worked with written parts in nearly 20 years. It was thrilling to join excellent musicians before a large, appreciative audience.

Adolescence and music are a powerful mix. It is a joy to watch the combination all over again with my son. Maturity and music blend nicely too. It is no longer a rock-star-or-bust proposition for me. Today I play music for the love of it.

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