

# CIRCUS TRICKS WALTER BECKER

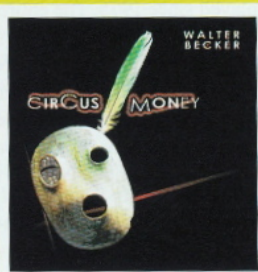
Interview by Joe Matera

**A**fter releasing his first solo effort back in 1994, Walter Becker - one half of jazz-infused pop-sters Steely Dan - finally offers up his second solo effort titled *Circus Money*. Fueled by Becker's love of 60s and 70s Jamaican grooves, and backed by his Steely Dan band mainstays, Becker (who takes on the lead vocal reins) handles all the bass too which proved to be the pivotal element in determining the album's musical direction. The quietly spoken, bespectacled Becker recently spoke to *Bass Guitar Magazine*.

**Who are your bass guitar heroes and in what ways did they influence your playing?**

I worked for many years with Chuck Rainey who played on most of the Steely Dan records and I think I

learned some things in general from him regarding my bass playing. His style is too much rooted in a very unusual technique and so he has a very complicated way of playing bass which is very different from most other players. But way before I met Chuck and I was beginning to play bass, there were players whose styles I imitated. One in particular was James Jamerson who was my hero and my favorite bass player. He was the most swinging and most free ranging player around as well as harmonically and melodically interesting. And there was also Paul McCartney who had some great lyrical and melodic ideas in constructing basslines. I also used to go and see The Youngbloods in New York when Jesse Colin Young was the singer and bass player. He was a great bass player and somewhat influential to me too.



**NEW ALBUM**

Walter Becker's album *Circus Money* is available now on Sonic 360



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**"When I am trying to develop something that has been written but is yet to be given a shape to it, it seems to be that by playing the bass I am given a powerful perch from where it helps me create and determine the feel of the song"**

**When it comes to song writing, do you write mainly on the bass?**

No, I mainly write on keyboards. Although in the case of this particularly record, some of the ideas for the songs, since the basslines figure so prominently in them, are derived from bass guitar lines that I either played or my ideas based on what I have heard played elsewhere.

**When approaching your basslines, do you get your musical ideas from notes, chordal tones or from the harmonic structure of the song?**

I get my ideas from all of those places, and in particular, the rhythmic interaction with the chord rhythm and the melody.

**What gear did you use for *Circus Money*?**

I used a Sadowsky bass which is like a Fender Jazz styled bass guitar that Roger Sadowsky makes. The bass has a built-in preamp that gives you some interesting EQ options. For this particular record, I plugged the Sadowsky through a Pendulum Audio

preamp EQ-compressor device. I really like this unit because the compressor in it really doesn't crap out in the way that most other compressors do with the low E string of the bass guitar. So you're able to get some compression without getting that sort of "farting" noise that a lot of other compressors suffer from because they can't handle the lower frequencies of the bass guitar. And on some other songs, we also ran the bass additionally through a Fairchild Compressor which is an old tube compressor that was designed originally as a compressor for making records.

**Aside from playing the bass, performing live with Steely Dan you prefer the guitar. Do you enjoy one instrument over the other?**

I enjoy playing both really. But in the studio, when I am trying to develop something that has been written but is yet to be given a shape to it, it seems to be that by playing the bass I am given a powerful perch from where it helps me create and determine the feel and so on of the song.

**Joe Matera**

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