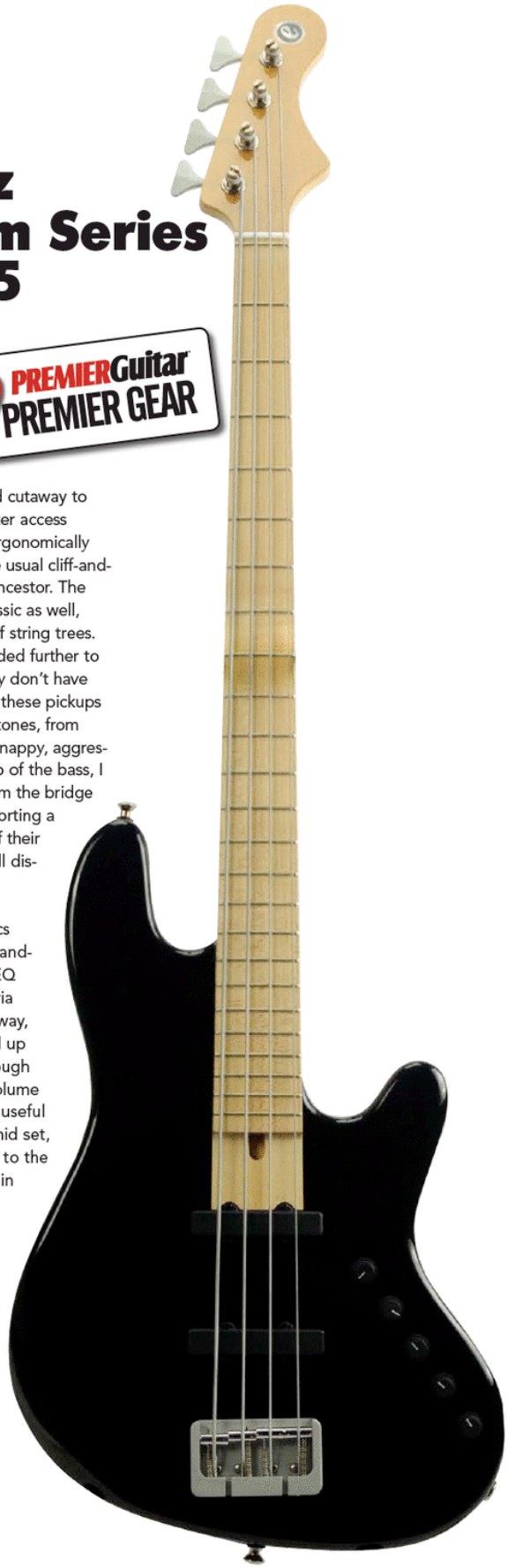
ELRICK

Expat Series New Jazz Standard and Platinum Series e-volution Single-Cut 5

BY DAN BERKOWITZ



If you take a look at the top-selling basses these days, you'll find endless variations of the Leo Fender designs, plus some imported originals created to catch the eye of younger players wanting to emulate their favorite bass superstars. To find a bass that has escaped CNC-machine cloning, you'll need to travel beyond the mom-and-pop and big-box music stores to a bass boutique where the prices zoom up quickly beyond the two thousand dollar mark—and the attention to detail in design and build increases accordingly. These two Elrick basses fall into that category.

These basses are clearly not for every player—both because of their price and their sound—but if you're hankering for a bass beyond the ordinary, you might soon hear them calling to you in the soft breezes of the night.

Expat Series New Jazz Standard

The New Jazz Standard (NJS) takes a long-standing design in the bass world—a contoured body and sleek neck with a pair of single-coil pickups—and brings it into the new millennium. Built in the Czech Republic from all US components, it closely replicates the dimensions of the hand-carved Elrick model built in Chicago.

The NJS is elegantly understated, with a piano-black lacquer finish on an alder body topped off with black knobs and a satin silver Hipshot bridge. The 24-fret, three-piece neck is likewise understated. Its quarter-sawn maple fingerboard eschews position markers, providing only petite black dots on the fingerboard edge. The veneer-capped headstock is equally simple, with a conventional shape and no adornment other than a small, round Elrick "e" toward the end, along with the satin Hipshot tuners. Elrick adds a modern innovation to the build with a deep bolt-on neck that uses six screws and runs clear through to the neck pickup. Like the old school, though, the truss rod access is through the neck heel end, except that the truss rod nut can be reached without any disassembly. Thoughtfully, Elrick includes a ball-end, t-handle Allen wrench among the in-case goodies, along with a screwdriver-style Allen wrench for adjusting the bridge saddles.

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On the back of the body, there is a deeply sculpted cutaway to comfortably accommodate better access up the neck. The neck heel is ergonomically sculpted to match, avoiding the usual cliff-and-stair joint of this bass's classic ancestor. The headstock departs from the classic as well, angling back to avoid the use of string trees. The Bartolini J-style pickups added further to the toned-down look, since they don't have exposed pole-pieces. Sonically, these pickups allow a pretty serious range of tones, from warm, modern and smooth to snappy, aggressive and bright. Tapping the top of the bass, I heard a bit of "spring ping" from the bridge pickup, where the springs supporting a pickup produce a little sound of their own—nothing major, but a small disappointment nonetheless.

The Bartolini NTMBF electronics provide for three bands of cut-and-boost EQ, with an alternative EQ center on the midrange knob via a push-pull switch. In a similar way, the volume knob can be pulled up to bypass the electronics, although doing so cuts out all but the volume and blend pots. This would be useful in a dead-battery emergency mid set, but the preamp really adds life to the bass—I would imagine playing in active mode all the time.

With the EQ set flat, this is a fairly neutral sounding instrument—more polite than the classic version—letting the player bring out his own voice rather than trying to modify a pre-existing voice distinctive to a specific design. I generally found that favoring one pickup or the other via the blend pot brought out some ▶▶▶

PRODUCT REVIEW

character and clarity. I could then flavor my tone to taste by tweaking the EQ knobs. Keep the Midrange knob down for some added beef (250hz) or pull it up for more snap (800hz).

As might be expected with an instrument in this price range, the details of the build received very careful attention. The black lacquer finish was rich and deep. The medium frets—a little unusual for a bass like this—were well-seated, with carefully rounded ends and smooth crowns. In the hand, the back of the neck had a familiar rounded profile, while the fingerboard had a wider radius than the classic, very comfortable and playable. The Elrick Zero-Gravity case was a nice touch, fulfilling its name with a near weightless feel accomplished by a cloth shell over foam, lined with a smooth, black plush fabric inside. Outside, there is a generous zippered pouch just right for carrying a couple of cables, a strap and a tuner.

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Buy if...

you have old-school tastes, but like the convenience of modern evolutions—and high quality is important.

Skip if...

you like a bass with two knobs, a rootsy kind of feel and sound—and a budget price.

Rating... 5.0

ONTHEWeb

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Elrick Bass Guitars, Ltd.
Street $2199
elrick.com

Platinum Series e-volution Single-Cut 5

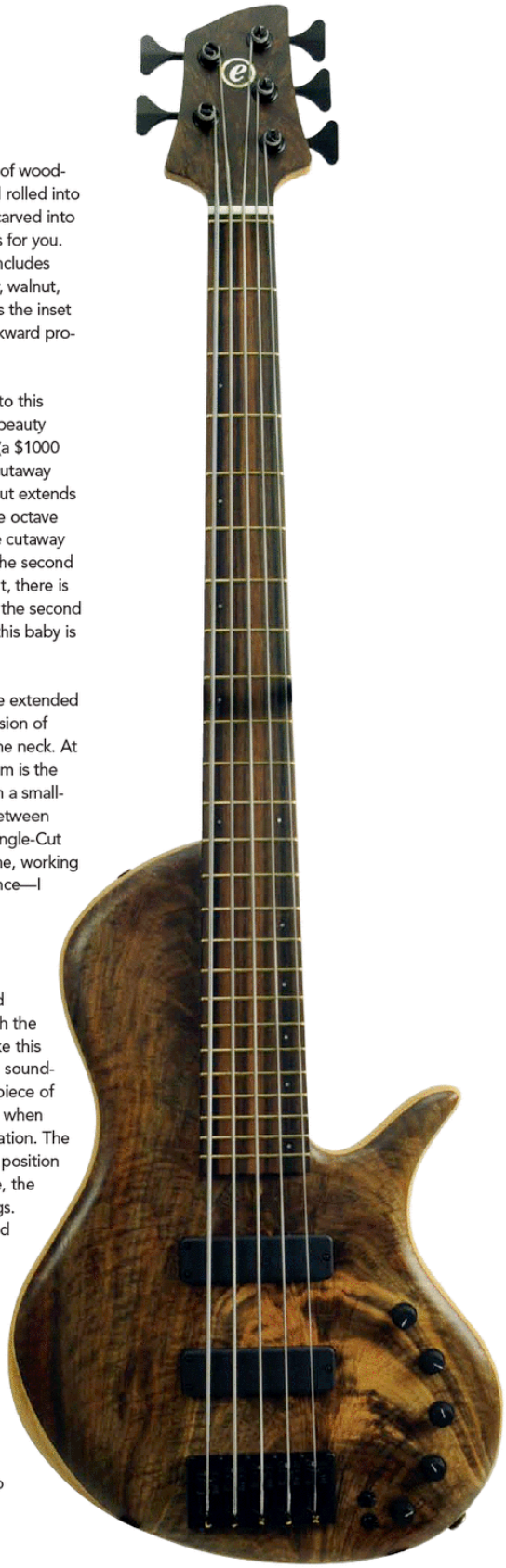
Ironically, if the New Jazz Standard represents an evolution of an old classic, the e-volution Single-Cut can be seen as a new beginning for bass design—*not really* an evolution of any instrument's genetic line at all. The e-volution is an exquisitely hand-crafted piece of woodworking art and a fine instrument all rolled into one. If you're into beautiful woods carved into smooth ergonomic form, this bass is for you. If my eye is correct, the e-volution includes maple, swamp ash, Macassar ebony, walnut, and alder. A simple, elegant touch is the inset straplock receivers to avoid that awkward protrusion of dual-duty strap buttons.

A first glance, the eye quickly goes to this axe's unique body shape—and the beauty of the one-piece crotch walnut top (a $1000 option). Unlike the familiar double-cutaway design of most basses, the Single-Cut extends the attached upper horn clear to the octave fret. On the lower horn, though, the cutaway is quite deep, going all the way to the second octave. With a fully carved neck joint, there is no problem whatsoever in reaching the second octave with ease. Come solo time, this baby is ready to soar.

The key to this design is the way the extended body section enhances the transmission of resonance between the body and the neck. At one end of the transmission spectrum is the humble bolt-on design that relies on a small-surface of mechanical connection between neck and body. Elrick's distinctive Single-Cut innovation goes to the other extreme, working to maximize an instrument's resonance—I found it had a ton of sustain.

The 35" neck on this e-volution is decked out with smaller-than-usual medium fretwire on its nicely striped two-tone ebony fingerboard. As with the NJS bass, Elrick uses a zero fret. I like this choice because it keeps open notes sounding like all the others, but also one piece of the setup challenge gets eliminated when nut slots are removed from the equation. The fingerboard is appointed with small position markers. From the nut to the octave, the dots run between the B and E strings. At the octave, a second dot is added between the D and G strings. From that point on, though, the dots remain only on the high side of the neck—that's the side of the neck where the money notes are.

What looks at first like a neck-through design actually is much more complex. A neck-width piece of alder (with ebony stringers) runs through the body clear to the bottom strap button, but then



remember—the neck itself is built as three-piece maple. This design could be considered a cross between a set neck and a neck-through. Because of the phenomenal heel sculpting, the whole amalgam of woods looks a little like the sandstone beside a creek that has been eroding over the centuries to reveal differing colors of smooth rock layers.

Equally amazing is how the cover over the battery and electronics has been cut right out of the body with what appears to be a zero-kerf cut—the grain flows continuously across the body, interrupted only by faint joints. The neck profile itself tends again toward the modern, feeling a little flatter and wider than the classic neck forms. This is a functional choice, because the thinner G-side profile makes access across the wide 19mm-spaced bridge a cinch—a spacing that allows either digging in or clean slapping with ease. The thin finish of the neck adds to the overall sensory experience, making moves both across and up-and-down the neck a luxurious glide.

But what about the sound?

The e-volution boasts all Bartolini electronics, with a pair of soapbar humbuckers run into the NTMBF 3-band preamp and controlled by three EQ knobs and two switches. The switch nearest the bottom of the bass selects active or passive mode. On its own, the tone is rather neutral, neither begging to be slapped nor calling for deep-voiced thumping, and I found myself wishing for a little more authority. The sound was consistent across strings, an important attribute that sometimes doesn't hold true for a bass's low B string.

Indeed, there are plenty of voicing options to work with. I tended to favor soloing one of the two pickups and then applying some EQ to taste. The three-option midrange control was seriously helpful in this regard, guiding the bass toward bright, deep, scooped, or even a burpy staccato tone. Both fingerstyle and slap players can adapt the sound to their own preference and the transparent, musically-voiced Bartolini electronics accomplish the job without adding noise or creating odd-sounding tones.

Clearly, with a street price of $5200, it won't make many players' short list of must-have gear. But if you have the cash and want to play something distinctive, the Elrick e-volution Single-Cut 5 would be quite worthy of consideration. Maybe the hardest part would be the heightened playing expectations when you show up with this axe at a gig or studio session.

Buy If...

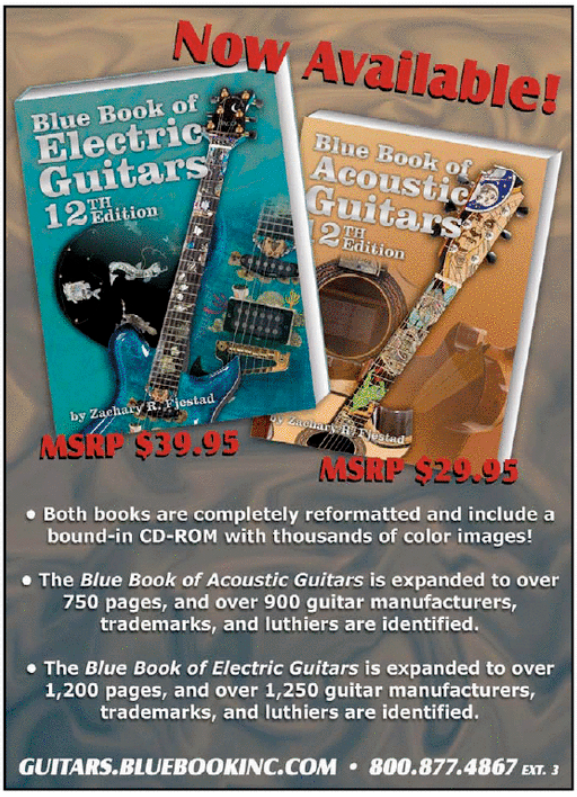
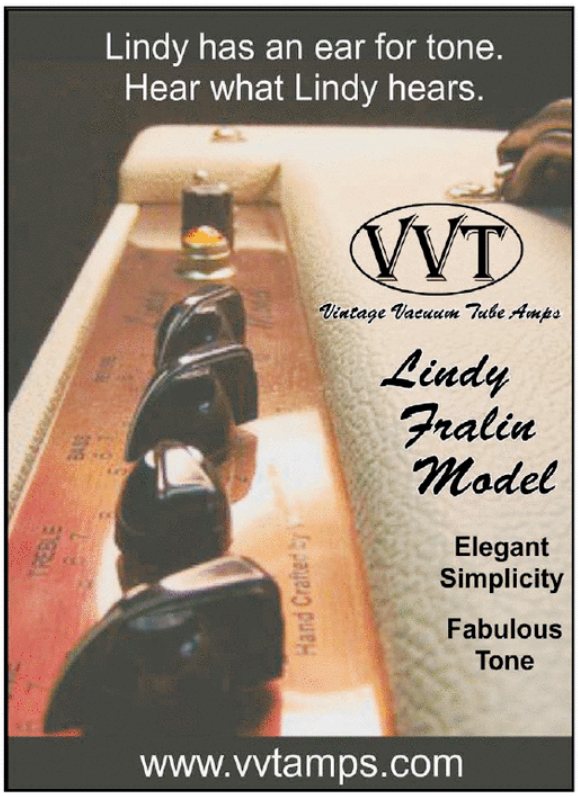
aesthetic considerations, quality, playability, and tone-shaping options are high on your list.

Skip If...

you want a bass that brings a distinctive sound right out of the case and are on a tight budget.

Rating... 4.5

ONTHEWeb

Click here to hear sound clips of these basses in action

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