

DEEP IN THE POCKET

Henman-Bevilacqua B4 bass

BY ED FRIEDLAND

IN PURSUIT OF THE ultimate, a connoisseur will search far and wide—and pay dearly for the pleasure of owning a unique, one-of-a-kind item. Henman-Bevilacqua is a newcomer to the musical instrument market, and it has targeted these very particular consumers with its B4 bass. And if you have to ask how much it costs, you probably can't afford it.

FEATURES

THE UNDERSTATED DARK brown open-grain satin finish, simple lines and passive electronics represent Hen-Bev's minimalist aesthetic. In spite of its unassuming presence, the B4 has unique technology under the hood and, aside from its pickups and tuning gear assembly, is completely handbuilt.

The uniquely shaped headstock is thin, with rounded edges, a flamed maple cap and body-matching finish. It's outfitted with aluminum Sperzel locking tuners that have an anodized clear-coat finish and hand-milled door-lock-shaped thumb wheels stamped with the HB logo—a nice custom touch. The 1.7-inch bell brass nut is finished in silver to match the rest of the hardware.

The satin-finished five-piece African sapele neck has a dense, tight grain pattern that transfers vibration well and feels good under the hand. Twenty-four nickel-silver frets sit on the black Filipino ebony fingerboard, which is adorned with aluminum fret-marker dots positioned between the E and A strings. The Tension Free neck design was developed by David Bunker and was first seen on the early Nineties U.S.-made Ibanez ATK bass, as well as PBC and Trekker basses.

Hen-Bev comes by this technology honestly, as luthier Scotty Bevilacqua worked with Bunker for 15 years as his apprentice, eventually going on to build custom axes for luminaries like Govt. Mule's Allen Woody and the Red Hot Chili Peppers' Flea. The neck design places the string tension on a 3/8-inch cold-rolled steel square truss bar instead of the wood itself for greater sustain and resonance. As a result, the B4 has remarkable sustain and clarity: the open string's fundamental seems to ring forever. While the truss rod is not traditional, neck relief is still adjustable via a 5/32-inch Allen screw hidden under an extra screw on the neck plate. The body is a one-piece Honduras

mahogany with a figured North American maple top, though the dark finish hides much of the detail. Its rather basic shape recalls the Jazz bass but with a decidedly modern slant. Though nicely tapered, it is a chunky 1.8 inches at its thickest points.

The individual through-the-body bridge is another Bunker design concept and also contributes to the B4's sustain. Each string essentially has its own bridge that mounts through the body. They are joined together on the back of the bass with a mounting plate that houses the adjustment screws. The bridge is made entirely from bell brass and each part is hand machined. The one-piece brushed aluminum "ashtray" bridge cover looks both retro and post-modern, but I took it off to make the bass more playable.

The passive EMG HZ pickups were a surprising choice for an instrument in this price range, but their ultra-clear, high-frequency response fit the bright sonic profile Hen-Bev had in mind. The company plans to make other pickups optional.

PERFORMANCE

WHILE THE LOOK OF THE B4 is fairly traditional, the tone is decidedly modern and, unplugged, it has a lively snap. The guitar's bell-like clarity may be too bright for some tastes, but with a versatile amp you can sculpt a darker tone that will still have cutting power. Soling the neck pickup produces a thick, chunky tone with edge that fills out the bottom nicely, and running both pickups at full volume adds detail to the tone, making the B4 great for slapping or picking. The bridge pickup delivers a tight and compressed sound that is slightly lower in volume due to the pickup's close proximity to the bridge.

THE BOTTOM LINE

THE HEN-BEV B4'S modern tone may be too edgy and ringing for traditionalists, and the price tag represents big money. It's true that building a custom bass in the U.S. with so many handmade parts is expensive, but the B4's minimalist design tends to overshadow the instrument's uniqueness. But if you are a connoisseur (with deep pockets) and a taste for modern tone, the B4 just might be your ultimate prize. ✨

PRO	CON
GREAT SUSTAIN; UNIQUE; HAND-CRAFTED QUALITY	EXPENSIVE



HENMAN-BEVLACQUA B4 BASS

LIST PRICE: \$5,900.00

MANUFACTURER: Henman-Bevilacqua Guitars, henbev.com

BODY: Honduran mahogany, figured maple top

NECK: Five-piece African sapele, bolt-on

FINGERBOARD: Filipino ebony

FRETS: 24

SCALE: 34 inches

PICKUPS: Two EMG HZ pickups

ELECTRONICS: Passive volume, volume, master tone

NUT WIDTH: 1.7 inches

EXTRAS: Heavy-duty aluminum hardshell case, DVD with neck- and bridge-adjustment videos, wrenches and leather strap

Sperzel locking tuners are a big plus.

The B4's body recalls the Jazz bass shape, with a modern slant.

