

Mohini Dey: It's A Whole New Dey

Dey Does It Her Way On Her New Solo Album

E. E. BRADMAN / SEP 3, 2024



Photos by Nathan Sigman



"Unapologetically embracing my own unique path because I don't fit into molds — I break them. Let's break free from the mundane and ordinary. Take risks and challenge the status quo. It's time to unleash your creativity, ignite innovation, and carve your unique path. Embracing the unconventional isn't just a choice — it's a revolution. Dare to be different and shape a world that celebrates the extraordinary. The future belongs to those who dare to dream beyond the conventional boundaries. Are you ready to redefine what's possible? Because I am."





If you've seen Mohini Dey play, you already know that she's the living embodiment of daring to be different. Her singular combination of passion, virtuosity, versatility, and stage presence have made this Bengali Indian woman with a superhuman work ethic and uninhibited fashion sense one of the most exciting bass players of the past few years — and she's just getting started.

Born in Mumbai, India to Hindustani classical singer Romia Dey and studio bassist Sujoy Dey, Mohini got her first lesson on her father's Fender Jazz Bass when she was three. Sujoy, who played on hundreds of Bollywood soundtracks, raised Mohini (and her sister, guitarist Esani) on funk, fusion, and Indian music. She was onstage at age ten, and in her teens, Mohini put aside her dreams of being a fashion designer to work with mentors like drummer Ranjit Barot, keyboardist Louis Banks, and Bollywood musical mastermind A.R. Rahman. American audiences took notice when Dey, then 18, brought down the house alongside Rahman at Berklee in 2014; a couple years later, she was collaborating with heavy hitters like Jordan Rudess and Steve Vai. By 2019, when she turned heads at NAMM and the Baked Potato in L.A. and recorded with Rush guitarist Alex Lifeson, Japanese rock band B'z, Indian jazz-fusion duo Ekalavya, Russian guitarist Evgeny Poboziy, Italian guitarist Alex Giallombardo, and Indonesian guitarist Dewa Budjana (alongside Red Hot Chili Pepper John Frusciante), Mohini was an international sensation.

The past five years have only raised her profile. With dozens of collabs around the world, nearly half a million followers on social media, millions of views on YouTube, and masterclasses at Steve Vai Academy, Sweetwater, and livdemy, Dey has established herself as a badass with down-to-earth humor and a take-no-prisoners attitude. The enthusiastic reception last year for her ass-kicking self-titled debut, as well as the spectacular first album by MaMoGi (her trio with saxophonist Mark Hartsuch and drummer Gino Banks), was marred only by the death of her father in November 2023.

As we went to press, Dey — fresh off a Rick Beato interview that has garnered 1.4 million views so far — was on the road and in the studio with Willow Smith while prepping for MaMoGi gigs at Billboard Live venues in Tokyo and Osaka. Later in 2024, she's scheduled to tour Europe with Greg Howe, go to Brazil for two shows at Rio Das Ostras Jazz Fest, record with DarWin and drummer Simon Phillips in Switzerland, and play Bahrain Jazz Festival, all while planning her sophomore album and the next moves for MaMoGi. In the rare moments when she's not on the road, Mohini is at the Nashville, Tennessee home she shares with Hartsuch, her husband since 2021.





What inspired you to move to Nashville?

It's very peaceful and calm, and there are lots of great musicians. I like that I can come home to a quiet environment from hectic tours. India will always be my home because my mom and sister are there, but I can't deal with the traffic and honking on the

streets. Who knows what the future holds, though. I love moving with the flow of life, so wherever it takes me, I'll be happy to explore.

Are you working in Nashville?

I have a studio in my home, and that's where I do all my recording sessions for clients all over the world.

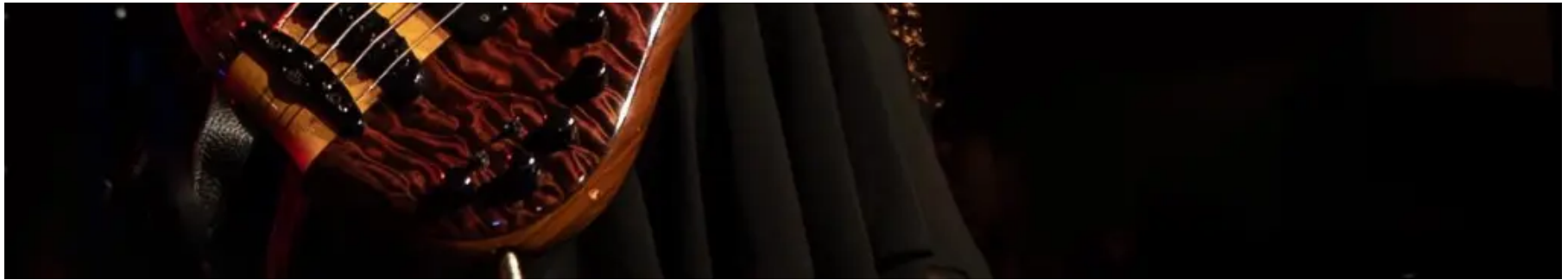
Do you enjoy working with other artists?

Yes. I'm fortunate that people hire me not only to play bass but also to produce, compose, and arrange songs for their projects. People I tour with fly me out of Nashville or Mumbai, so it works out perfectly — I get to hop in and out of exciting projects with talented artists from across the globe and then come back to my home sweet home, where I feel the most grounded and spiritually centered. My goal is to only be doing session work when I'm 50.

So Nashville is a place to work, but also to recharge.

Coming back to my sacred place, my studio, reminds me of the hard work I've done to be where I am at in my career. This helps me feel inspired, which allows me to be creative. I'm a very emotional soul. From the outside, it might look like I'm super confident and killing it everywhere, but I am equally self-critical and judgmental toward myself.





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Let yourself feel every moment. Allow yourself to be vulnerable, and don't be afraid to fail. We all have good and bad days. Some days you will feel

like a winner, and some days you will fail, but that's life. Dedicate yourself to your craft at a level that your intentions are felt.

How would you advise someone to develop fearlessness?

That's a hard one! Let yourself feel every moment. Allow yourself to be vulnerable, and don't be afraid to fail. We all have good and bad days. Some days you will feel like a winner, and some days you will fail, but that's life. Dedicate yourself to your craft at a level that your intentions are felt. Don't think about what others are doing — focus on what you're doing. Figure out your path first before showing others. What's inside you is more important than what's online.

What about showmanship?

It depends on what kind of setting you see yourself in. If you want to be in a string orchestra, you don't need to be a performer; you'll most likely be required to sit, read, and play. But if you're in a pop band, you need to have the groove/pocket that will let your "stank faces" out [laughs]. If you're in a metal or rock band, you can be a serious headbanger and just rock out with great stage presence and a look.

Hilarious!

All jokes aside, the most important thing is to play the songs right. Get your parts right first and then think about your look and performance. But yes, showmanship is crucial because people connect not only with your playing, but also with your personality and aura.

Is it important for you to prioritize your own music?

Extremely important. But it's hard to balance it with the amount of work for others. I try!

How do you approach writing bass parts?

I usually start with a vague idea of the instrumentation; after that, I think of the sound I am going for. Either the groove or the harmony comes first, and then I build from there. Sometimes melody will come before everything.



MOHINI DEY

Preview [Mohini Dey](#)

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- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | In-N-Out
Mohini Dey | 04:45 |
| 2 | Introverted Soul
Mohini Dey | 05:28 |
| 3 | Bombay Bong
Mohini Dey | 05:44 |

How was the writing and recording process for your first album?

It was years of work. All the musicians recorded from their home studios, so everything was done remotely. I was able to finish most of the album during the pandemic because I had a lot of time to give to myself.

You brought on some amazing guests, including Narada Michael Walden, Guthrie Govan, and Scott Kinsey.

I wanted to get some of my biggest inspirations to play on the record, and they were kind enough to do it. I wrote my first song, "Introverted Soul," when I was 13, and I wrote "Kick'B'ass" when I was 15. The rest came slowly in bits and parts.

What's the writing and recording process for MaMoGi?

Mark [Hartsuch] writes and produces all the songs for MaMoGi, including the bass and drum parts, but Gino [Banks, drummer] and I tweak them to our liking and add our style. I'm also the manager for MaMoGi, so I strategize releases and do all the pitching and managing for tours and gigs.



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I don't generalize or categorize, because my voice remains the same; it's the approach, the vocabulary that changes. But when you hear my tone, you know it's me.

How do you handle promotion, business, social media, and logistics in your day-to-day career?

I manage myself, although I do have an assistant who takes some of the load off my shoulders. I have a photographer and videographer who does all the shooting for brand deals and promotions. Most times, it's just me shooting, editing, and recording, but when it's a lot at once, I get help.

It must be tough to find time to practice.

I don't have time to practice anymore, but I play a lot and learn songs for shows. I think that in itself is a practice, because I push the boundaries by allowing myself to experiment.

How do you navigate the relationship between Indian and Western music?

I don't. For me, it's all just music that glues everything together. I don't generalize or categorize, because my voice remains the same; it's the approach, the vocabulary that changes. But when you hear my tone, you know it's me.

Have tabla rhythms influenced you?

Yes. I wanted to sound like those amazing instruments, so I developed exercises to play percussive things like septuplets and quintuplets on bass.

What other Indian bass players have caught your ear?

Sheldon D'Silva, Josy John, and Avishek Dey.





Tell us a little about your dad, your first bass teacher.

He was an interesting personality. He loved and lived for my mom, me, and my younger sister. He was a giver who helped many people.

Did your success make him happy?

I remember asking him, "What makes you happy?" He said, "I don't know. I've always wanted to have a family and I have that. Music gave me purpose, and family gave me another purpose. Seeing you do all the great things makes me happy, but it's hard to see another person doing everything that I wanted to do — it was my dream. It's hard to let go, but I am so proud of you and your achievements. You are my diamond."

Wow. What do you say to that?

I acknowledged that despite my desire to become a fashion designer, he had pushed me to follow what he wanted for me. I told him that I was grateful for the hard work he had invested in me. I said, "I know I'm living your dream. I hope you know that I wanted to please you so badly that I allowed you to control me, because that's the level of unconditional love I have for you. You made sure that I was exceptional, and I made sure to show you what I can be. Even though we had many disagreements, we can respect and love each other."

Did you feel like you were competing with him?

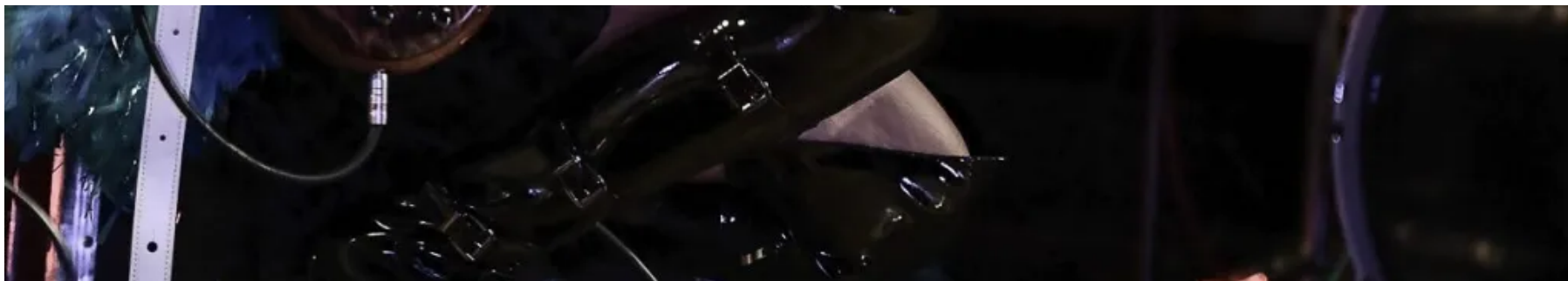
I never felt competitive, but he did. He told me, lovingly, that I was his biggest enemy because I was so good at bass. I know that might sound insane, but that was his way of saying, "I love you too much, but also, you are hard."

What did he mean by that?

He had a lot of unresolved trauma — his family did not support his music career or his falling in love with my mom. Both their families disowned them. They struggled, moved to Mumbai from Kolkata, started from scratch, and worked very hard to provide a

good life for me and my sister. They wanted to make us strong in every way so that we never had to struggle.



**Did your mother support the idea of you going into music?**

They were both musicians, so they wanted us to be in music. My father felt very strongly about the spark he saw in me; he knew I was special. Losing him was a hard pill to swallow, and I needed to move somewhere with less chaos, so Nashville it is.

What lesson do you take from your dad's passing?

Life is extremely fragile and unpredictable, so make the most of it and live in the present. Just be. And give it your all!

What did you learn from mentors like Ranjit Barot and Louis Banks?

Musicianship, business, groove, and the importance of keeping time.

You and Banks' son Gino have such a great rhythm-section connection.

We've known each other and played together since I was 12 years old. We saw each other evolve while playing together and with others; we've played with various artists and we have done many tours together, too. That's how you develop a great connection: by seeing each other grow and improve, and by inspiring each other.





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Vocabulary is more important than chops. Gimmicks and cool tricks are fun, but they're not enough to get you hired to play in a reputable band or with an educated artist.

Do you adjust your style to suit different drummers?

I react carefully by choosing to play certain things that complement their playing, but I don't change my sound or playing unless I am required to, which has never been the case.

Do you look for particular qualities in a drummer?

Overall tone, ability to improvise, ability to learn things fast, and professionalism.

When it comes to tone, how do you decide when to use effects?

The music tells me what it needs. Pedals can be overused, but they're necessary in today's music; on the radio, synth bass is more common than electric bass. Every bassist needs the option to fit into the correct sonic space, depending on the gig. Context is key.

Are chops important?

Vocabulary is more important than chops. Gimmicks and cool tricks are fun, but they're not enough to get you hired to play in a reputable band or with an educated artist. Learn songs — you need content within yourself to be able to tell a story. Focus on cool tricks later in life.

What advice would you have for someone struggling to learn a long, complex piece of music?

Slow it down. Listen to smaller parts carefully instead of going for longer lines. Don't speed up the process just to get it done; that's bad for ear training. Take your time, even if it takes more than a day.

What about odd time signatures?

Same thing: Slow it down. Keeping time with your feet or hands while vocalizing the pattern trains your independence so that when you're playing your instrument, you won't have to think about it. It'll come naturally.



Mohini Dey Covering John Coltrane's Solo on COUNTDOWN

Mohini Dey



Watch on

When you solo, are you thinking of scales and chords?

No. I play like I'm singing, and I groove like I'm drumming. I express feeling. I'm thinking shapes and paying attention to what's happening around me. I am reactive.

What are your favorite warmups?

Stretched-out shapes that facilitate flexibility, and grooves that have a bit of everything to warm me up for the show.

How did you develop your right-hand techniques?

I just listened to my body and did whatever felt natural. There's always a base inspiration, of course, and that came from Victor Wooten. My technique is a hybrid of his and evolved "me."

With your busy schedule, how do you learn new music quickly?

I can learn songs by ear. When I don't have time, I'll just listen to the songs and make notes. You have to be a fast learner when arrangements change. You need to prep well, especially if you are not a reader and you are required to learn everything by heart [before rehearsal]. Rehearsals are for practicing songs, not learning music.

Great advice. Do you enjoy teaching?

Honestly, I don't enjoy teaching, and that's only because I am not much of a talker and teaching requires a lot of talking [*laughs*]. I like making lesson videos because I don't have to talk or explain, and I like masterclasses because I get to share my journey and exercises. I am still very introverted in that sense, but I'm good at pretending I am not.



What would you consider the three most important things for bass players to understand?

Tone, improvisation, and keeping time.

What would you say to young women who are just getting started on bass?

Stay focused and hone your craft. Dedicate yourself and your time to get better at what you do. Listen to your instincts. Don't look for shortcuts; they don't last. Work hard.

I love the manifesto you posted on social media. What inspired it?

It comes from experience. The more you practice it, the better it gets. Your mindset will keep evolving the more you meet interesting people. Running into challenges also makes you learn a lot about yourself, and when you study your patterns, it helps you with your confidence because you know your usual tendencies.

Having said that, it's difficult to have it all together all the time. There are times when I am very clear-minded, and other times I just pretend to be confident because I know that there are little kids who look up to me. I want to set a good example for them and be a role model if I can.



The Mohini Sound

Mohini Dey uses several Mayones basses, including a Commodus Classic V ("the most beautiful fretless ever produced"), a Patriot 5 with "natural rock character," and a Caledonius 6 that she loves for chords. Her main Mayones is a fretted Commodus Classic

V with Aguilar Super Single pickups and an OBP-3 preamp. "This bass, with low action and .045–.125 SIT Rock Brites [now called Fusion Wounds] gives me a sound that has clarity, lots of headroom, and extremely flexible tone options," she says.





Dey's bass collection also includes her first headless bass, an Ottobass ("great for traveling without losing out on tone"), and an MGBass Extreman 6, which she says has "a really interesting twang/high-end response I'm excited to use." On the road, she flies with a GruvGear Kapsule Duo travel case, which means she can pack her clothes around a fretted 5 and a fretless 5 (or a 5 and a 6) and check it without worrying. And then there's her NS CR5M electric upright, which she won't be using for bebop anytime soon. "Let me set the record straight: I am not trying to play the electric upright like a straight-ahead jazz bassist or a classical bassist. I want to be able to play with the same dexterity and flexibility that I play my electric bass with, and thus, I am going to use those techniques on the instrument. I understand that it is unconventional and goes against the traditional way that teachers teach the instrument. I see the CR5M as the perfect hybrid instrument. Every player can come at this instrument from a different perspective and make it work for them."



Dey manages to coax wildly different perspectives from her pedals, including an EH Mono Synth guitar synth, Boss OC-2 octaver, Boss Loop Station RC-1, Future Impact synth bass pedal, Darkglass Alpha Omega distortion, and MoogerFooger MF-102 ring modulator. She has a sweet spot for TC Electronic pedals, especially the Hall Of Fame reverb, Sub 'N' Up octaver, Brain Waves pitch shifter, as well as the Corona and Afterglow choruses. Dey also favors Source Audio products, especially the SoundBlox Pro Bass Envelope, Spectrum Intelligent Filter, C4 Synth, and Ultrawave Bass Processor; she says that using the company's Neuro app/editor to create presets has "revolutionized the ability to tweak synth tones on a guitar processor."

Onstage, Dey finds that using a Markbass Little Mark 800 with Markbass 4×10 or 8×10 cabinets means she doesn't have to compromise when it comes to low end or tone. "On other amps, finding my sound is an ongoing process that ends in accepting a lesser version of what the tone should be. As a bassist, there is no worse feeling than that."

If there's one word that sums up Mohini's idea of tone, it's clarity. "From a gear perspective, it's important to have clarity in the sound, which comes from my mid-lows. Some basses are too sub-focused, while other basses sound tinny and lack body. Many amps have a boxy sound that makes the ground rumble but lacks definition. Some strings are only good at either soloing or at grooving while sitting in a mix. SIT is great for both. Markbass has the most even response of any amp I have ever played. And I can find my tone on 99 percent of Mayones basses."

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