

Elvin Bironien - The Great Journey

Author : Brent-Anthony Johnson

Date : 03-02-2017

French born Bassist/Composer [Elvin Bironien](#) is one of the most exciting bassist to happen onto the active World Music scene in recent years!

In November 2016, he released **A Quest**, and the collection of great music thereon is definitely amongst my favorite instrumental releases of 2016!



Along with his group of young, hungry, big-eared musicians: Guitarist Ralph Lavital, Pianist Laurent Coulondre, and stunningly vital Drummer Pierre Alain Tocanier, Elvin accomplishes the near impossible feat of musical telepathy to offer up a masterpiece. The unison lines that season **A Quest** find the bassist and, in particular, monster guitarist Lavital, in an obviously ongoing conversation between musicians who have willingly entrained to a common vision. In fact, the entire outing functions as a picture of musicians listening deeply and conversing intimately with one another! **A Quest** was recorded at the House of Artists in Chamonix, and produced by André Manoukian.



If you've been fortunate enough to hear Elvin with FDH Trio, Conga Libre, Mamy Wata, or the wonderful Dorliz Trio, you will understand completely when I state that his continued use of the virtual melting pot of African/Caribbean melodies and rhythms that mark his compositions, coupled with a cool use of effects in order to articulate his conversational soloing style, is fully stated on his first full-length release as a leader, and the follow-up to the 2014 Jazz Family Label release *Elvin P-leez 4tet 16 Mars*.

Born on 26 September 1986 to multi ethnic parents Elvin began his instrumental education, at the age of 6-years-old, as a pianist. He then turned to percussion, and remained there until turning to the bass guitar at age 13. For the first several years of his bass studies, he remained completely self-taught. But in 2003, he enrolled in the Music Halle, in Toulouse, for 2 years of intense music education.

In 2005, he successfully auditioned for the bass spot with Pape N'Diaye and Pamaath in the afro-pop group Kaa, and launched his career as a sideman bassist with several touring and recording groups. In 2008 he co-founded the FDH Trio with pianist Thibaud Dufoy and drummer Arnaud Dolmen, which began his career as a composing and contributing member of a regular band. FDH performed at numerous concert events and the group also began competing in jazz band contests around France that included the winning of the Jazz Springboard Prize in Porquerolles, the 2010 National Jazz Competition in La Défense, Jazz Festivals On 31, Jazz in Millau, Souillac in Jazz, Jazz in the North, and the Afters Hours Duke of Lombard Competition. FDH won a 1st Prize at the Golden Jazz Trophy Jury Prize, which was chaired by Omar Sosa.

In 2012 FDH recorded their premier release *Le Free du Hazard?* with guest musicians: saxophonist Jacques Schwarz-Bart, percussionist Mino Cinelu and drummer/percussionist SonnyTroupe. At this writing, Elvin continues to participate in several World Music projects. The future looks bright for this incredible young player!

BAJ: Elvin! Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to talk with us at Bass Musician

Magazine! [A QUEST](#) is a very exciting album, and I am anticipating a very good response from the listening world, once the record has been heard! Tell us about your process for composing music, and how you present that material to your band. Is the music complete? Or, do you allow each musician to translate your vision?

EB: Thank you for letting me to talk about it! I compose over a period of several consecutive days. Then, I dedicate focused time to develop one or more of the ideas. As I write everything from my bass, I first record chords and then add bass lines and any additional voice which helps me achieve the superstructure that I hear. Sometimes all the melody and harmony is already present in my mind and everything is going very fast! But, most of the time, I need to come back several times to my ideas - as I often set them aside for awhile, in order to re-think my direction. Sometimes I spend several hours on only 4 bars!

In general, I bring the musicians the most complete material possible in the form of audio model and partitions then I explain to them my vision precisely. For example, even some drum breaks are written but when they make me a proposal that will enrich my basic vision I am open and I take it into account. They each have a strong personality, but they manage to put their involvement and energy into the service of the composition Also, they have free reign to perform their solos!

BAJ: Your use of harmony is very impressive! How do you decipher and navigate the tight intervals that are throughout your compositions?

EB: In fact, I purposely do not put a theoretical barrier upon myself when I compose. I think, it is my self-taught side that makes it easier to think this way. So, some chord sequences may seem quite complicated, because they are very personal to my tastes... But, in the end, I do not think it is so very difficult.

BAJ: Talk with me about your soloing concept!

EB: Over time I tried to develop my own phrases and refine my style. My purpose is being recognized after only few notes. My solos are also very related to the musicians I play with. In any case, I think it is difficult to tell a true story that makes sense while being original and without making a prepared musical direction.

BASSMUSICIAN

THE FACE OF BASS



BAJ: Your unison work with both Ralph and Grégory is fantastic! How much conversation goes into the lines you are playing together? Also, there seems to be a deep sense of togetherness and shared sense of humor. Do you find that important?

EB: I think there is a lot of listening between us, and our common musical vocabulary allows us to dialogue. I also try to write compositions while thinking of the musicians who play with me. The unity and the humor are the reflection of our complicity in the life and, yes, I think it is absolutely primordial for the music to be alive.

BAJ: You began your bass studies from a self-taught perspective. What were you listening to, musically, that directed you toward studying at the Musical Halle School?

EB: At 13, or 14 years old, I studied the bass lines of the artists I loved and that helped me to develop my memory and my ear. At the time, I listened to artists (and groups) like The Police, James Brown, Rage Against The Machine, Bob Marley, the rhythm section work of Sly and Robbie, and the Great Jaco Pastorius - who is the only jazz artist I loved at the time. At home my father listened to a lot of jazz or artists like Frank Zappa for example and it has enormously influenced me subconsciously. My mother advised me to take classes That would present me with things I did not know.

BAJ: What were your most invaluable lessons from your formal education?

EB: I was very immature, and stubborn, and I did not really know how to take advantage of it at the time. It was afterwards that I understood certain bases of harmonies and analysis of listening that I acquired while at school. It also allowed me to meet several good musicians with whom I have subsequently played including an excellent pianist who hired me for his trio and

with whom I learned a lot about harmony and jazz music.



BAJ: You have worked in African-based World Music for some time. How has that helped you grow as a musician?

EB: Yes! Especially music from West Africa and Maghreb! The incredible rhythmic richness of these musics where tradition is very important has made me discover rhythmic flows and placements that I could never have imagined or understood alone. I can't consider myself a specialist because it would take years of work... but it clearly influenced my playing, especially in how I support other musicians.

BAJ: How do you achieve your bass tone? What type of gear are you using? Finally, what is your ideal bass tone, and how would you achieve that?

EB: I think it comes, mainly, from the fingers and how I approach articulation. I also feel that personal tone is inexplicable, a bit like a human voice. When I listen to my first recordings, when I was playing lower quality instruments, I could already hear my sound except that the instruments could not respond as precisely as my current basses. I have collaborated with the French Luthier COMBE for 3 years and I am really a fan of his work. The two basses played on the album were made by him. In addition, I often use pedals, like an octaver, (Electro Harmonix) Q-tron, or a reverb Toneprint. I also like Aguilar very much for amplification.

Currently, I think I'm very close to the sound I'm looking for. It is possible that it has evolved over time. But, I also like the change! So, if I play a P-bass for a project that requires this type of sound I find it very interesting.

BAJ: I am very excited for the next release! When can we expect more from you?

EB: I have already composed several new songs, and I am thinking about the next release. But, for now, I am not in a hurry. I want to make this album exist as much as possible. So, I do not think I'll be back in studio until 2018.

BAJ: Congratulations on the birth of your daughter! How has becoming a father affected your musical life?

EB: Thank you very much! What happiness! My daughter Soa is only 3 weeks old! So, it is really early to see the direct impact on my musical life, yet! But, she brings me a lot of joy, and I think it is felt in my playing.

BAJ: Please tell us about your practice regimen, and those factors you feel are most important to your musical articulation.

EB: I do not practice exercises every day. But, I am always playing the bass! When I was younger, I listened a great deal Jaco or the (Gerald Veasley, Richard Bona, Matthew Garrison, Victor Bailey, Étienne M'Bappé and Linley Marthe) lines of the Zawinul Syndicate! I also worked hard to exploit my skills to their maximum and refine them. I work on scales and arpeggios every day.

BAJ: Let's talk about your very nice interpretation of The Police tune, "*Tea in the Sahara*".

EB: The mystical atmosphere of the original version inspired me a lot. As I do not have the vocal talent of Sting, I wanted to be able to articulate the emotion of singing with my fretless bass. I chose a fretless bass to give a softer side to the vocal interpretation, and I did not want to touch the overall harmony of the song, but I allowed myself to incorporate a short melodic theme in the introduction. The piano also brings a lot of poetry to the version.

BAJ: Where can we listen to and purchase your other recorded materials?

EB: My first EP was released in 2014; it is available on all legal download platforms.

BAJ: Who are your musical influences?

EB: Not easy to choose but I can definitely cite: Pat Metheny, Miles Davis, Joe Zawinul, Ultramarine, and many Caribbean artists like Mario Canonge, Sakésho, Marius Cultier, Gonzalo Rubalcaba, and Havana D' Primera.

At the moment I am listening to a lot Kneebody, Walter Smith 3, Wayne Krantz, and Terence Blanchard. As far as bassists... Jaco Pastorius, Richard Bona, Linley Marthe, Michel Alibo, Anthony Jackson, Hadrien Feraud, Etienne Mbappé, John Patitucci, and Christian McBride are important players.

BAJ: What have you never been asked in an interview that you would like to be asked?

EB: That question! (Laughs)

BAJ: Thank you for the release of [A QUEST!](#) It is a beautiful statement, and I look forward to hearing more from you! Thank you, again, for taking the time to talk with us!

EB: My pleasure.

BASSMUSICIAN

THE FACE OF BASS

[Visit online at elvinbironien.com](http://elvinbironien.com)

bassmusicianmagazine.com