

# DEAN B<sup>2</sup> Brian Bromberg 4-string

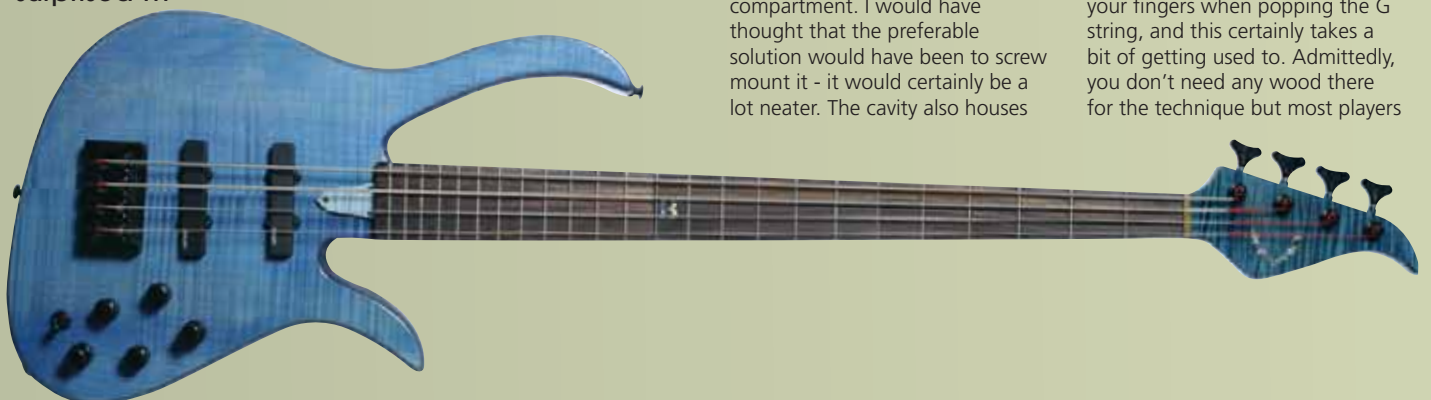
Dean have an impressive track record with both their guitar and bass ranges, and in recent years have been able to attract several big name endorsees such as Antone Caldwell, and Jeff Berlin. The B<sup>2</sup> is the latest offering from Dean and was designed with and for another notable bass luminary, Brian Bromberg. Bromberg will be familiar to those with a penchant for jazz/fusion. He has, for several years, been not only a highly regarded player, but also something of an innovator. With a powerful soloist's voice, a string of acclaimed solo albums and a keenness to experiment, Bromberg is one of today's most forward thinking bassists. The new bass has been designed with this in mind and promises to be the instrument of choice for anyone who wants to step forward out of the traditional bass player role. Stuart Clayton grabs hold of a B<sup>2</sup>, hoping to be surprised ...

First impressions certainly mean something, and I was taken aback by the B<sup>2</sup> as soon as I got it out of the box. Always keen to see something a bit different, I was immediately struck by the unique body shape, which in a rather odd way reminded me somewhat of the Parker Fly bass. With that ultra deep cutaway, offset body shape and claw-like headstock, it certainly is a rather elegant looking instrument, with a classy feel to it that I can't help but like. The book-matched flamed maple top sets things off nicely and the abalone B<sup>2</sup> logo at the 12<sup>th</sup> fret is the icing on the cake. The only thing that I didn't like the look of was the bell-shaped cover piece for the trussrod - as you can see from the photographs, the stain seems to be of a lighter shade and consequently makes the piece stick out like a sore thumb. In fact, the bass looks a lot better without it, as seen in some of the recent Dean ads. Black hardware was a sensible choice here, as was the rosewood fingerboard.

Built in Korea, the instrument appears to be very well made. I certainly couldn't find any untoward marks on the finish, which appeared to be well polished. The neck was smooth and the fretwork was excellent. While the exterior of the bass was almost faultless, the interior was slightly less impressive by comparison. Strangely, the circuit board itself was completely wrapped in padded foam, which I found unusual, although presumably this was done to prevent it coming into contact with any other parts inside the compartment. I would have thought that the preferable solution would have been to screw mount it - it would certainly be a lot neater. The cavity also houses

a battery (for the circuit) - curious that the battery should be inside the cavity when there is a flip-up battery compartment for the piezo battery separate on the back. I couldn't help but wonder why not have two of these, making it easy to change both batteries! The control cavity was reasonably well screened and soldered, and featured brass screw ferrules for the screws - always a nice touch, so no problems there.

In terms of playability the B<sup>2</sup> was excellent in many regards. I have seldom played a better balanced instrument. There was absolutely no headstock dive when seated (as I half expected with the shape of the headstock being what it is) and balance while standing was faultless; it actually encourages the player to play with the headstock slightly elevated. This in turn makes the upper fret access even better - and it's already superb, thanks to the more than generous cutaway. This appears to be in keeping with Dean/Bromberg's vision that the instrument be aimed for those who wish to step forward and push the envelope with their playing/soloing. I have to admit that I have never played a 24 fret instrument with this degree of access to the upper frets, but there is a downside: it makes slapping - or more accurately, popping quite tricky, since it's quite easy to lose a finger in the cutaway! While this might not deter the non slappers out there, anyone who likes to put thumb to string will find themselves needing to slightly adjust their popping technique - there is simply no wood under your fingers when popping the G string, and this certainly takes a bit of getting used to. Admittedly, you don't need any wood there for the technique but most players





will be used to feeling it.

The B<sup>2</sup> has a rather sophisticated control set that was initially confusing. It comprises: *Master Volume*, *Stacked Pickup Volume* (one for each magnetic pickup), *Piezo Volume*, *Mid-Range*, *Stacked Treble/Bass* and a 3-way *Toggle Switch*. The toggle switch has three positions: magnetic pickups, magnetic and piezo pickups in combination, and soloed piezo pickup. All this makes up for a stunning array of tones that can be coaxed forth at your behest. With the usual configurations of neck and bridge pickup in varying ratios you can obviously find a selection of more than respectable tones for doing the real bass player's job - holding down the low-end. The addition of a mid control offers the chance to add considerably more bite to these, which worked well for tight funky lines in the style of Jaco et al. Obviously a great slap tone is pretty easy to dial in too. The fun starts when you add the piezo pickup into the equation. When used in combination with the magnetic pickups, this allows the tone to both stand out a little better in the mix and gives it some balls too. In pure piezo mode the tone is less useable in band situations, but wonderful for solo work - try tapping out a Victor Wooten-style arpeggio riff in this setting and you'll soon be grinning from ear to ear! The bass worked well in a rehearsal environment, and was met with interest from other band members, and particularly other bass players, who were also keen to see something different.

In conclusion, this is an instrument that seems to have been well thought out and put together. The balance is excellent, the tonal palate is exceptional and it looks cool too. Not everyone was into the shaping, and the deep cutaway created a problem for me as well as solving one, but that won't be an issue for everyone. If you're looking for a quality instrument that is eye-catching as well as great sounding you can't go wrong here.

Stuart Clayton

**RATINGS** ●●  
SECTION IS RATED OUT OF 20

## DEAN B<sup>2</sup> BRIAN BROMBERG 4-STRING

**Build Quality** ●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●19

The B<sup>2</sup> was well built and finished. I couldn't find any faults with the exterior of the instrument, but felt that the circuit board would be better secured in some way rather than wrapped in foam.

**Sound** ●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●20

Excellent. There are a lot of tonal possibilities on offer here. While it does everything most other basses do in terms of tone, you have the added bonus of the piezo pickups. The piezo tone works extremely well for solo pieces, and adds attack to your regular sound.

**Playability** ●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●18

Good on the most part. The balance of the B<sup>2</sup> was excellent, making it comfortable and enjoyable to play in either seated or standing situations. The deep cutaway provides unparalleled access to the upper frets, but this is something of a double edged sword since your slap and pop technique may be affected.

**Value** ●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●18

At £769 you're getting a lot of bass. With all these great tones, good looks and serious playability, it's money well spent.

**Wow Factor** ●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●20

The B<sup>2</sup> certainly makes an impression visually, although the outlandish shape won't be to everyone's tastes. I very much liked the shape, and even those that don't have to admit that the range of tones available is impressive.

**Total Score** ●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●95

A score of 95 makes this one of the highest scoring basses we've had in the pages of this magazine, but it's a score that's well deserved. A great sounding, good looking bass that's not going to break the bank - what more can you ask for?

## SPECIFICATIONS

DEAN B<sup>2</sup> BRIAN BROMBERG 4-STRING

### PRICE: £769

- Made in: ..... Korea
- Body: ..... Basswood with flame maple top
- Finish: ..... Gloss lacquer
- Neck: ..... Maple
- Fingerboard: ..... Rosewood
- Frets: ..... 24
- Scale length: ..... 34"
- Hardware: ..... Black
- Pickups: ..... 2 Dean J pickups and a Fishman Piezo bridge
- Controls: ..... Master volume, stacked pickup volume, piezo volume, mid-range volume, stacked treble/bass and a pickup selector toggle switch
- Colours: ..... Transparent Teal (as reviewed), Transparent Amber, Transparent Amberburst
- Options: ..... 5-string available at £849, no fretless or left handed versions at present, case available at extra cost.

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