

JUST PEACHY

THIS BASS HAS ACTIVE ELECTRONICS, FIVE STRINGS, ARTIST ENDORSEMENT AND BIG-BRAND BACKING FOR UNDER £300. **LOUIS THORNE** IS FINDING IT HARD NOT TO BE IMPRESSED

GBINFO



OLP TONY LEVIN 5-STRING BASS

PRICE: £299.95

BUILT IN: China

SCALE LENGTH: 864mm (34 inches)

NUT WIDTH: 46mm (1.81 inches)

BODY: Basswood

NECK: Maple, bolt on

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood

FRETS: 22 jumbo (no fretless option available)

PICKUPS: 1 x Musicman-style humbucker

CONTROLS: Bass, mid and treble pots, active circuit with 9v battery

MACHINEHEADS: Generic chrome, open back

CASE: No

FINISHES: Peach, or natural with flamed maple top

LEFT HANDERS: No

CONTACT: Strings and Things

PHONE: 01273 440442

WEB: www.olpguitars.com

... **OLP (Officially Licensed Product)** is a brand that sits on the peghead of a range of guitar and bass designs, the majority of which are made under license from Ernie Ball Music Man. Produced in the Far East to keep costs low, OLP is to Music Man what Squier is to Fender. We've looked previously at the MM4 guitar, plus signature axes from Benji Madden, Steve Lukather and John Petrucci.

This Tony Levin model is the only artist-series bass currently available, and sits at the top of the OLP bass range, featuring five strings, three-band active electronics and a fetching logo of the man himself on the headstock. Levin is famous for his work with the likes of Peter Gabriel, King Crimson and a whole host of others, which adds a fair bit of kudos to this modestly priced instrument. So, does it live up to its star billing?

BODY & NECK

The Musicman Stingray body shape is a firm classic, here given the five-

string model treatment with some extra-gentle contouring, compared with its more famous four-string brother. Although it's a basswood body and says 'OLP' on the 4+1 peghead, you'd have a job saying for sure that it's not a genuine Music Man from any more than a few paces. On the rear of the body there is an easily opened 9v battery compartment for the active circuit. The basswood feels thankfully light and managable beneath the expanse of well applied, flat, peach-coloured paint. And for those of you who may find this bass a little too peachy, there's a natural finish option, with the added visual benefit of a quilted maple top, and happily at no extra cost.

The American maple neck has a slim contour and is very comfortable to play, with the strings spaced relatively close to one another. In practice, this will make fretting a little easier, particularly for newcomers to the low-B club (given that there's a whole extra string to deal with), although there's not as much room to get your fingers in for slapping. To give you an example, this →

FUNK FINGERS

DRUMSTICKS FOR BASS – EH?

■ Tony Levin is no ordinary bassist. Indeed, those of you who have seen Peter Gabriel in concert may have been struck by the Freddie Krueger-like protrusions on the bass player's picking hand...

Levin explains the origin of the Funk Fingers – short sections of drumstick – as the result of a suggestion from Peter Gabriel. Check out his tune 'Big Time', from the album *So*, to hear Jerry Marotta (drums), play on the strings while Tony frets the notes. TL's guitar tech at the time fashioned this solution for live use.



spacing is similar to that of my own Warwick Thumb V, whereas my Fender Jazz V has spacing more akin to a four string. It's very much a case of personal preference, though at under £300, it makes sense for the OLP Tony Levin to be friendly for newbies. After that, you're playing on 22 well finished jumbo frets, on a neck that's fitted snugly into the body cavity. The plastic nut is well cut and provides a sensible action at the low end of the neck; there are no outstanding frets to cause unwanted buzzing. However, on this review model the action was perhaps too low when it arrived, and a bit of adjustment using one of the supplied allen keys was necessary to easily rectify the problem. Indeed, one noteworthy feature of this design is the easily accessible truss rod adjustment at the body end of the neck. For tweaks to the maple neck to allow for transit and temperature changes, it's a quick, straightforward job, requiring just a small turn of the allen key cog that's exposed just beyond the end of the neck.

In terms of basic construction, the Tony Levin is tidily built, and plays very well indeed for its humble cost.

HARDWARE & PARTS

The solid and simple bridge and open-back, somewhat retro 'clover' button tuners all look and feel as though they'll provide trouble-free service, as well as having the all-important Musicman look. Closer inspection reveals them to be somewhat inferior to the USA-spec components as you'd expect, but this stuff is by no means sub-standard. The bridge is simple to adjust, providing plenty of scope for



■ The peach finish will certainly get you noticed, but a natural option is available

action and intonation tweaks.

Similarly authentic is the single pickup in the bridge position, with its two rows of large exposed polepieces, although there was a bit of remedial work to be done straight out of the box on this review sample; the pickup had become loose in transit and therefore had to be screwed back into place – not exactly rocket science, but it may hint at issues of loosening with vibration as time goes on.

Four knobs may seem an extravagance for one pickup, but in this case the pots on the two-ply pearl scratchplate provide control for volume, and centre-notched bass, middle and treble EQ. A couple

of the pots were a little loose in the scratchplate on this bass, meaning another bit of pre-playing maintenance – all this stuff should be picked up by your guitar shop and rectified, but do be aware of these potential pitfalls. The wide Musicman pickup sits low in the scratchplate. Even after adjustment, this provides a fairly small area on which to rest your thumb when playing the low strings.

SOUNDS

After a quick battery replacement – the supplied nine-volter was flat – the OLP Tony Levin makes an exceptionally good tonal first impression. For slap, fingerstyle or plectrum playing, it

ENDORSE THIS!

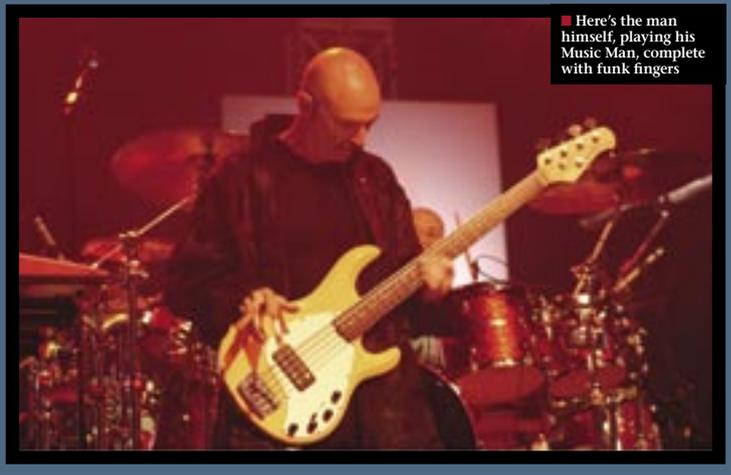
THE OLP TONY LEVIN IN HIS OWN WORDS

■ Cynics may question how much artists actually use the products they put their names to, especially if these are not top of the range items.

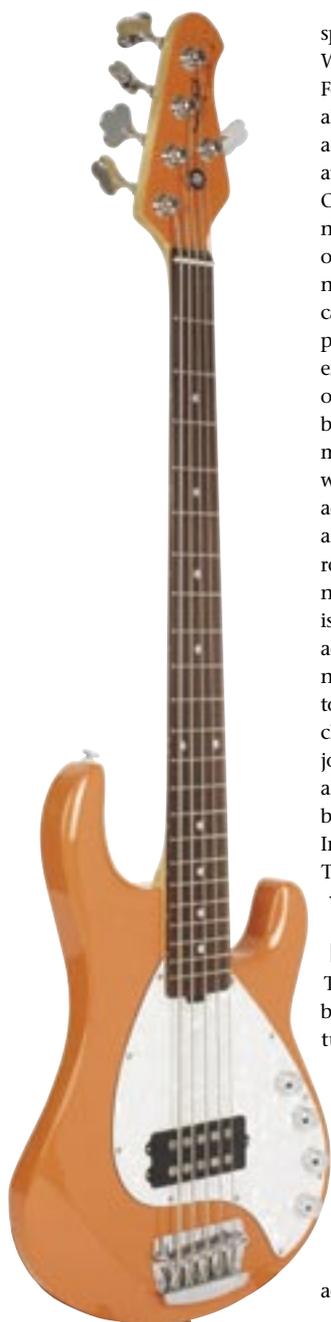
Well, a bit of a look at Tony Levin's road diary website reveals in his blog; "...I'll be playing mine tonight, pounding

it with Funk Fingers, and otherwise abusing the thing!" Also, "...it's a very good instrument for the money. Lately I've been using mine interchangeably with my StingRay 5, for sessions."

So there you are, it doesn't come much better endorsed than that.



■ Here's the man himself, playing his Music Man, complete with funk fingers



DETAILS

OLP PULLS OUT A CORKER IN THIS SIGNATURE BASS. FOR A SHOCKINGLY LOW PRICE



■ The battery compartment is easily accessible from the back of the body



■ Simple and effective: Musicman-style hardware is no-fuss stuff



■ Music Man's 4+1 peghead design plays home to the little Tony Levin graphic



GBOPINION

OLP TONY LEVIN 5-STRING BASS

GOLD STARS

- ★ Great value, artist endorsed instrument
- ★ Classic Musicman looks
- ★ Good sounds

BLACK MARKS

- Some quality assembly issues with hardware

IDEAL FOR...

Anyone after that Musicman vibe for very little money

provides the goods with a powerful, expressive overall character. One pickup is necessarily more limiting than two, but the intrinsic sound is good enough for that not to matter. The active bass and middle EQ pots have the scope to alter the tone quite drastically, to the extent that the bass pot almost works as another volume control. So you're able to manipulate the tone from bright, to honk, to scooped middle, providing a surprising range of sounds from just

the one pickup. Also worthy of praise is the fact that the treble EQ is more subtle in its voicing than the others, providing useful taming or boosting of the high frequencies without ever getting nasty. In fact, the overall sound of this bass is an impressive mixture of old-style bass tones, with a modern punch of active circuitry. The balance across the strings is even, meaning the low B is well defined without being too 'flappy'. If active circuitry is not your thing, or you want a bass on a tighter budget, however, there is a five-string passive OLP in this style (although not a Tony Levin model) for just under £200, in addition to a similarly-priced four string version.



■ Clover-shaped tuners are classic, and keeps the bass reliably in tune

GBCONCLUSION

BUDGET BASSING, WITH A HIGH STANDARD OF CONSTRUCTION AND HARDWARE FOR LESS

■ **Whether Tony Levin's name on the headstock influences you or not, there's no denying that this is a great sounding bass which provides exceptional value.**

For a single-pickup instrument, you have a surprisingly wide range of tones at your disposal from the active circuit, while the close-spaced neck feels comfortable and easy to play, especially for those players endeavouring to make the transition from four to five strings. We've uncovered a few quality control issues with the components and finishing with OLP instruments, though there's no denying the basic construction is sound, making for a highly likeable, playable bass. Definitely one to look at for any prospective five-string players who perhaps can't afford the more prestigious names, yet still yearn for big-brand endorsement. **GB**

GBRATINGS

OLP TONY LEVIN 5-STRING BASS

BODY & NECK	★★★★☆
HARDWARE & PARTS	★★★★☆
PLAYABILITY	★★★★☆
SOUNDS	★★★★☆
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★☆
GBVERDICT	★★★★☆