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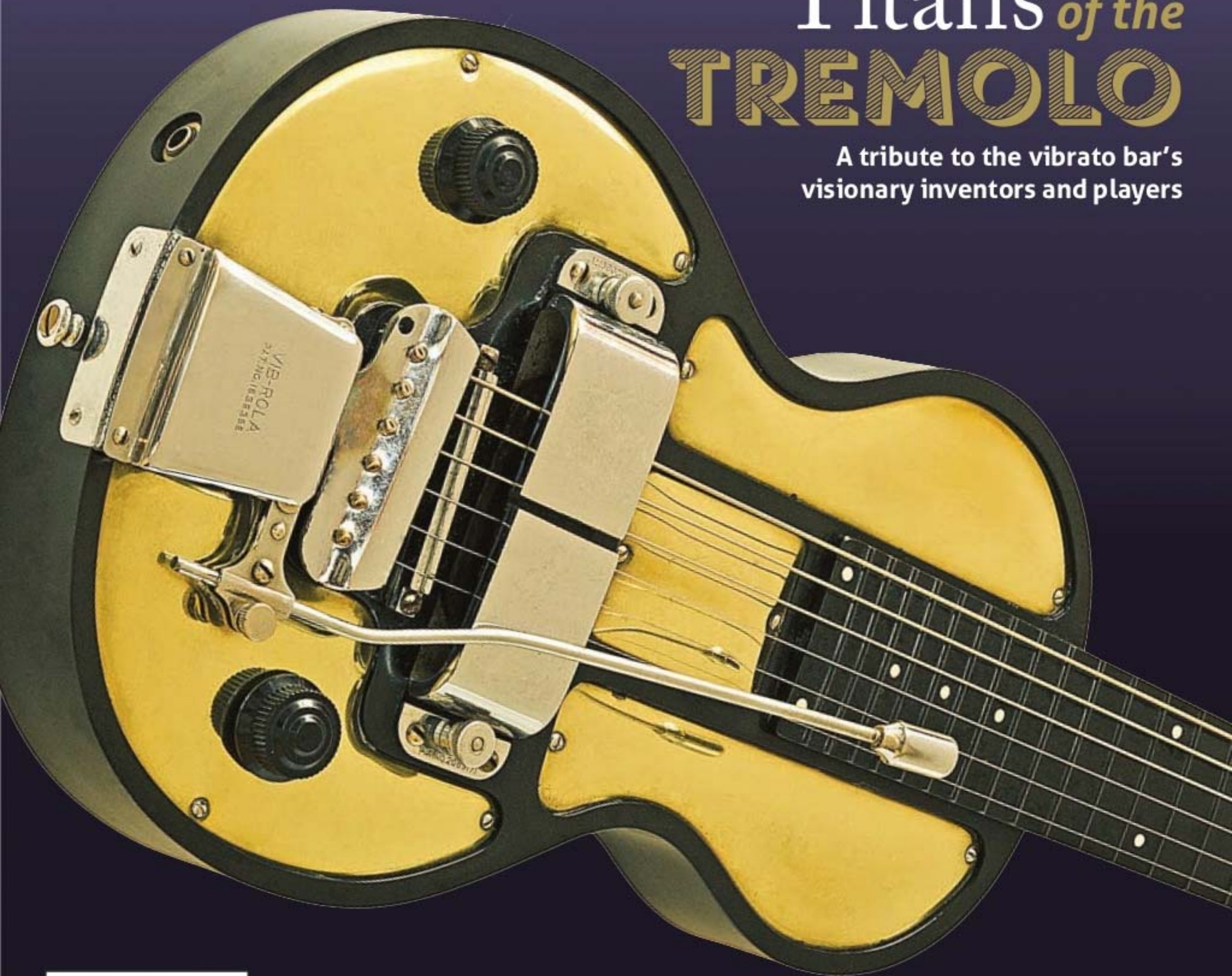
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NS DESIGN

CR5 Radius

By Steve Cook

The '80s were an interesting time for instrument builders because many players were trading in their Les Pauls and Strats for shiny new Charvels and Kramers. It seemed the more radical the instrument shape, the more it was revered. And it was in 1980 that a young Ned Steinberger introduced a wildly different bass design to the world. His L-series instruments were groundbreaking with their minimal footprint, headless neck, and a tuning assembly located behind the bridge. The L-series design was the first major overhaul for the electric bass since 1951. Not

surprisingly, bassists embraced Steinberger's new instruments, including notables like Bill Wyman and Geddy Lee.

Fast-forward to 2013 and NS Design's introduction of the headless CR5 Radius 5-string bass. This Czechoslovakian-made instrument is the production version of Steinberger's innovative U.S.-built Radius bass, which made its debut about a year ago. The dimensions are the same as the U.S. model and engineered to Ned Steinberger's exacting standards, but this new production model comes with a more approachable price tag.



Czech This Out

The test model arrived in a form-fitting gig bag, and from first sight (and weight), it identified itself as an easy carry-on companion for a traveling bassist. After unzipping the snug, nylon cocoon, I was greeted with a beautiful instrument that's *slightly* reminiscent of a Kubicki Factor 4 bass, but with a more graceful aesthetic. My tester was finished in a lovely charcoal satin, but the Radius is also available in amber or natural.

Steinberger has once again pushed the boundaries of interesting features while at the same time enhancing a bassist's overall comfort and interaction with an instrument. The CR5 Radius bass is an engineering feat: It's a blend of elegant form and practical purpose, with an array of dizzyingly meticulous details. The top of the chambered-maple body, for example, has a tighter radius than the back. This "Diradial" design enables a more comfortable right-hand position on top and enhanced hugging of the torso, thanks to the convex back.

A big selling point of the CR5 Radius is the tuning system. Having the tuners behind the bridge really does provide a more natural and subtle feel for on-the-fly tuning. At the other end of the bass,

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an aluminum head plate anchors the ball end of the strings atop the carbon-reinforced maple neck. Gone are the days of needing double ball-end strings for a headless bass. The CR5 Radius will accept any standard-scale strings and the hollow cavity on the back makes string changes a breeze.

The CR5 Radius is outfitted with a pair of EMG magnetic pickups, as well as a bridge-mounted NS Design Polar piezo system. The 18V preamp is designed to give the bass a lot of headroom and sonic range. The preamp's control set includes a pair of 3-way mini toggles: one for pickup selection and the other for the piezo's EQ settings. Four control knobs are onboard to take care of pickup balance, master volume, bass boost/cut, and treble boost/cut.

Headless and Loving It

Out of the gate, the ergonomically designed CR5 Radius felt very nice under

my fingers. The ebony fretboard is fast and even, and I didn't find a single dead spot all the way to the 24th fret. The bridge spacing is 18 mm, which also felt comfortable and even. The radius of the bass (hence the name) gives the instrument a slight angle towards the player, making the fretboard easy to see. An oversized horn and deep cutaway help provide balance and I didn't experience any neck dive whatsoever. Unplugged, the notes were true with power and sustain, and harmonics were fluid and effortless.

I had the opportunity to put the bass through its paces from two extreme sides of the spectrum—both my bedroom amp (a Warwick CCL combo) and an arena PA with my signal path coming from an Avalon U5. The bass performed beautifully in both situations.

The articulation and throaty sound of having only the piezo engaged really impressed me. Using the treble setting of the piezo's EQ, an




acoustic-like instrument came to life and I immediately imagined that the available fretless version of this bass would have some serious growl. When I switched to the bass-boost setting for the piezo, the tone the CR5 Radius produced sounded *nothing* like the piezo-only settings of other basses I've played with this kind of setup. It was intense and rich, as opposed to pointed and bright. This dazzling pickup setting could have handled the arena gig on its own.

The modern tones took over when I switched to the EMGs. My aggressive 5th string riffs that were clear and concise in the bedroom were simply gut-shaking in the arena setting. The 5th string is super-tight and responsive, and chords and double stops were even and equally responsive. I found the bridge pickup to be a *little* too nasal on its own for everyday use, as I moved between it and the neck pickup for tonal contrast. It might be a useable option, however, for a solo section or for a run that requires a bit more

articulation. I ultimately settled on the warmest setting, which was an equal blend of the two EMGs. And when I added the piezo into this mix, I was again greeted with some gorgeous, midrange growl.

The Verdict

I like this bass. At roughly \$2,700, the price isn't *astronomically* high, but it's still high enough that the CR5 Radius is probably going to appeal to a more select crowd. The Radius could definitely handle a meat-and-potatoes-type existence, but playing it in a smoky bar night after night might almost be like driving the Lotus for your runs to Home Depot instead of the truck. This bass is for the player that demands more than a mass-produced, slab-bodied mule. And with its slew of modern appointments and level of quality, the CR5 Radius is an instrument that is able to bridge the gap somewhat between Ned Steinberger's custom shop and an everyday bass. If you find one in a nearby store, you may not put it down. 



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RATINGS

NS Design CR5 Radius

\$2,700 street
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PROS Ridiculously well made and engineered. Resembles a work of art. You can still keep your headstock tuner.

CONS Somewhat pricey.

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