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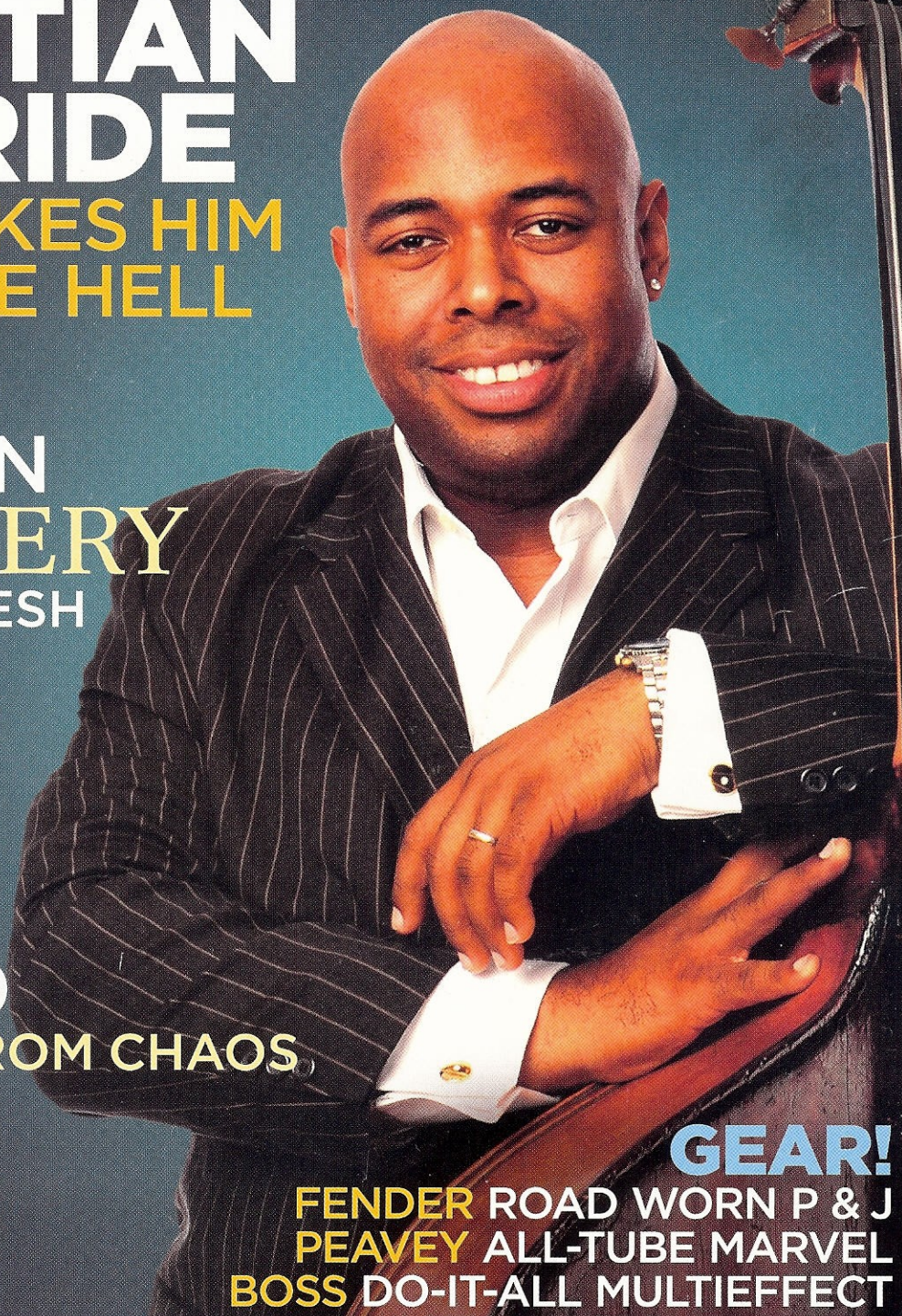
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# BASSNOTES

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## Joe Burcaw Gettin' Jiggy With Black 47

**BRONX-BORN BLACK 47 HAS BEEN A NEW YORK CITY INSTITUTION** since 1991, when six Irish ex-pats first delivered their edgy amalgam of rock & roll, traditional Celtic folk, reggae, and rap behind politically charged lyrics. In 2006, having gone through four bassists over their first 12 albums, the group sought someone who could get firm a grip on the bass chair. Enter Joe Burcaw, whose surname band-mates quickly twisted into "Bear Claw," in deference to his muscular, lock-down lines. The Akron, Ohio native was first drawn to bass in the 8th grade, via the melodic grooves of Duran Duran's John Taylor, and he quickly went to school on other '80s heavies like Bernard Edwards, Sting, and Geddy Lee. Burcaw is currently on tour with Black 47 in support of their latest CD, *Iraq*.

### How would you describe your role on bass, and how do you come up with your parts?

I like to think of myself as the anchorman and support between the rhythm guitar and kick drum. Both Larry [Kirwan, guitarist and vocalist] and Hammy [Thomas Hamlin, drums] have been instrumental in educating me about how to lock with the kick, and how to create space within the pulse by being attentive to your surroundings.

As for parts, when rehearsals started for *Iraq*, we split into two camps. Larry would present a rough outline of chord changes and tempo feels to Hammy and me, and then the three of us would bounce ideas off each other. Once we felt like the songs were solidified, the horns would come down and fine-tune their parts until they could sync up with what we had. As always, I had to make a conscious effort in selecting my choice of notes, without interfering with the horns and pipes. There's a lot going on sonically, so providing the bottom end is my number one concern.

### What have you learned about traditional Irish grooves, melodies, and harmonies since joining Black 47?

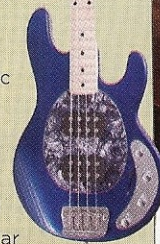
In traditional Irish music it's important to have an understanding of how the dance and song coincide with each other. The two most common tunes are jigs and reels, which we play at every show. A reel consists of two groups of four notes each, adding up to an eight-note bar in common (4/4) time. A jig consists of two eight-bar parts, usually in 6/8 time. Either a pipe, accordion, horn, or stringed instrument carries the melody and repeats the form in a series of cycles. The rhythm section provides the foundation necessary to push the wall of tribal beats in repetition, with particular emphasis on the downbeat from the floor tom. While much of the time I may be playing a recurring figure, the amount of stamina required makes the gig quite challenging. —CHRIS JISI



### GEAR

**Basses** 1989 and 2002 Ernie Ball/Music Man StingRays, DR Lo-Rider strings

**Rig** Markbass SD 1200 head with 106HR 6x10 cabinet; Aguilar Tone Hammer DI



### HEAR HIM ON



Black 47, *Iraq* [United Opportunity, 2008];  
*Black 47 at Connelly's: New Year's Eve In Times Square* (DVD) [Home Team Productions, 2007]

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