



Marleaux Mbass

The wares of German luthier Gerald Marleaux certainly drew the crowds at this year's Frankfurt Musik Messe. We audition the company's Mbass

Marleaux was founded in 1990 by German luthier, Gerald Marleaux. The company currently offers a comprehensive range of different models ranging from the workmanlike Consat and Votan basses to the sumptuous top woods and elegant curves of the Mbass, which was introduced to the Marleaux product range in 1999. Each instrument is made by hand at the company's HQ in Clausthal-Zellerfeld, in the North of Germany and is available with a host of different options including a choice of exotic top woods and electronics along with fretless and left-handed models. With its 'glued through' neck design, handwired pickups and active electronics, the Mbass has been designed with the modern professional in mind. Let's see how it fares.

Body and Neck

The craftsmanship inherent in the streamlined single-cut body is immediately impressive and lends the Mbass a remarkably ergonomic feel. The contoured edge and smoothly rounded horns

make for an exceptionally sleek body outline, but for those more used to traditional body shapes, this may get a little getting used to. The sizeable horn on the bass side allows for a greater surface area of contact between neck and body adding strength to the neck joint and allowing more vibration to transmit between the two sections. The body shape is relatively thin in depth from front to back with a smooth ribcage contour on the

rear side. The maple body has a highly figured Russian Walnut top and sandwiched between these two pieces of wood is another thin layer of padauk, which creates a thin line around the edge of the body. The body has been refined and sealed with 2-component PU varnish giving the Mbass a smooth and professional matte finish. All Marleaux basses are also available with a coloured or high-gloss finish upon request.



The 'glued through' neck joint extends deep into the body

The 'glued-through' neck joint has allowed Marleaux to do away with any kind of neck heel, which enables you to access the higher frets with considerable ease as you move further towards the body. This design is intended to combine the benefits of both neck-through and bolt-on designs and involves gluing the neck deep into the body. The neck profile is a comfortable, flattened C shape while the birdseye maple board is fitted with 24 expertly fitted and finished jumbo frets. A zero fret fills the space that's usually occupied by the nut and serves to hold the strings the correct distance above the other frets. This is intended to make the open strings sound more like a fretted note. A separate nut is still needed to dictate string spacing.

Hardware

The Mbass comes fitted with a soapbar-style humbucker in the bridge position and a single-coil neck pickup. These are wired to a volume control, which when pulled out switches off the active circuit, a centre-notched pickup pan control, a passive tone control that's also centre-notched, bass and treble EQ controls and a coil-tap mini switch. With this switch in the up position the coils are wired in series, in the down position the coils are wired in parallel, and in the middle position the pickup is in single-coil mode. The active electronics are housed in a cavity located on the rear side of the body.

The solid Marleaux bridge is a top-loading unit with individual saddles that can be adjusted for both string height and intonation. The Mbass arrived set with a relatively low action. The headstock has a matching Russian walnut





fascia and is fitted with a set of Schaller M2000 closed back tuners.

Sounds

Plugged in, the Mbass reveals an authentic bass 'growl' in the low register, responsive mids and a well-defined top end that culminate in a polished overall bass sound. The birdseye maple fretboard enhances the high-end frequencies, adding snap to higher register fills and ensuring a natural clarity that's inherent in every note right across the fretboard. The Russian walnut top lends the Mbass a tight low-end and heaps of natural sustain, but it's the overall tonal balance that's really impressive. The active EQ circuit opens up a versatile range of bass sounds that will easily cater for any genre from jazz and funk to



pop and rock and the smoothly sculpted body remains incredibly comfortable in use.

Using the active circuitry you can dial in an articulate and precise bass sound without compromising the natural tonal qualities of the wood. We opted to use the bridge pickup in most live situations, using the coil-tap switch to easily move between astute Jazz bass territories to more rounded P-bass tones. The full power of the coils in parallel delivers a brighter sound with stacks of bottom end. Bypassing the active circuit serves as a fantastic live tool when looking for a more traditional bass sound.

Perhaps due to its glued-through neck design, the Mbass manages to combine the punch and attack of a bolt-on instrument with the sustain and resonance inherent in neck-through bass designs, resulting in an impressive and very versatile blend of professional bass sounds.

Conclusion

Aside from its elegant design and sculpted body curves the Marleaux Mbass retains a functional aspect that makes for an outstanding bass. Its precise construction and versatile components make it ideal for the working musician, though the modern feel may be a step too far for more traditional players. The price may seem high for some, but given its tonal versatility and the quality of its construction, it still seems like excellent value for money. The level of craftsmanship and originality that's inherent in the design coupled with outstanding playability and tone is a testament to Gerald Marleaux's work ethic, while the high standard of build and range of sounds on offer makes the Mbass a first-rate instrument. Highly recommended.

“The maple fretboard enhances the high-end frequencies, adding snap to higher register fills and ensuring a natural clarity that's inherent in every note right across the fretboard.”



Marleaux Mbass

Price: £2495
 Made In: Germany
 Finish: 2 component PU varnish
 Body: Maple with Russian walnut top and padauk veneer
 Neck: 3-piece maple, 'glued through'
 Fingerboard: Birdseye maple
 Frets: 24, jumbo
 Pickups: 1 x single coil, 1 x humbucker
 Controls: Master volume & push-pull active/passive control, bass & treble EQ controls, pickup pan, passive tone control & 3-way coil-tap mini switch
 Scale Length: 864mm (34 inches)
 Weight: 4.3kg (9lb 10oz)

What We Think

Plus: Huge range of tones, flexible electronics and exceptional build quality.
 Minus: None
 Overall: The ergonomic design and tonal flexibility coupled with the quality materials and faultless construction make the Mbass an ideal instrument for the working professional.

Contact Details

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BGM RATING OUT OF FIVE

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
SOUNDS	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★