Bass Guitar's **Jon D'Auria**, **Ken Micallef**, and **E.E. Bradman** ask: How do you break into the session scene? Is specializing better than being versatile? How important is music school? How do you get endorsements? In short: What does it take to be a successful bass player?

Taking Care of Business

The mighty **Randy Jackson**—legendary bassist, producer, manager, and *American Idol* judge—plus **Nate Query** of the Decemberists and L.A. sideman extraordinaire **Chris Chaney** spill their secrets.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY EMILY SHUR

"Don't act like you're in Guitar Center and play 18 notes a second, or at the NAMM show playing 5,000 notes a minute."

WE HERE AT *BASS GUITAR* spend a lot of time talking about everything related to music. Like you, we search for the best ways to hone our chops, work with other musicians, understand music theory, and find the perfect gear. We read columns, take lessons, attend schools, listen to all kinds of music, go see our favorite bands, and practice as much as possible. ❖ Deep down, however, we all know that there's more to becoming a successful professional musician than theory or gear, or determination, or even talent. Is it just a question of nurturing our talent, picking a niche, recognizing the roadmaps to success, and putting in the work?

RANDY JACKSON thinks so. In the three decades since he snagged his first big gigs with Seventies fusion masters Billy Cobham and Jean-Luc Ponty, Jackson has become one of the most successful session bassists in history, and one of the very few who has transitioned to the upper echelon of the music business. Besides working on over 1,000 gold and multi-platinum albums for artists like Celine Dion, *NSYNC, Journey, Whitney Houston, Madonna, and Elton John, Jackson also spent much of the Nineties as a label executive at Columbia Records and at MCA, where he was instrumental in the careers of stars like Gladys Knight and Mariah Carey.

Jackson, famously nicknamed "The Emperor," would still be an industry legend even if his career had ended upon the advent of the phenomenally successful *American Idol*, which starts its sixth season in January 2007. But the Louisiana native—who turns 50 this year—still

THE EMPEROR ♦ *A quick glance at Randy Jackson's studio credits*

In the studio in 2003

With Journey in 1986

With Journey in 1987

THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT: JESSE GRANT/WIREIMAGE.COM; MICHAEL MENDELSON; WILLIAM HAMES

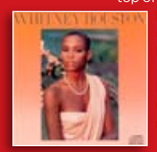
OVER HIS THREE-DECADE career, Jackson has played on more than 1,000 recordings across genres spanning jazz-rock, fusion, rock, R&B/funk, blues, and hard rock. He's best known, however, for playing with some of the biggest adult-contemporary pop stars of the Eighties and Nineties. Here are some of the highlights of his catalog.

The Seventies

Jackson, barely 20 in 1976, scores his first big gig, touring with Mahavishnu Orchestra drummer Billy Cobham. He appears on two 1977 Cobham albums, ***Magic*** and ***Simplicity of Expression: Depth of Thought*** (both on Columbia). While on tour with Cobham, he meets producer/drummer Narada Michael Walden.

The Eighties

Jackson's pop collaborations with Walden become blockbuster hits, most notably Whitney Houston's ***Whitney Houston*** and Aretha Franklin's ***Who's Zoomin' Who?***, both released on Arista in 1985. Franklin's smash single "Freeway to Love," 1987's "I Wanna Dance With Somebody (Who Loves Me)" (from ***Whitney***, also on Arista), and the theme Houston sang for the 1988 Olympics, "One Moment in Time," bring them even more acclaim.



Meeting Journey guitarist Neil Schon in 1983 leads to Jackson ghosting on ***Frontiers*** (Columbia, 1985), which was to be the band's last album. Jackson becomes a full-time member when the band reunites for ***Raised on Radio*** (Columbia, 1986), playing on hits like "Be Good to Yourself" and "Girl Can't Help It."

Jackson also works with Blue Öyster Cult, Eddie Money, Joe Cocker, Bobby McFerrin, George Benson, Todd Rundgren, Eddie Murphy, and Bob Dylan, and his playing helps take Lionel Richie's ***Dancing on the Ceiling*** (Motown, 1986), Kenny G's ubiquitous ***Duotones*** (Arista, 1986), and Michael Bolton's breakthrough on Columbia, 1987's ***The Hunger***, to the top of the charts—that's him on Bolton's cover of "(Sittin' on the) Dock of the Bay." He closed out the Eighties with the bassline of Madonna's "Express Yourself" (from 1989's ***Like a Prayer***, Warner/Sire).

The Nineties

Jackson's career goes into overdrive when he moves to L.A. at the start of the Nineties. He continues working with Eighties stars (Bolton, Marx, Richie), plays with rockers (Billy Idol, Stryper, Aldo Nova), and gets into smooth jazz (Kirk Whalum, Nancy Wilson), while adding even more high-profile pop hitmakers to his résumé—Celine Dion, Cher, Elton John, Billy Joel, and Jon Bon Jovi (Jackson played on "Blaze of Glory"). He's especially proud of his work on Bruce Springsteen's ***Human Touch*** (Columbia, 1992). The killer bass part on former Arrested Development singer Dionne Farris's smash "I Know," from ***Wild Seed—Wild Flower*** (Sony, 1995) is his, too.

By the middle of the decade, Jackson moves into doing A&R at Columbia. His studio schedule begins to slow down, but he plays bass on select cuts for friends like Mariah Carey, for whom he also served as musical director and Columbia A&R. Her ***MTV Unplugged*** EP and DVD (Columbia, 1992) show both of them at the height of their powers. Jackson is still involved in her career as musical director, producer, co-writer, and occasional bassist.

Since 2000

Twenty-five years after he jumped into the music biz, Jackson—now senior VP of A&R and staff producer at MCA—snags a Grammy in 2000 for producing Motown soul icon Gladys Knight's ***At Last*** (Motown/MCA). At the other end of the age spectrum, he guests on *NSYNC's ***Celebrity*** (Jive, 2001). After a label shakeup, he gets fired in 2002—and almost immediately lands ***American Idol***. He spent 2006 finishing and promoting Sixties-era soul singer Sam Moore's all-star ***Overnight Sensational*** (Rhino, 2006). He's currently working on upcoming releases by country star Travis Tritt and second-season ***Idol*** finalist Kimberly Caldwell (he also played on first-season winner Kelly Clarkson's 2003 hit, ***Thankful***, on RCA).

Jackson promises that his first solo album, scheduled for June 2007, will be a diverse taste of "who I am—a coupla months in a dawg's life. I'm gonna do an ode to bass players and drummers, with three drummers, three bass players—and we're gonna have some fun. I'm gonna have a good time with it!"

finds time to be a musical director and occasional bassist (Carey), manager (Van Hunt and Nikka Costa), producer (Travis Tritt), recording artist (his first solo album is due next summer), and radio-show host (he deejays the syndicated *Hit List*).

Beyond being just another world-class musician, however, Jackson has always been one industry insider who keeps it real: his early-Nineties columns for *Bass Player* offered practical insights from his recording sessions; his bass instructional video, 1992's *Mastering the Groove* (CPP Media), focused on fundamentals Jackson felt were lost in an era of gratuitous technique; and his 2004 book, *What's Up Dawg: How to Become a Superstar in the Music Business* (Hyperion), may be the ultimate guide to making it. His use of slang and his friendly manner are hallmarks of his experienced but unjaded persona; as numerous *American Idol* contestants and viewers can attest, his energy and optimism can make you feel like you can take on the industry and win.

Jackson's first inkling of the studio life was a 1973 visit to L.A. to watch the legendary Chuck Rainey in action, so it is only fitting that we started our conversation with one of his favorite topics—mentors.

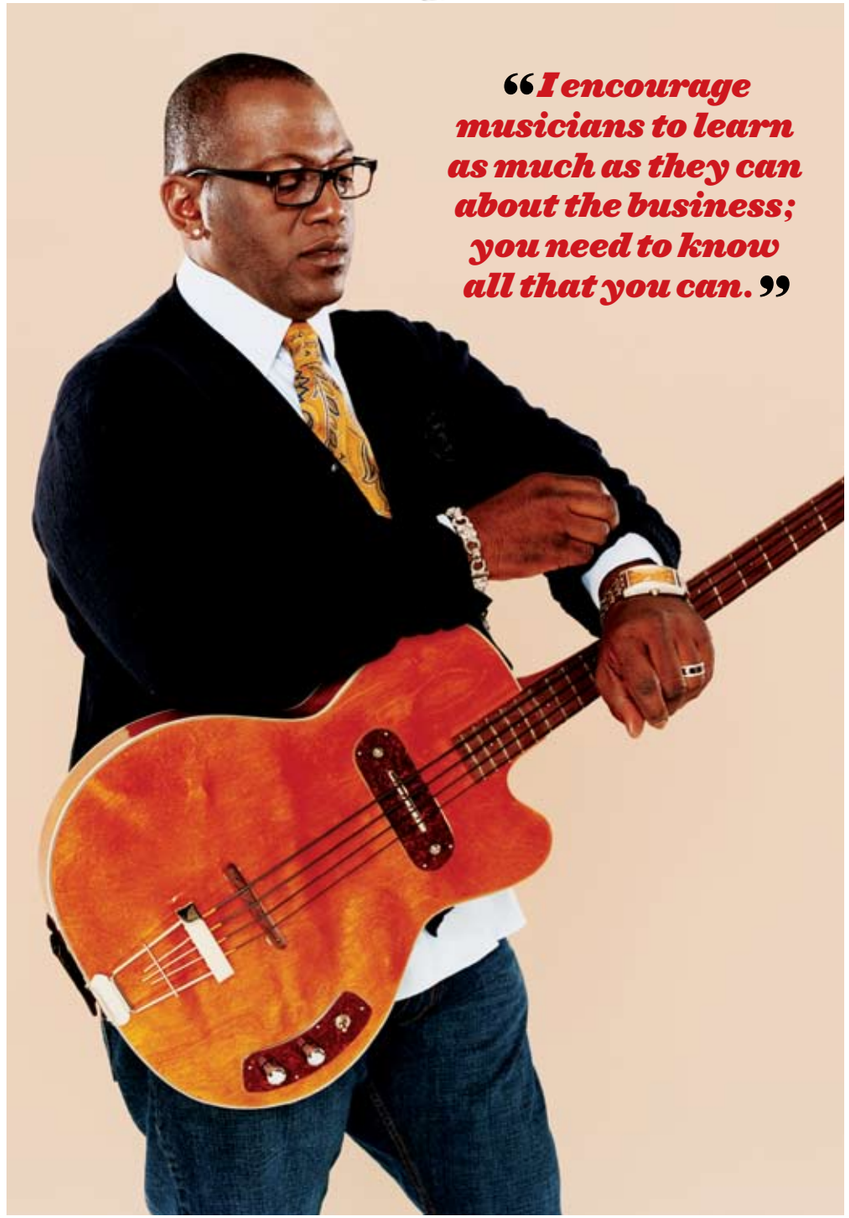
♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦

BASS GUITAR: Who were your earliest mentors?

RANDY JACKSON: I had tons of mentors. I got started by taking lessons with this guy Sammy Thornton in my hometown of Baton Rouge. He was in an R&B band, he played a Fender Precision—and everything he played, he made it feel good. He was *dope*! Later on I learned a lot from records—I loved Ron Carter, Miroslav Vitous, Stanley [Clarke], Jaco Pastorius, Scott LaFaro.

BG: What was it like to meet and hang with Chuck Rainey, and to get those early gigs with Billy Cobham and Jean-Luc Ponty?

RJ: To see Chuck Rainey in action while he was working on Donald Byrd's *Black Byrd* album (Blue Note, 1973)—I was 17—to see him doing sessions, and to get to hang out with him—it was great. He was just the coolest guy; he created a part of who I am today. Playing with Billy was a dream come true; he has so much power, so much force. One of the first gigs we played was at the Great American Music Hall in San Francisco, and dude, he was playing so hard and fierce that the whole stage was shaking! And, of course, I met Narada Michael Walden while I was touring with Billy—Narada was out with L. Shankar and John McLaughlin, and we talked about hooking up and working together. Jean-Luc Ponty was another musician out of the Mahavishnu Orchestra. I've been so lucky.



"I encourage musicians to learn as much as they can about the business; you need to know all that you can."

BG: By the time you hit the scene, Stanley Clarke and Jaco Pastorius were taking James Jamerson's innovations to the next level.

RJ: Jamerson was a melodic bass player along with Paul

THE ULTIMATE PRO • *Chris Chaney*

A JACK-OF-ALL-TRADES who can handle any style for any gig, L.A.-based Chris Chaney has a deep knowledge of both the session and band scenes. Currently plying his rig with the Panic Channel and the Coattail Riders, Chris is an alumnus of Jane's Addiction, Porno for Pyros, and Alanis Morissette's band. Most recently, he joined Scott Weiland and Dave Navarro for Camp Freddy, a Seventies cover band. He's also recording the soundtrack for the upcoming adventure flick *300*, he's in the studio with Christian artist Stephen Curtis Chapman and blues rocker Robben Ford, and he's developing music for a TV reality show, *The Search for the Next Pussycat Doll*.

♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦

BG: How important is a formal music education?

CC: It depends. Some musicians I know have never gone to music school. It's about how much music is in you and how motivated you are to work on songs and how good your ears are. But it is important to learn how to read; in sessions, you are expected to read chord charts and notation. Generally, I'm pro-music school, because it surrounds you with musicians from all over the world, you'll be thrown into a melting pot of styles, and you'll absorb a ton of influences. I went to Berklee for two years. All that competition kicked me into high gear.

BG: How did you network and become known?

CC: I used to have a house gig in L.A. [at Dragonfly] for a singers' showcase where I met a lot of people. The band director would bring in 20 vocalists every Tuesday night and it became a well-known gig in the early Nineties. The guitarist in the band got called for Alanis Morissette's gig, and then they called me, which is how I joined her band. I was also giving bass lessons to a video director, and he introduced me to Steven Bray, who produced Madonna's early records. He called me for a gig; I said "Yes" to everything.

L.A. is a fickle city. You can just get an audition and land a gig [ahead of] of people who have been in L.A. for 20 years. I just climbed the ladder.

BG: Do you schedule all your own work?

CC: I have management that represents me for various bands, but I book all my own session work. I have never had a business card or a BlackBerry; I'm good with names and faces. I have a Mac account with producers' and musicians' names I have worked with. My session gigs get booked about a month in advance.

Money-wise, some labels want to pay a day rate instead of full double scale, which used to be standard. With a million-selling artist the day rate will be higher than someone who is doing a 12-song demo for a couple of days. I negotiate my rate accordingly. And I always discuss money before the session. But I'm flexible. I want to play, first and foremost. The worst day as a musician is still better than doing anything else.

BG: What's the best way to learn a setlist in a hurry?

CC: I go down the list and listen to the songs; then I sit down with my bass, and then I make charts if the songs are complex. I've learned enough songs that I can pretty much memorize an arrangement. That's where having an education based in jazz is good, 'cause songs are all based on forms—AABA, AAB, ABC—these different sections that tell you where you are. I might write notes on the top of the chart to remind me of note values or the groove. Sometimes I'll write down the first two bars in bass clef, which will help me remember the rest of the track.

DANIELLE ST. LAURENT

BG: Do you have any tips for doing well at auditions?

CC: You have to go in and own the gig. You almost have to have the confidence that you are in the band before you even arrive. If you get the songs in advance, go above and beyond. If they pick one song or change the arrangement, you have to be über-prepared. When we auditioned keyboardists for Jane's Addiction, no one told the players we were tuned down a half-step from the records. Some could do it, some couldn't. Be adaptable, be flexible, be professional. And be someone everyone can get along with and not cause a lot of drama.

"The worst day as a musician is still better than doing anything else."

BG: What is the best way to leave a band?

CC: It depends why you're leaving. It helps to have a good set of reasons that people can relate to. I can't tour for three months straight 'cause my wife and kids will shoot me. I had done Alanis's gig for a long time and was enjoying working on other projects; she liked to do long tours; and we'd just had our first child. Shakira wanted me to tour all of last year and I had to turn her down. You can't do it all.

BG: As a freelancer, how do obtain health-care coverage?

CC: I get health care for my family through my union, Local 47. The union has your back. Some musicians have regular gigs where the union can really help. And when labels take their sweet time to pay you for sessions, the union can step in, make some calls, and come down hard. They are the hammer.

BG: Is your gear insured?

CC: I have homeowners insurance and the bands have tour insurance. It cost the Coattail Riders $7,000 to get everything insured. I don't know if my home insurance covers my ax around town, though. I have to ask my accountant, who has all my serial numbers and receipts. I hate to even think about it.

BG: Do you still find time to practice?

CC: I'm always working on something—even learning songs in different styles is practicing. I might be able to draw from those songs when I am doing sessions. If you play a groove from a song all day, that groove will find its way into your playing on a gig. I like compilation box sets to learn all the different songs. The best way to become a great bass player is to learn songs with great basslines. I will also make up exercises based on scales and arpeggios. Playing bass is a muscle you have to exercise.

BG: Do you listen to the radio to stay current?

CC: I listen to classic-rock radio. I'm in that world of modern rock so I don't have to listen to it—I know it.

BG: How are you preparing for your financial future?

CC: Even before I joined Alanis, I had saved five grand, which at the time was a miracle. My dad suggested I invest that in a money market account, and with Alanis I added paychecks to the account and watched my money grow. I also have money in IRAs that I add to every year. And I have money in ETFs, which are foreign trade funds. Most musicians are worrying about surviving. With the guys I work with, it is split down the middle: Some of them just have a savings account; others put money into brokerage accounts. And I write off my home studio and my car.

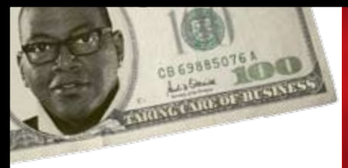
BG: What advice can you give to bassists who are looking for endorsements?

CC: You have to either be known as a phenomenal player or you have to have a gig. Or your dad has to own the company. Endorsements are helpful when you are on the road—they will save your butt. I endorse Aguilar, Epiphone, and Lakland. I play everything they make.

BG: If you want to take over the session world, should your destination be L.A. or New York?

CC: It is a hard scene to get into anyway, but Nashville and New York are the meccas. For soundtrack work it's L.A., though you can do well in Nashville, too. But there is more rock, pop, and film work in L.A. My roots are here.

—KEN MICALLEF



“If you are hot, there will always be work for you.”

McCartney, another genius of the bass. He played a lot of notes, but Motown’s music was built around his basslines. Stanley and Jaco were *the* frontrunners for the electric, fusion-ish kinda playing where the bass was like a lead instrument.

I think many players made the mistake of thinking that those guys weren’t listening, that they were playing whatever they wanted to play. But if you dig deep, you’ll see that those guys *were* listening, and that their voices fit their bands perfectly! Jaco came to prominence in Weather Report, where [saxophonist/co-leader] Wayne Shorter’s lyrical sense and [keyboardist/co-leader] Joe Zawinul’s lyrical sense allowed him to play like he did. Stanley was in Return to Forever with [keyboardist] Chick Corea, [drummer] Lenny White, and [guitarist] Al DiMeola—all of them playing just like him—so it was perfect. Victor Wooten, one of my favorite young bass play-

THE TEAM PLAYER • *Nate Query*

UNLIKE CHRIS CHANEY and Randy Jackson, Nate Query is a one-band man. With four critically acclaimed albums and a slew of EPs under their belt, his Portand-based five-piece the Decemberists have finally hit it big with their first release on a major label, *The Crane Wife* (Capitol). We asked him about some of the day-to-day aspects of being in an up-and-coming band.

BG: What does being “pro” mean in the context of your band? Now that you’re making a living by creating music, what’s different?

NQ: I’ve made a living by way of music for the last 15 years, but I’ve really only been successful financially from it in the last three. In my opinion, success and wealth are two entirely different things—I paid for our first album on my credit card when we had no label interest and no money. That, to me, was success because we were so happy with what we had created. There was no wealth involved on that one.

BG: So how has your lifestyle changed in light of your recent success?

NQ: Being signed to Capitol Records means that I don’t need a day job to pay my bills. It frees up all of my time to making music, which in turn aids my creative process. The first thing I did with my record advance was purchase a new upright, and that’s something I really couldn’t do without label support.

BG: There must be quite a risk of theft or loss while touring the world as much as you do. Do you insure your gear?

NQ: Absolutely. I’ve been robbed of my gear twice in my career, and after the first time I ran out immediately and got insurance. I go through an amazing company called MusicPro (musicproinsurance.com). Every musician out there should be insured—it saves a lot of headache if anything were to happen to you.

BG: How important are endorsements, and how do you get them?

NQ: I am currently endorsed by Lakland basses and Aguilar amplifiers. It feels so good to be recognized in that light, and those two companies really take care of me. Most endorsements come from a band’s mainstream popularity, but even if you’re not in the limelight, it is very possible to get them. Just keep contacting the companies and get your name stuck in their head, whether they like it or not.

BG: How much of the business side (paperwork, lawyers, etc.) do you have to handle on your own?

NQ: In three years, I went from doing everything myself to doing none of the business side at all. I used to do all of our tour managing and bookkeeping, but now we’ve hired people we trust to take care of that. But it’s definitely important for bands to know how to do those things—to really understand what’s going on—so there is no risk of getting burned later on.

BG: Now that you are on a major label, what goes into promoting your records?

NQ: Bands can kill themselves trying to take every promo opportunity handed to them, so we try to be very strategic about our promotion. For our most recent album, ***The Crane Wife***, we tried a new approach: We promoted it all over the country before it was released so that once it was out, we could just focus on touring. It allowed us to take it all on at once while still getting the word out to build anticipation.

BG: With such a busy agenda and constant travel regimen, how do you keep track of your daily schedule and manage your time?

NQ: All of the band members carry laptops on the road, and several have BlackBerrys. Our managers really do keep us on point, but my main source for organization is my Palm Pilot. It has GPS maps and a very nice calendar that keeps me on schedule. The band always makes fun of me for having it, but they always rely on it to find the closest restaurants, so I guess that validates it! (*laughs*)

BG: With such a rigorous schedule, how do you stay healthy on the road?

NQ: When we first started traveling by bus, I got really sick from staying up late at night—it’s like a fun apartment on wheels. It was easier to rest before because I was either sleeping or driving the van. This tour, I’ve definitely focused on getting enough sleep, eating right, and getting exercise, such as bike riding, to keep me healthy.

BG: Do you have a band fund or does it go straight to your pockets?

NQ: We actually have a business manager that handles all of our cash, but the irony is that business managers are very expensive to employ. The only clients that need them are successful bands and therefore they are able to charge more. It’s pretty funny.

BG: And are you investing your money or saving it for the future?

NQ: Well, my wife’s in medical school, so that’s probably my biggest investment (*laughs*), but honestly, I just started making investments and saving my money wisely. We’ve definitely been on a major roll in the last several years, but we all know that nothing lasts forever, and at some point the money won’t be coming in like it is now. This is the time when I have to budget wisely so that I’m not flipping burgers in ten years.

BG: How do you find time for your friends and family while you’re on the road?

NQ: My wife’s very occupied with school at the moment, so we just really rely on open communication. Two members of the band recently had kids, so it’s a bit more difficult for them. It’s really hard because labels and managers have no incentive to give a band time off—when we’re out on the road, they’re making their money. A good manager will always look out for your best interests, mentally and emotionally.

BG: The Decemberists are based out of Portland, Oregon, but you live in San Francisco.

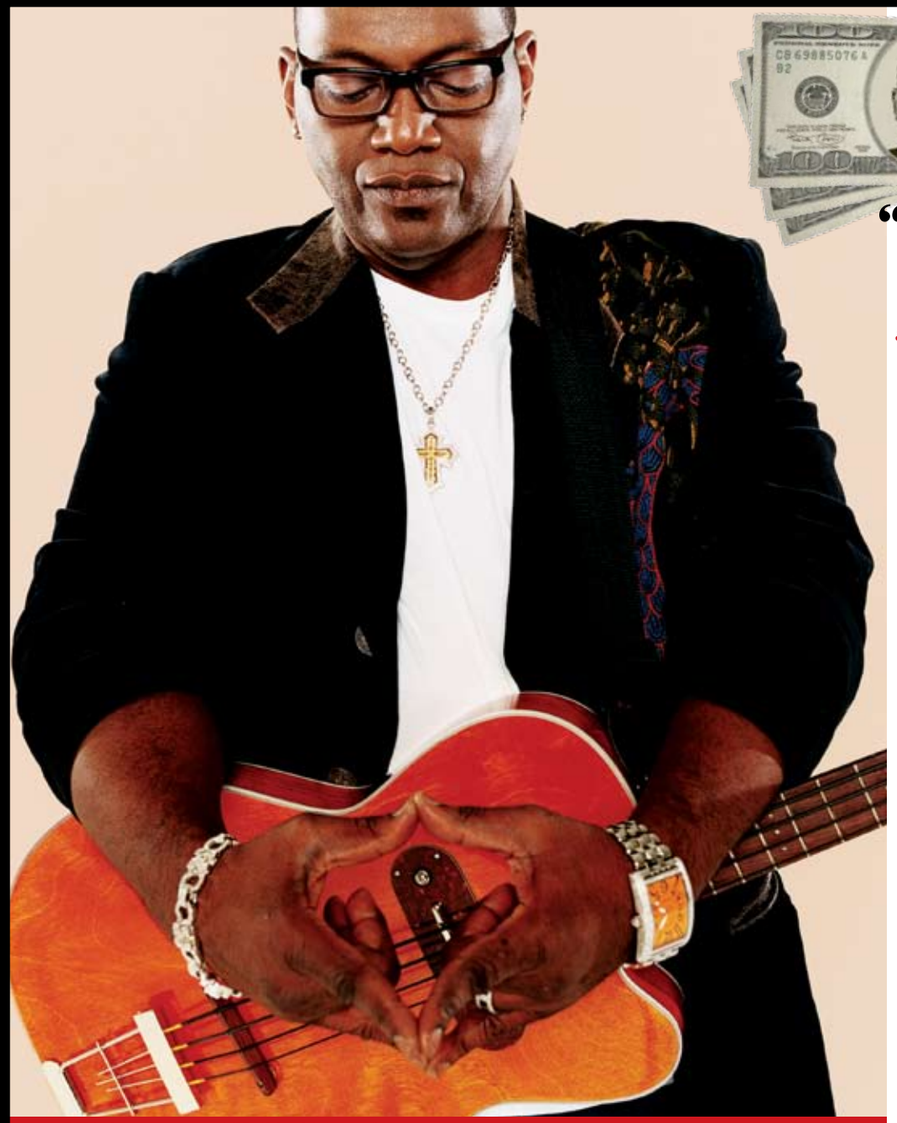
NQ: It really wasn’t my first choice, but this is where my wife’s school is. It’s really quite beautiful here, but it lacks the type of music scene that I have been spoiled with in other places. It sucks when I have to fly three hours round-trip with my gear to Portland for a two-hour photo shoot.

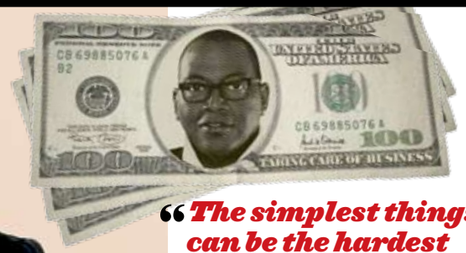
BG: If you weren’t in the music business, what would you be doing right now?

NQ: I’d probably be a teacher or in some type of profession that moves people. Honestly, I was born to be a musician, and at this point, it’s extremely hard to picture doing anything else with my life.

“This is the time when I have to budget wisely so that I’m not flipping burgers in ten years.”

FRANCINE DAVETA/RETNA (NATE QUERY)





“The simplest things can be the hardest to play, because no one wants to be simple anymore.”

ers, is brilliant with Bela Fleck and the Flecktones; he’s playing in a way that complements the situation, and complements him.

BG: What did you do after Jean-Luc Ponty?

RJ: I played in Jeff Lorber’s band, Jeff Lorber Fusion, did some records with him, made some records with Kenny G (he was in Jeff’s band at the time), and made a record with Herbie Hancock. I hooked up with Narada Michael Walden in the Bay Area, and we made a lot of records with Aretha Franklin, Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey, Stacy Lattislaw. . . . These were very pure, great times. Just living through the music.

BG: You joined Journey in 1983 and played on *Raised on Radio*. What was that like?

RJ: Playing with them was one of the greatest experiences ever. Steve Perry is one of the greatest vocalists, period, and Neil Schon is an unbelievable guitar player. Jonathan Cain is a brilliant songwriter, and Steve Smith? One of the best drummers ever. I made a couple of albums with Bruce Springsteen that I love. Bob Dylan, too. I’ve been blessed to be around some great people.

BG: In your book, you say that you hit a wall with the session-player thing.

RJ: I was working with Dylan, Springsteen, Celine Dion, Elton John, Lionel Richie, Billy Joel, Mariah—all these greats. I was like, I have to pinch myself. It’s never gonna get better than this. I need to figure out where I’m going from here, because this is a peak, a dream come true.

BG: So you got into doing A&R at Columbia Records.

RJ: Yes. I always knew a lot about the business and it has

FULL CIRCLE • *Randy Jackson’s Gear*

“THERE’S NOT A lot of bass companies making anything new and exciting,” says Randy Jackson, who has been associated with Peavey, Fender, and Mike Lull axes for years. “They think bass players are dull people, but we’re usually the life of the party.”

Jackson has stepped into the void by collaborating with Dean Markley on the new, gold-wrapped Randy Jackson Alchemy Strings, which boast “the sound benefits of stainless steel strings with the feel, tension, and growl of a nickel-plated steel string that will last a long, long time.” “The whole idea is, I wanted to make a string you didn’t need to break in,” says Jackson. “As soon as you open up the package, you’re dressed for the prom. They feel good, they sound good, and they look good.”

And he isn’t stopping there. “I’m in the process of making a new line of amps and a new line of basses, but I can’t name the manufacturer yet,” Jackson reveals. “I had never really wanted to do that, but I’m at the point where I have the knowledge to do this. . . I’ve been doing the research, working on it for the last couple of years, and now we’re finally ready. Not that anybody needs to reinvent the wheel—I’m certainly not trying to—but I think I finally have an angle on what to do.”

In the meantime, he’s been playing old-school basses like the Fritz Bros. F.B. Bass he sported for the *Bass Guitar* photo shoot. “I love the way old semi-hollow and hollowbody basses sound—Kays, Nationals, Gibsons,” he says. “I’ve also been playing old Fenders, especially a 1957 P-Bass, on a lot of records.” He says Ibanez and Sterling Ball Bongo basses have also caught his eye, and he’s “really impressed” with Jay Turser’s budget-friendly creations.

When it comes to effects, Jackson says, “I use a lot of Line 6 pedals in the studio, and I love the [Line 6] Bass POD Pro. I try to keep the gear thing a little bit on the simple side, but I think bass players shouldn’t be afraid to try pedals and gadgets—they might help to spark an idea, even if, just for nothing else, in writing.”

always helped me. I encourage musicians to learn as much as they can about the business; you're selling your wares, selling your music, and you need to know all that you can.

BG: Do today's bass players need different skills than they did in the past?

RJ: We're living in a time now when you need to know as much as you can about music.

Ultimately, you need to become as great as you can. That's why you need to narrow down your field and decide what category is the one for you. As soon as you do that, you can decide what it's gonna take for you to become great in that area.

"I can call 80 bazillion people that can play the part, but how many are living and breathing the soul of that part?"

BG: What's wrong with playing many different styles?

RJ: Listen, you can work and get gigs and make money and have fun, because when you're not making records or it's not a highbrow professional thing, you can play whatever you want. But as soon as it's time to be authentic, you have to know who you are.

BG: So we have to limit ourselves?

RJ: We all have limitations. Most bass players, especially of the jazz and jazz-fusion type, think they can play everything, but playing everything is *not* about the notes and *not* about dexterity. It's about being centered in the soul and attitude of the music. That's the hard part.

BG: What if someone doesn't have lofty ambitions—they just want to be a meat-and-potatoes player?

RJ: There's nothing wrong with that. In fact, the simplest things can be the hardest to play, because no one wants to be simple anymore. If that's the kinda player you are, that's what you do.

You know what I tell most young bass players? Just be who you are. Live in the moment—go with it. Don't try to force that moment to be something else, and you'll be much happier.

BG: How do you zero in on your passion and your identity as a bass player?

RJ: What really lights up your soul? The easiest way to find out is to spend time investigating, playing the music you like with people that authentically play it. It takes time. You really have to listen and pay attention.

BG: But you didn't have to choose—you played so many different styles with different artists.

RJ: Times are different now. That kinda player, the "bassist for all seasons"—people like myself, Freddy Washington, Will Lee, Nathan East, Neil Stubenhaus—I don't think that particular kind of player is being created anymore. I mentioned five or six people, and there's maybe a list of 20, and that's it. Victor Wooten doesn't do that. Oteil Burbridge doesn't do that. They're unbelievable players, but they don't do that.

Look, people ask me why music was so much better in the Seventies. There's about 50 bazillion more albums out now than there were in the Seventies, but the quality control was a lot higher back then—now there are a trillion times more bad albums to weed through. The answer? There's just more people—the planet has grown—and everybody's in the music game. I mean, a kid can buy records, buy an MPC, sample stuff, make some beats, somebody raps over it, and all of a sudden he's a producer. You buy the gear today at 4 o'clock in the afternoon and by 10 o'clock tonight you're a producer. The session player with all that proficiency, all those skills—there's no call for them, and they're *(continued on page 56)*

not being made like that anymore.

A kid comes out now and sees Jay-Z over here, Justin Timberlake over there, Mariah Carey, the Killers, the Fray over here, Mudvayne, Metallica over here, Jill Scott, The Roots. . . he has to decide where he's gonna go. There are so many colors of the rainbow now. We—and I'm speaking for *all* of us session guys—we had a lotta colors, but we didn't have *that* many colors! It's hard to even be that kinda player now.

As a producer—with all my 30 years of experience in the business, and knowing

the game—if I'm doing a rock record, guess who I'm gonna call? A rock & roller. I don't wanna call someone else that's gonna give me 12 other colors but they'll also give me this color. I only want authenticity on my records. Gimme that rock player, because he's gonna play the *hell* out of that rock, and I ain't gonna have to tell him, "Yo, make it more like this, it ain't rock enough."

BG: What else do you look for in a bass player?

RJ: I like people who actually listen to the music, who try to get into the soul of what the song is about. I can call 80 bazillion people that can play the part, but how many are living and breathing the *soul* of that part? When I don't play bass on a session I'm producing, I hire Sonny Thompson out of Minneapolis, who used to play with Prince and the NPG, or Tommy Sims from Nashville, or this guy here in town, Cornelius Mims. These guys always listen before jumping in.

BG: How can bass players get into the spirit of the song?

RJ: You have to think, Let me not *be* the song—let me play to what the song needs. You have to *really* listen first. Don't pick up your instrument and act like you're in Guitar Center and play 18 notes a second, or at the NAMM show playing 5,000 notes a minute. This is not about shredder time. It's about listening and reacting to the music in a great, ensemble way.

BG: You talk about the "roadmaps to success" in your book.

RJ: There are enough big signs in life [that point to] what's working and what's not working. The easiest way to see them is to go back and know what came before you; it's important to know where you came from in order to know where you really want to go. If you're a bass player who wants to be successful, go back and soak up all those old grooves. Really get involved, get into it—learn what all that's about before you go charging into the future.

BG: How can a band distinguish itself in this competitive marketplace?

RJ: I don't believe a band will be successful unless something about it has star power. Either the music is a star—the songs are just phenomenal—or there's a star personality.

Most successful bands have a star singer and star guitar player. Look at Zeppelin: Robert Plant and Jimmy Page. Bon Jovi has Jon and Richie Sambora. Journey? Neil Schon and Steve Perry. David Lee Roth and Eddie Van Halen. Pete Townshend and Roger Daltrey. Star singer and star guitar player. If you don't have that, do you even have a band?

I'm not making up the rules. I'm just looking at the biggest roadmap in life: success. It's the plainest to see. I call these the natural laws of the universe. But people just don't want to live by them—they don't even want to look at 'em.

BG: We're spending lots of time talking about success in the music business, but the truth is, most musicians don't want to know about any of this business stuff.

RJ: Look, you have a choice: You can make it some fantasy playtime that you do on weekends *(continued on page 72)*

JACKSON *(cont. from page 72)*

and holidays and a coupla nights a week, or it can become your career. It's like being a carpenter or a painter or working for NASA or McDonald's—it's a job. Wouldn't you want to know everything there is to know about your job?

BG: So many musicians get that message pounded into them that they have to play for the love of music because there's no money in it.

RJ: No. No. No. *No!* Look at the roadmap: Stanley Clarke has made a great living. Jaco Pastorius made a great living. Larry Graham,

Bootsy Collins—hey, there's *money* out here! A session guy today can maybe get $2,000 to $2,500 a day!

BG: But when you talk to session veterans, they say there's a lot less work these days—that thanks to technology like Pro Tools, there's no such thing as a session scene.

RJ: No. Make no mistake—and you heard the Dawg say it: If you are hot, there will *always* be work for you. If you are no longer hot, or if what you're best at is now passé, no one's gonna be callin' your ass. But check it out: If you are hot, you *will* be getting calls. End of story.

Now, the session game *has* changed because of Pro Tools, and the advent of [this] technology has moved everybody into their own bedroom—but there will still be time for musicians.

BG: Then why aren't musicians making more money?

RJ: What I said was, *Make it hot*. If you're on a gig and you're hot, your shit is blazing, then somebody's gonna hire you and pay you some money for what you do. But if your shit is just alright, maybe you need to go back to the woodshed.

Dollars are harder-earned than they were ten or 20 years ago. People need to know that you have something they can only get from you. That's why you need to specialize. Your calling card is your talent. Gotta make it hot, man!

BG: Are you saying that talent is more important than versatility?

RJ: *Specialized* talent is more important than versatility. You're selling your skills. You're saying, "I am John Joseph, I play bass, and I play the hell out of some rock shit. I can rock you to death. I'm like Billy Sheehan, Flea, John Entwistle, and Justin Chancellor all in one." And when you show up, you need to *look* the part, you need to *be* the part, you need to *breathe* it. If you don't. . . . There's a lotta people like myself that have been doing this a long time, and as soon as you walk through the door, we know the measure of who you are, and we're already judging whether this is going to work or not before you've even plugged that bass in.

BG: What do you think when you look back on your career, and what final advice would you have for someone who wanted to follow in your footsteps?

RJ: My whole thing is always about keepin' it real and living in reality. I don't look back. I believe that once you finish this page, you go on to the next chapter and continue to grow as a person. It helps to not carry one chapter to the next.

I was just a kid growing up in Louisiana that loved music, and music is still the center of everything I do in my life—*American Idol*, my solo record, the artists I manage, everything. So I'm in the middle of living out my music dreams.

I tried to play wherever I could, and I've made so many records that I've stopped counting. It was never about money, and it will never be about money, because I believe that if you do your thing correctly, if you do it to the best of your ability—if you make it *hot*—money will come. ■