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Sadowsky Will Lee Model

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The partnership between New York luthier Roger Sadowsky and international bass icon Will Lee is one of the longest in the field. Originally a Fender specialist, Sadowsky began servicing and modding Will's basses in 1979, and when Sadowsky decided to start his own brand of Fender J-Bass-inspired instruments, Will was one of his early boosters and endorsers. After years of playing several slightly tweaked Sadowsky production models, Will and Roger decided to work together on a signature bass that incorporated some of Will's favorite mods. As to the design mission for the bass, Will himself says, "This bass is meant to be played by any serious bassist who loves good sound and playability in a variety of styles, both live and in the studio. It's the product of a 30-year relationship between a guy out in the field and a master builder in the lab."



The Will Lee bass is obviously a Jazz-style bass, so that means an ergonomically contoured body, two single-coil pickups, and a narrow and shallow neck. But going beyond the standard formula, Sadowsky has added and/or modified several important facets of the J-Bass design to accommodate Will's requests. First, the neck is even narrower than Sadowsky's already narrow standard width. Second, Will has long asked Sadowsky for more midrange punch, particularly to cut through when playing live. Since Sadowsky's standard boost-only preamp does not offer midrange control, Sadowsky originally experimented with wood choice and pickup design and location, but none of these variables seemed to produce the punch Will sought. Finally, Sadowsky provided Will an onboard parametric midrange-boost box, asking him to experiment with it in order to determine the specific frequency, bandwidth (Q), and amplitude of Will's favorite boost. After awhile, Will settled on a wide-Q boost at 500Hz. Roger integrated this into his onboard preamp for the Will Lee bass and it's engaged via a small toggle switch on the control plate. To enhance the circuit's utility, control-cavity trim pots and switches allow a player to adjust the amount of boost, the overall output of the preamp, whether the boost is centered at 500 or 800Hz, and select between a wide or narrow Q.



As is Will's preference, the Sadowsky arrived with its chrome "bell cover" installed. It took me about two minutes of earnest effort before I forever relegated it to the bass's case. It's just not for me. The bass also arrived with a protective static-cling vinyl covering in spots that are particularly vulnerable to scratches and dings. Since Sadowsky offers his customers a seven-day approval period, he asks that they leave the covering on until they're sure they'll keep the bass.

The Sadowsky's construction was topnotch. Each component was high quality and well installed. The setup was near perfect, too, although I had to slightly tweak the trussrod for a bit more relief, undoubtedly due to the climate shift between New York and my California office. I was pleased to find a trussrod adjustment wheel at the body end of the neck, as opposed to the more typical trussrod adjustment nut. As I've pointed out in my reviews of Music Man basses, which universally feature this style of trussrod adjustment, I love the design for its simplicity and easy use.

The Will Lee bass was exceptionally comfortable and easy to navigate. Though it's a J-style bass, its proportions are not identical to a Fender. The body is slightly more compact and there's a nice little contour at the cutaway to improve high-fret access. The ultra-narrow, mildly radiused neck made it easy to fly around and really manhandle the neck; my thumb easily wrapped around the nut. The fretwork and fit and finish was superb—Sadowskys have truly excellent necks.

SOUND

I've played a lot of J-style basses in my time, including many high-end "Super-J" basses. Each tends to have its own idiosyncrasies while also fulfilling players' J-Bass expectations. The Sadowsky is no different, although it's perhaps the most unique sounding of all the J-style basses I've played. The combination of Sadowsky's pickups and FET-powered preamp results in a singular tone that is the exclusive purvey of these instruments. The Sadowsky sound is taut and controlled with bountiful, but clear lows, a slightly subdued midrange, and a detailed and articulate treble response. The prevailing impression is one of broad frequency response and a notable lack of harshness or imbalance. To my ear, the Sadowsky sounded nothing like a passive Fender Jazz Bass, but somehow it's also clearly from the same sonic universe.

The boost-only EQ is effective and well voiced. It's exceedingly difficult to wring a bad sound out of the Sadowsky (well, at least not one that's the instrument's fault). Slap worked especially well on the bass, particularly when I boosted the bass and treble by about 50 percent (thus producing an incidental midrange scoop) and blended the pickups. The tone was dead-on NYC slap, *al la* Marcus Miller—subtly compressed and sparkly.

The Sadowsky's soloed pickup tones were also inspired and always useful. While I've quibbled about the Sadowsky's blend control orientation in the past (clockwise selects the bridge pickup, which still seems backwards to me), I adapted to it pretty quickly. The soloed bridge tone was burpy, but not offensively so. It was cool having the mid-boost switch when I wanted to add even more bump to my back-pickup bite.

It's no wonder one of the heaviest session bassists in the world favors this instrument. It's a serious musical tool, equipped with a thoughtful array of features that were of real musical value on my gigs. It's pricey, but extremely effective.

SADOWSKY WILL LEE MODEL

List \$3,975

Pros Versatile sideman's best friend with an excellent assortment of useable tones; excellent construction and ergonomics

Cons None



Cort Action DLX Bass



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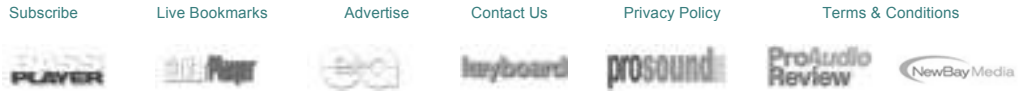
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So is the Will Lee model significantly different or better than the regular and great Sadowsky NYC model?



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