

Role Model: An Interview with Victor Wooten

By Michael Forfia

Victor Wooten shares his thoughts on the role of the bass, teachers and music camps (an edited version of the interview appears in Bass World, the membership magazine of the International Society of Bassists, Volume 40 #3.)



M: Welcome

V: Thank you. Thanks Mike.

M: What have you been up to recently?

V: Recently? Well, we'll work backwards. I just landed in Boston, MA where I teach five days every month at Berklee College of Music. So that's where I'm at today, and I just came from Korea and Japan. I did some shows over there and I've just been keeping busy. A lot of touring. I have a new record that came out in September, so I've been touring that. It's a trio record with a great drummer named Dennis Chambers, and a great saxophone player named Bob Franceschini. I've been having fun with that. I've been playing electric, I've been playing some acoustic/upright, as well as what I call a Bow Bass, which is just an electric bass that I had built. It's a five-string fretless with a high-C and it's bow-able. I strap it on just like an electric and I bow on it vertically up and down rather than horizontally left and right. It's a cool thing, and life has been good. I've been able to stay busy in this crazy music business and things are good. I'm happy to be speaking with you.

M: Happy to be speaking with you too. Can we talk about that Bow Bass a little bit? What is your history with the bow? You played cello, right?

V: Right, well I started as a very very young kid on electric bass as the bassist for my brothers' five-piece band. They needed a bass player, so I've been playing electric bass my whole life. But in Virginia back in the 70's they start kids in music programs in the 6th grade. So I grew up in nightclubs - literally from ages 5 and 6 I was playing in clubs on the weekends. So the double basses I had seen were huge to me. I learn now that they are probably 3/4 size, but me being a little kid and always being short and even still today these basses were huge. So, when I got into orchestra in 6th grade I thought that I would be too small to play a double bass. So I chose cello. It was really a blessing in disguise because the cello parts were always more interesting than the bass parts. That was how I learned to read music, so I really had to learn to read music playing cello. But what was most interesting was the sound of the bow. The sound and the feeling of bowing an instrument. Because it was a side that my electric bass didn't have. That sustain, with that vibrato. The melody. Just that whole voice... and since I've been playing cello I've always wanted that

sound and that feeling on my electric bass, and that has finally resulted in the Bow Bass, the bass that I can bow.

M: What kind of experience has that been to get reconnected with the bow?

V: For me it's great. I mean I just love the sound. It's an idea I've had for at least 15 years before we got it built so to have it in my hands and play it and the fact that it does work after all these years... Sometimes you haven't an idea and you finally make it and - nope, it doesn't work. This actually works, and I'm so happy. And audiences flip out because they've never seen anything like it. And it *is* a beautiful sound. It has a learning curve because it's bowing in a totally different way but there's a sound that is really gorgeous. I'm loving it.

M: What sort of projects are you using this bass for?

V: Well, a couple. Lately, again to work backwards I've been using it with this new project. During the show I do a solo spot. With my electric bass I set up a little mellow pattern. usually what I do is I take a part of a song that I wrote for a bass concerto. Part of the second movement, which is a slow movement. I set up the chord structure for this melody that I came up with for the concerto and I bow that melody. It's a lot of fun. There's also a song on my new record where I use the Bow Bass; pizzicato and arco. So during our show we might do both.

M: What sort of things have been encouraging you lately? What's driving you?

V: Well, ten years ago I released a book called "The Music Lesson: A Spiritual Search for Growth Through Music" and over the last six months or so I've been writing the sequel to that book. It's just gotten me excited because writing music or anything accesses a different part of your brain. For me, writing a book is a whole lot like writing music. It's gotten my brain in a different place and it's open and ideas just flow. It's almost like... the book writes itself the way music can write itself when you get into that place. And I'm in a prolonged period of that space and because of it Life is just wonderful. It affects everything else, everything I see, the people I meet. I see them differently. I hear music differently because I've in that writing space so I'm in a good place in my life right now.

M: You have your hand in many things. You run a Bass & Nature Camp, you author books, you teach, you play the bass, and different kinds of basses. You're involved in writing new pieces and recording new albums. How do you stay balanced?

V: Well, a big part of it is by having people to help me. In all senses. My wife is making sure that I don't have to worry about the kids. I have a manager who is taking care of my business life. She makes sure that I don't have to worry about that so that I can just stay creative and just play. So, without going through everyone, having people around me...

even just friends who will tell me the truth... You know, a lot of the time we just want people around us that will agree with us, that'll tell us what we want to hear. But we need friends that'll tell us what we *need to hear*, regardless of whether we want it or not. And I have that. I really do have that. But also I do things to stay grounded and to stay balanced. The way that I think, the way that I speak, the exercises or meditation... One of the things that I do, knowing that we are bombarded with... negativity... a lot of what is on TV - let's just take the news: in most cases the news doesn't report it unless it's negative. If there's something nice that happens it gets a small little feature or mention, but in the paper or on television it's the negative that wins our attention. Because of that, we are the same way in our daily lives. We don't like to talk about it when everything went well. We talk about it when it went wrong. We've kind of been conditioned to gravitate towards negative things, and I understand it. I do understand it. We gravitate towards the negative things because most things are positive. We're used to things going right. Like, right now nobody is breaking into our houses. Nobody is stealing our car. Things are going well and this is what we're used to. So we don't think about it too much. I go to my mailbox, my mail is there. You know? I only talk about it on the days it's *not* there, and someone stole it. Then it's a big deal and it deserves press and it deserves my attention.... Well, I've just kind of trained myself to give attention to when things are going right. Which is ninety-nine-point-nine-point-nine-point-nine percent of the time. But we're so used to it that when something bad jumps out at me I have trained myself to realize it's jumping out at me because it's not normal. So the negative things now-a-days will help me remember that things are good. I caught a little slight cold in Asia. Instead of being bummed out I'm like, "wow." I forget how well we usually are. Most of the time our body is healthy. It's working. We're breathing fine. And that just made me feel better. I'll wind this narrative up by saying that I do things to help foster that. Knowing that the press and society is doing things to help me see the negative, I have to do *my* part to make sure that I continue to see the positive. So we live in a day of social media. We all have cell phones and computers. I keep things on my cell phone and my computer that remind me every day that things are good. I call them positive, or even spiritual, vitamins that I take every day. There's photographs, there's quotes, there's stories, there's music that I look at on my phone everyday just as reminders. It's my way of combating what I see when I turn on the TV. I like TV. But it's mostly negative. I want to combat that so I don't unconsciously get taken over by that. In doing that my life is good. I'm able to see and remember all the beautiful things that are happening around us every day and I like reminding people of that also.

M: There's a theme of that in your work. I remember you talking in your book about the way that music can be used for positive or negative. I've seen you talking about using music as a love-bomb as a way to counter that negative narrative. I wonder if you could talk about how you approach that, specifically with the Bass and Nature camps or the various teaching and authorship that you've done over the years. What sort of impact does that feeling have in the programming?

V: Just to be clear: for the first seven years we did Bass & Nature camps, meaning it was only for bass players. Now that we own our own location, our 150 acre location called Wooten Woods just outside of Nashville, for the last ten years [it's been] for any instrument as well as vocalists. All ages. Most of our camps are fifteen and up, but we do some camps that go down below 15 also. Our schedule is usually very tough. We fit a lot into a day. We start early, we go late and so we want to make sure that people are of the age that they can handle it. So most of our camps are fifteen and up. When we go below fifteen we shorten the classes. We shorten the days and try to make it more palatable for that age and attention span. But any instrument now. We still do our Bass and Nature camp once a year, but all the other camps - we do a camp once a month - this year April through October. We'll do a different camp every month. So people can go to my website - victorwooten.com and check it out, or they can go straight to the campsite which is vixcamps.com and see if there's a program that suits your liking. But the main thing that the camps offers, I believe, is the opportunity for a person to be themselves. We have some things that we do at camp that are designed to bring the real person out, and in most cases they don't know they're happening. For example, even as an adult if we go to a camp and we don't know anyone we're going to be a little self-conscious. 'Am I good enough? Maybe I'm the best here...' If I hear someone else play I'm constantly going to be comparing myself to that person. All of that stuff. A lot of people are going to be subdued, nervous, or whatever. So we have some things that are designed to eliminate that. One of the best things that I like is that whole mystic of who Victor Wooten is disappears. By the middle of the second day nobody cares. I make the joke at the camp that 'hey remember me? I'm Victor Wooten. Look, it's me.' They don't care anymore, and to me that's really really cool. It's not that my status lowers, it's that theirs raises. They realize that now they're not beneath me. The pedestal they put me on, they are now up there with me. I haven't come off. But they're starting to realize *their* worth and that they *are* good enough. They're making new friends and they're realizing that everybody's good enough. The best quote I've ever gotten from camp came from our very first camp in the year 2000. At the end of that five day camp there was a young kid who came over to me, and he was fighting back tears, and he said, "you know, when I first got here I was like, 'wow! There goes Victor Wooten.' Now, I see everybody that way." I was like, 'wow, that was nice.' And this was from a *bass music camp*. So I really love that. The whole premise for the camp, as well as getting you better at music, is: my mom had a quote that she would always tell us. She would say, "what does the world need with just another good musician?" She said, "the world needs good people." So in our quest to get better at music, if we're going to spend all this time, energy, money, effort it should do *more* than just make us good musicians. It should make us good people and the world better. That is the underlying premise of our camp.

M: This podcast is going out through the International Society of Bassists and their mission is to 'Inspire, Educate, and Connect.' I wonder how this group of listeners can support you in that quest of being not just better musicians but better people. What can we do to tap into these other essential qualities?

V: V: Sure, well tap into the goodness of yourself. Love yourself. I know we're talking about bass and stuff, but it really starts with how you see yourself because how you see yourself is how you're going to see other people. If you're having a bad day you're probably going to see the badness in other parts of life. So really know who you are and realize that just the fact that you are born - you're already special. I mean we each have a fingerprint on our hand that's never been here before. In the history of humankind, before and after today this fingerprint will never be here again. That means I'm special. I'm unique. I'm a one-of-a-kind that has never been here and will never be here again. *Me...* is that special. *You* are that special. That puts us on an equal playing ground. And we accept that. In other words I don't look at my fingerprint and look at yours and think, 'Oh man, I like yours better.' We don't look at it that way. I'm already special. And for anybody that knows what it takes to *be* born, right? The whole process of sperm and all of that stuff, not to go into it, but we realize, *you have to realize*, that you've already won the biggest lottery, the biggest race you will ever enter. So even if I do nothing for my life, if I just sit on the couch and do nothing I'm still special. I'm not any less special. You can't take that away from me. I can't take that away from you. Doesn't matter what you think of me. What I know about myself is I won already. I'm special. I have something no one else will ever have in the history of humans. Right? The cool thing about *being* human is we have the gift, or the curse, whatever you want to call it, of choice. I get to choose what I do with this. What I do with this specialness, this fingerprint, this gift... I can choose what to do with it. And I choose to make things better with it, if at all possible. Through music, through talking, through friendship, through a wave, through a hug. I want to make other people realize their uniqueness and their specialness. I just do it through music, and other people can do that too. If you're a music teacher teacher the student to be the best version they can be of themselves. A lot of us want our students to be like us. We don't know it all. I know I don't know it all. I want my students to be better than me. The world already has Victor Wooten. What the world doesn't have yet is that little student. That's what the world needs, so we need to build them up as quickly as possible, as honestly as possible to be the best version of themselves. We can start by how we interact with people - helping raise people up to be the best versions of themselves. It helps if we don't get caught up into the negativities of society. What I mean by that - it doesn't mean that you ignore them, because they are there, but you don't have to become a part of them. In other words... we have reality TV now. You'll get your own show if you are negative enough. They have Jersey Shore... or they had... Flavors of Love. If you remember that show - the most evil, worst, person on that show that caused the most trouble was a woman that called herself New York. She was so horrible on that show that they gave her *her* own show called 'I Love New York.' So now there's men wanting to fall in love with her. She only got the show because she was horrible. That's awful that we celebrate horribleness. You know? That's just awful as a society. So for me to work against that I need to see that and be aware of it. So I'm not trying to ignore it, but I don't *become* it either. You know that's the whole yin/yang of life. You need one to have the other. We're not good people unless there's bad people. We're not bassists unless there's other things, you know?

So it all works together. But to answer that question again, it starts with how we see ourselves. In our making ourselves better we become an example for others.

M: I'm just kind of letting that digest for a minute. I first encountered you and what you had to say and what you did on the bass with a series of videos from Bass Day '98. Then my friend gave me your book. I saw you for the first time in Rochester and you spoke about your book in a way where you described the value of writing a fictional story with a character to describe some of the things that you wanted to talk about. In what sort of ways does your work stay attached to who you are and your persona and what sort of ways do you try and get away from that in order to show certain things?

V: Sure. So in writing a fictional story I could go further. Like Star Wars, or the movie Avatar. The difference between a fictional story and what we might call a documentary in most cases is the attitude that the *viewer* brings to it. When I go to watch Star Wars we go there smiling and happy and we just kind of take whatever comes. I don't even have to believe it. It's just a story, but I'm loose and I'm light. We don't argue over whether Yoda, this little green dude, is real or not. Or whether Luke is really Darth Vader's son. There's no argument. But for those of us that really pay attention and *hear* what Yoda's saying, what Darth Vader's saying, what the force really *is*, we get something from it. We go, "wow! There's truth there." So there's truth kind of hidden or placed in a fictional story so that we can come to it lightly. So I stayed away from writing for many years because the students who were coming to our camp were liking the information and they wanted it in a book, but I didn't want a book that I would have to defend. Because I *know* that the way I teach and what I talk about is different when it comes to music. It's different than most people, and at my camp is one thing, talking to you personally is one thing... as soon as you write it it can be taken however people want. Look at Facebook: doesn't matter what you put on there. There's going to be people screaming at you. So I didn't want that. I didn't want to write something that I would have to defend. Until it hit me: "wait a minute, write a fictional story. Just write a novel. We'll start from the standpoint that *none of this is true*." That way I'm cut loose from it. Then I can actually go *further* in the book. I may be able to talk about things I know but I can't do yet. I can still put it in there. Usually, I'm not teaching what I can't demonstrate, and that's my own fault. But in the book I can put it all in there. So I was able to write a story. In the book I could talk about *my* experiences, but I could also talk about *your* experiences. I could talk about other people's experiences. Maybe I don't get that nervous on stage, but I could still talk about it and have the character get nervous. So I can go in ways that I don't always go in life. Things that I think about. That's why I say I can go *further* with a fictional story. Rather than having to prove that this is true or this is not. With fiction I don't have to prove anything. I didn't even say it, you know? The character said it. That kind of thing. So there's a lightness that comes with fiction and that lightness of course comes from the author but it comes from the viewer also, the reader. They come to it in a

different mindset than if this is a story that's supposed to be true. A documentary or a nonfiction story. And I like that lightness.

M: You mentioned earlier things that you keep in front of you to combat the negativity. Is that something that helps you [alone] to stay light, or is there a quality of you that you want to stay light when you approach other things?

V: Absolutely. Absolutely. Another version, another meaning of lightness is truthfulness. I want to stay true. I can go through this day today and look at all the negative things and think it's a bad day. But as my brother Joseph says, "a whole lot of things have to go right even to have a bad day." If I want to really be truthful then I need to look at the good things also, and when I look at the good things I realize, 'wow, most of my day is good.' Even on a bad day. Even on my worst day. If you're here to talk about it that means your heart's beating, you can breathe, there's food on the table. I'm sitting here complaining about [things] *while* I'm on the internet - that means I have a computer. There's so many [good] things, we're just used to it. I mean I'm not living on the street. There's snow outside, but I'm inside. There's so many things that we take for granted. So for me staying lighting is really staying truthful, being honest about how good things really are. Now, a lot of people hear me say this and they might mistake me for saying that I ignore the bad parts, and no, that's not true. That's not true. I just don't let them paralyze me. I don't let them take over my life. So that's the difference.

M: If we could move back a little bit - you were talking about each individual and how everybody is individual. Sometimes what can be perceived as good or bad, or lightness or darkness, or truthfulness... can just be to see someone else do something that you wish you were doing or wish you could do. Are there things that you do or that you guide your students to do to acknowledge those things and support them and not have that creep up on your sense of worth or your identity or anything?

V: Well, one of the things that I learned as a kid, and I hope this answers the question, is that when I saw someone do something... I remember seeing Stanley Clarke for the first time. I remember hearing Jaco, I never got to see Jaco, but I remember hearing Jaco. I remember my brothers making me stay up to watch the Merv Griffin show because there was this bass player named Ray Brown that I had to see. All of these people were doing things I couldn't do, but it made me happy, because it was showing me possibility. Where a lot of us have been trained to see it as negative because *I* can't do it and *he* can, I am happy that these people can do it. I'm happy for them but I'm also happy for me, because if they can do it I can do it. The same way that if you can say a word I can say that word. I'm so envious: "oh man, I wish I could say that word. You shouldn't be able to say it, I should be able to say it..." I don't have that. I didn't grow up with that so I don't live with that. When I see you do something that's really cool I'm excited for you, "Man, that's amazing!" But also if

I want to do it, I'm going to learn it. Not to be better, because no matter how good I get it I can't do it the way you do it. I can only do it the way I do it. So I'm going to do it with my own voice anyway. I just realize that, so I get inspired by seeing other people do things. Even when they're doing them better than me. I realize that it's just different. I get inspired and excited by so many things in life. It's just hard not to be inspired. Hard not to be excited about the wonders of life. I don't get bored. I heard a saying that says, 'only the boring get bored,' and I understand that, but I also realize that it's a lack of attention. If you're bored then you're not looking around enough, you're not inquisitive enough. There's too many wonderful things going on all the time to ever get bored. There's too many things I could be doing that aren't boring, and if I'm bored I'm just mentally lazy.

M: Yeah, or inundated. Just need to focus in on something.

V: Yeah, sometimes focusing in, or focusing out. A lot of the time it's because we're focused in on this *one little thing* that's not going right. "Oh, I've got taxes." You know? And that's robbing me of everything else that's going on. All this beauty around me. So sometimes it's focusing in, sometimes it's focusing out, but I'm just one that says even in the state of our economy and politics and our world, life is still beautiful. We still live in a wonderful place. I get to talk to wonderful people who appreciate what I do. I just love to play music and people want to talk to me about it. To me, life is wonderful, and when I realize that, when I live that, it only gets more wonderful. I don't want to be in this alone, I don't want to be in this beautiful world alone. I want you to see how wonderful your life is too. That's, to me, that's what everything I do is about. Whether it's music, whether it's camps, whether it's writing. It's about the wonders of life.

M: We are involved with bass communities. Bass players have this wonderful commitment to banding together and supporting one another. When bass players get together there is a particular energy about it that can really be special. The ISB just went over this big milestone - 50th anniversary - and people of all generations are connecting in ways that they've never connected before. In that community or in your students' community what is the greatest opportunity that we have right now with these tools that we have to collaborate and to connect?

V: It's to remember that we're connecting with everybody, not just with each other. As beautiful as it is to be able to go to a bass convention and connect with other bass players... that's beautiful but there's also a problem that can arise from it. I hope this comes across right, I have to tread lightly here. I look at the different instruments sort of like the different races of society. If I go to an all black convention there's some problems that will probably show up about 'who we are' and 'are we better?' and 'are we equal?' Here's the thing I like about music. Music is a representation of how the world should be. In other words, an orchestra is better when all the instruments are different. If we just had an all bass orchestra, yeah if the musicians are good it's going to be good but it won't be as good as an

orchestra with different instruments. People will like it more when there's differences. In music we celebrate the differences. The orchestra is better when we're different. In music we have to listen to each other. We have to take turns. These are all great qualities of a human being. Music celebrates that. I'm a product of the sixties. I was born in '64. I've been a bass player since '66. So that's fifty-one years for me. I love these conventions, I love it all but here's what I'm starting to see. Let me go back again. One of the reasons I think the bass community is so cool is that we're used to being in the background. The whole design for inventing our instrument, the whole purpose is to support other musicians. Whoever invented the bass, electric or acoustic, I'm sure they were sitting there thinking, "I just invented the world's greatest solo instrument." It was designed to support other people. The bass is like the foundation. Nobody walks into a room and compliments the foundation. When you're doing your part you go unnoticed. As a whole we are comfortable with that as bassists. That is a *holier than thou* mentality to be able to be satisfied supporting other people and *not* get credit. Wow! That's our whole world, but I also see that changing. Just to use the ISB as an example. I'll go to the ISB and I remember being there and there was a room where people could check out bows or check out basses and everything and I see people in there just like, playing up high, *amazingly* fast like you know Edgar Meyer and beyond, and I'm sitting there thinking, 'this guy is not testing this bass out this guy is just showing off his stuff.' So I see the mentality changing because now we have ability. We can play fast. I can play as high as a violin. Faster than a trumpet. And we're liking that attention. Not that it's wrong, but it *can* be. So I can see the mentality of the instrument changing where a lot of us want to learn the flash before we learn the basics. We're practicing learning the icing before we ever have a cake to put the icing on. So as teachers, as a society, as educators, as friends hopefully there's a way that we can regulate, curb, control that. So that our students, our comrades are learning the role of the instrument first. We have to remember that bass is not an instrument first. Bass is a role that music needs to be complete. That's what's first. To have a full drum set you need a bass drum. A drum set without a bass drum is incomplete. Right? If a piano player plays a chord it needs a bass note to be complete. A guitar the same way. So bass is a role that's needed. It's like the base of a house or anything it's a role that's needed for music to be complete. We use an instrument to fulfill that role, but it can be a bass drum, it can be a tuba, in Mexico it'll be a guitarrón. It could literally be a trombone. It could be keyboard bass. It's doesn't matter. Not one is better than the other. It's a role that's needed. Many of us are learning to play the instrument and forgetting about the role. I'm not even going to say that that's wrong, but I hope that more of us are remembering the role first and will learn the role in its completeness first and *then* start branching upwards and outwards.

M: You were talking about the bass as an instrument but also more importantly as a role. I was wondering if you ever get caught up or if students or people that you speak to ever get caught up with the way the role gets defined in certain kinds of music - related to the instrument or not.

V: Yes. Absolutely. Absolutely. I teach now at Berklee College of Music five days every month and it's probably the greatest place in the world. There's teachers who have been teaching here in the bass department over forty years. It's amazing. I get to see students of all ages from around the world. To answer your question: I think a lot of it needs to start with us as teachers. How we teach music. I don't know how it is in the orchestra or with double bass but I know in our electric bass world we are part of a section of the band that is called the rhythm section. The bass, the drums, the keyboards, and the guitar together we make up the rhythm section. What that means is our goal, our main purpose is supposed to be to provide the rhythm. The foundation for the other instruments to stand upon. It's basically a support role. We are instruments of service but for the most part we don't teach it that way. We teach you notes first. We teach you chords, scales, you know we do all of that and there is very, very little rhythm exercises. There's almost *no* exercises about how to support a band. We talk about it. We mention it passing by, but there's no exercises. There's no theory behind it. The only theory pertains to notes. All we call music theory only deals with 12 notes. Our country only has twelve, and all the theory only deals with that? All ear training deals with pitches. We learn chords, scales, modes, key signatures. Pitches. But I thought you told me that I was rhythm section. Where is the rhythm theory? What does a person's body do when I play this rhythm? When should I go to whole notes versus half notes? Where's the theory behind this? Who's teaching it? Only the really really good teachers are going into that. Most of us are just teaching what notes to play over this chord. If you have good rhythm I don't care what note you play. Especially if you're playing jazz. Nobody is listening to what notes the bass player is playing. It's a feel. You listen to those old records man it's a feel back there that's going on. Like the kick drum, there's no pitch that matters. Yes we want to know the notes. But, even if I guess what note it is it's going to be right more than half the time. There's always seven out of twelve right notes. I can guess. But to put all the attention on 'I have to play this note' or 'I have to play that' takes the attention off of 'wow, I'm screwing up the rhythm.' If I screw up the rhythm, *any note* is not going to work. But that's too long of a diatribe just to say I think we should spend more time on the feel, the rhythm, of the music. There's a great professional bass player who I grew up listening to who says all the time you can't play until you know what note to play. That's as backwards as it comes. A baby doesn't have to know what word to say to talk. A baby says any sound. It's the emotion that comes out of it that tells us what the baby means. The parents learn everything the baby is saying even though it's not correct. The thing is it's more correct than incorrect. The only thing that's not correct is the word. The emotion, the tone, the phrasing, the feeling that's all there is enough that the parents know what they're talking about. In music it's no different. If you play a note with confidence, on time, on rhythm I can play the wrong note *so wrong* and *so powerful* that you'll think the rest of the band is wrong. That's what you should be teaching. A lot of us are so concerned with being right that we play as if we're walking on eggshells. That's not the way to support a band. You don't support anything with eggshells. This will sound egotistical and I'm not against anyone or any teacher, but I can't get a person to play jazz and to sound jazzy within a few minutes and it mainly comes down to: have you heard jazz? Do you know what it's

supposed to feel like? If you know what it's supposed to feel like we are there. Especially in jazz the more wrong notes you play, the better. The whole thing is about how to play wrong notes in the right way. The right way is by making it feel right. So when I teach music I teach music through feel first. We'll learn the notes later. Again there's only twelve total, and seven of them are always right. That's the easy part. There's an unlimited amount of dynamics, feel, articulations, phrases. If we get that right it doesn't matter what note you play. It's going to feel right, and sound right. And then I demonstrate it to the students. This is what I do at my camp where we have time. We talk about all the different elements of music, notes only being one of them. What else in music is just as equal to notes? Well, there's rhythm, yes. There's phrasing, articulation, tone, feel. We need technique before we can play anything. You have to be a good listener. How do we practice that? Where's the theory behind it? Where are the exercises? Who's teaching how to *not play*? When do you add space? Where's the theory behind it? We're teaching everyone how to *play*. We rush through the spaces because we just want to play again. There's so many things that are just as important that we don't teach. We put all the importance on notes. So even though we're the rhythm section we're treated as if we're the notes section, and even more so the *right notes* section. In getting a person to play the right feel, play the way a dancer dances. If a song comes on a dancer doesn't have to ask what key it's in, what's the feel, is it twelve-bar blues, is it this... a dancer just dances. You feel the music. Music makes your body move. Musicians: the more we know, the more we've learned, 'can't do that.' 'Let's play this.' 'Ok, what key? What's the phrase? Who solos first?' Why all these questions? Let's just play. When we get together to talk we don't have to ask all these questions first. 'Hey what do you want to talk about Mike?' or 'Hey man I learned these new words so I need you to say this to me in an interview.' You know? We just start talking. *Why* can't we play music that way? It's the minority of people who can. We aren't free, and it comes from the top down. We don't teach that freedom. We teach rules. A student comes to us with their mind open, and the more we teach the narrower it gets. If I say 'what can you play on an A maj#11 chord?' before you know anything you'll play anything. As soon as I teach you now you know only to play these few notes. Sometimes our teaching *narrows* the possibility where it should be *broadening* the student's mind. So we have to be careful as teachers. Are we diminishing the person, or helping the person grow? But again, to go back, the bass is a role. It's a role before it's an instrument. So for one mentality to say, 'this instrument is better than that instrument,' 'the double bass is better than the electric,' or 'no, the five-string is better than the four-string...' We gotta be careful with that. That should not be our mentality. our instrument was not designed for that. Our instrument is an instrument of service. We are here to support people. For the most part we are still doing that, but in both worlds of the double bass and the electric bass I see that slowly changing with the new mentality. I see it at the ISB when they're testing the basses. I see little show-off sessions; not all the time. And I see it on Youtube with the electric basses. We learn one little thing cool enough to put it on Youtube. We get it right *once*, but we recorded it. We post it and then we just sit back and we count the number of hits. The people out there that are gigging, they're not posting videos. They've got too many gigs. So it's a different mentality, and I'm not even saying one

is better than the other, but I guess in my mind I think one *is* better than the other, but I have to be careful as to what I say is better for someone else. I think it's something that can be looked at, and as teachers we should really add into our teaching curriculum how the instrument *supports* other people, because that's what it was designed to do.

M: Regardless of what you can do with it, or if it's electric or upright?

V: Sure. Sure. All that flashy stuff is good. It gets attention and I love it. I'm flashy too, but it's icing on the cake. The icing might get somebody's attention. You go the store to buy a cake, you might choose it because of what it looks like. But if you get home and you stick your fork in that cake and it's all icing you are thoroughly disappointed. Ninety-nine percent needs to be the boring part. It needs to be the cake. The icing is just that little thin layer, and our playing should be the same way.

M: What can an organization like the ISB, or college professors, do to distinguish a musical person who wants to grow? Who may not be at a certain level on an instrument or playing a certain way?

V: We need to redefine what level we're talking about. Are we talking about level of proficiency on an instrument? Or are we talking about the level of their desire to become proficient? I don't care about how well you play. I care more about your desire to express yourself. If you have a desire, we'll get there. A person who has more desire. Some people have more desire and more willingness to work. Some people are just natural-ability people, but the person with the desire will go further in the long run. That's the whole story of the tortoise and the hare. So if you just have to be good enough to participate I don't think we're serving the people in the best way. I think we should be training people to have desire. Training people to be curious. Training people to have love for the music and for the instrument. That, to me, should be the greatest joy because that's what's going to propel music and the instrument in the *best* direction. More than just ability alone. Anyone who practices enough will get the ability. That's easy. But most people that practice a lot: the better they get, the lower their love for it goes. And you see it. So to me, *that's* what we need to be more aware of and more cautious about: are we loving this? If we exclude the people who don't have the ability but love it then we're doing a disservice to everyone.

M: I've been speaking to Victor Wooten for this special edition of Bass World. Victor, thank you so much for taking this time.

V: Thank you. I appreciate you speaking with me.