



// David Swift

David Gallant talks to the bassist and trombonist about how he got started, the instruments he has played over the years and his all-time favourite choice

"When my trombone teacher saw that I was playing bass guitar he said to me 'you really should get a double bass, because if you decide to become a professional musician, you will get a lot more work if you can play both.' It was possibly the best piece of advice anyone has ever given me!"

Swift has held the line for the Jools Holland Rhythm & Blues Orchestra for over 20 years. "It all started when I was happily playing the trombone. Some friends suggested forming a jazz band at school and as we didn't have a bass player, for whatever reason, I volunteered."

"My first bass was a Kay – a copy of a Fender Precision. It really should've been a double bass, but my brother and I didn't know where we could buy one. So a month or so later my mum took me to a violin shop in Birmingham and bought me my first double bass. A nameless cheap plywood model. I then taught myself to play both instruments with the help of some Carol Kaye books and the *New Method for the Double Bass* by Simandl."

"The cheap plywood bass was so awful that after six months of struggling with it, I went back to the shop in Birmingham with my dad to part exchange it for a better, and hopefully older, instrument and left with a far superior German bass made in 1939 by Ernst Heinrich Roth (Charles Mingus also owned a bass made by this luthier). It was a great bass to play, really easy to get around and worked very well with pickups – I fitted an Underwood. This was my main gigging double bass from 1979 to 2006. In 2007 I bought a 1906 Hawkes Concert double bass which I only sold last year."

Swift then asked Roger Dawson, one of the world's top double bass luthiers, to make him an instrument. "I picked the bass up earlier this year and it is without question the best double bass I've ever owned, and certainly one of the best I've ever played. It's fitted with a Fishman Full Circle pickup," Swift continues. "I've known Roger for over 20 years and not only does he make basses, but he also repairs and restores them, and I've been very lucky in that Roger has always worked in south east London, which is where I'm based. He's a master craftsman and I can't recommend him highly enough."

Onto the electric basses: "After the Kay – which weighed a ton, I bought an Aria Pro II which was also a copy of a Fender Precision, but this was fretless. I loved the idea of a fretless bass as it was closer to my double bass in terms of both sound and feel." Then came a Music Man Cutlass. "This was like a regular Music Man Stingray bass guitar, but with a graphite neck made by Modulus. The Music Man Cutlass was one of the best basses I've ever owned, and I used this when I started to work on cruise ships travelling all over the world in my

late teens/early twenties. After several years I decided that I wanted a five string bass, so I foolishly sold the Cutlass. This has been the only time I've regretted selling a bass. While on the cruise ships, I bought a five string Steinberger bass from the Guitar Center in LA. The problem was, they had just put another string on a four-string neck, so the strings were very close together, making it very difficult to play. That bass didn't last long!"

When Swift joined the Jools Holland R&B Orchestra in 1991 he was playing a Ken Smith six string bass. "Jools wasn't happy. For him, it had to be vintage." Cue Fender: "While on tour up in Edinburgh, I spotted a white 1978 Fender Jazz which had both chrome covers and the thumb rest. It was in great shape and I bought it for only £575. I used that on one of the *Later...* shows with George Benson." Swift eventually decided however, that a Fender Precision would suit the Jools gig better and so bought a 1968 sunburst with a rosewood fingerboard from a store in Denmark Street. "Shortly afterwards that got stolen from our touring truck. It's a long story... but nine months later we were happily reunited."

As Jools is always looking for an 'upright' sound, Swift also owns a Rob Allen Deep Five Custom. "This bass guitar (with piezo pickups) had such a convincing upright-like tone that even Van Morrison commented on how much it sounded like a double bass." Added to this, Swift also plays a Yamaha SLB200 Ltd Edition EUB (electric upright bass) and a Fender American Standard five-string Precision Bass, lacing his uprights with Pirastro strings, while his electrics benefit from D'Addario ECB82 Chromes.

"I remember buying my first proper bass amp from Woodroffe's in Birmingham in 1981. It was an HH Bass Machine Combo – huge and heavy and it even had a built in phaser, but it was too much and I needed something more portable, so I moved on to a Polytone Mini Brute III, as this was much smaller and I could take it on the train or bus." But this wasn't powerful enough for the Jools' gig. "I've been through Mesa and EBS setups, but I've now settled on the Aguilar DB751 Amp head and the DB 412 Cab. I also use an Aguilar Tone Hammer 500 amp, and one or two Aguilar SL112'S for smaller jazz gigs."

Swift's very keen to tell me about his latest acquisition, a Harvey Citron acoustic/electric bass guitar. "This instrument really will be the ultimate crossover instrument from a solid bodied bass guitar to my double bass. This bass will be potentially the most 'organic' sounding bass guitar I will ever own and this really excites me!"

And what about that old 'Bone'? "Yeah, I still play. Sometimes I'll join the brass section when Jools has a guest bassist."