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# ERB Legend Yves Carbonne - Bass Musician Magazine, December 2016 Issue

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# BASS MUSICIAN

THE FACE OF BASS

**YVES  
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## ERB Legend Yves Carbonne

Well-known for his beautiful tone and his spectacular Jerzy Drozd 12-String ERB, French bassist Yves Carbonne is perhaps the only player in this special edition that has dedicated his whole career almost exclusively to the fretless ERB. He also has a different ERB concept, which he calls “sub-bass”. Yves has been playing ERBs since 2003 and after 13 years dedicated to this instrument, he has many experiences to share with BMM readers...

**Please tell us about your musical background and that crucial moment when you decided to move into the ERB field.**

I started playing music by studying classical piano when I was 7 back in 1974. Then at 13, I started playing the electric bass as an autodidact. At 15, I took some private lessons in Bordeaux (France) with Jack Tocah, a local bass player. At this time, encouraged by my teacher to be creative, I was already playing a fretless 5-string with high C. At 17, I got some lessons in Paris from Tony Ballester and Laurent Cokelaere. Later, my teachers were Alain Caron and Dominique Di Piazza.

My professional career as a musician began at 17. Most of my gigs were jazz gigs. I did tour with some of the most important European jazz musicians like Bernard Lubat, who influenced my taste for improvisation. By the age of 20, I was playing a fretless 6-string as my main instrument.

I was (and I'm still) very interested in original sounds and lutherie, so in the nineties I started working with Luthiers to develop some personal ideas regarding instruments. My collaboration with Christian Noguera started in 1998 and with Jerzy Drozd, in 2005.

In 2002, I wanted to try new directions and I tried tuning a 4-string one octave lower than standard tuning, with the help of La Bella Strings. I call this concept “sub-bass”. For me, it makes more sense than using F# and C# strings because it allows me to play with guitarists and/or bassists using the same fingerings and open strings; it sounds better, more powerful. In fact, it follows the same logic as the organization of string instruments in the symphonic orchestra: the cello is tuned one octave below the viola, and the low C on the 5-string contrabass is tuned one octave below the low C on the cello. I think that the full octave below regular basses (including 5 and 6-string) is fully usable because technology is evolving in this direction; lower and clearer. For instance, iPhones and iPads pass 20 Hz.

In 2003, I got my Noguera 8-string sub-bass and the fretless version in 2004. This is the instrument I use for my song “Holy Spirit”. Jerzy made my fretless 10-string in 2006 and my first fretless 12-string in 2007.

**What would you say to all those ERB haters around?**

In 2015, I asked myself about how many strings I would need for playing bass and only “bass,”

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which means assuming the bass role in a band. My conclusion is that with 2 strings I could probably play at least 95% of all the songs a bass player will ever have to play during his musical life. Jon Letts got amused with my posts on Facebook about the 2-string bass and proposed to make me one. It is a great instrument, perfect for playing groove. It confirms that the less strings you have on an instrument, the easier you can get a big sound. I took the time to learn and record "Donna Lee" (Miles Davis/Charlie Parker) with it to show that you can do a lot with only 2 strings. That is perfect for developing horizontal playing, which I think is a crucial point to acquire a great technique. So if someone dares telling me that I have, "Too many strings," I reply, "You have too many strings, too!" and show him a video with the 2-string.

### **In your opinion, what are the benefits and downsides of playing with an ERB?**

I play 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 & 12-string instruments because they all have a distinct voice and range. I mostly use the 8, 10 & 12 for my own music. I love them because they extend my fretless voice to the range of the biggest piano (Bösendorfer Imperial - 8 octaves, including additional black keys) and they are great tools for composing my music. Those instruments are not easy to play, some would stupidly think they are fancy but actually they are not. They require a lot of work, particularly for intonation as well as perfect physical condition, which is a very good thing because it forces me to always stay in shape.

### **How do you take care of the string-muting and string-spacing issues?**

I mute the strings with both hands. My standard string spacing is 20 mm (for 4, 6 and 8-string instruments), but on the 10 it is 18 mm and on the 12, 17 mm. I made sure that I could mute all the strings on all my instruments with the width of my hands before they were built.

### **Please tell us how your extended range bass has evolved through the years.**

2003: 8-string Noguera sub-bass

2004: fretless 8-string semi-acoustic Noguera sub-bass #1

2006: fretless 10-string semi-acoustic Jerzy Drozd sub-bass; fretless 8-string semi-acoustic Noguera sub-bass #2

2007: fretless 12-string semi-acoustic Jerzy Drozd sub-bass #1

2011: fretless 12-string semi-acoustic Jerzy Drozd sub-bass #2

I'm currently waiting for my new fretless 12-string semi-acoustic Jerzy Drozd sub-bass (#3): this instrument will be the most acoustic and the most spectacular version of all my fretless ERBs, including a feature never seen before on a bass guitar.



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**Please tell us about the evolution your ERB playing technique has experienced through the years.**

Since I started playing those instruments (2003), I like to use the potential of the lower octave; the lowest note on my 12-string is a B00, one octave below regular low B on a 5 or a 6. This string is a .266 made by Kalium Strings. I had to develop a cleaner articulation for both hands than what I had because the mass of those big strings can be very noisy if it is not correctly moved. It has to do with the frequencies: for example, 20 Hz means that the string is moving 20 times per second; so the string has some inertia, it moves slowly and must be handled with care. I also developed my chords and melodies techniques. Finally, I developed the use of those ERBs as full-range instruments. All that gives me a lot of possibilities and endless work for the rest of my life. I love that!

The evolution of my technique is that with time I get less confused switching from an instrument to another one. I practice slowly and I believe that my intonation becomes better. Playing all those chords on very large necks made my hands stronger. I can do it, I have no pain. In conclusion, after playing those instruments for 13 years, I think that my technique is more accurate.

**What do you think is the turning point in your career as a bassist and what do you consider your main contributions to the bass scene? In other words what do you consider your legacy?**

The turning point in my career as a bassist is the album "Carbonne Di Piazza Manring" (2005). It allowed me to show my personal voice using the fretless 8-string sub bass. Then, I extended this voice on the fretless 10-string in my album "Seven Waves", and on the fretless 12-string in my album "A Life".

My main contribution to the bass scene is exploring fretless sounds in registers which were not used before. I think that my legacy could be to inspire others to use the sub-bass tuning and to experiment with those fretless ERBs, particularly as full-range instruments.

**What would you say to those young musicians who're considering at this moment going into the ERB world but are still not quite sure about doing so?**

The most important thing to consider is the music intended to be played with an ERB before buying one! Let's be honest... if you want one just because you think it looks cool, forget about it; ERBs are not easy instruments. And sadly, most people I see with them don't have a lot of music to play with them.

**Please let us know about the specific elements of your gear.**

I represent and play Noguera and Jerzy Drozd instruments. Recently I also had a collaboration with Jon Letts for a 2-string bass and with François Payen (Bird Basses) for a 5-string bass. I love and play all my instruments. I use different kind of strings, today mostly Kalium Strings. Those strings are great and really make a difference for me; they are available in balanced tension, which is a considerable improvement as they make my 10 and 12 easier to play while sounding clearer and warmer! Garry Goodman (Octave4Plus) is making me some strings I

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could not find somewhere else, like some roundwound .014s. I represent AccuGroove Cabs and use a Tri 210L and El Whappo Grande (21”). I have an Aguilar TH 500, a custom 1x12” YC Flame Maple Bird Cab (made by François Payen), some Jam Pedals (the WaterFall Bass is amazing!), an Eventide Space, a Visual volume pedal, a TC Ditto looper, several Guardian Pro Cables (Jim Phillips), Peterson tuners and FretWraps from Gruv Gear.

**Finally, what do you see as the possible evolution of our instrument?**

Instruments are tools for creating music. Their existence depends on the imagination of the players. It is not a contest about adding the maximum amount of strings on a neck but only about the music. Instruments created without musical reasons will be forgotten. I believe that the 4-string will stay the reference bass, but since we opened the roads, some inspired players will continue to use ERBs. I see them as being something common in the future.

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