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*NS Design Photos by:
Cia Gould*

NS Design CR5 Radius

By Ted “Blyss” Gould

The Company

NS Design is based in Nobleboro, Maine and was founded in 1990 by Ned Steinberger with a focus on developing electric versions of bowed classical instruments. I’ve been a fan of the NS design WAV4 electric upright bass for some time, and, as a matter of fact, I just finished a run of Broadway By the Bay’s production of *Cabaret* using that fine instrument. Ned has a solid reputation for building innovative versions of traditional guitars and

basses that lack a traditional headstock. His idea was to create instruments that used non-conventional materials and weren’t constrained by traditional design concepts. In this endeavor, he discovered that the tuners actually provided a better balance when placed on the body, and that the traditional headstock was not actually a necessity. Steinberger Sound Corp grew out of the birth of the headless bass and guitar, and has marketed and sold these graphite instruments all over the world.

In addition to designing for NS Design, Ned also designs products for other companies, like the Realist™ pickup for acoustic string instruments in collaboration with David Gage, and hardware for Martin and D’Addario. NS Design continues to advance the state of the art and holds new patents on its line of concert string instruments. They now take the headless bass concept another step further with the introduction of the Radius Bass.

The new NS Design Radius bass was unveiled at the 2012 NAMM Show and the CR5 versions of the Radius are built alongside the cello, upright bass, viola and violins in the Czech Republic. The CR5 is a more affordable version of the custom shop version, NS US-5, which are built on request in Nobleboro, Maine. At first glance, it is pretty clear that the same innovative design aspects that Steinberger brought to its predecessors exist in the CR5.

Options

The Radius comes in both fretted and fretless models and is available with Amber Satin, Natural Satin, or Charcoal Satin Finishes. In my opinion, the satin finish brings these basses from commuter status down to Sunday Driver. If you're looking for a bass to gig with regularly, with the occasional bump and bruise that are inevitable with the gigging world, you'd do yourself a favor by getting comfortable with the fact that, without some babying – maybe even a lot of babying – the Radius CR5 won't age as well as a bass with a poly finish. This bass had a small scratch near the input jack, and I'm not sure how it got there, but it's small enough for me to know that it didn't take much for it to happen.

The bass is light weight (8.85 lbs) and well balanced, with no neck dive, and the bass takes its name from the convex back radius. The body is maple with a flamed maple top, and the back radius provides enhanced contact and stability against the torso. The bolt-on, one-piece maple neck has an embedded continuous carbon fiber core and

adjustable truss rod. This combination has the natural feel of wood, but the core provides enhanced sustain and definition to each note. The fingerboard is ebony, with a 35" scale and familiar 10" radius. Heavy conventional tuning machines are replaced by an aluminum headplate with ball-end string mounting slots, which are custom produced for NS Design. The tuning system is integrated into the body.

Electronics

The piezo pickup (originally designed for the bowed instruments) provides a deeper low end than one might expect, and doesn't detract from the magnetic pickups. The blend of piezo and magnetic pickups opens up another realm of possibilities for the player. Say, for instance, that you want to get an acoustic bass sound, but either can't play the acoustic bass or space constraints make it hard to use a traditional acoustic bass. The piezo really provides a deep, round low end, as opposed to the nasally squawk kind of a sound that one

might expect. The blend of technology really opens up a broad range of possibilities for the player.

The CR5 Radius bass will also accept the NS Omni Bass strings which will allow the player to "fudge" that sound. Theater bassists will know exactly what I'm talking about! The master volume, active treble cut/boost, active bass cut/boost, rotary magnetic/piezo pickup blend, 3-position magnetic pickup selector switch and 3-position piezo EQ switch are cleanly laid out and easily accessible, without being a distraction in the middle of a performance. The pickups are dual low-impedance custom EMG pickups, in addition to their own bridge-mounted system.

The self-clamping tuning system is one of the features that Ned himself is very excited about and was originally designed for the NS designs violins. The tuners, accept





all ball-end strings. This system allows the string to be changed with ease, and the strings are clamped in place only by the weight of the tuner. The neck is essentially a carbon fiber neck with the feel of a wood neck that has absolutely no dead spots.

The Bottom Line

My thoughts, at a glance, were that this was a really cool-looking bass with great lines that mixed classic and more futuristic styling well, without going overboard. The bass really screams “ergonomics.” Hey, I don’t know about you, but I think that’s important. You ever see a person riding a motorcycle down the freeway and think, “that person just doesn’t look right on that bike?” If you haven’t, I have. How the thing looks definitely influences my buying decision. This bass has a sleek and graceful look and comes in a snug-fitting gig bag that travels

easily. If you’re a traveling bassist, or just want take a practice axe on vacation with you, the CR5 will fit nicely in the overhead compartment. The headless body is well-balanced and the trademarked Diradial™ curved maple body drapes nicely over the player, conforming to his or her body. Ergonomics were obviously at the forefront of the design process. I was only able to play this bass in one live R&B/Soul/Funk setting, and, while it may have been too modern-sounding for some tunes, it really sang and cut through the live mix well. The comfort of the bass, however, was pretty amazing. This is a perfectly well-balanced instrument that is meticulously put together. Ned Steinberger and NS Design continue to push the design envelope. **BGM**