



Roger Sadowsky – Exclusive Interview with Jon Liebman

Interviews

21-APR-2013

Roger Sadowsky is one of the most highly respected instrument manufacturers in the world. Sadowsky instruments have been played by guitarists Jim Hall, John Abercrombie, Pat Metheny, Lee Ritenour, Earl Klugh and dozens of others. The list of bassists who play Sadowsky includes everyone from Marcus Miller, Roscoe Beck, Oskar Cartaya, and Jason Newsted to Michael Rhodes, Darryl Jones, Verdine White, Will Lee, Rickey Minor and many others. Sadowsky Guitars, based in New York, was founded in 1979.

JL: How would you describe your musical upbringing?

RS: I grew up in the '50s with a Dad that listened to Sinatra, Nat King Cole and even Josh White. My mother mostly listened to Broadway musicals. I took piano lessons for four years until my teacher told me I was wasting my parents' money!

JL: It almost seems like you fell into your present career by accident. Weren't your original career aspirations pretty far removed from the music world?

RS: I was half way to a PhD in psychobiology, studying animal behavior. It was 1972 and Nixon was cutting all the funding to the sciences and a future in science and academia did not look very promising then.

JL: Can you identify a defining moment, a turning point that brought about this dramatic change in career paths?

RS: I began to play guitar in the spring of my junior year in college. I was learning to fingerpick and playing Gordon Lightfoot and Paul Simon tunes. During graduate school, I got in with a group of professional folk musicians and admired all of their vintage Martin guitars. I got obsessed with the guitar and had this romantic notion that if I could learn to build them, I could escape from the rat race, live in the country and musicians would beat a path to my door. After a year of writing to guitar makers all over the world with no success, I finally got a job with Augie LoPrinzi, who was building acoustic guitars in New Jersey.

JL: I don't think the list of instruments you played while growing included a bass. How did you end up being the go-to guy for so many bass players?

RS: I started building my own electric guitars in 1979 and basses in 1982. When I began my business in 1979, I was primarily doing repairs and restorations for all the top studio players in NYC. All the top bass guys were coming to my shop...Will Lee, Marcus Miller, Neil Jason, Francisco Centeno, John Miller, Sal Cuevas, John Patitucci, Zev Katz, Russell George, etc. I was also at the forefront of active tone circuits, which appealed much more to bassists than guitarists.

JL: Would you say the "seal of approval" you received from Marcus Miller and Will Lee served as the catalyst for launching your career as a luthier/bass maker, since they were among your first customers?

RS: I owe a great debt of gratitude to Marcus and Will for helping me gain recognition. They really gave me instant credibility.

JL: What distinguishes the Sadowsky line from other instruments, particularly your basses?

RS: First of all was my commitment to staying small and wanting to sell direct to the player, rather than to music stores. I really like to deal direct with the player and see the process through, from design to completion. I think my background in acoustic instruments helped me build a lightweight, acoustically resonant instrument. And my background in shielding and hum cancelling technology produced instruments that were significantly quieter than many others on the market. Of course, I have always had a reputation for being “picky” and a stickler for quality, regarding both materials and workmanship.

Another factor is the fact that I located myself where the best players are and always looked to their feedback to discover what works and what doesn’t work in the real world. For example, in 1982, there were two listings for bass in the 802 Musicians Union directory: “Acoustic Bass” and “Fender Bass.” At that time, all electric basses were considered Fender basses. There was very little acceptance in the studios and among engineers for anything other than a Fender. So that is why my instruments are so Fender-inspired. It was the only way to get players to feel comfortable bringing them to the studio.

JL: A lot of people might not be aware that you make more than guitars and basses. What other products do you offer?

RS: In addition to my solid body basses and guitars, I also have a line of archtop jazz guitars and my MetroLine of basses, which are made by my crew in Japan and are sold through dealers worldwide. I have a line of accessories, which include by Preamp/DI Pedal, several preamp kits for retrofitting into other basses, a line of polish and cleaners and my Sadowsky Strings. We have an ecommerce store on my website that sells of all my accessories. And finally, after a 20-year hiatus, I am beginning to build flat-top acoustic guitars again.

JL: What about the future? What lies ahead for Roger Sadowsky and for Sadowsky Guitars?

RS: For the future, my goals are to just keep it going. I have ten employees to support and I have no plans to retire. There is nothing else I want to do than make instruments. Golf, Florida ... those things just don’t speak to me.

JL: What would you be if your career hadn’t taken the path that it did?

RS: If I did not become a guitar maker, I would have probably stayed in school and would be teaching at a college somewhere. Otherwise, I would have been a chef or a photographer, perhaps.



Jon Liebman is a world-renowned bass player, author, educator and entrepreneur. He is the founder of the popular ForBassPlayersOnly.com and JonLiebman.com websites.

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13 Responses to “Roger Sadowsky – Exclusive Interview with Jon Liebman”

I’ve owned a Sadowsky bass and would do so again. I traded mine for a Ken Smith. It would be great to own both...

April 22, 2013 at 6:30 pm - [Reply](#) or [Post a new comment](#)

Hello Roger, My Sadowsky 5 which I got in the 90’s is both my favorite and the sound folks. -Rich

April 22, 2013 at 8:05 pm - [Reply](#) or [Post a new comment](#)

I’ve owned several Sadowsky basses over the last 10 years or so, and currently own two. Roger definitely does it “right”. I challenge anyone to work with his shop and not feel like a king.

April 24, 2013 at 1:25 pm - [Reply](#) or [Post a new comment](#)

Challenge met and, after owning three Sadowsky basses, I’ve sold them all. No plans on going back as I was certainly not made to “feel like a king”.

April 30, 2013 at 3:35 am - [Reply](#) or [Post a new comment](#)

integrity. as rare as the rarest diamond in this day and age.

April 24, 2013 at 1:27 pm - [Reply](#) or [Post a new comment](#)

I’ve had my Sadowsky Bass for about 2 years now. Have played the heck out of it and it’s still going strong. The most reliable and best sounding bass I’ve ever had! If anything ever happened to it I’d get

another instantly! I've had questions about it in the past, called the shop and have talked to Roger himself. One of the many great things about Roger and his group is that they appreciate all of their customers. A rare breed these days!

April 24, 2013 at 3:28 pm - [Reply](#) or [Post a new comment](#)

Not only does he feel responsible to his employees, he doesn't want to retire to God's waiting room (Florida) or sellout to some Gibson or float his business to watch it float away... love the guy and his rare integrity.

April 24, 2013 at 4:53 pm - [Reply](#) or [Post a new comment](#)

I have a Sadowsky Nylon great guitar and Roger worked with me every step of the build.Thanks Roger Dan Des Moines Iowa

April 24, 2013 at 8:31 pm - [Reply](#) or [Post a new comment](#)

I just bought a nyc will lee and could not be happier. If everyone dealt with their customers the way roger and staff does,it would be a great world. Steve Livingston. New Albany Ms

April 26, 2013 at 7:41 am - [Reply](#) or [Post a new comment](#)

in egypt bassists admire and crave a sadowsky bass

April 29, 2013 at 8:05 pm - [Reply](#) or [Post a new comment](#)

I have played the same Sadowsky 4 string j- bass, (NYC) for the past 23 years. It has NEVER failed me in any manner, though we both now have many 1000's of travel miles on us. Even the airlines haven't killed it! I couldn't ask for a better instrument and friend! (Roger & Co....and the bass) Chazz Frichtel

November 7, 2013 at 5:59 pm - [Reply](#) or [Post a new comment](#)

Sadowsky first came to my notice when they put a bass in my compatriot's hands.... none other than Tal Wilkenfeld.... good catch Roger.

January 16, 2014 at 5:57 am - [Reply](#) or [Post a new comment](#)

I am a proud owner of a Will Lee 4-string and a soapbar pick-up 5-string. These Sadowsky basses are made with high attention to detail and most important, very tough and durable. I have several other custom basses but they are a notch below my Sadowsky's. Also, as others have stated, the crew at Sadowsky treats you like their #1 customer.

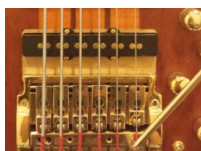
January 24, 2014 at 11:12 am - [Reply](#) or [Post a new comment](#)

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[Bass of the Week] Modified Schecter Stiletto Studio-6

This week's BotW isn't a ground-up build but rather just modding. Sheldon, owner of a Schecter Stiletto Studio-6, wanted to do something different with his bass. Way different. So he along with 4 other people did some modding to the instrument. Sheldon writes: I always wanted a super versatile bass and thought it would be... [Read more >](#)



How are German Hofner basses made?

How is a real-deal German Hofner bass made? Well, for those of you who are builders are there, the inside of the Hofner shop looks very familiar to you. Why? Because they truly do make basses by hand, and do it darned well. Check out this video on how it's done where they make Hofner... [Read more >](#)



[Bass of the Week] Beardly Customs Reggie Grayson 7 String

This week's BotW is a multi-scale 7-string beast with a nice blend of exotic woods. Builder Rick Link writes: This is a custom build for Reggie Grayson. The bass is a multi scale/fanned fret 7 string tuned F#/B/E/A/D/G/C. The scale lengths are 37"-34". The fretboard is cocobolo with a very nice mix of heart and... [Read more >](#)

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