

BASS MAGAZINE

ISSUE 3

THE FUTURE OF BASS

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ELTON JOHN
DICKIE WARWICK
BETTY MIDLER
GEORGE BENSON
SHAKA KHAN
BOB DYLAN
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ABRAHAM LABORIEL EL MAESTRO!

HERB ALPERT
BIG MOUNTAIN
SHEENA EASTMAN
AL JARREAU
LIONEL RICHIE
GLESIAS
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The Soundtrack of Our Lives

By E. E. Bradman / Photo by Phil Farnsworth

IN a speech first published after his death in 2008, the influential American writer David Foster Wallace told a parable about two young fish who meet an older fish swimming the other way. The older fish nods at them and says, "Morning, boys, how's the water?" The young fish swim on for a bit, and eventually, one of them looks over at the oth-

er and goes, "What the hell is water?"

Wallace was referring to the deep-seated belief, "hard-wired into our boards at birth," that each of us is the center of the universe. But the celebrated writer, who was fond of Pink Floyd, Alanis Morissette, the Flaming Lips, and '80s music, could easily have been talking about a body of work so ubiquitous in American pop culture that we've barely noticed its creator.

Over the course of his 48-year career, Abraham Laboriel has brought his heart, ears, and hands to over 4,000 recording sessions, combining a studio ninja's intense focus with a full-body style that includes energetic strumming and slapping, flurries of four-finger flamenco technique, bluesy bends, bold trills, as well as delicious swoops and slides that cover the entire fretboard. Rhythmic, soulful, complex, and playful, his bass lines convey an excitement that can be hard to contain: Indeed, Laboriel has been known to let the spirit move him in the studio, prompting his fellow musicians to ask, "Abraham, why are you dancing? There are no cameras here!"

In conversation, Laboriel is a generous listener who laughs easily. He exudes wisdom and gratitude, and his tendency to get choked-up — which happens often when he talks about his sons Mateo and Abraham Jr., both highly accomplished musicians — is right in line with his intuitive, impassioned playing style. In a town like L.A., which has refined the art of false modesty, Laboriel's warmly humble manner, perhaps enhanced by his Christian values, certainly stands out. But make no mistake: Abraham is a virtuoso you've heard before, even if you didn't know it.

If you were anywhere near a television in the past five decades, you've caught Laboriel on the themes to *CHiPs*, *What's Happening!!*, *Starsky & Hutch*, *Cheers*, *Knots Landing*, *Amen*, *Moonlighting*, *Melrose Place*, *Will & Grace*, *Ugly Betty*, and *Bernie Mac*. That was also him adding special sauce to #1 hits like Leo Sayer's "You Make Me Feel Like Dancing," getting nasty on Jimmy Smith's "Give Up the Booty," and helping Quincy Jones, Al Jarreau, Lee Ritenour, Larry Carlton, Dave Grusin, David Benoit, Herb Alpert, Bennie Maupin, Joe Farrell, John Klemmer, and the Crusaders create a new style of sophisticated, jazz-tinged pop music. (Laboriel's contributions were so undeniable that the Recording Academy gave him its MVP award in the bass category four years in a row, eventually granting him emeritus status so other bass-

ists could have a chance to win.) When he wasn't putting the bottom underneath iconic songs like Bette Midler's "Wind Beneath My Wings" and Dolly Parton's "9 to 5," or contributing to the soundtracks of *Terms of Endearment*, *The Color Purple*, *My Cousin Vinny*, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, and *There's Something About Mary*, Laboriel brought the joyful fusion grooves of his band Koinonia to sell-out crowds in Scandinavia and Western Europe. But the pop juggernauts are what sealed Abraham's legacy. What would Lionel Richie's string of hits — "All Night Long," "Say You, Say Me," "Penny Lover," "Truly," and "Dancing on the Ceiling" — be without that Laboriel magic? His massive output means that at any given moment, someone somewhere is almost surely listening to one of his bass lines.

The past two decades have found Laboriel laying it down for Michael McDonald, Luis Miguel, George Benson, Larry Carlton, and Lee Ritenour; making crucial beauty with Paul Simon; appearing on albums by country stars Allison Krauss, LeAnn Rimes, and Clint Black; and working with artists as dissimilar as Ray Charles, Ziggy Marley, Andy Summers, Les Paul, Natalie Cole, Christopher Cross, and His Majesty Bhumibol Adulyadej, the former monarch of Thailand. On his own, Laboriel has continued to perform with his lifelong friends, including Justo Almarino, Greg Mathieson, Vinnie Colaiuta, Michael Landau, Bill Maxwell, Alex Acuña, and Paul Jackson Jr., as captured on *Laboriel Mathieson* (2001), *Live in Switzerland* (2005), and a couple discs of shows at L.A.'s famed Baked Potato. And in Hollywood, Laboriel's friendship with acclaimed director Michael Giacchino has brought him work on TV shows like *Lost* and *Alias* and juggernauts such as *Jurassic World*, *Rogue One*, and *Mission: Impossible III*. Thanks to his work on *Frozen* — as well as Giacchino-directed smashes like *Coco*, *Inside Out*, the *Incredibles* movies, *Ratatouille*, and *Zootopia* — Laboriel is making magic for a whole new generation.

This, then, is our celebration of the life and career of Abraham Laboriel, right in time

for his 72nd birthday, in July. We met at the home he has owned for more than 20 years in Tarzana, deep in the San Fernando Valley.

His son Mateo — a composer, producer, recording engineer, and multi-instrumentalist — chimed in.



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COURTESY ABRAHAM LABORIEL

Mexico

As origin stories go, Abraham Laboriel's is as epic and inspiring as any Hollywood hero's journey.

Back in the 17th century, West Africans whose slave ship ran aground managed to swim to the Caribbean island of St. Vincent, where they mixed with Carib Indians, creating a vibrant blend and a unique culture. In the late 18th century, the British exiled these "black Caribs" — also known as Garifuna — to Roatan, an island off the coast of Honduras, where Abraham's father, Juan José Laboriel, was born in 1906.

The senior Laboriel, already a seasoned musician when he arrived in Mexico City in

the 1930s, would eventually become one of the country's most respected composers, lyricists, and actors, appearing in nearly 30 films between 1938 and 1972. He and his children share the same strong Garifuna features, energetic presence, and million-watt smiles; watching Juan José Laboriel melt a bad guy's heart by singing "Quiéreme Mucho" in the 1965 film *Alma Llanera* is a window into the power of the family's strong genes. Laboriel's mother, Francisca López de Laboriel, was an actress, and the four children — Juan Jr., Abraham, Ela, and Francis — followed suit. By the late '50s, Ela and Francis had begun their careers as actresses and singers, and Juan Jr., rechristened Johnny Laboriel, had

become the lead singer of one of Mexico's first rock & roll bands.

Abraham, born in the summer of 1947, was musical from day one. "My father gave me my first guitar lesson when I was six," he remembers, leaning over to pick up an old acoustic that belonged to Laboriel senior. "The first thing I learned was a *D* chord, and he taught me to play with [the ring finger] because I had lost the tip of my [index] finger in an accident." Although he temporarily quit guitar, frustrated by his injury, it would eventually contribute to his unusual style.

By age ten, Abraham was playing guitar by ear, internalizing the wide variety of American music ("everything from Lambert, Hendricks & Ross doing vocal arrangements of Count Basie and Duke Ellington, to Buck Owens & the Buckaroos"), that came from the U.S. "My brother became the most important rock & roll singer in Mexico. All the publishing companies from the United States would ask him to consider recording their

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Juan José Laboriel

songs in Spanish, and anything that he didn't like he would give to me." Abraham, who became his brother Johnny's arranger, was also making waves with a band called Los Quatros Traviesos ("the Four Naughty Boys"), and his sisters kept him busy, too: teenage Abraham was in Fanny & the Lollipops with Francis, who recorded Motown covers; in 1969, Ela, known for her versions of Platters and Su-

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COURTESY LYN LABORIEL

(top left) Abraham and Johnny Laboriel.
(top right): Abraham and Ela Laboriel.

premes hits, had Abraham lead a recording session that boasted unusual arrangements — including two basses or two drummers on some tracks — of soul, bossa nova hits, and ballads. On his own, Abraham attained notoriety with teenage rockers Los Profetas, who recorded an LP with Capitol in 1967 and scored hits with “Ya, Ya, Ya” and “Lupe Against the Red Baron.”



COURTESY LYN LABORIEL

Although primarily a guitarist, Abraham felt the pull of the low end right from the beginning, and his attempt to capture the essence of bass, guitar, and drum parts contributed to his rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic approach. “After my first lesson, I knew the function of the bass. And I absolutely fell in love with James Jamerson. I played Motown and rhythm & blues in bands, and although I was a guitarist, I would teach the bass player his parts.”

At his parents’ insistence, Abraham spent two painful years studying aeronautics and not playing music. Eventually, he made a deal: If music didn’t work out after a year, he’d return to engineering. He abandoned plans to study at Mexico’s National School of Music the moment he learned that a composition degree would take 11 years to complete. But when a teacher at his Boston Conservatory audition suggested that he might like Berklee’s non-classical curriculum better, Abraham took a chance.

The Laboriel core, from left: Johnny, Francesca, Ela, Juan José, Abraham, and Francis.



COURTESY LYN LABORIEL



COURTESY LYN LABORIEL

All the Doors Began to Open

Abraham with his Goya bass at Berklee

Laboriel auditioned and was accepted into Berklee in 1968. His major was composition, and initially, he played guitar. A year before he graduated, however, Abraham began to play bass. Buying his first 4-string from a fellow student led to recording with vibraphonist and future Berklee dean Gary Burton, and after graduation, Abraham hit the road with Johnny Mathis and Henry Mancini, who was pivotal in helping him transition to Los Angeles. We asked about his first few years on the scene, playing fretless, and the impact of his singular tone.

How did you end up buying your first bass?

There was a Greek musician who needed to sell his bass and go back home, so in 1971,

I paid \$400 for his Goya. It was a very unusual bass; it had a small neck and a high *E* natural. For my small hands, it was perfect. I was completely at home, and suddenly all the doors began to open: Students began to hire me for gigs and recordings, I learned how to read bass clef, and my teachers allowed me to have play bass in my ensembles. But I had to continue to declare guitar as my main instrument, because the Board of Education did not recognize electric bass as a legitimate instrument.

You were still a student when you recorded *The New Quartet* with Gary Burton, right?

Yes. That was my first recording session in the United States. I was still at Berklee, and in

Laboriel in Cleveland (left) and with Abraham Jr.

the same studio where we recorded with Gary Burton, we did “Avenging Annie” with Andy Pratt [for Pratt’s 1973 self-titled album].

How did you make the move to L.A.?

When I asked Henry Mancini about getting into the studio scene, he said a very powerful thing: “Abraham, there is nothing I can do for you. Only your peers can help you, and doing [Mancini’s *Symphonic Soul* record in L.A.] will give you an opportunity to meet some of the local people.” Then he blew my mind! Doing those sessions introduced me to Joe Sample, Lee Ritenour, Harvey Mason, Dennis Budimir, Artie Kane on B3, and Emil Richards on percussion — all of whom told me there was lots of work in Los Angeles. I had to wait a year for my wife to finish her internship in Cleveland, so when I came back to L.A. a year later, they all had bass players they loved. Lee had Anthony Jackson; Harvey had Louis Johnson; Joe had Pops Popwell; and everybody else had Chuck Rainey. Everyone said, “A year ago, there was room, but now we are all happy with our bass players.” So, I had to wait two more years before the doors opened in L.A.

What was your first session after you moved to town in 1976?

Jimmy Smith’s *Sit on It*, with Herbie Hancock on piano and Lenny White on drums, produced by Alan Silvestri and Eugene McDaniels.

Your sight-reading must have been in tip-top shape.

Speaking in very raw terms, I still think that I am a very poor sight-reader, but music has always been very much in my heart. When I started to make records in the United States, I discovered that the musicians would spend sometimes an hour on one song, so that by the time the song had been played 30 times, I could equate whatever was on paper with whatever I was playing.

Even in those early days, one can hear the seeds of the same tone that you have today.

I have many different basses, but Matteo says, “Obviously, it doesn’t matter which bass you play — you have a touch that comes through no matter what.”



COURTESY LYN LABORIEL

Even though you love Jameson, there’s no Jamerson tone on those old recordings.

I was playing the Goya, which is all I could afford, and in those days, I was using Roto-sounds, so there was a built-in brightness.

How did other musicians react to the Goya?

They made fun of me for having a bass with buttons I had to push. They would say, “Man, don’t bring your Sears & Roebuck bass here. Look at the name on the part — it says, ‘Fender bass.’ Buy a Fender!” [Laughs.] It was difficult for me to get accepted, because for the first four years, all I had was the Goya.

Wow. No love for the Goya?

Jay Graydon once told me, “Abraham, all of us studio musicians design our sound to blend with one another. Get a Fender bass so that we don’t have to keep trying to figure out how to blend with you. The engineers



COURTESY LYN LABORIEL

Chart Attack: 25 Classic Abe Performances

1. Leo Sayer, "You Make Me Feel Like Dancing"
2. James Ingram, "Just Once"
3. Herb Alpert, "Rise"
4. George Benson, "Give Me the Night"
5. Chaka Khan, "And the Melody Still Lingers On"
6. Jeffrey Osborne, "On the Wings of Love"
7. Dolly Parton, "9 to 5"
8. Joe Cocker & Jennifer Warnes, "(Love Lifts Us) Up Where We Belong"
9. Quincy Jones, "Turn on the Action"
10. Elton John & Dionne Warwick, "That's What Friends Are For"
11. Bette Midler, "Wind Beneath My Wings"
12. Hanson, "MMMBop"
13. Big Mountain, "Baby I Love Your Way"
14. Sheena Easton, "Strut"
15. Al Jarreau, "We're in This Love Together"
16. Lionel Richie, "All Night Long"
17. DeBarge, "Rhythm of the Night"
18. Johnny Mathis (featuring Deniece Williams), "Love Won't Let Me Wait"
19. Julio Iglesias, "Me Va, Me Va"
20. Idina Manzel, "Let It Go" (from the *Frozen* soundtrack)
21. Donald Fagen, "New Frontier"
22. Dr. John, "Accentuate the Positive"
23. Madonna, "I'm Going Bananas"
24. Michael Jackson, "Gone Too Soon"
25. Paul Simon, "Father and Daughter"

are going nuts trying to figure out how to make it sound like a Fender!" Engineers told me, "You know, no matter what we did, we couldn't make it sound like a Fender, so we had to leave it alone. It sounds different, but it's you, and everybody is happy."

Sometimes I hear how engineers added low end to fatten up your tone. Did that bother you?

Not at all. When I first came to town, Earth, Wind & Fire's engineers told me that they had Verdine [White] play with tone that was as thin and high-end as possible because

they could always add bottom.

But if it was already fat to start with . . .

Then they couldn't take it off, and they'd have to bring down the bass volume because it wouldn't sit well with the rest of the band. If an engineer wants to fatten it up because it helps the mix, that's okay. That was an important conversation.

Did you prefer thinner tone, though?

To be honest, in those days I was not thinking about tone. I was so focused on making the music as beautiful as I could — and defying the fact that the Goya was a very simple instrument, as opposed to a Fender, which had all this reputation and weight. My Goya bass is what I used to record "Carmel" with Joe Sample and "French Roast" with Lee Ritenour. They are both iconic, and they both feature the Goya.

Nowadays, you're known for your Wyn, Kala, and Yamaha basses. In your *New Bass Concepts* video from 1990, you introduced us to your Ernie Ball Earthwood acoustic bass, the upright you played on *The Color Purple*, your Valley Arts 4- and 8-strings, your 4- and 5-string Yamahas, and your Tyler basses.

I still play the Tylers! James Tyler was the premiere repairman for all the instruments of the studio musicians. Dean Parks, Mike Landau ... we would all bring our instruments to him. Pretty soon, he started to make his own instruments based on the knowledge he had accumulated from repairing everybody else's. The electronics that he puts in his instruments are very special. They're great for the studio. Engineers really like the preamps Tyler uses.

Some of your lines sound as if you played fretless, too.

Many people think that I am a fretless player because I do a lot of glissando.

You did play an actual fretless on Paul Simon's "The Teacher," though.

Yes. That's a fretless Yamaha acoustic. I also played fretless with Kirk Whalum on "The Promise." I am a very insecure fretless player, so when Bob James told me that that bass line touched his spirit deeply, it was incredible.



Studio King

Abraham Laboriel has been celebrated as one of the most prolific studio bassists in history, and thanks to online sources like discogs.com and allmusic.com, it is now possible to get a glimpse of Laboriel's superhuman output, which is so staggering that Abraham himself admits there are more than a few sessions he can't remember. We asked him about a handful of artists who inspired some of his best-known work.

Henry Mancini, *Symphonic Soul* (1975)
Michael Giacchino, *The Incredibles*
(2004); *Ratatouille* (2007); *Coco* (2017)

"When we started to record *Symphonic Soul*, I would play a few bars, stop, play a few

more, and stop again. Henry asked me what I was doing, and I told him I was taking a solo. 'But why are you starting and stopping?' 'I'm giving the click room — I'm exchanging ideas,' I told him. And he said, 'No, Abraham, nobody's going to hear the click. That's just for us.' I did not know," says Laboriel, laughing.

"Henry also told me, 'Don't play what's on the paper, Abraham. I can get anybody to do that. I want you to play who you are.' And that's what Giacchino has been saying to me. He writes difficult music, and when I told him I might have to overdub, Giacchino said, 'Abraham, Mancini told you: If we wanted what was on the player, we could call anyone. Please — ignore the paper. Play you.' *Incredi-*

bles, *Ratatouille*, *Coco* — all that stuff is a result of me being encouraged to just play me.”

Al Jarreau, *Look to the Rainbow* (1977); *Breakin’ Away* (1981); *Jarreau* (1983); *Heart’s Horizon* (1988)

“I had never met Al Jarreau, but I recognized him when he walked into Donte’s to see Greg Mathieson’s band one night in 1977. I was playing with Greg, and afterwards, Al asked me if I come do an audition. I’m always grateful and very moved when I think about it, because Greg had invited Al Jarreau to hear me play, knowing that if he liked me, I was going to disappear for a while.

“At the audition, with Joe Corroero on drums, Tom Canning on keyboard, and Lynn Blessing on vibes, we tried a few songs, and then they asked me to come to Europe for six weeks to do a live album. It wasn’t until we finished the album that they told me they had fired the bass player they’d originally contracted on the gig. I asked them why, and they said, ‘We fired him because at the audition, you were the first bass player who was able to play with intensity even at low volumes.’ They’d never seen that before.

“Besides, Corroero and I got along so well musically — people could build anything they wanted on top of what Joe and I were doing. He was from Memphis, and he had a thing that reminded me of [drummer] Zigaboo Modeliste from the Meters. I said, ‘Man, I’m home.’”

The Crusaders, *Rhapsody and Blues* (1980); *Ghetto Blaster* (1984)

“They called me two weeks before the audition. They rented a room at SIR, and when I walked in, there was Wilton [Felder], Stix [Hooper], and Joe [Sample]. They told me, ‘We want to do an album that has Latin colors, so we want to see if we can relate to you musically.’ It was beautiful. We jammed, and within half an hour, they told me to come to the studio.”

Why did Laboriel and Wilton Felder split credits on some of the great sessions for singer Randy Crawford? “Because she was [the Crusaders’] artist, but Wilton really loved my

playing, and he very much wanted to be part of what was happening. He was a phenomenal bass player, so he was playing just to be part of it.”

Donald Fagen, *The Nightfly* (1980)

“Jeff Porcaro, who recommended me to Donald Fagen, picked me up and drove me to the studio for the ‘New Frontier’ session. We arrive, I plug in, and they say, ‘Abraham, give us a few seconds — we’re working on something.’ On this one song, they had Michael Omartian, Victor Feldman, David Foster, and David Paich, and Donald is saying to the engineer, ‘Let me hear David Paich’s right hand with Victor Feldman’s left hand. Okay, now let me hear Michael Omartian’s left hand and David Page’s right hand,’ and they are doing all these juxtapositions. I tell myself that I just might be there all day.

“Eventually, they play the song for me, and I start playing. They ask if I can come up with anything else. I do something different, and they say, ‘Yes! Let’s do that for the whole song.’ When I finish, they tell me it sounds monotonous. I could not believe it [*laughs*]. So, pretty soon I played [what would become the final part], and they said, ‘Let’s record that!’ We did it in three and a half hours. Jeff told me he had never seen them do anything that fast.”

Laboriel says that one bass player was just as nitpicky as the Steely Dan crew. “Anthony Jackson was even more perfectionist than they were,” he says, laughing. “Steve



COURTESY RANDY FULLER

Gadd told me he had to threaten Anthony to within an inch of his life because Anthony was constantly asking for a pencil, and anything that Donald would say, Anthony would write it on his part.”

Ella Fitzgerald, *Ella Abraça Jobim* (1981)

“That was a very special day, and I was super concentrated. Alex [Acuña], Henry Trotter on keyboards, and me. We were the foundation, and Toots [Thielemans], Joe Pass, Clark Terry, and Zoot Sims were arriving separately to do their parts. At that time, Ella was legally blind, so they had huge cue cards, and she was reading the words while singing. It blows your mind, doesn’t it? That was a whole other caliber of understanding music.”

Chaka Khan, *What Cha’ Gonna Do for*

100% Abe

Laboriel is frequently one of several session bassists on an album, but these are all Abe from start to finish:

Al Jarreau, *Breakin’ Away* and *Look to the Rainbow*

Lee Ritenour, *Feel the Night*

Larry Carlton, *Larry Carlton*

The Zawinul Syndicate, *Immigrants*

Luis Bonilla Latin Jazz All Stars, *Pasos Gigantos*

Bobby King, *Bobby King*

Café Quijano, *La Taberna del Buda*

The Winans, *Introducing* and *Tomorrow*

Andy Summers, *Earth and Sky*

2nd Chapter of Acts, *Mansion Builder*

All tracks mentioned are on Spotify

Search for “Abraham Laboriel on Bass” or click the link below

CHECK IT OUT

Search for “Abraham Laboriel Hits & Classics”

or click the link below

CHECK IT OUT

Me (1981)

“And the Melody Still Lingers On (Night in Tunisia)’ is a very important recording, because they used a sample of Charlie Parker and then overdubbed Dizzy Gillespie to reproduce what they had done 60 years before. That alone was historic — and then they had Herbie Hancock and Greg Phillinganes, who is absurdly talented.

“Arif Mardin put it together at the last minute with Casey Scheuerell on drums and me on bass. Robbie Buchanan, Greg, and Arif were working on the arrangement when we walked in, and that whole thing was born in front of us. It was very elaborate, and Chaka just concentrated and killed it. She is a genius.”

The Zawinul Syndicate, *Immigrants* (1984)

“Recording *Immigrants* was another proud moment. It was also scary because Joe Zawinul is a different kind of cat: He had all the music professionally copied, and when he passed the parts around, everything looked perfect; it was perfectly conceived. We start running it, and anytime somebody would make a mistake, Joe would say, ‘Okay, stop — in this bar, forget what’s on the paper. Everybody write down that mistake, because that’s how we’re going to play it.’ The music was very nice to look at for a few bars, and then there’d be ten corrections. But I’m proud of what I did on ‘Shadow and Light’ because Joe left my bass part completely the way I played it.”

Paul Simon, *Surprise* (2006); *You’re the One* (2011)

“Paul sent me the music for ‘The Teacher’ ahead of time, so when I went to his apartment in New York, which is where he records, I had done my homework. At first, I was playing a very complex bass line, but Paul said, ‘Abraham, can you simplify this? I don’t feel worthy of being on a record with that bass line.’ [Laughs.] The final line is not a pattern; I just freely decided to play, and he kept it. I love Bakithi Kumalo’s playing with all my heart, and it was Steve Gadd on drums, so it was really special to get together with Paul.”



Louis & Quincy

Perhaps the easiest way to get a handle on Abraham Laboriel's huge body of work is to consider groups of collaborators as branches of a tree. One limb would be the many Japanese artists he has played with, including Hiroko Nakamura, Mari Nakamoto, Izumi Kobayashi, Yumi Matsutoya, Junko Ohashi, Keiko Matsui, and Yutaka Okukura, whose "Love Light" featured Abraham on bass; Laboriel has also done a dozen albums with Akira Jimbo. Another branch might be the GRP family — musicians like Dave Grusin, David Benoit, Gary Burton, Diane Schuur, Ernie Watts, and Al Jarreau — with whom Laboriel sowed the seeds of what we now call smooth jazz.

The Crusaders crew, a separate but related bough, is headed by Joe Sample, Randy Crawford, and Wilton Felder. Abraham's extensive gospel/contemporary Christian work would be another, as would his lengthy list of Latin connections, featuring icons like Julio Iglesias, Gilberto Gil, Rubén Blades, Shakira, Ricky Martin, and Luis Miguel. Laboriel's dozens of TV and soundtrack credits over the past four decades, which includes keepers (*48 Hrs.*, *Absence of Malice*, *Beaches*, *Deadpool*, *Forrest Gump*, *Mission: Impossible*, *Ordinary People*) and clunkers (*Police Academy: Mission to Moscow*), merits its own offshoot. And the mighty Quincy Jones, under whose umbrella Laboriel col-

laborated with James Ingram, Patty Austin, Jeffrey Osbourne, George Duke, George Benson, Louis Johnson, and Stevie Wonder, is one of the stoutest branches of them all.

What was your relationship with Louis Johnson?

Louis and I loved and respected each other. When he played with drummer Bill Maxwell at the beginning of his career, Bill told me, “Abraham, I’ve never played with a musician who could wear me out like Louis can.” Later, Louis invited me to be part of his series of bass instructional videos, which is how *Beginning Funk Bass* was born. He was a troubled spirit, but I was always so moved by the caliber of his gift.

Mateo Laboriel Wasn’t there a song that Quincy asked you to teach Louis?

Abraham Laboriel “Betcha Wouldn’t Hurt Me.” Stevie Wonder taught me the bass line, and Quincy asked me to show it to Louis.

How did that happen?

Carlos Vega and I were recording for George Benson with Quincy and Bruce Swedien, and Quincy asked us to stay because Stevie was coming to demo a song for *The Dude*; Quincy figured that hearing it with a rhythm section would give him a better sense of how the song would fit the record. Many hours later, Stevie shows up with an entourage — and no song. He was hoping to arrive, apologize to Quincy, and then go out and socialize, right? But Quincy tells him that Carlos and I are there to play the songs with him, so he sits at the piano.

He starts playing and singing, and it was beautiful! Quincy says, “That’s great!” And Stevie says, “No, that’s not for you.” [Laughs.] Quincy was recording while Stevie basically made a demo for himself. When Stevie was done, he sat down and said, “Abraham, play this [*sings a long and complex rhythmic figure*].” It was hard! He’s improvising the song on the spot, and he says, “You can keep this one, Quincy.” That’s what became “Betcha Wouldn’t Hurt Me.”

A few days later, Quincy calls me and says, “Abraham, you know I’ve always been honest with you. I want Louis to play the

song on the album, but Louis cannot read, and I know this is a difficult bass line. Will you please come and record it so that he can learn it?” That touched me, because Quincy was not playing games. I said, “I’ll be there.” I recorded it for Louis, who made the final recording.

When you guys honored Louis at Bass Player LIVE! 2014, I played “Betcha Wouldn’t Hurt Me” and told the story, and it was really touching. Greg Phillinganes said he never knew that Quincy had asked me to teach Louis that bass line, and I told him it was important for people to know that we are not in competition with each other — we are a community of people that support and love each other. ●



PHIL FARNSWORTH





Pocket Full Of Drummers

In his nearly five decades of creating bass magic, Abraham Laboriel has played with most of the great drummers of the 20th century, so we had to ask him about the rhythm-section partners he's most associated with — and his all-time favorite drummer.

When you moved to L.A., did you get a chance to play with Hal Blaine?

Yes. It was mostly jingles, but it was amazing to play with Hal. It was always instant love. We just loved and respected each other.

Let's talk about your time with Jeff Porcaro.

My time with Jeff was very special. [Andy Pratt's] "Avenging Annie" was his favorite record, and when I moved to Los Angeles in '76, Jeff played on my first demo, along with Freddy Tackett on guitar and keyboardist Bill Payne, who would both later join Little Feat. He was unbelievable, instantly part of my life. He started to recommend me for all kinds of things, and I began to record with him. In fact, when I first came to town, Jeff went out of his way to recommend me and to help me.

Mateo Laboriel How would you describe Jeff's playing?

Abraham Laboriel No matter what the tempo was, every beat felt huge; because of

the way he placed things, you had all the time in the world. His natural gift was like no one else's, and you knew the music was going to be excellent just because he was there.

You've played with Vinnie Colaiuta a lot, too.

Vinnie learned a lot from Jeff. Vinnie and I coincided at Berklee for about two years, and he stayed in the practice room 24/7. When he started to do studio work, producers would be overwhelmed by his technique, but Jeff kept insisting that they hire Vinnie, who could go on rhythmic tangents that were absolutely impossible for producers to relate to. But Vinnie and I always liked each other — there was always an implied trust.

ML You're one of the few people that when he goes there, you don't lose track of time.

AL Exactly. My ongoing joke with Vinnie is that he's the only musician I know who can subdivide the week against the month. And you know what he says to me? "The month is rushing." [Laughs.] Because he can hear those nanosecond things.

Your connection with Steve Gadd on tracks like Lee Ritenour's "French Roast" is phenomenal.

AL When Anthony Jackson went back to New York in 1978, Lee Ritenour started to use me, and pretty soon, we did "French Roast." Steve Gadd and I ... it was an instant thing.

ML You guys agree where the *one* is, for sure.

Every note, he would give his whole being. Gadd puts so much life and love into everything he does that you feel a sense of privilege playing with him.

Who influenced you most?

Gadd really shaped me. Jeff always inspired me. Because of the ten years I spent with Koinonia, Bill Maxwell also shaped me. It was brutal when he said, "You are my favorite bass player in the world, but you are not comfortable playing a shuffle." He spent time with me until I finally got it.

How did you get it?

In Berklee, I learned that a shuffle is not triplets or dotted eighths, but I still didn't understand it. So, one day, I was walking in the street and thinking in five, and it completely blew my mind because I suddenly heard the shuffle: 1-2-3 1-2, 1-2-3 1-2, 1-2-3 1-2. That's why shuffle feels special, because it's actually in 5.

Mind blown! Did you ever work on complex rhythms with Vinnie?

I asked him to teach me four over five, but he told me I didn't need to learn it — in his opinion, it's an artificial rhythm that does not appear anywhere in nature. [Laughs.]

Who else comes to mind as an exceptional rhythm-section partner?

I had a lot of fun playing with Alphonse Mouzon on the *Dingo* sessions for Miles Davis. Peter Donald went to school with me at Berklee; he's a genius. We played together in Greg Mathieson's band, and when he was at the Dick Grove School of Music, he taught Abe Jr. for about two years. I've also been fortunate enough to play with drummers like Mike Baird, John "J.R." Robinson, and Carlos Vega. The time I spent with Jim Keltner was very important to me. Jim is not a pattern player, and he certainly is not a predictable player; the things that he does are delicious and unexpected. He's an acquired taste, but at the same time, he's so consistent that people feel that everything is okay.

ML So who's your favorite?

AL By now, I've recorded with all the drummers, and Bill and Alex Acuña are a very, very crucial part of my heart and my life. But as the years go by, my favorite drum-

mer on earth is Abe Jr., bar none.

I noticed that you both played on Alison Krauss' *A Hundred Miles or More: A Collection* in 2007.

That experience was like nothing else. We met when Abe Jr. and I were doing *Les Paul & Friends: A Tribute to a Legend*, and the next thing you know, she invited us to come to Nashville to record with her. The first time we began playing, she started crying, and then she called her nanny, and then she and her nanny were crying. I asked her what was wrong, and she told us that the way me and Abe Jr. love each other and make music together was something she had never seen before. She said, "You guys have something special that is making my music better than I ever expected."

Were you ready to play country?

At some point, we started to play country, and she said, "No, no, no — I don't want this record to sound country at all. I want your hearts." Abe Jr. and I were very proud of our country grooves [laughs]. But that was a really special relationship.

It's a family thing. The chemistry in that video of the three of you at Berklee is amazing.

We are very proud of that day.

ML I was nervous but I loved it.

AL The way Mateo programs the sequencer is unbelievable. If you notice, that performance starts with Mateo's sequencer, and it feels great. Then Abe Jr. joins in and it's fantastic.

Why haven't the three of you put out an album yet?

ML We're working on it! We've laid down at least 20 to 30 things.

AL Yeah, it's being born.

How close is it?

AL It's more done than not. Basically, if the three of us could dedicate two months to it, we could get it done. When we worked on it for a week straight, we could not believe the creativity and the quality of the ideas. But uninterrupted time has been really hard.

ML If we could dedicate one more month, it'd be done. We're hoping that it will be released this year.



Joy Is Not Optional

At Berklee in
2005

Faith is a crucial ingredient for Laboriel, who became a born-again Christian on October 11, 1977. His band Koinonia — which also included fellow Christians Alex Acuña, Hadley Hockensmith, Bill Maxwell, Justin Almarino, and Harlan Rogers — was named for the Christian concept of fellowship, and Abraham continues to be a beacon among Hispanic Christian musicians all over the world. Over the years, he has balanced his secular studio and live work with a steady stream of gospel and Christian contemporary artists, including Andraé Crouch, the Winans, Helen Baylor, Phil Driscoll, Ron Kenoly, Oslo Gospel Choir, Don Moen, Twila Paris, 2nd Chap-

ter Of Acts, and Donnie McClurkin, as well as performing on devotional albums by artists such as Joe Williams, Deniece Williams, and Maria Muldaur.

How did becoming born-again affect you as a musician?

I was 30 years old, and the first thing that happened is that the burden to be creative disappeared. When I realized that I was just a vessel the music goes through — and that my responsibility was to be available to share the gift of music — the burden was removed.

Your faith is central.

Central to the groove!

In your videos, you recommend always

playing with feeling, even during practice. Of all the emotions, I hear joy in your playing.

Joy is not optional. One of the scriptures says that the joy of the Lord is our strength. So, if you are going to have any strength to share anything, it's got to be joyful. Joy has nothing to do with a smile. It has to do with a deep state of being. Without joy, there's no strength. Isn't that powerful?

Somebody told me once, "When I hear you, I feel like you're giving me permission to cry."

I can imagine that being in L.A. in the '70s and '80s, you've been around some things that challenge your faith.

ML Some people have told me that whenever my father would come to a session, even if there had been tension, it would become peaceful. And he'd be able to stay until four or five in the morning — even if he didn't go into the control room and get a little extra "bump." They were shocked that he was fully present even though he wasn't participating.

AL I would not participate, but they would not feel judged, which is important. I never acted holier than normal or better than anyone else. Some artists would want me to take drugs for a good time, but then they'd see that I was having just as good a time as they were, and they were surprised that I was

keeping up with them.

What do you tell fellow Christian musicians in similar situations?

A Christian musician came to me, very sad, and told me that after he had agreed to do a world tour, he realized that part of the performance every night involved a demonic ritual. I felt the freedom to tell this musician that he didn't have to cancel — instead, if he played every note as an expression of love, it would touch their hearts and give them the courage to make it through the day, something the ritual would not do. He went on the tour and came back three years later to thank me and tell me I was right.

So, you don't tell Christian musicians to avoid secular gigs.

Don't say yes to a gig just because it's Christian or turn it down just because it's not. You have to constantly use discernment and talk to the Lord. The Lord loves talking with you; he loves having a relationship with you.

I was surprised that you played on an album with a song like Sheena Easton's "Sugar Walls."

Greg Mathieson apologized for letting me play on that. He told me later, "I needed your bass playing, but it's not the kind of song you would usually be part of." [*Laughs.*]





The Teacher

Abe, Patrice Rushen, and Steve Gadd get honorary doctorates from Berklee in 2005

Old-school bass students may remember Abraham's instructional videos *Funk Bass Concepts* (1990) and *Beginning Funk Bass* (1994), which balanced humor, heartfelt advice, and encouragement with hardcore practical tips. Over the years, Laboriel has conducted many clinics and workshops around the world, including in Spanish-speaking countries and for Christian musicians. He has also conducted masterclasses at his alma mater, Berklee, which gave him an honorary doctorate in 2005. More recently, he did two videos for MyMusicMasterclass.com that covered topics such as rhythmic displacement, playing ahead of/on top of/behind the beat, tapping,

rhythmic independence, articulation, versatility, on-the-gig advice, pedal tones, chords, and of course — his ferocious right-hand technique. We asked him for a few pearls of wisdom.

Keep your ears open. "One of the things I say to people in all my clinics is that when you arrive at the studio, pay attention to all the conversations that the producers are having with the other musicians, or the artist is having with other musicians, because it will inform how your part fits or doesn't."

Pick target notes. "One of the important things I learned in Berklee is that when you have a very difficult part, pick your target notes and play those target notes perfectly in

time — the rest of the band will play the other notes.”

Hear the big picture. “Here’s another thing Steve Gadd said that has guided me: When he plays, he thinks of the music and how what he’s doing affects the music. He’s always listening to the music, not thinking about doing ratamacues or paradiddles.”

Use other flavors. “I’ve listened to a lot of ethnic music, and I try to incorporate as much as I can. But it didn’t work with Joe Sample, because he would say, ‘Abraham, I’m from Texas. I need to hear the *one*, and I need to have the downbeat.’”

Don’t lose the intensity. “We have developed a very bad habit as human beings in terms of dynamics. Instinctively, loud means fast and soft means slow. You should be able to play soft without losing intensity.”

Be a whole person. “Sometimes, when you develop one area of your life, you neglect others. And that’s not good. A pastor, God bless him, told me, ‘Just because you are an entertainer does not give you the right to require everybody else to treat you as if you are privileged.’ We need to learn to be people, and you need to enjoy being a person with other people.”

Watch out for carpal tunnel. “I had lost the feeling in my right hand; when I would shake it, it would come back. The main

problem was with my left hand, though. My first instrument was the Goya, and it had a small neck; when I started to play other basses, made for upright players, I had to open up and bend my wrist.

“God bless my wife. She read an article about this neurologist in Boston named Fred Hochberg who had developed a specialty in musicians’ hand problems. He had me bring my basses to the appointment with him, and he noticed that when I played the Goya, I didn’t bend my wrist, but with wider necks, I did. His advice? ‘Tell bass manufacturers to make you instruments that don’t require you to bend your wrist. And if you’re going to play a really wide bass [neck], play it in such a way that instead of playing chords all the way from the top to the bottom, find all the chords that don’t require you to bend your wrist.’ He gave me a couple of exercises, which I learned. The carpal tunnel has never come back.

“Another very important thing he told me was that the moment the string touches the frets, there is sound, so whether you have to play very loudly or very softly, the pressure [exerted by the fretting hand] doesn’t need to change. All of his advice was very practical.”

Groove! “My personal philosophy has always been the groove is everything. The most important thing is groove.”





Abraham & Friends

With Justo Almaro

Some session musicians avoid nurturing a solo career, preferring to avoid the spotlight, while others prioritize self-expression away from the studio. Miraculously, Abraham Laboriel has managed to balance a lifetime of session work with a thriving schedule as a leader and co-leader. And of the many wunderkinds with whom Abraham has made music over the years, it's safe to say that windwood maestro Justo Almaro, keyboardist/producer Greg Mathieson, and drummer/producer Bill Maxwell have been his most frequent collaborators.

Laboriel met soprano and tenor saxophonist/clarinetist/flutist Almaro at Berklee in 1969, and he first played with Mathieson while subbing for bassist Joe DiBartolo

shortly after moving to L.A. in 1976. Working on the Christian compilation album *Hosanna* for the Maranatha! label in 1979 introduced Abraham to Maxwell and his bandmates Hadley Hockensmith and Harlan Rogers (guitarist and *Hosanna* producer/keyboardist, respectively). It was only a matter of time before they joined Abraham and percussionist Alex Acuña — and eventually, Almaro — in a new group, which Laboriel christened Koinonia.

The original seven-piece lineup, which included saxophonist John Philips and L.A. session gun Dean Parks on guitar, debuted in the summer of 1980 at the Baked Potato, launching a weekly Koinonia gig for three straight years. (Abraham chuckles when he

recalls the immense popularity of the band's spectacular subs — Larry Carlton on guitar, Joe Sample on keys, Steve Gadd on drums, Ernie Watts on sax, Paulinho DaCosta on percussion, and John Patitucci on bass.) After Koinonia disbanded in 1991, Laboriel embarked on a robust solo career, usually accompanied by Almario, Mathieson, Maxwell, or all three. Here's an introduction to Abraham's projects as leader and co-leader.

Koinonia, *More Than a Feeling* (1983)

Three years after the band's birth, the Koinonia recipe — feel-good jazz-funk with joyful Latin flavors and a mix of ballads and mid-tempo groovers — finally makes it onto record. Laboriel is up in the mix and prominent on every track, lending vocals to the sweet "Divina" and soloing on "Valentine." Highlights include the catchy "Funky Bumpkins."

Koinonia, *Celebration* (1984)

On Almario's debut with the band (and their first without Parks and Philips), Koinonia throws down live in Sweden. "We had such a great time in Scandinavia, especially Sweden," remembers Laboriel. "There were 14,000 people at the show, and it was incredible to hear them sing the melodies back to us." Search YouTube for *Scandinavi-um*, shot in 1983, and *Celebration: Live at Montreux 1984* to see Abraham leave it all onstage.

Koinonia, *Frontline* (1986)

On the band's second studio album, named for the Bible reference about musicians being the frontline of the Lord's army, the synths and guitars are occasionally a bit edgier, but the basic aesthetic is intact. The gorgeous "You Can't Hide" is a classic; Laboriel's exciting intro to "Chuncho" is one for the ages, and his vocals elevate "Señor" and "Making Room."

Koinonia (1989)

The band's last album, featuring singer Lou Pardini, signals a new direction: mostly vo-

cal tunes, fewer acoustic textures, no involvement from Acuña and Hockensmith, and worst of all, no Laboriel solos. Fortunately, ***Compact Favorites*** (1989) and ***Pilgrim's Progression: The Best of Koinonia*** (1991) offer an overview of the band's funky, soulful decade.

Abraham Laboriel, *Dear Friends* (1993)

Laboriel's solo debut is a party with a long list of all-star friends (hence its title), including Al Jarreau, Philip Bailey, the Grusin brothers, Joe Sample, Larry Carlton, Steve Gadd, and Abe Jr. Standout moments include "Look at Me," with Laboriel on lead vocals and a smokin' fretless solo, an odd-time Brazilian jam with Jarreau ("Samba 7"), the organ-drenched "My Joy is You," and Laboriel's smooth, glissando-rich solo on "Arroyo."

Abraham Laboriel, *Guidum* (1994)

With just Abe Jr. on drums, Mathieson on keys, and Almario on flute, soprano sax, and tenor sax, *Guidum* boasts bigger, bolder flavors, soaring unison lines with Almario, killer synth bass, and in-your-face solos. "Everyone was in celebration mode," says Laboriel, who stakes out original territory on tracks like "Let My People," the emotional "Guidum," and "Exchange," which perfects a solo style and texture later adopted by Thundercat. The back-and-forth between Abe Sr. and Abe Jr. on "Bebop Drive" is a stone-cold highlight, and "Breakfast at Tiffany's," by old Laboriel friend Henry Mancini, is the perfect way to end this audacious, soulful outing.

Various artists, *Mathieson, Laboriel, Landau, Colaiuta: Live at the Baked Potato* (2001)

Various artists, *Mathieson, Laboriel, Landau, Laboriel Jr: The Jazz Ministry—Another Night at the Baked Potato* (2005)

Listening to Abraham channel music onstage with some of the world's baddest musicians at L.A.'s famed Baked Potato is a



With Bill Maxwell

masterclass in group synergy, deep listening, four-way dynamics, and chops in the service of the song. “Greg [Mathieson] is usually very organized and structured,” says Laboriel, “but for these albums, he decided to not tell anyone what to play. He would count things off, and what happened next was a surprise to all of us.” The results are impressive and frequently incredible.

3 Prime (2001)

“It’s difficult to find people who know how to play ‘spang-alang’ the right way,” Laboriel says, referring to the jazz subgenre based on a specific ride-cymbal pattern. Abraham mentions how much he enjoyed his straight-ahead time with renowned pianist/saxophonist/clarinetist Tom Ranier and Berklee classmate/Abe Jr. drum teacher Peter Donald. The depth of their connection is evident on songs like the uptempo “You Stepped out of a Dream,” the timeless “All the Things You Are,” and the contemplative “Blue Daniel.”

Abraham Laboriel & Friends, *Live in Switzerland* (2005)

This disc finds Laboriel, Vinnie Colaiuta, guitarist Paul Jackson Jr., and keyboardist Tom Brooks on a Christ-centered 2003 gig before an enthusiastic Zurich audience. Abraham calls it a “special document of the bond between me and Vinnie,” and on tunes like Jackson’s funky “On Eagle’s Wings” and an explosive version of “Guidum,” they are indeed synced at the hip. As always, Abraham’s between-song banter is not to be missed.

Open Hands (2009)

In 2010, Laboriel, Almario, Mathieson, and Maxwell were filmed recording at Hollywood’s Schnee Studio for National Geographic Weekend. The resulting three-part documentary on YouTube, a window into the spirit of four world-class pros who still play with the enthusiasm and energy of newbies, is a perfect accompaniment to Open Hands’ eponymous 2009 album, as well as previous collaborations such as *Justo Almario & Abraham Laboriel* (1995) and *Laboriel Mathieson* (2001). “When we get together, it’s breathtaking,” says Abraham.

What’s next for Laboriel? For starters, a new trio with 3 Prime mastermind Tom Ranier and movie veteran Steve Shaeffer, best known for his drumming on film scores like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Forrest Gump*, and *Toy Story*. “We don’t have a name yet, but we’re thinking of calling it TSA, for Tom, Steven, and Abraham,” Laboriel jokes. He’s teaching lessons again, and now that his energy is returning after his bout with cancer, he’s looking forward to connecting with fans on social media. As for his own film work, Abraham — who has just finished working on upcoming *Spider-Man* and *Frozen* movies in addition to laying down bass lines for a *Lion King*-based theme park — confirms that his schedule is filling up. “The people I’m working with like what I do, and they say there is so much more,” he says, smiling. “The future is bright.”



Showtime At The Write-Off

**A rhythm section
par excellence:
James Gadson and
Abe (photo by E.E.
Bradman)**

The Write-Off Room, a low-key Woodland Hills venue that's 15 minutes from Abraham Laboriel's house in Tarzana, bills itself as "a place for good people and good music." On this Thursday night in April, the vibe is right: The bar is hip, the staff is friendly, the stage is nice, and the sound system is impressive. My wife, a pianist and songwriter who has heard me talk about Laboriel nonstop for the past few days, settles in with me near the front. Abraham is particularly excited about tonight's show; because of health issues, this will be the first time in weeks that this group of friends will be onstage together.

In 2016, after bouncing back from a knee replacement due to arthritis, Laboriel was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a cancer of

the bone-marrow cells. He's in good spirits, though, and he tells me that he's responding well to cutting-edge treatment. ("If I'd gotten this kind of cancer even just five years ago," Laboriel says, "it could've been 'curtains.'") During the two-week stem-cell transplant process, Mateo and Abe Jr. had visited Abe and his wife Lyn in a private bungalow on the hospital's campus, laughing and making music. "What a difference the love and the music made for him to get through that," says Lyn. "He is now in complete remission and full of joy and energy."

The show starts right on time, and we are immediately struck by the caliber of the musicians. We recognize James Gadson, of course — the groovemeister for everyone from Dyke & the Blazers and Bill Withers to



Movie Bass:

5 Times Abe Made Your Kid's Popcorn Taste Better

***Incredibles 2*, 2018**

The *Mission: Impossible*/007-flavored throwback magic — and Abraham's low-end gifts — showcased on *The Incredibles* continues on tracks like "Consider Yourself Undermined," "Diggin' the New Digs," "Incredits 2," "Here Comes Elastigirl — Elastigirl's Theme," "Chill or Be Chilled — Frozone's Theme," "Pow! Pow! Pow! — Mr. Incredible's Theme," and "DevTechno!"

***Inside Out*, 2015**

It's a lesson in orchestration and mixing to hear Laboriel's contribution to evocative tracks like "Team Building," "Overcoming Sadness," "First Day of School," "Memory Lanes," "The Forgetters," "Abstract Thought," "Dream a Little Nightmare," "Escaping the Unconscious," and "The Joy of Credits."

***Zootopia*, 2015**

Abraham gets to groove hard on tracks like "Ticket to Write," "Jumbo Pop Hustle," "Walk and Stalk,"

"Hopps Goes (After) the Weasel," "The Naturalist," "Weasel Shakedown," and "Three-Toe Bandito."

***Ratatouille*, 2007**

Laboriel is up in the mix and indispensable on tracks like "Wall Rat," "Cast of Cooks," "Souped Up," "A New Deal," "Remy Drives a Linguini," "Colette Shows Him Le Ropes," "Special Order," and "End Creditouilles."

***The Incredibles*, 2004**

On Giacchino's retro-flavored soundtrack for this acclaimed Pixar film, Laboriel brings humor and bounce to tracks like "Glory Days," "Life's Incredible Again," "Off to Work," "Escaping Nomanism," "Saving Metroville," and "The Incredits."

All tracks mentioned are on Spotify

CHECK IT OUT

CHECK IT OUT

DEEP CUTS:

25 More Great Abe Performances

You Might Have Missed

1. **Sylvia St. James**, “If You Let Me Love You”
2. **Brenda Russell**, “Lucky”
3. **Bobby King**, “Fool for the Night”
4. **David Benoit**, “Freedom at Midnight”
5. **Dianne Reeves**, “Hello, Haven’t I Seen You Before”
6. **Djavan**, “Capim”
7. **Jimmy Smith**, “Give Up the Booty”
8. **Koinonia**, “Chuncho”
9. **Kelly Willard**, “Blame It on the One I Love”
10. **Larry Carlton**, “Where Be Mosada?”
11. **Laura Allen**, “Opening Up to You”
12. **The Manhattan Transfer**, “(Wanted) Dead or Alive”
13. **Rubén Blades**, “Chameleons”
14. **David Shire**, “Manhattan Skyline”
15. **Olivia Newton-John**, “Toughen Up”
16. **Tania Maria**, “Funky Tamborim”
17. **Lee Ritenour**, “Mr. Briefcase”
18. **Andraé Crouch**, “Handwriting on the Wall”
19. **The Winans**, “Restoration”
20. **Randy Crawford**, “You Might Need Somebody”
21. **Jennifer Warnes**, “When the Feeling Comes Around”
22. **Jennifer Warnes**, “Tell Me Just One More Time”
23. **Joe Sample**, “Carmel”
24. **Khaled**, “Walou Walou”
25. **Marc Jordan**, “Generalities”

Marvin Gaye, Diana Ross, and for one glorious video, Vulfpeck — but a quick Google search reveals that keyboardist Mike Finnegan’s 50-year résumé includes one-name-only icons like Hendrix, Etta, Cher, and Ringo, as well as acronyms like CS&N and TOP. The guitarist, it turns out, is Write-Off Room owner Bill Lynch, who has shared the stage with Stevie Ray Vaughan, Bonnie Raitt, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Bruce Willis. Clearly, Abraham is in exalted company.

There’s nothing stuffy, however, about the music or the musicians. Like an old-school Cadillac in tip-top condition, the quartet glides

smoothly through two sets of blues chestnuts, vintage shuffles, R&B classics, and familiar-sounding originals with nary a flashy, unnecessary lick. Individually and as an ensemble, they groove with confidence and ease, occasionally stepping on the gas but more often than not cruising with the top down. They are also having a ton of fun. “That’s what we all hope to grow up to be — high-level pros who can treat the stage as if it was a living room,” says my wife. I couldn’t agree more.

Laboriel, sitting on a stool in front of his charts, is the only one who doesn’t take a turn at the mic. He’s deeply attuned to everything his bandmates do, and I chuckle when I think about how much flak he caught back in the day for his thin tone; tonight, his Yamaha 5 might as well be a P-Bass with flats and a piece of foam. The crowd, which seems filled with industry folks, musicians, and fans who all recognize each other, breaks into “Go, Abe! Go, Abe! Go, Abe!” when he stands up to solo. Shooting past the 12th fret, he digs into his repertoire of syncopated strums and slaps, reminding me that despite his status as one of the O.G. fusion bass gods, he has far fewer imitators than contemporaries like Jaco, Stanley Clarke, or Larry Graham. Before long, Laboriel is singing and dancing while trading fours with Gadson, carried along by Lynch and Finnegan as he brings his solo to a rousing climax that elicits applause, whoops, hollers, and camera flashes.

At the end of the night, Abraham is all smiles. He packs his basses, gathers his charts, and after a few hugs and photos with fans, heads to his car. We stand by the driver’s-side door to see him off, and he thanks us effusively for making the trek from Culver City. He’s still blown away that Gadson had expressed in no uncertain terms just how much he had enjoyed playing with Abraham that night. Beaming, Laboriel begins pulling away as we walk back to the bar, then suddenly stops and gets out. He’d left his charts on the roof of the car. Laughing at himself and waving goodbye, he tosses the folder on the seat and gets back in, speeding off into the night. ●