

## *Mike Frost – Deep Voice*

Mike Frost is one of those players everyone has heard, and everyone should know. He's been on the scene since the late '70's/early '80's and has a tone and approach that can only be defined as "fierce". He's a "player's player" and an East Coast legend. He is a pioneer of the employment of 10" speaker bass enclosures, as well as an early convert to the 6-string electric contrabass guitar. Yet, he remains humble, unassuming and relentlessly curious about the bass guitar. These days Mr. Frost's career finds him bouncing between his current residence in South Carolina, and his beloved NYC hometown – where he gigs, records, and meets with his impressive roster of students. Mike is, himself, an avid student of the instrument. He was a student and close friend of Jaco Pastorius, and he also studied with guitarist Pat Martino.

Over the past 10 years Mike has led the bass/bass/drum trio The Deep with fellow bassist Chuck Alder, in addition to leading his quintet, Inner Voice. The Deep has produced a single, eponymous release while Inner Voice produced both "Inner Voice" and "Tears of Joy". Mike's most recent release as a co-leader is the wonderful Latin-Jazz outing *Karmic Tiempo!* You also may have seen Mike with guitarist Esteban on the Home Shopping Network, or in concert, or with Ken Talve, or on one of his other side-man ventures. Finally, Mike is an endorsing artist for Luthier Clifford Roi and also for Brickhouse bass enclosures! In short... Mike Frost is virtually everywhere! Mike's website is: [www.mcfrost.com](http://www.mcfrost.com)

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It has been a few years since "Frost" and I sat down together, and our conversation covered a lot of ground...

**BAJ:** Man! It's been a minute since our last conversation, and I am so happy to be spending time with you! We have a lot to cover, so let's get stated...

Let's start from the start, Mike! When did you begin playing bass and how were you inspired to do so? Also, what were your earliest musical experiences?

**MF:** I was sixteen years old, the year was 1977, when I switched from drums to bass. My older brother Bill purchased a cheap bass, it never left my hands. A week later, I grabbed a used 1972 Fender P Bass for \$200. I dissected that Bass inside and out. I was curious about how does this thing worked. What if?...questions began to enter my mind. Like, How does it make sound? I learned about truss rods, bridges, pickups, wiring, woods, and finishing - all the parts of the bass. I also began to consider the musical aspects of the instrument.

With two older siblings at that time, early influences came in the forms of the Beatles, Led Zepplin, Grateful Dead, Hot Tuna, the Allman Brothers, and a lot of southern rock. And then it hit, Stanley Clarke Schools Day one week, Weather Report and Mr. Jaco Pastorius the next. It was all over at that point. Heavy Weather stayed on my turntable for about 1 ½ years. I used a turntable and cassette to transcribe and absorb as much as possible. From my view, Jaco was the Master, a true Free Thinker.

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I remember in 1978 using an auto-reverse Reel to Reel at ½ speed and dropping the pitch down one octave to slowing down the tempo. I listened to some favorite solo's ( Milestones, Giant Steps, Donna Lee), and focused on the breaths and pauses. I opened up to Cannonball, Coltrane, Jaco, and Parker. It was a great way to zone in before sleep.

**BAJ:** When did you meet Chuck Alder? Doesn't he have an interesting musical history as well? The Deep is such a cool project, what's next for it?

**MF:** I met Chuck Alder in 1977- he was my first Bass Instructor. Chuck was the Bassist from the Illusion, an early Rock Fusion Band from the '60's. Lucky for me, Chuck's background was in Blues, Rock, Fusion, with a passion for Jazz. Together we would develop the two Bass concept, blending all styles like Jazz and Funk, opening the door to the birth of *The Deep*. We would explore the possibilities of music through the electric bass. We performed many concert's in the New York area from 1979 until 2007. The most recent incarnation of The Deep is called *Two Deep* - with Bassist John Helhoski. It was important for me to keep The Deep concept alive, of course, with Chuck's blessings.

**BAJ:** Let's talk about how you met and began studying with Jaco! Also, go into depth about how he influenced your musical world.

**MF:** In 1981 I took a lesson with Bassist Jerry Jermott, and Jerry recognized the major impact that Jaco had on me. Jerry was helping arrange students for Jaco in NYC and I think that I was his first call. I was going to meet "The Man." I could not sleep for two weeks - up all day and night practicing. The day finally came. I took a train from Lynbrook Long Island to Penn Station on a cold February morning, and then walked to the studio. I was early and so pumped to meet him. I heard a voice come out of nowhere, "Mr. Frost, what it is?" Walking in from the street, playing his bass, Jaco greeted me with his snapping finger hand shake. We got settled into the studio and it began. We played, and he shared his ideas and concepts. Those images and sounds are still deeply ingrained in my mind. He barked at me, "Hit it, it's a Bass!" That was the essence of the Master's right hand secret of stroke and sound. He was emphasizing that one needed to be very deliberate with the right hand. No dinky touch allowed. That totally changed my perception of the right hand motor stroke. His dynamic ceiling and his ability to punch through at loud stage volumes was amazing. I have some audio from that lesson that is priceless to me. There is a trend of light touch Bassists with wood ramps between the pickups and lighter motor strokes out there, but in general, I think one's sound gets lost when the band kicks up the volume - especially with a loud drummer. I am a big fan of Mr. Gary Willis and chose to blend my right hand strokes somewhere between Jaco and Gary, depending on the music. Also, I have been playing Six String Bass since 1982 and right hand motor adjustments are needed. The topic of Jaco's musical influence on me is an endless continuum - sorry for the pun. I think all electric bass players today owe thanks to Jaco. I am especially grateful to have met and studied with him before he passed on.

**BAJ:** I've always really dug your soloing. What approach do you find yourself taking when you take flight and "sing it"?

**MF:** What I love to share with my students is, if you think, you stink. We practice scales, modes, arpeggios, etc., but that is just one side. We need to cross over the bridge, to our Inner Voice, to create. Sound, touch, emotion, and expression are all tools to get there. When I "take flight and sing it," I wish to take the listeners on a journey with me. I am hoping that all listeners will be moved or interested by each note and phase. That's where I try to keep my motivation and concentration. I think we need to stop thinking as musicians, in a sense, in order to let that inner voice create and be heard. That's a tough one for new students to grab onto.

**BAJ:** Is Inner Voice taking a hiatus in light of your new project, Karmic Tiempo? Can we expect another Karmic Tiempo release next year? What are you recording next, man? By the way, "Synergy" is an incredibly well played recording! Congratulations! How did that record come together?

**MF:** The only constant in my life is change. My view is; Inner Voice, Karmic Tiempo, The Deep, are all *one* in the big scheme of things. All are outlets for creative ideas and sound. Karmic Tiempo consists of pianist Jim Ahrend and drummer Joe Chirco, and of course me on bass. Jim wrote all of the tunes with the exception of *Impossible Dream*. *Synergy* was rehearsed, recorded, mixed and mastered at my NY Studio - Spirit Recordings - in 4 months. Jim and I engineered, mastered and mixed; that was an alignment of the stars, if you ask me. I love the project. Jim is great in the studio. Joe really has a great feel for that style. The project came together rather smoothly.



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**BAJ:** Your fretless and fretted tones are incredibly well matched, and both display incredible depth and beauty! Take a moment and talk about your concept for both instruments.

**MF:** Since the beginning, for me, sound quality was of utmost importance. My Dad was a carpenter, and I had a wood shop at home. I used to carve and build basses for fun; trying different woods, bodies, shapes, chambers, and carvings to explore different things. I did this while listening to WRVR of NYC, a favorite Jazz station of the day. I also have had the great pleasure of working with some of the finest luthiers, such as Abe Rivera, Vinney Fodera, Dave Segal (NY Bass Works), and Clifford Roi. In 1980, Chuck Alder and I would drive into Brooklyn to visit our dear friends, Joey and Vinney at Fodera guitars. The four of us were designing their first attempt at the Six String Basses. There were three made in that first run. Chuck got one, I got one, and Fodera kept one. The good old days.

At this stage of the game, all of my basses are made by Clifford Roi Instruments and, from my view, are second to none. A lot of luthiers are just assemblers - buying preamps here, pickups there, having necks carved somewhere else, truss rods, etc., and then they assemble the parts. Sort of like the *cafeteria food* of basses - they'll keep you alive, but I prefer to have a meal made from scratch. Where a chef knows his customer and makes the meal just the way he likes it. At Clifford Roi basses,

pickups are hand wound, preamps custom designed, all woods hand carved - in house. I can see my bass made. Wow, now we are talking!

Instruments, amps, cabinets are all important parts of the equation, but like Jaco said, the sound is in my hands. Drawing tone from your bass, no matter what type it is, is the real deal. Where and how one strokes the bass will drastically change the timbre, more than the EQ of your amp. I choose to float my right hand from the back pickup to on top of the fingerboard. Over the back pickup one gets more of a Jaco-esque punch, and over the fingerboard, of course one gets a fat acoustic bass sound. I explore all the places in between to produce the tone I want for a part of recording.

**BAJ:** How did you hook-up the Esteban gig? What's it like – playing with a guitarist who is so widely recognized through the Home Shopping network?

**MF:** One of my students, Lindsey, her father shoots video for Esteban, and they kept telling him about me. Finally, the chair opened up and I got the call for an audition. Here we are, over three years later. Home Shopping pays the bills, but it is a lot more open in concert. I really enjoy the concerts whee the band gets to let loose and play. Playing for the troops in *Guantonimo Bay* was a great experience. My first concert with Esteban my first concert was at Red Rocks - awesome place. We shot a DVD that day. Love that venue.

**BAJ:** You know... I've failed to mention the recording with Ken Talve! Tell us all about that project, please.

**MF:** Ken Talve is a great friend, guitarist, composer from NY. His recording "Across the Board" was a great work! The line up, Ken Talve, Brian Dunne drums, David Mann on sax, and Tim Regusis on keys. That was a wonderful recording session.

**BAJ:** Who are some of the other folks you're playing with these days?

**MF:** I've been blessed to be working and recording with Jessie Collin Young from *The Youngbloods*. We just got out of the studio with his latest work, "Bring 'Em Home." What a great experience that was - it gave me chills. Just like the first time we played *Get Together*. Jessie is the voice of peace from the '60's - we need him now more than ever, that is what "Bring Em Home" is about. May be he should contact Ron Paul and sing at his gathering in September. He seems to be the only politician asking to bring the troops home.

Another exciting project to be released in 08 is with long time friend and drummer extraordinaire - Todd Turkisher. We recorded this project at Todd's Manhattan studio. This work is a tribute to Charles Bukowski, using his poems, Ute Lempur sang over the top. Ute Lempur is an international phenomenon. What an honor to work with such brilliant musicians.

**BAJ:** Mike, there's so many ways we can learn, conversationally... what are you teaching your students these days? Are you encouraging your students to record and take-on as many gigs as you're known for holding down?

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**MF:** My first teaching goal is to motivate. Each person is in a different mental and physical place, and to relax and calm the mind is key. Learning how to concentrate is another. Their personal goals will vary. It's music therapy of sorts. I make a deal with all of my students from the jump - they must practice some basic ground work and then we will learn their favorite tunes (that they choose). That always works as a great motivation tool. Plus, we connect the theory aspect to the music the student chooses and try to get inside the mind of the original artist. Another thing I encourage is to complete a practice routine and then do it again without looking, shut the eyes. This helps build a mental image of the finger-board.

As far as students gigging and recording, it is a must. Book knowledge without manifestation is useless. We need the experiences to develop fully. Interaction with others is an important part of the process of development. The more the better.

The four main functions are also encouraged - melody, bass role, chords, and soloing. Jaco opened the door to these other aspects of music. Knowing what's what, and when to switch function. I think practice in each function help the other functions. In the end, a better musician is born.

**BAJ:** You recently made the move from NYC to South Carolina. What was that about and how is it going for you?

**MF:** I have an awesome wife and two wonderful kids - ages nine and seven. Our move was motivated by quality of life. It's like back in time in a good way - like a *Mayberry* vibe. I have a studio in NY and one in South Carolina - still gigging, teach-

ing, and recording in both places. I switched to Apple's Logic Pro and I have Mac-Book Pro laptop that allows me to record or edit away from the NY main studio. I am still thinking of building a studio in SC too. Going digital has made a big impact on how music is produced these days. I'm glad.

**BAJ:** Your frequent flyer miles must be astronomical! Okay, let's discuss your relationships with Brickhouse and with Clifford Roi... Let's talk about all the essential gear!

**MF:** *Brickhouse*, I'm not just a client, I'm the president. Along the journey for sound, I was never happy with bass cabinets. So, I started trying out different drivers, crossovers, tuning materials, and I started building cabinets. I've never stopped. *Brickhouse* is only a word of mouth operation, when bassists hear them, they usually know if they want one. My favorites would be my line of the 12 inch Brick cubes, but I have made all different cabinets - from 4 X 4 ½ to 15" X 12" combos.

All of my basses are made by Clifford Roi Instruments. I own two 35 ½ scale fretless and three fretted. The newest fretted is a 34" scale Zebra top. I expect a new fretted neck thru this summer, some more *free thinking* no fear concepts, brilliant work. This one has a new concept carving that will make the bass hug your chest. I tried the 5 string prototype... amazing.

I met Clifford Roi at a bass lesson in the early '80's. I had just made a fretless bass out of my mom's old oak table and was showing it to our acoustic bass teacher while **CR** was outside waiting for his lesson. He got called in to see and play it. We have come full circle since then. I leave all of the building to him, and thank him very much!

**BAJ:** How much time do you spend composing and developing musical concepts?

**MF:** I am a traveling Musician, Husband, Father and Teacher - I spend most of the time developing in the mind. Every day I'm thinking in concepts. My students are my greatest teachers. I am always trying to be looking ten steps ahead to guide them to the best path, it's a wonderful way to grow.

Composing: I am the proud owner of Logic Pro. With this tool, it is an endless form for development of concepts and ideas, and it is always with me on the road.

**BAJ:** Do you take time to listen to other bassists on the scene? If so, who are your favorite players, and who are your favorite musicians in general?

**MF:** My favorite on the bass scene right now is, without a question, Mr. Gary Willis. In my view, Gary is a master of bass and melodic ideas. There are many champs... Keith Horne, Victor Wooten, Oteil, Richie Bona, and this Italian guy on YouTube.

You Tube is a great place to experience others from around the globe. Take what I like and leave the rest. I just found Giano Serino that way - wow. I still listen to and study Jaco, Joe Pass, NHOP, Bird, Bach, Chick Corea, etc. Evelyn Glennie was a huge discovery and sparked many lesson plans, such as seeing with touch. The inspiration comes from all different places.

**BAJ:** What's next for you as far as live performances and sessions?

**MF:** I am flying out this weekend to Alto New Mexico at the Spencer Theater for a concert with Esteban, and then back to South Carolina for lessons. The following week I will be in NY, teaching and doing a concert with "Two Deep". I am usually in NY every other week. My webpage ([www.mcfrost.com](http://www.mcfrost.com)) has my concert calendar link- it helps me remember. Ha ha ha.

**BAJ:** What are the 5 most essential things you take on tour? Also, how often do you get to eat your favorite foods?

**MF**

1. Bass
2. Suite Case
3. MacBook Pro
4. iPod
5. Cell phone

Of course the credit card - we like to eat a lot. I do love that part of it

**BAJ:** Let's go over a great quote I read recently, "Without inner peace, outer peace is impossible." Let's hear your thoughts on this saying. How do you locate (and maintain) inner peace?

**MF:** I do love my *quote of the day* part to the web site. I think the author of the quote, a Tibetan Lama, is pointing out that we cannot gain world peace by trying to stop war, we must remove the causes for war - minds without peace. We live in our minds. "Without inner peace, outer peace is impossible." Why? Because human beings will continue to create conflict until their minds are virtuous. That's a spiritual idea, of course, and perhaps a logical idea too. I mean every war has causes. What

are they - at the root? I think we can develop inner peace in our mind by developing kindness, compassion, patience, generosity, etc., which are simply the source of this potential inner, and therefore outer peace. How can one cultivate these things? I read, and think about them deeply. Then I try to manifest them in daily life - not easy. But I think if we all attempt to cultivate these things it can only make the world a better place. My life is one big multitasking operation. That is today's modern life. Meditating on these things is a great way to help keep a positive happy mind. Multi tasking is not advised here! The idea is to concentrate on one of these virtues (meditation) until we become acquainted with it deeply.

**BAJ:** Man, welcome back to Bass Frontiers! It is so good to be in touch with you again! Thanks for taking some time with us! Do you have any closing thoughts or comments?

**MF:** I was blessed to have played both of Jaco's main axes, and I even got to set up his fretted during my first lesson with him. I think Jaco knew that I was one of his admirers and that I would share some insights gained from the lessons for future generations of bassists. Jaco's "left hand dance" was always setting up and springing into position. Those images are still captured in my mind, still nothing like it.

Jaco helped me realize the importance of tone. I have always been on a mission to improve and development the quality of my bass sound. As a result of this approach, I have always been experimenting with different amps, cabinet designs, cables, strings, etc.. At this time I am using, the Mark bass amp (a Walter Woods in recent years), SIT strings (I have a custom set for my basses), of course Brickhouse 12" Cubes, cables by Dunright Systems, and several different Clifford Roi basses. All my basses are six strings, but I am thinking of having a four string made for fun - something I can do some crazy slap stuff without the B & C strings. It might come in handy, and it might make it easier for some students too.

The other thing I would like to say is... the good news for all musicians is that there is room for all of us. We don't have to become superstars to enjoy being a musician. Everyone has their own life experiences to tap into and share. There are a lot of musicians that feel that success will fall on their doorstep. I think it is more realistic to apply effort and try to get better (if they wish) until they stop playing. I believe Music is an art of expression, the sharing of emotion and life experience with others. I hope that musicians will be in the moment, create joy and inner peace with others. I think music can help do this for us.

Thanks for the questions and the opportunity to express my perspectives.