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# BASS PLAYER

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YEARS**

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# BASS NOTES

NEWS • VIEWS • FACES • PLACES

## Jerome Harris On Acoustic Bass Guitar

### IT WAS ON A EUROPEAN TOUR WITH SONNY ROLLINS

in the late '80s when Jerome Harris first got turned on to the acoustic bass guitar. Jerome had been playing a Fender Precision Bass with the legendary tenor saxophonist, but after encountering the warm, round tones of the acoustic bass guitar one afternoon in Amsterdam, Harris was inspired to acquire one for himself. "I wanted something I could play on a straight-ahead jazz gig without getting the hairy eyeball," says Harris. "That's generally how straight-ahead cats would look at me when I'd pull out my Fender P-Bass. I've certainly studied upright jazz *style*, but I've never taken that beast on," says the native New Yorker. "I thought about getting a double bass when I was studying at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, but I couldn't find one I could afford. Since I was already playing guitar and bass guitar, I figured I'd have to drop something if I were to seriously study double bass. For me, the acoustic bass guitar was the answer."

Harris recorded prolifically on electric bass through the '80s and '90s with the likes of Rollins, Oliver Lake's *Jump Up*, and Bobby Previte's *Latin For Travelers*, and made appearances on recordings by Bill Frisell, Bob Moses, Ray Anderson, Ned Rothenberg, and Don Byron. More recently he's played acoustic bass guitar in bands led by jazz drumming greats Jack DeJohnette and Paul Motian. "More than half of my bass-playing career has been on an acoustic instrument," says Harris. "For me, the acoustic bass guitar is a better fit than a typical solid-body."

Since 1996, Harris's main ax has been a Steve Klein-designed Taylor AB-1, which he first showcased on his album *Rendezvous* [Stereophile, 1999]. "It's been an evolution," says Harris of his infatuation with the acoustic bass guitar. "My first was a budget-priced Martin Sigma. I used that bass on *Hidden In Plain View* [New World Records, 1995], which was my exploration of Eric Dolphy's compositions. But the Sigma was a plywood instrument. The action on mine was really high, and it didn't have an adjustable truss rod. Eventually I wanted an instrument that had a richer tone." Harris found it in the Taylor AB-1, and is now focusing his attention on his 5-string Ribbecke Halfling Bobby Vega Bass, an



instrument he has not yet laid to tape. "I've never owned a 5-string before," says Harris. "I've wanted one for years, but hadn't gotten around to pulling the trigger. I've been in settings where people have written down low and I've had to detune my 4-string, which can be awkward. I'd much rather have this fifth low string."

"In terms of amplification, the choices I've made have had to do with good sound, but also there's also the element of practicality, being someone who lives in New York City," says Harris. "The Mesa Walkabout, which I can easily carry with one hand, has become my go-to 'round-town bass amp."

Upcoming gigs for Harris include dates with Paul Motian's sextet, Adam Rudolph's 30-piece Go Organic orchestra, harmonica virtuoso Richard Hunter, alto saxophonist Marty Erhlich, and guitarist Kenny Wessel. Harris is also involved with Jack DeJohnette's Intercontinentals project, featuring stellar South African vocalist Sibongile Khumalo. "Jack's got a few irons in the fire, and I'm really fortunate to be part of his musical world," says Harris. The multi-faceted, open-minded bassist is also playing in clarinetist David Krakauer's Klezmer Madness and Abraham, Inc., a new band that fuses klezmer, funk, and hip-hop, and features former James Brown trombonist Fred Wesley and Yiddish rapper So-Called. "I've got my hands full," laughs Jerome. "It keeps me from getting bored." —

BILL MILKOWSKI



ESTELLE EROMENTIN

## Roland Guerin

### On Groove & Expression

#### NEW ORLEANS SCENE STALWART

Roland Guerin was an undeclared MVP at Jazz Fest this year, variously laying down solid jazz walking and spiky funk grooves with keyboard men Allen Toussaint, Henry Butler, and Ellis Marsalis. When not playing with them, guitarist John Scofield, or pianist Marcus Roberts, Guerin is busy prepping his sixth solo album. He has also contributed music to the score of the documentary "Historically Black," a forthcoming DVD from Nerjyzed Entertainment.

**Lately, you seem to be drawn to playing in piano trios. What do you like about that kind of setting?**

There's plenty of space for everyone's voices. I can rest assured the other guys are listening and ready to support me, as long as I have good ideas that make sense. But I like just about any setting where the music is on a high level.

**How do you approach your gigs with New Orleans legend Allen Toussaint?**

The bass lines Allen writes have a personality that help define the essence of his songs. When I play the lines exactly as written, that personality comes through in my voice, with my interpretation of the groove and melody.

**What's a key element in playing the New Orleans style rhythm?**

You have to understand where the *four* sits. There's no other place with that kind of groove and expression. —PHILIP BOOTH



#### HEAR HIM ON

Marcus Roberts Trio, *New Orleans Meets Harlem, Vol. 1* [J-Master, 2009]; Jeremy Davenport, *We'll Dance 'Til Dawn* [Basin Street, 2009]; Wess Anderson, *Warm It Up, Warm-daddy!* [Nu Jazz, 2009]

#### GEAR

**Upright basses** Two  $\frac{3}{4}$ -size Juzeks with medium-gauge Corelli 370 strings, Fishman Full Circle pickups, and Audio-Technica ATM350 condenser mics

**Electric basses** Ibanez BTB 576 six-string tuned *EADGCF*, Ken Smith 7-string strings; Ibanez Roadster 2 4-string; custom arch top 6-string hollowbody acoustic bass guitar (of his own design)

**Rig** SWR Natural

Blonde combo;

SWR Working-

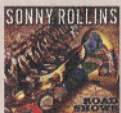
Pro 700 head

and SWR Goliath

Junior Cab;

SWR Baby Blue head

(for recording)



#### HEAR HIM ON

Sonny Rollins, *Road Shows, Vol. 1* [Emarcy/PGD, 2008]

#### GEAR

**Basses** 5-string Ribbecke

Halfing Bobby Vega Bass,

Taylor AB-1; LaBella strings

**Rig** Walter Woods head,

Eden cabinets; Mesa Boo-

gie Walkabout Scout 1x12

