



*Yellowjackets*

# DANE ALDERSON

*Raising His Voice With  
Yellowjackets*

**By Chris Jisi** | *Photo by Maggie Graff*

**T**here are bass gigs, and then there are the coveted bass chairs — seats so well-established by badasses in service to major musical voices that when a replacement comes onboard, the expectations are particularly high. That was certainly the case when Jimmy Haslip left the nest of Yellowjackets, after four decades of landmark work, to be followed in fine form by Felix Pastorius for a few years. Since then, the buzz about the third heir to the Jackets throne can best be described as a continuous crescendo. Dane Alderson has been nothing short of a revelation. On his 2016 Jackets' debut, *Cohearance*, he first turned heads on saxophonist Bob Mintzer's straight-ahead jaunt "Guarded Optimism," bringing a new level of nuance to walking on the electric bass, both in half-time and double-time tempos. Next, he takes an assured, expressive solo on pianist Russell Ferrante's key-hopping ballad "Anticipation," before bringing both skills to the giant-stepping harmony of Ferrante and Felix Pastorius' "Trane Changing." Add Alderson's percolating, palm-muted groove prowess

while locking with drummer Will Kennedy on "Inevitable Outcome" and "Eddie's in the House," and his lyrical, arching solo on the 7/4 "Fran's Scene" to his plucking package.

Most recently, the congenial 6-stringer has shown his growth and influence within Yellowjackets on the quartet's most recent outing, *Raising Our Voice*, with guest vocalist Luciana Souza. Presented with two Haslip-recorded Jackets covers, Alderson makes them his own, both solo and groove-wise. Elsewhere, he deftly doubles melodies with Souza, Mintzer, and Ferrante; twice takes trade-off solos with Mintzer; contributes his first Jackets composition; and summons his command of his onboard MIDI system, effect pedals, and Loop Station to create a couple of ear-bending, ambient interlude tracks. With due respect to the late Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen, Yellowjackets have the bass world's next Great Dane.

Born in Perth, Western Australia, on April 19, 1983, Alderson heard a wide range of music growing up. His father, an Australian jazz drummer, spun everything from Oscar Peter-









### LISTEN

Yellowjackets, *Raising Our Voice* [2018, Mack Ave], *Coherence* [2016, Mack Ave]; Kait Dunton, *Planet D'earth* [2019, Real & Imagined Music]; the Grid, *Wear More Headbands* [2013, Listen/Hear]; thumpR, *Echo Papa Alphabet* [2011, thumpR]; Logic, *Logic Live* [2010, Bandcamp]; VOID, *VOID* [2006, XenDen Music]

### GEAR

**Basses** NYBW RS6-24 "Oceana" prototype signature 6-string; Yamaha TRB II 6-string; "I borrowed Ben Shepherd's custom fretless Ibanez 5-string for the track 'Quiet'"

**Strings** DR Strings Hi-Beams medium (.030, .045, .065, .085, .105, .130)

**Amp** Aguilar Tone Hammer 500 or DB 751 head with Aguilar DB 410 cabinet

**Effects** Roland VB-99 V-Bass System, Boss RC-300 Loop Station, Boss OC-3 Super Octave, MXR M169 Carbon Copy Analog Delay, Boss FV-500H Volume Pedal

son to Weather Report. His American-born mom favored the pop radio of Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson, Prince, and the Neville Brothers. And his sister dug the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and Irish music. Dane started on his dad's drum kit at age four and found his way to playing the metal of bands like Metallica and Pantera with school friends. His step-brother's passion for the Red Hot Chili Peppers turned his focus to bass, at 13. "Hearing Flea changed my life; he's the reason I play bass," Dane admits. "As a drummer, I could relate to his slapping technique on *Blood Sugar Sex Magik* and *One Hot Minute* [1991 and 1995, Warner Bros.]." Equipped with a Fame Hondo 4-string he got for Christmas, he applied his drum-rudiment books to bass, using his thumb as the kick drum and his index finger as the snare. His father got him into the youth big band in their suburban town of Kalamunda, escalating Dane's ascent into jazz. He saved up to buy a Yamaha BBN5 5-string and became a huge fan of the Dave Weckl band. When they came through Perth, he sat in the front row and soaked up the influence of Tom Kennedy. "His sound, touch, and style blew me away. I transcribed a lot of his parts and solos using Amazing Slow Downer [software]." At 16, Alderson successfully auditioned for the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA). Perth's thriving music scene was awaiting.

### You came up amid a potent group of young musicians in Perth.

I was very fortunate, considering what many of them have since accomplished. I knew Linda May Han Oh from the scene, and there was a local band called K, who hired me when I was 17 and took me under their wing. They had saxophonist Graeme Blevins [Phil Collins, Kyle Eastwood], keyboardist Grant Windsor [José James, Gregory Porter], and drummer Andy Fisenden [Boy George], who is the reason I got in the Jackets. They turned me on to the acid-jazz scene of the time, and also Meshell Ndegeocello's albums. We were into group improvisation, which opened up my ears in a big way. At 19 I won a scholar-

ship given by local trumpeter James Morrison, which included a new Yamaha 6-string bass. James formed a band with few of the previous winners, including Andy, saxophonist Troy Roberts [Jeff "Tain" Watts, Joey DeFrancesco], trumpeter Matt Jodrell [Gil Evans, Jon Batiste], and keyboardist Simon Stockhausen [Karlheinz's son]. We cut a record and toured Europe several times. I was settling into the Perth scene, doing gigs and sessions, and playing in Logic, an odd-meter fusion band. But my dream was to go to New York City to play jazz with my heroes.

### How did you get to the States?

In 2012, my housemate was moving on, so I thought, Why not make the move now? My sister and mom were living in Charlottesville, Virginia, so I moved there, and it has remained my home base. Because it's a college town, it's thriving musically, with an array of styles played in various venues. I've had a regular Monday night quartet gig at a restaurant/club called Rapture for years. I also took advantage of being fairly close to New York by coming up regularly. I took a lesson from the late Jeff Andrews, saw a lot of my favorites, like Mike Stern and Wayne Krantz, and did some gigs with Troy Roberts' band, Nu-Jive.

### How did you land the Jackets bass chair?

In March 2015, I had hit a rough patch; it was wintertime, gigs were slow, and I was a bit worried and discouraged. I woke up one morning, and out of the blue there was an email from Will Kennedy that said, "Hey, Dane, we saw some videos with you on YouTube; would you like to do some gigs with the Jackets?" It was insane! The videos they had seen were of a Perth band called VOID, which was a spinoff of K, with Andy [Fisenden] and Troy [Roberts]. Will had met Andy when they both played at a drum festival in Melbourne, and they stayed in touch, which included Andy sending VOID videos to Will. When the bass slot opened in the Jackets, Will contacted Andy and asked who the bass player was in those videos. Andy gave him my contact information, and told him I was living in Virginia.

### What happened from there?

## CONNECT

CHECK IT OUT

CHECK IT OUT

CHECK IT OUT

CHECK IT OUT

Watch Dane playing with Yellowjackets, Logic, and VOID.

They called and gave me a gig in Denver that was a month away, which was essentially my audition. I had a few Jackets albums and had played tunes like “Revelation” and “Downtown” in school, and of course I was a big fan of Jimmy Haslip, but I had a lot of homework to do. They sent me 15 songs, and I only knew “Revelation.” The first thing I did was memorize all of them. I didn’t want to be reading for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity; I wanted to be alert for cues and changes on the fly. My advice is, if you ever get a chance to audition for your heroes, memorize the music — the guys really appreciated me doing that. In Denver, we had a quick rehearsal the day before without Bob [Mintzer], which included some arrangement changes. The gig went well, I felt an instant chemistry with Will, and a few days later, they offered me the position. Two weeks after that, we were playing the Blue Note in New York and we began working on *Cohearence* soon after. I was in the right place at the right time, for which I’m extremely grateful.

### How do you view your role in the band?

First and foremost, I want to provide a solid foundation for the guys; my main goal is to make them feel comfortable. I noticed right away that their focus on dynamics is more extreme than any band I’ve ever been in. So I concentrated on being able to play grooves very quietly but with intensity. Will is the master of that — he can lay down a nasty groove at super-low volumes. Beyond locking it down, I also have plenty of freedom. Russ and Bob were like, “The floor is yours. If you’re hearing something harmonically, go for it and we’ll go with you. If you want to experiment with effects, feel free.” The music is open; even their most famous tunes have consistently evolved since I’ve been onboard.

### Let’s talk about your approach to soloing.

For me it started with transcribing bass players: Tom Kennedy, Jeff Andrews, John Patitucci, Gary Willis, Oteil Burbridge, Richard Bona, and Matt Garrison, who’s a major influence of mine; I had a major shift in perspective of what the instrument is capable of after hearing Matt. All of them were key to de-

veloping my phrasing — using hammer-ons and pull-offs to play legato, instead of plucking every note, and with Oteil and Richard, there was the vocal element. Along the way I also started transcribing horn players, piano players, and guitarists — a lot of Mike Stern and his II–V–I patterns. Eventually I started sounding too much like other bassists, so I tuned everyone out for a while. I record myself on gigs now more than I ever have. It can be painful to listen back, but it’s helpful in the long pursuit of trying to find my own voice. More than anything I try to create melodies; that’s what the best soloists are able to do.

**On *Raising Our Voice*, the Jackets cover two tunes from their 1993 *Like a River* album, “Solitude” and “Man Facing North.”**

That decision happened pretty close to when we hit the studio. On the original “Solitude,” Jimmy Haslip is featured throughout the track playing the melody and soloing beautifully on his fretless. Here, Russ reworked the arrangement to feature Luciana. I double the melody at the start and I take a one-chorus solo; then Luciana gets some space to sing in Portuguese and English, including a new repeated section at the end where she can stretch. For “Man Facing North,” we changed the groove a bit in the studio, Luciana sang some of the melody, and Russ wrote a new section where Bob and I trade solos.

**You start the second solo trade with a beautiful chordal passage. Who are your influences in that area?**

Matt, Oteil, John Patitucci, Dominique DiPiazza, and Hadrien Feraud are the main ones. I learned voicings from all of them. And what they all do, that I love, is have a droning open string in their chords, particularly Matt with his droning open C string.

**You make use of a hammer-on/pull-off technique to start your solo on “Everyone Else Is Taken.”**

Credit to Matt again. The spark for that comes from him using that technique when he guested on Meshell’s album *The Spirit Music Jamia: Dance of the Infidel* [2005, Shanachie]. It also comes from listening to

and transcribing a lot of Irish music: jigs, reels, and aires — their melodies are full of inflections involving hammers and pull-offs. Essentially, on the technique side, I started as a two-finger plucker, and when I got in the band K, they taught me how to do the palm-mute using my thumb, index, and middle fingers to play fingerstyle, like Anthony Jackson or Pino Palladino. From there I got into Matt's fingerstyle approach, where he uses the thumb and all four fingers. And I began using a ramp on my basses inspired by Matt and Gary Willis. By the way, the most challenging aspect of "Everyone," which is Russell's tune, is that he wanted us to create a sense of flipping the feel back and forth between 12/8 and three.

**On "Ecuador," Bob and Russ solo over "Red Clay"-like changes, but you solo over a different section.**

Yup, I was definitely ready for the "Red Clay" solo changes, and initially we were all going to blow over those. But after hearing it

back, they decided to add another section to have me play over, and they're cool changes, as well. That's one of my favorite tunes on the record; it's fun to play live.

**The ambient tracks "Emerge" and "Divert" are yours.**

I've always loved ambient music, everything from Aphex Twin to Squarepusher to minimalist stuff that borders on new age. So when I get my solo spot on gigs, I usually experiment by looping a drone and then playing something atmospheric on top of it, using my Boss RC-300 Loop Station and Roland VB-99 MIDI unit. The guys like it because it's a contrast to all the notes flying around on our tunes, and they asked me to do a couple of sonic interludes on the record. "Emerge" is basically a loop of bass swells and harmonics, and then I improvise on top with a patch on the Roland that puts the note up two octaves and adds reverse delay. "Divert" developed on Jacket gigs; it's a loop of a 6/8 drum beat I slap out on my strings, and then I add



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a bass line and melody, and I improvise over that with a guitar patch.

**“Brotherly” is your full-song contribution.**

The guys squeezed it out of me; they were like, “You have to get a tune on this album.” It was an idea I’d had on my laptop for a few years, and I wrote it using my Loop Station. The inspiration is the U.K. husband-and-wife band Brotherly, whose main members are [writer, producer, bassist, and multi-instrumentalist] Robin Mullarkey and [co-writer/vocalist] Anna Stubbs. What I love about their music — particularly their first album, *One Sweet Life* [2007, MAM] — is their grooves are in 4/4, but they mess with the syncopation of their drum parts and beats to make it sound like the feel is flipped around or that it’s in odd time. A lot of drummers post clips of themselves playing over Brotherly tracks on YouTube. When it came time to hand my charts to Bob and Russ and give them directions and suggestions, I think I’ve never been more nervous in my life! But they were terrific, as was Will, who immediately got the concept and made the drum part his own.

**Since your Perth days you’ve been known for being especially adept at walking on the electric bass. Any insight?**

I listened to a lot of upright players for bass line construction and tone, especially Ray Brown, Ron Carter, Paul Chambers, and Christian McBride. Sounding like an electric bass when you’re walking still puts off a lot of bandleaders. If you can incorporate a bit of muting with either hand, you can get closer to the attack of an upright bass. I like incorporating my right palm because it gives the note a fat attack, and then by lifting my palm slightly, I get some of the upright-like resonance and sustain — and I can control the overall dynamics, as well. I’ll also move my right hand to various spots for a rounder or punchier sound. I picked up some metronome tips for swinging and for time in general from Jeff Andrews and also from Victor Wooten, when I did an Australian clinic tour with him. And my early bass teacher, Paul Pooley, had me practice II-V-I patterns when I was walking, which was great because it

gets you away from always landing on the root, and it helps your lines melodically.

**You’re working on a signature bass with New York Bass Works.**

I’ve been very lucky to collaborate with David Segal, an incredibly talented luthier who has gone above and beyond with every detail of the design I’ve requested. He reached out to me a few years ago through bassist Cheikh Ndoeye, who had worked with Russ. We’ve been working on my Oceana model 6-string. It has an alder body, quilted-maple top, a 35”-scale one-piece roasted-maple neck, and an Indian rosewood fingerboard with a virtually flat radius. That’s due to the way I set up my basses for my right-hand raking. I generally rest my thumb on the string above the string I’m plucking, so my action across the strings gets gradually higher as you go from the *C* string to the *B* string. The bass also has two adjustable NYBW custom pickups, with an adjustable ramp in-between them; a Pike Amplification preamp, with low, mid, and high cut and boost, and a mid-frequency selector; and a Graph Tech Ghost MIDI system. It’s a hexaphonic unit with a 13-pin input on the side of the bass, to drive my Roland V-Bass. Once the Oceana moves from prototype to standard model, David and I are going to work on a P-Bass model and a fretless bass.

**I understand there’s a Yellowjackets big band record in the works. What else lies ahead?**

Yes, in November we’ll be doing a record with the WDR Big Band in Cologne, Germany [anchored by *BASS MAGAZINE* columnist John Goldsby], and we’ve already begun writing for a new album in early 2020. I’ve also been doing some dates with another Mack Avenue artist, vocalist Alicia Olatuja, and gigging with some great local musicians in Charlottesville, like organist Jonah Kane-West, trumpeter John D’earth, and saxophonist Charles Owens. Other than that, in my home studio I’m very slowly piecing together material for a solo record down the line. For now, getting to play great music with great musicians keeps me challenged, inspired, and full of awe and joy. *See music, page 62.* ●

## BROTHER FROM ANOTHER METER

**D**ane Alderson offers a peek into his creative process with a mini score he created for *BASS MAGAZINE* showing the four basic components of the C section of “Brotherly” (at 4:38, with the melody entering at 5:12). This section was the genesis of the composition, and from it he created the song’s other sections. As Alderson explains in the Q&A, the U.K. duo Brotherly was the inspiration for the track, particularly their penchant for writing in 4/4 but with drums parts and beats that feel displaced or turned around, or suggesting odd meters or measures. Here, he unravels each component:

The drum staff “I used basic drum notation here for what is a four-bar phrase repeated twice. The bottom line of the staff is the kick drum, the the second space from the top is the snare, the top of the staff is the hi-hat, and the second line from the bottom is the tom-tom. This was the very first idea I had for the song. I literally came up with the kick-and-snare groove by playing the kick with my thumb and the snare with my index finger, on my bass — before programming it on a drum machine. Notice none of the kicks land on the *one*, and most of them are upbeats, in the spirit of Brotherly playing around with the syncopation.”

The chords staff “The chords came next, adapted here for bass and played an octave up [all of which are in the range of a 4-string]. They’re all 1–5–9 chords, except for the final *E13* chord [cheat and use the open *E* on a 4-string]. I want-



ed to have a strong, open sound, not colored by 3rds or 7ths. Notice that the last three chords of the first four-bar section, starting with the pickup to bar 3 [*E5(add9)*, *B5(add9)*, *G♭5(add9)*], move down a whole-step in the second four bars, starting with the pickup to bar 7 [*D5(add9)*, *A5(add9)*, *E13*]. Rhythmically, I came up with a different syncopation for the chords, while playing them against the drum part. But they all avoid landing on downbeats and are mostly shifted over by a 16th-note.”

The bass staff “The bass line came next, for which I basically matched the rhythm of the chords, except for the extra *D♭* root notes and leading-tone *F* in the first and fifth measures [play the low *D♭*’s and *D*’s an octave up on a 4-string]. On the actual track I play a few more extra notes before the melody comes in.”

“The melody came last. I started writing it on bass, but I had an Akai MIDI keyboard I was trying out synth sounds on, and I end-

ed up writing the melody on that. As a result, the range and flow of the melody is keyboard-like, and not the kind of shapes I’d typically play on bass, which was nice [the high *G♭* in bars 1 and 6 are not on most 4-strings]. The melody is influenced by the harmony, starting off with a 1–5–9 shape for the first three notes, and I tried to avoid 3rds and 7ths in the melody to prevent it from having a happy or sad sound. The melody’s tonality in the last two measures is *E* Lydian dominant, relating to the *E13* chord. Overall, rhythmically, the melody has its own offbeat syncopation, but it’s more closely related to the chord and bass lines than to the drums. I also used fragments of it earlier in the song. The melody at the end of bar 4 and the first beat of bar 5 is heard as the track’s opening melody [at 0:00 and 0:20]. And the melody in bar 3 and the beat *one* of bar 4 is the vamp Russell and I play at the beginning of the track [at 0:09], which recurs throughout.”

## EXCERPT FROM 'BROTHERLY'

DANE ALDERSON

MELODY

CHORDS

BASS

DRUMS

♩ = 110

8va

8va

Db5(add9) Gb5(add9) G5(add9) Ab5(add9) E5(add9) E5(add9) G5(add9) Gb5(add9)

4

E. BASS

E. BASS

E. BASS

Dr.

Db5(add9) Gb5(add9) G5(add9) Ab5(add9) D5(add9)

7

E. BASS

E. BASS

E. BASS

Dr.

A5(add9) E13

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