

Gitarre & Bass

D A S M U S I K E R - F A H M A G A Z I N

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**MANNE
VIBRABASS
32" MALAMAN**

**TWICE
AS NICE**



5808



TWICE AS NICE

Manne Vibrabass 32" Malaman

Andrea Ballarin's Vibrabass wants to fuse two worlds: On the one hand, it seeks to be as easy to handle and comfortable as an electric bass, but on the other, it should sound as acoustic as possible. We had a chance to check out the Federico Malaman signature model, which is designed to imitate the sound of an upright bass.

TEXT Dirk Groll | PHOTOS Dieter Stork

say Almost, because if you keep looking, you'll notice incredible details such as the inlay work around the rosette (which surrounds a simulated soundhole), and the binding of the headstock and body. Furthermore, the contoured top, which serves as a comfortable armrest, is a special Malaman feature. Clever solutions are also found in the construction itself, the most visible of which is the 12-piece center section of the neck. Glued between two solid maple neck halves, these laminated layers of beech wood – which have been a feature on Manne instruments for decades – seek to prevent any twisting of the neck. The instrument's fingerboard looks like pitch-black ebony, but it's actually made from a special phenolic resin in order to achieve even tonality across all registers. The neck is glued into a perfectly fit pocket in the body, which is cut at a slight angle, allowing the neck to be slightly pitched back.

The beautiful poplar burl top is certainly worthy of the attention it demands, but the woods and construction details of the body's back are equally noteworthy. Built from two pieces of sycamore with leopard-like grain patterns, the back features a resonance chamber created by a pattern of holes drilled in strategic locations that optimize an even tone production.

The simulated soundhole is home to a spring-supported mounting plate that holds a custom made Mama single coil pickup with steel pole-pieces and a ceramic magnet. The bass foregoes the piezo pickup that's found in the bridge of other Vibrabass models, and only features passive volume and controls, located in the lower bout area of the instrument's side.



Like the fingerboard, the bridge is made from phenolic resin, and its design allows for slight movement in order to optimize intonation. Four wooden cylinders serve as individual saddles, and a string-through body design ensures plenty of string pressure.

acoustic without piezos

Most recipes for achieving amplified acoustic tone include piezo pickups, but the Malaman-Vibrabass leaves this ingredient out. As such, it is all the more surprising that it achieves the goal of delivering powerful upright bass-like tone, with a nice woody attack and growly mids. Sure, the flatwound strings that were installed on our demo bass certainly helped, but without a doubt, it's the unique construction of the instrument that allows the wood and the strings to interact in a most harmonious way. The tone's elasticity also explains the reason for the

Italian bassist Federico Malaman's virtuoso playing isn't limited to electric instruments, and having extensively studied upright double bass, his expectations go beyond standard solidbody bass sounds. Interestingly, his special edition Manne bass includes several elements – a shorter scale among them – that may seem counterproductive at first, yet ultimately arrives at the goal of a huge acoustic tone. We tested the actual prototype of the bass, which was hand-made for Federico.

subtle details

Despite its spectacularly figured poplar burl top, the fretless medium-scale bass appears almost austere at first glance. I



The instrument's lone magnetic pickup delivers surprising acoustic sound.

The center of the neck is made of a 12-layer poplar strip laminate.



short scale, which of course creates less string tension, therefore allowing the otherwise relatively stiff flatwounds to vibrate more freely. Furthermore, the soft wooden saddles assist in avoiding tonal harshness.

Another factor in achieving an authentic upright bass sound, with its thumpy, yet rich tone, is that the instrument's action is set up relatively high, allowing for a harder attack with the picking hand. However, the physical demands created by this setup are offset by the medium scale, so that even players who are used to standard electric basses will find the playability to be acceptable, even on long gigs. Because of the neck/body joint shape, even the fingerboard's highest registers are easy to reach without acrobatics, and big dots in the fingerboard edge keep the player oriented. One drawback of the single-cut body is that it doesn't allow for ideal balance, and when used with a slippery strap, the Vibrabass leans toward being a bit peghead-heavy. But with a low weight of about 7.7 pounds, this doesn't pose a serious problem, as long as a good strap is used.

the wrap

Many makers of electric basses have attempted to capture the tonal character of an upright double-bass, but most haven't been able to achieve the goal with



Wooden saddles tame bright string sounds.

as much success as Andrea Ballarin. This is all the more surprising given how his Federico Malaman model Vibrabass only uses a magnetic pickup and has no addi-



tional piezos in the bridge. Clearly, this is a case where the sum of countless subtleties is allowing authentic results. Certainly, this special instrument has no lack of attention to detail, whether hidden from the eye, or in plain sight. ■

PLUS

- Special sound reproduction. Upright bass character.
- Woods
- Craftsmanship
- Effortless playability

MINUS

- Slight imbalance

OVERVIEW

Brand: Manne
Model: Vibrabass 32" Malaman
Type: Four-string electric bass with chambered body
Made in: Italy
Hardware: Black. Enclosed tuners. Graphite-reinforced phenolic resin bridge with wooden saddles. Standard strap buttons.
Neck: Glued-in. Multi-layer laminated, with maple outside strips and 12-layers of poplar in the center.
Fingerboard: Phenolic resin.
Neck-width: 38.4 mm. (1.512-inches) at nut, 52.2 mm. (2.05-inches) at 12-fret position.
Frets: Fretless
Scale: 814 mm. (32.05-inches) medium scale.
Body: Two-piece, sycamore, with drilled chambers.
Finish: Satin.
Pickup: One passive Mama Custom single-coil.
Controls: Volume, tone.
String-spacing at the bridge: 3/4-inches.
Weight: 7.7 pounds.
Available left-handed: Yes.
Contact: Manne Guitars, 36015 Schio, Italy. www.manne.com.
Accessories: Gigbag.
Price: Base-model starting at 3,513 Euro, Malaman Mastergrade 4,525 Euro.