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GARRY GOODMAN ON INNOVATION AND GROWTH

What instrument allows a musician the range of a 97-note Bosendorfer grand piano but is not a piano? The answer is a 12-string electric bass guitar conceived by bassist and composer Garry Goodman and built by luthier Mike Adler. That's 12 individual strings, folks, C#-Ab. More importantly: Why? [Read more.](#)

"I like having access to all music," said Goodman during a recent conversation. "With the [Adler](#) 11-string, I can pretty much pull out sheet music and play anything, regardless of the instrument it's written for."

But as Goodman continued to stretch himself musically, he still found himself reaching for notes that did not exist on the 11-string.

"It was wanting to play certain music that drove my desire for the twelfth string," stresses Goodman.

But he first had to find someone who could make an Ab string that a) would not break at 32" scale and b) would hold a tuning.

After exhausting the possibilities with many major string manufacturers, Goodman got in touch with some steel workers, and dozens of spools of sample wire later, Goodman now has specially drawn steel wire strong enough to withstand the tension.

However, the Ab string was only one of the issues Goodman has had to resolve. Rendering the low C# string properly and keeping it in balance with other strings required a special cabinet from [Basson Sound](#).

"A lot of people think you can't hear the C#, which resonates at only 17 hertz. I asked a hearing specialist about this. He told me here is no limit to human hearing - everyone's ability to hear is different. Twenty hertz is an arbitrary baseline point for measuring speech intelligibility. The Basson cabinet has a special design and custom components which reproduce the tone clearly."

But to ensure that all the notes are rendered clearly, the 12-string bass is also fitted with a special one-of-a kind high-speed pre-amp, one that surpasses the type found in the highest end mixing consoles.

Goodman is still tinkering with the bass, one of his goals being to get it to be able to respond as much like a piano as possible in evenness, tone and



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volume across its 8-octave range. He's also still learning to play it, as the addition of the extra string means that there are now 432 fret positions, plus the corresponding harmonic and thumb positions!

"The best thing about having the additional string is that my hands no longer have to cross over each other to play notes. Additionally, there are times when the two hands are each playing independent lines and suddenly find that the next note each has to play is on the same string. Now there's no more fighting over which hand gets the string because I have additional fret positions. So you can see, it's not about having 12 strings, it's about having multiple fret positions for each note. It's really freed me to be able to play a nice low groove while at the same time interweaving a distinct melody on the higher strings - without compromising."

The other reason Goodman has been pursuing the extended range bass is to establish the bass as a solo instrument, equal in acceptance to the piano and the classical guitar.

"This extended range allows me to play the same pieces as piano or classical guitar as written, but on a bass. There are more positions and locations for the same notes. On the 12-string I now have eight positions for middle C and three positions for B0." (We know B0 as the low B on a 5-string.)

Goodman says he kept adding strings to be able to keep growing musically. He said his recordings are done mostly to document that process. But recently he's been made aware that his music may have another -much higher- purpose.

"Tap Dance on a Cloud (Goodman's latest CD with the Nielsen-Goodman project, which ranked in the New Age Reporter Top 100 Chart in 2005) somehow ended up in the hands of a woman who works with autistic children. She plays all kinds of great music for them, hoping something will reach them: Vivaldi, Herbie Hancock, Beethoven and the like. She told me that when she put my CD on they all at once turned their heads toward the speaker and started moving around and responding to each other. She said she's never seen anything like it."

Goodman says he's not sure what it is about the music that caused this effect, but he suspects that, in part, it might have something to do with his unique playing technique called Percussive Harmonics. Once he figures out which component of the music the kids are responding to, he plans to do more of it.

"It's very satisfying to know that the sum total of all I've strived for over the past 42 years has resulted in music that is both beautiful and therapeutic."

What's next for Goodman?

"Even after a year with this bass, I'm still discovering new things about it. I'm still exploring the new range and its capabilities, but this bass meets all my specific needs and objectives, and it feels very right. It feels like home."

For more information about Garry Goodman, visit his [website](#).

For a larger view of the above picture, click [here](#).

Posted by Helena Bouchez on December 20, 2005 12:49 PM | [Permalink](#)

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