

Fodera Guitars

... the building of a bass (Pt. II)

By David C. Gross

Last issue I took you on a tour of the Fodera Factory. This issue we will look at the construction of one of their basses, specifically the *Imperial 6-String Bass*. I feel that knowing what goes into the making of a custom instrument will help any bassist who is looking to buy a new bass, hand-made or manufactured.

The first step is the selection of the wood (see last issue's final picture). In this case the body top is Horse Chestnut Burl, the back is Swamp Ash, the neck is Hard Maple, and the fingerboard will be Ebony.

Vinny Fodera takes the Swamp Ash, matches the grain of the wood, and squares up the



VINNY GLUEING ON THE PEGHEAD

wood to make the body halves. Now the face of the body is glued on. This particular piece of Chestnut came from an 11x3' piece. A lucite template is positioned for Vinny to trace the body shape. He then cuts the wood into that shape. This completes the basic body work and Vinny moves on to the neck.

The neck billet is cut to the proper width and thickness and it is then trued to insure that it is completely level. The peghead is then cut off. Vinny believes that working with a thin flat billet as opposed to band sawing the entire pro-



TAPERED NECK

file from a thicker block of wood insures the stability necessary for the tension on a bass. The trussrod is now inserted. This particular trussrod is a stainless steel duoflex rod that works in both directions, north and south and is replaceable. It's adjustable with an 1/8" hex (Allen) wrench. The ebony fingerboard, which is slotted for 28 frets, and the peghead are now glued onto the neck.

The heelblock is glued

onto the body end of the neck making that area thick enough to receive the body halves. This method was chosen for superior control of stress relief. You can pick a dense wood for brightness, or a light weight wood for punchy mids. I find it amazing that the choice of wood for the heelblock can alter the tone. This bass will be using a heelblock made of Swamp Ash which is a light weight wood.

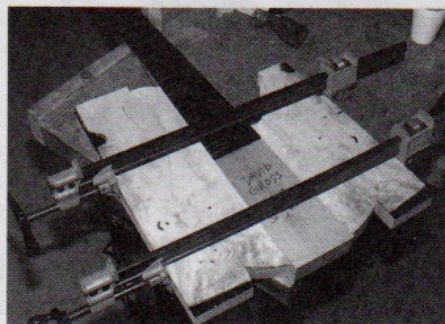
Before the body is glued to the neck, Vinny tapers the neck to its proper width, 2-1/4" at the nut and 4" at the end of the fingerboard. Pearl dots are generally inlaid into the fingerboard and top of the neck, but the dots on the fingerboard have been eliminated on this bass. The surface of the fretboard is then radiused, which means the curve is sanded in. The frets



INSTALLING THE FRETS

are now hammered in by hand. The peghead ears are shaped and glued on to the headstock end of the neck. The sides of the body are now glued to the neck and Vinny likes to let the glue set overnight. He says the glue is so strong that after 10 minutes it can't be pried apart, but why take chances?

The heelblock and neck-through portions need to be leveled with the side pieces and at this point the final thickness of the body is decided upon. If the bass seems too heavy, the weight is reduced with this process. (continued)



GLUEING BODY HALVES



SCULPTING THE UNIQUE NECK/
BODY JUNCTURE OF THE *IMPERIAL*

The control and pickup cavities are carved and the circuitry holes are drilled through. Final sculpting of the body including the body scoop and the heel of the neck (where the neck joins and blends to the body) is now accomplished.

The design of the *Imperial* is markedly different from other Fodera models as well as other manufacturers, because Vinny feels



VINNY CARVING THE NECK
THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY

that increasing the surface area of the body halves and joining them to the neck stiffens it by shortening the unsupported remainder of the neck. There is more connection of the body to the neck particularly on the top side, increasing its resonance responsiveness. Incidentally, it looks great too! The *Imperial* is slightly thinner than Fodera's other models weighing in at approximately 10 lbs.

Throughout the building process the neck is left a little oversized to allow for any movement. At this point the final shaping of the neck is completed. Each neck is carved to the customers specifications which is why if you happen to be fortunate enough to play two or three of these basses, you'll notice the neck sizing may be different. Everyone's hands



HANGING IN THE SPRAY BOOTH
WITH FINGERBOARD TAPED UP
READY TO RECEIVE FINISH. NOTICE
THE HAND ENGRAVED MOTHER-OF-
PEARL SIGNATURE.

are different, so it makes sense that each neck be different, carved to order.

The Butterfly logo on the headstock and any other inlay is set in by hand and the bass is now ready for final sanding. These basses are sanded by hand so as not to alter

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their shape. Certain production basses utilizing hardwoods are designed to be sanded by machines, but Fodera basses use a variety of woods making it imperative to sand by hand.

The fingerboard is masked (masking tape is put over the fretboard) and the finish is applied. For a built-up finish, one that can be polished, a special catalytic urethane is sprayed on and allowed to cure, (usually 7 to 10 days). A hand rubbed oil finish

is also available. The fret job, which consists of leveling, peaking, and polishing each fret, is done before the polishing and buffing of the finish because it's easier to handle.

Now it's ready for the electronic installation. The electronics consist of two Bartolini T style pickups which are exclusive to Fodera, and a HAZ circuit board consisting of a master volume, pan pot, bass and treble cut and boost, on/off switch, and an active/passive switch. Internally on the board is a DIP switch (sliding switch) that can shift the bass and treble frequencies, although they are in the process of making a new circuit board with a mid control that will eliminate the DIP switch.

The hardware includes a hand made brass nut, a custom built bridge, Dunlop strap locks, and Gotoh tuners made exclusively for Fodera.

The final setup consists of adjusting the string height and the trussrod and setting the intonation, then it's ready to go.

The final test was in the playing. I was blown away by how easy this bass felt and played. The deep, rich sound was unbelievable. It balanced beautifully with a strap and was lightweight to boot!

This was the fourth Fodera bass that has been built for me and each one gets better and bet-



JOEY LAURICELLA, THE SINGING SETUP GUY



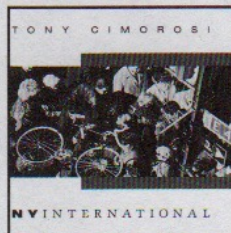
**A SATISFIED CUSTOMER—DAVID C. GROSS.
ONE HECK OF A HAPPY GUY!**

ter. Vinny and Joey tell me that all processes are improved as per the players needs, electronics innovations, and the quality of the woods. In spite of the improvements in design, they assert that the most important consideration in the building of a bass is the choice of quality wood. Fodera is always seeking advice from top players and truly cares about the players view.

I want to thank Vinny and Joey for making this an incredible learning experience and I wish them nothing but great success, they deserve it. For more information about these fine basses contact: Fodera Guitars, 68-34th St. Brooklyn NY 11232 (718)832-3455.

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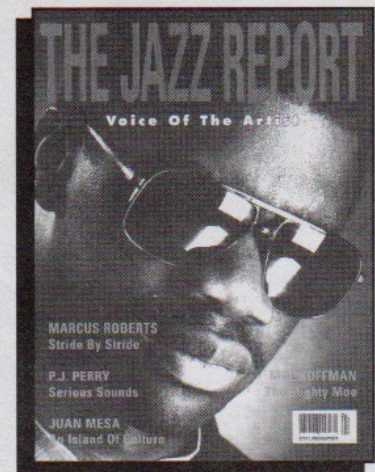
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