



Multi String Bass Master: Gary Goodman

by Kenn Smith

I remember when I saw my first multi string bass. It was back in 1984 at a Guitar Center here in Chicago. It was an Alembic 6 string. I remember taking it down off the wall, sitting with it, and thinking "how in the hell do you play this thing". 14 years later I find myself sitting in my living room with a 6 string Ibanez, saying the same thing. After climbing that mountain I decided to go back to the 4 string bass. I guess that's where my heart is. There are others who have taken the multi string bass to great heights, including players such as Anthony Jackson, Bill Dickens and this

month's interviewee, Garry Goodman.

Garry began playing bass in 1964 at the age of nine. He became a full-time professional bassist in the 1970's. His venture in to multi string instruments started in 1975 with the Chapman Stick and later in 1978 he switched to a 7-string bass. Currently Garry plays a Tobias 7-string, Warrior 9- string and Adler 11-string bass. He has also developed a unique playing technique called "Percussive Harmonics", expanding the tonal possibilities of modern electric bass. He is also a composer/producer of film scores, TV productions and advertising jingles.

Kenn: Garry, welcome to Bass Sessions, it is a blessing having you here.

Garry: My pleasure.

Kenn: Tells us Garry, what are percussive harmonics, and how are they different from say, the tapping technique most bass players or Chapman Stick players use?

Garry: "Percussive harmonics" is a term I arrived at in the mid1970's, a term that encompasses an effect, as well as a technique. I wish there had been an effect pedal that could do the job simply by plugging into it and pressing the foot switch. The part that makes this different from the above- mentioned examples is that it is a system of playing. The Chapman Stick really is touching or pressing the strings down on the fingerboard to create a sound. When I think of tapping, I think of tapping on someone's shoulder. "Percussive Harmonics" is something like this. Unlike the harmonics described in Adam Novick's book, "Harmonics for Electric Bass" ,or the kind Jaco Pastorius used on "Portrait of Tracy," "Percussive Harmonics" is similar to striking a xylophone bar with a mallet. This allows one to play a harmonic octave, fifth, third, etc. harmonic over every note fretted by the fingerboard hand. Many players do this to a limited degree, one or two or three notes, but with "Percussive Harmonics", you can play anything from a single-note melody to a seven-note chord all in harmonics, in any key, anywhere.

Kenn: How did it all start? Did you develop this technique on a 4-string first?

Garry: This technique was developed on a Fender Bass VI and led to the development of the 7-string bass guitar. It can be applied to 4-string bass guitar , but the more strings available to you, the more dramatic the effect. My initial inspiration for this technique was spawned from hours of observing the "mandolin bar" drop down between the strings and the hammers on player pianos. This is the effect that gives the piano that "rinky tink" tack sound. I was fascinated by the sound and began playing with ways to emulate its qualities on the bass guitar.

Kenn: How long did it take you to develop this technique?

Garry: It took several years to locate every possible harmonic that could be "tapped" and play it with any of the four fingers on my right hand. As you know, it's something similar to tapping one octave above the fretted note, which seems easy enough if you are just playing one note at a time. To be able to play anything that you would normally be able to play on this instrument in this manner has taken me decades to achieve.

Kenn: What were some of the first steps to developing this style?

Garry: The first step was developing two-handed independence such as a pianist uses when playing. This involved taking the basic piano pieces, such as the Bach Two-Part Inventions, and playing the pianist's left hand part using my left hand or right hand without any help from the opposite hand; then doing the same with the pianist's right hand part. Once I began to be able to play the left and right hand parts with either one of my hands, the next step was to use the free hand to create the harmonics.

Kenn: In the beginning, what was your practice routine like?

Garry: I started by playing four-octave chromatic scales at a metronome setting of 40 BPM, one metronome click per note. This way I could make sure that every left hand note was even in tone and volume and I could securely strike the desired harmonic with the right hand. I eventually did this with every metronome marking and repeated the process with all other scale forms. Then, I began to play scales in thirds the same way and eventually scales played in triads. I continued with every possible four, five, six and seven-note chord. I later applied this to a combined bass line with chord accompaniment played simultaneously.

Kenn: Has this technique enhanced your regular bass playing skills in anyway?

Garry: This technique has caused me to become extremely accurate, rhythmically, and to create bass grooves that you would normally associate with a clavinet or synthesizer bass. You can hear an example of this at: <http://www.garrygoodman.com/Music.htm> and click on sample #5. This particular example has the left hand playing tumbao and the right hand playing an octave piano line. Currently on the Adler single course 12-string bass guitar, I'm able to play grooves that span eight octaves, which is especially useful in solo bass performance.

Kenn: Can you tell us a little about your instruments? How did you come about designing these instruments?

Garry: In the late 1970's, I had amassed a collection of 6-string bass guitars of the era, such as several Fender Bass VI's, a Gibson EB6, a micro-fret 6-string, and the Chapman Stick. I liked the low B string on the Chapman Stick and wanted to find a way to add that to the E-F tuning in fourths that I used on the 6-string basses. This led to the creation of the 7-string bass guitar. At the time, it was really considered somewhat insane, but I needed the low string to have additional locations for notes found only on the low E string. This four and a half octave configuration (24 frets) allowed me to more easily play pieces such as the Bach Two-Part Inventions.

By 1998, I was already mulling over the concept of a bass/guitar tuned in fourths with the range of a range piano. Part of the problem would be finding strings for such an instrument. Thanks to Jauco III-X and S.I.T. Strings, I had the C#0 string, but it has taken me several years to realize the G4-Ab4 string for the bass guitar scale.

In 2003, Mike Adler began the design for the 12-string as he was finishing the construction for the prototype 11-string bass. We were able to apply everything learned by playing the 11-string bass for a year to create a perfect 12-string on the first try. Mike was able to create a bass neck that would not bend, move or warp, yet was very thin. Using a 34" to 32" fan kept the bass feeling like a bass without any noticeable affect due to the fanned fretboard. Special state-of-the-art electronics were designed and installed with 0-phase variance preventing harmonic re-alignment. This, in conjunction with a very hi-fi pick-up, gives the bass a breathtaking sound. In order to keep the high G4-Ab4 string flexible, we had to use a diameter of string wire that is too narrow to wind a ball end onto. So Mike devised a clamping bridge system, which allows me to use any string wire I choose. The end result is bass guitar that is physically comfortable to play, that is not "neck heavy" and balances easily on the knee without a strap. In addition, I can play from the lowest open string to the highest note, a C8, at the pick-up cover with one continuous sweep across the fretboard. Other touch instruments are made up of two 6, 7, 8, or 9-string instruments

sharing one fretboard. This instrument is one continuous series of ascending fourths from C#0 or C0, depending on the tuning, to Ab0 or G0, giving it the same range as the Bosendorfer 97-note grand piano.

Kenn: What is the tuning?

Garry: I have several tunings, and with 12-strings it doesn't much matter which one I use. I can use Bb00-F4, B00-F#4, C0-G4, or C#0-Ab4. Right now I am fascinated with the Bosendorfer piano range, so I tune it as follows: C0-F0-Bb0-Eb1-Ab1-Db2-F#2-B3-E3-A3-D4-G4

Kenn: How much does a bass like that weigh?

Garry: I haven't weighed the bass, but it weighs less than the 11-string, which was around 15 lbs.

Kenn: What is the most important part in its construction and how long did it take to make?

Garry: The most important part of the construction was the design which demanded a very specialized bridge, a fanned fretboard, a special state-of-the-art pre-amp and Mike Adler's phenomenal construction of the neck I mentioned earlier. I believe the actual construction took somewhere between three to four months.

Kenn: Do you find yourself performing more as a soloist or as a part of an ensemble?

Garry: One of the main aspects of working as a bass player is to be able to continue to be an extremely useful member of a rhythm section. I play regularly with a jazz trio and with my duo, The Nielsen-Goodman Project, which features the "Percussive Harmonic Technique". I also record music for advertising commercials and film and use my 4, 7, 9, 11 and 12-string basses in the studio. I play solo gigs usually with a 9-string, but more recently with the 12-string. I used the 11-string last summer as a member of the pit orchestra for an off-Broadway musical in Greenwich Village, NY.

Kenn: What style of music do you play the most when performing with the 12- string?

Garry: Currently, I am playing solo piano pieces, which include jazz standards, classical ragtime, baroque, blues, and funk. I also play some symphonic orchestral pieces from piano score reductions. Some of this will soon be heard on my internet radio program, "The Sounds Are Real" coming soon to KSPAZ Radio.com.

Kenn: Could you tell us about some of the composers and musicians who have influenced you as a solo artist and bassist?

Garry: I have been influenced by a large variety of composers in all genres. Many classical, pre-classical, and twentieth century composers have had a great influence on me. To mention just a few, there was J.S. Bach, Scarlatti and Beethoven all the way out to Richard Strauss, Arnold Schoenberg and Wagner; Jazz composers, such as Thelonius Monk, Miles Davis, Scott Joplin, Joe Zawinul, and the list goes on and on. Then there were pop composers such as Lennon & McCartney, Stevie Wonder, Jon Anderson, Chris Squire, and Steve Howe.

Kenn: So what's in the future for Garry Goodman?

Garry: Establishing what has come to be known as the Extended Range Bass as a practical instrument is paramount to me. When I first showed up with a 7-string bass in the 1980's, musicians laughed at me and asked, "What are you doing with all those strings?" Now the 7-string is a widely accepted bass guitar. With the advent of the 11 and 12-string basses, is it important for those who have them built to be able to use them in a way that justifies their very existence. I am in the process of authoring a book to make extended range basses more easily approachable for those that are drawn to them. Also, I'm recording some solo bass tracks that will demonstrate the potential of an instrument that spans eight octaves and has a greater range than any fretted, stringed instrument in existence. I have to apply my 41 years of playing to this process, which may take me another 41 years to accomplish.

Kenn: Let's hope not. Garry it has been a real pleasure talking with you. Thank you for your time and most importantly your vision and your music.

For more information on Garry Goodman visit his website at www.garrygoodman.com

Garry Goodman and "Tap Dance On A Cloud" were in the January 06' issue of Bassics Magazine and on the Bassics Compilation CD.

"Tap Dance On A Cloud" is also available online at Apple iTunes, MusicNet, MSN Music, MusicNow, Sony Connect, Ruckus, Chondo, PassAlong, Bitmunk, MP3tunes, DigitalKiosk, Rhapsody.

About the Author

Kenn Smith: Solo Performer/ Clinician/ Instructor/Author, 20 Years Professional Touring & Session Bassist & Guitarist. Kenn has performed with many great artists such as: Tower of Power, Stanley Turrentine, Stanley Jordan, Wynton Marsalis, members of the Miles Davis Band, and many more. He has written and performed in various styles ranging from Classical to Jazz, Funk to Progressive Rock and World Music. He has released two guitar discs "BLUE" and "TWO" and a solo bass CD titled "Short Stories". Kenn is currently performing bass clinics and writing articles for bass related books and magazines. Visit his site at: www.kennsmith.com