

BASSNOTES

Todd Rundgren, Meat Loaf, Joan Jett

Kasim Sulton

Rocking For Utopia



“I WAS SHOCKED WHEN I GOT KICKED out of my first band because I didn’t have a bass amp,” says Kasim Sulton. “I promised myself I would show those guys!” At age 14, Kasim began on bass by shedding on the techniques of ’60s rockers like Paul McCartney. Since 1976, Sulton has been a lynchpin in guitarist Todd Rundgren’s ensembles—including Utopia—and he recently joined “The Runt” as he performed his 1973 progressive opus *A Wizard, a True Star* live in its epic entirety. (That band’s current lineup includes Tubes drummer Prairie Prince, Cars keyboardist Greg Hawkes, and longtime GUITAR PLAYER contributor Jesse Gress.) Sulton’s other long-running gig is with Meat Loaf; he played on the Rundgren-produced 1977 classic *Bat Out of Hell*, and he is currently Meat’s musical director.

How did you prepare to perform *A Wizard, A True Star*?

It was a real task to pick out [original bassist John Seigler’s] bass lines from all the other stuff on the recording. Like a lot of

Todd’s material, the music is quirky, and it’s filled with changes in key, tempo, and time signature. It was a challenge to get the music together to perform it from top to bottom.

How did you learn the parts?

I had to sit down and figure it all out by ear. My secret weapon for doing that is Roni Music’s Amazing SlowDowner software. It’s available as shareware, and works on Mac or PC. The program allows you to slow down or speed up music without changing the pitch. It was very helpful when I was learning challenging lines that would otherwise fly by, like the one in “When the Shit Hits the Fan/Sunset Blvd.”

What’s the trickiest passage in the show?

The bridge to “Sunset Blvd.” is an endless succession of syncopated notes grouped into various clusters. Prairie has to deal with flipping the beat around, and then bringing it back. I don’t have to worry about that, but I do have to make sure that it doesn’t throw me off track. It’s an exercise in concentration for all of us—how long can seven people play the same thing together before somebody screws up? The end of “Sunset Blvd.” is pretty tricky, too. To play those octave-5-root note passages quickly, I rake down with my second finger, and then with my first finger. I always anchor my thumb on the middle pickup.

Do you incorporate any pick playing?

I don’t use a pick on this Rundgren material, but I will play with a pick when the song calls for it. During the three years I spent in Joan Jett’s band, I always played with a pick, and I only used the two bottom strings—that’s all you need to play “I Love Rock ‘n’ Roll.” I keep my palm available to mute the strings at the bridge, just like a guitar player. Otherwise the sound rings too much.

Your fingerstyle playing is rather aggressive.

That probably comes from listening to



HEAR HIM ON

An Evening with Kasim Sulton: Live in Atlanta (DVD) [kasimsulton.com, 2009]; Meatloaf, *3 Bats Live* (DVD) [Mercury, 2007]; Todd Rundgren, *Liars Live* (DVD) [Sanctuary Visual, 2005]

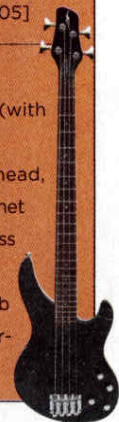
GEAR

Bass Archer K Sulton Signature (with Hipshot Xtender)

Rig Euphonic Audio EA800 head, Euphonic Audio NM410 4x10 cabinet

Effects None. “Using effects on bass is bullshit.”

Strings & Picks Elixir Nanoweb Mediums (.045–.105), Dunlop Tortex Custom .73mm



players like Tim Bogert and Ron Wood when I was growing up. I loved Ron’s playing in the Jeff Beck Group, especially on *Beck-Ola*. It sounds like crap, but it feels so good because you can tell he was having a great time rocking out. I really go for it with my plucking hand, and I like to dig in with my fretting hand too, incorporating considerable vibrato when appropriate.

How do you relate to the other musicians as MD of Meat Loaf’s band?

I also play guitar and keyboards, so when I teach one of the guys a part, I sit down and show him. Then I let him go shed on it, and make it his own. I think that handing out charts takes the life out of music. I prefer to actually interact with the band.

How is the Meat Loaf gig similar or different from other gigs?

Meat Loaf is all about the spectacle. The music has to be as big as his stage presence, which is pretty huge. I’m constantly arguing with the two guitar players, because I always want them to be in different positions on the fretboard—otherwise they kind of cancel each other out.

How do you make your bass as big as possible?

I try to play as little as possible. I lock

Continues on page 20