

BEHIND THE BASS

A regular feature in which the intrepid Mike Brooks follows a bass player around for a day on tour. Will it be groupies and debauchery — or just string-changing and a cup of tea? This month: Paul Geary

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ith a stellar list of artists on his resumé including Nik Kershaw, George Michael, Donnie Osmond and the Lighthouse Family, it's no wonder that Paul Geary is a bassist in demand. He certainly racks up the touring miles, and 2018 has been a standout year for the bassman so far, with tours and festivals across the UK and Europe. Somehow, all of this falls

into place alongside his teaching commitments at ACM in Guildford and his private tuition courses, so when the opportunity arose to follow Mr Geary for a day at a London show with the Dire Straits Experience, we were quick to take up the offer

Quite how he manages to fit everything into his diary borders on the miraculous, yet it all seems to dovetail relatively smoothly, despite Geary being a central part of several projects all at the same time. And as it was summer when we met him, we caught him slap-bang in the middle of 'crazy season' - which sees him moving from one project to another on a practically daily basis.

No two gigs are ever the same from a performance point of view but the pre-show rituals of arrival, loading-in, setting up and soundcheck all have to be performed prior to kick-off - so we arrive at the salubrious O2 Shepherd's Bush Empire around 2.30pm to assess the current state of play...

2.30pm to 4pm

Load in and set up

With no support band, the stage is clear for the crew to work their magic - and as Geary's stage rig is relatively simple due to the requirements of the show, we have plenty of time to catch up on his activities so far this year. "This year has been absolutely phenomenal," he tells us. "I started the year with recording sessions for Celemony, which is part of Kemper; they wanted to record pieces to camera, rather than generic loops. I was there for a whole week with all of my basses and my Aguilar gear, from 9am to 6pm every day. I'd been prepping for a couple of months beforehand, and at the last count, I provided 137 pieces of music for their library of tones and samples."

Following shows across Europe and Russia with the Dire Straits Experience, Paul found himself donning his finest disco threads as he provided the bottom end for the *40 Years Of Disco* show. This toured the UK's arenas earlier in the year, featuring the likes of Sister Sledge, Tavares and Rose Royce among others. Plenty of bass-laden material there for the groove-master to enjoy, no doubt? "It was so much fun, a real joy to do," he says. "I was playing for all seven acts on the bill, with only two days of rehearsal and roughly two hours per act, so I was grateful that I'd done my homework in my hotel room on the DSE dates beforehand." The power of personal recommendation saw Paul get the gig but as he explains, it passed by very quickly. "Just as I was getting into the groove and played in, the tour finished! Such is life on an arena tour; the audiences are large, so for a show like that, you'll only perform one show in each arena."

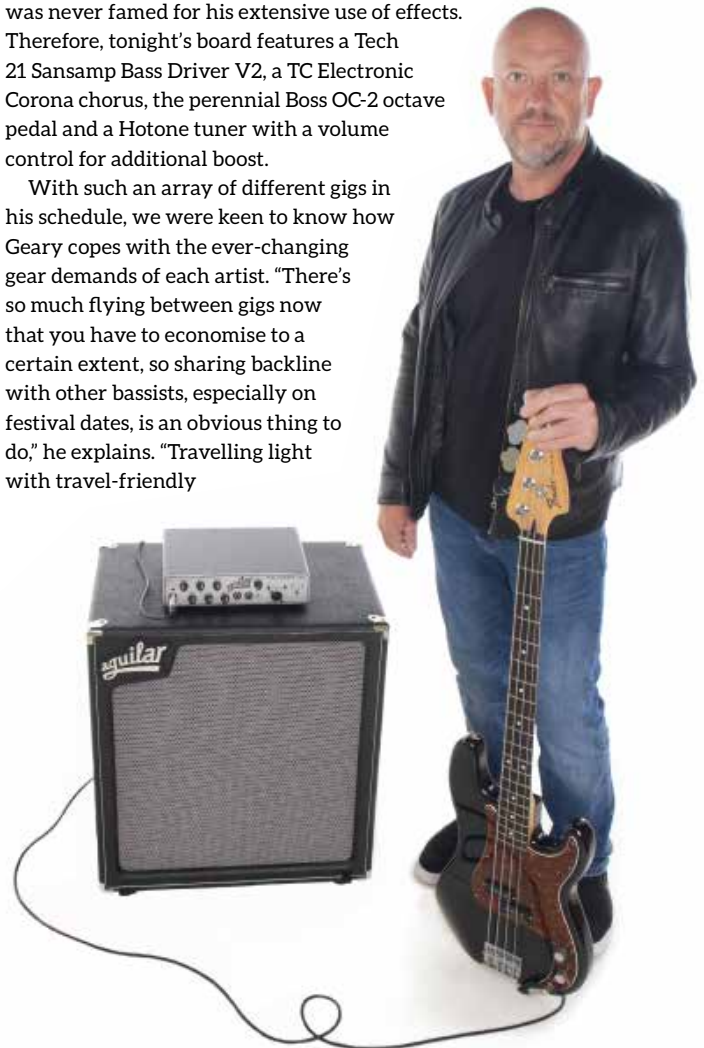
As spring becomes summer, so the season for festival shows blooms. For Paul, this means rejoining his long-time bandmates in Nik Kershaw's live band. "It's a very comfortable place to be, as we all get on so well; I've been with Nik for 20 years this year."

5pm to 5.20pm

Bass soundcheck and monitors

As Geary makes his way to the stage, we take a quick peek at the bass arsenal employed for tonight's show. He has opted for an Overwater Jazz and a Fender Precision, both four-strings, strung with DR strings and amplified through an Aguilar Tone Hammer 500 with SL410x cabinets. His pedalboard is equally minimal, but then that's what the gig demands; original Dire Straits bassist John Illsley was never famed for his extensive use of effects. Therefore, tonight's board features a Tech 21 Sansamp Bass Driver V2, a TC Electronic Corona chorus, the perennial Boss OC-2 octave pedal and a Hotone tuner with a volume control for additional boost.

With such an array of different gigs in his schedule, we were keen to know how Geary copes with the ever-changing gear demands of each artist. "There's so much flying between gigs now that you have to economise to a certain extent, so sharing backline with other bassists, especially on festival dates, is an obvious thing to do," he explains. "Travelling light with travel-friendly





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preamps, such as the Tone Hammer 500, and a small travel bag for the pedals means I can keep my sound without the stresses of travelling with gear.”

Soundchecking the basses is relatively quick and painless. Despite using IEMs, Geary still uses an amp/cabinet setup on-stage – “so that I’m still shifting some air”, he chuckles. “I have a great relationship with the team at Aguilar. I’m at a point in my career where it’s good to know that the companies whose equipment I use care about what I’m doing.”

5.30pm to 6pm

Full band soundcheck and run-through

With the rest of the DSE band members taking the stage, you start to hear the familiar guitar tones and soundscape of the Dire Straits back catalogue; it becomes obvious very quickly that this is a full-on reproduction of the Straits live experience of yesteryear. Geary explains: “They’ve always included ex-members of Dire Straits, although [founder and frontman] Mark Knopfler obviously does his own thing. I became involved around 2015. It’s a real celebration of the music and the band as a whole, and it’s a real privilege to make people feel good while they listen to it.”

8pm to 10.15pm

Stage time

With just enough time to grab a pre-show bite, we return to the venue. The buzz around the place is tangible, and it’s pleasing to see younger faces alongside older fans. As the lights go down, we’re treated to a full-length version of the classic ‘Telegraph Road’ and we’re off and running. The classic hits are covered, alongside some deep cuts; all are handled with finesse and care. Our man Geary plays a blinder, his bass performance sitting perfectly among the seven-piece band. It’s a performance that John Illsley would no doubt be proud of.

10.15pm to 11pm

Pack away and depart

With various meet-and-greet obligations and some wind-down time required, we leave Geary to grab a libation or three before he’s whisked off to an airport hotel for a trip to Sweden the following day. He may love his job, but it certainly isn’t ‘Money for Nothing’ – he has to be up at the crack of dawn to catch his flight! ■

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