

similarities in some rules that my parents set down for us. First of all, my father was very strict with me when it came to wearing make-up, and he is the same way with Candice. I was not allowed to wear any type of make-up until I was fifteen, and when I did get to wear it, my father had the authority to tell me I had too much on and to go wash it off. My dad enforced the same rules with Candice. She could not wear make-up until she was fifteen, and he tells her when she has too much on her face.

Another major similarity pertains to my sister and me getting our drivers' licenses. Before either of us were allowed to get our license, we had to know how to drive a stick shift, change the car tire, fill the washer fluid and check the oil in the car. We both also had to have our permits for over six months and drive with my parents as much as we possibly could. My parents remained strict with the car rules, both before we got our license and after we had them. Candice has the same rules that I did when I was sixteen and got my license. Just as I did, she has to have my mother's car or my father's truck in the driveway by 9:00 on weeknights and by 11:00 on weekends no matter what. She always has to have permission to take a car, and she cannot just leave with a car when she feels like it.

Overall, the differences most definitely outweigh the similarities. Actually, I have come to the conclusion that the oldest child sets the stage for the following children. Parents put high expectations and harsh rules on their first born, and when that child turns out unharmed and wonderful, the parents figure each of the following children will be the same without their constant supervision and crazy regulations. I personally feel that my sisters have me to thank for their freedoms and early privileges. I was a good kid, and I showed my parents that I was capable of making the right decisions without them looking over my shoulder. My sisters owe me big.

A TALE OF TWO BASSES

by
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In the past fifty years a quiet revolution has taken place in the world of the bassline. It's called the electric bass. Since its invention in 1951 by Leo Fender, it has come to dominate pop and rock music, and, to a lesser extent, jazz and country. The acoustic bass (also known as the upright bass, double bass, and bass fiddle) which it replaced, has faded to the point of being almost a specialty instrument for many bass players. The electric bass (or "bass guitar") is the easier of the two to play and,

consequently, many bass players are content to learn it but not bother with the acoustic variety. The two really are quite different in their sounds and, therefore, in the types of music for which they are appropriate. Because of the unwillingness of electric players to learn the more challenging acoustic bass, the electric bass is overused today and played in many situations where it is neither stylistically appropriate nor satisfying to the ear.

If the two different basses were cars, the acoustic would be a stick shift and the electric would be an automatic. Electric basses take less skill and overall effort to play, just as automatic cars require less skill to drive. Converting from the electric bass is not an overwhelmingly difficult task, though. They have many similarities, just like cars. Their tuning, for instance, is identical; both have strings tuned to G,D,A, and E, which makes fingerings very compatible. Some electric basses have five or even six strings, but they're simply an extension of the system on which the usual four are based.

Despite these similarities, the acoustic bass still remains an intimidating creature to many electric players. The principle reason is that it has no frets. To use another vehicular analogy, the electric bass is like a magical car that steers on its own. Bass playing becomes that much easier with a fretted fingerboard. Because they automatically and perfectly tune whatever pitch the player fingers, frets eliminate the need for a bass player to continually check his intonation while playing. He can put down his finger anywhere between the two frets of the note he wants to play, and it will be in tune. On the fretless acoustic bass, however, fingers must be put down in just the right place on the fingerboard or the note will be out of tune. While an electric player might know how to finger a passage on an acoustic bass, he couldn't play it in tune without some serious practice. Another obstacle for the electric bass player is the righthand plucking technique of the acoustic bass. The strings of an electric bass need only to be lightly plucked to produce a full, deep sound. In fact, by adjusting his amplifier a player can produce a tone by simply pressing down the string with his left hand (a technique called a "hammer-on"). The amplifier really does all the work for an electric player. The acoustic bass is a whole different story. To produce a good tone, acoustic strings have to be firmly gripped and pulled in the right direction, and then released cleanly and quickly. Proficient acoustic players must have strong right arms and large calluses on their fingers. All of this takes time to develop--time which many electric bass players would rather not spend.

The difference in technique is what has scared so many bassists away from the acoustic bass, but it is the difference in their sounds that determines what styles of music each is appropriate for. The tone of an acoustic bass is rich and boomy, but at the same time, light and simple. It has the effect of pushing music along and "lifting it off the ground." Firm but not overpowering, it very competently supports all the other voices in an ensemble. The intense, thuddy tone of an electric bass has a much different effect. While it certainly provides a strong foundation, it doesn't add any great effect to an ensemble. It supports, but doesn't enhance.

So, which bass is more suited to what kinds of music? It depends on the instrumentation of the group that the bass player will be playing in, and the amount of bass volume that will be necessary. In a rock band, the electric bass is the obvious choice. It complements all the other electric instruments which it is accompanying, and has the pure volume necessary to support them. Rock is the natural home of the electric bass--it has grown up and evolved around it. Try to imagine Led Zeppelin or Jimi Hendrix with an upright bass!

The electric bass has become a part of other styles of music as well, particularly jazz and country, but with only moderate success. Jazz bands always relied on acoustic basses until the advent of jazz-rock fusion in the 1970's. Most fusion bands still considered their music to be jazz, but with rock influences, and one of the biggest ways that they achieved a more rock-like sound was to include an electric bass. Since then electric basses have been used in many jazz groups, even those of traditional jazz greats Dizzy Gillespie or Branford Marsallis. While an electric bass will adequately support a jazz band, it doesn't give it the life or "lift" that an acoustic bass does. And does it really make sense to use an electric bass in an otherwise acoustic ensemble?

Country music also has gone electric in the past few years. Most of the popular country artists today use synthesizers, electric guitars, and, of course, an electric bass. Traditionally, country has been very simple, easygoing music, perfectly suited to the lighter sound of the acoustic bass. Since its electrification, however, it has lost its charming simplicity and either turned into something that sounds more like light rock, or else devolved into nothing more than "loud hillbilly music" as one critic called it. Perhaps the re-inclusion of the acoustic bass could help to return country to its simpler roots.

Laziness and apathy on the part of electric players has resulted in a lack of people who can or want to play the acoustic bass today. Electric basses can be heard anywhere, from country music to jazz to rock. Bass players need to gain the courage to learn both basses so that they can be stylistically appropriate. Perhaps one day they will realize that the electric bass, even though it's easier, is not always the best choice for the integrity of the music that they play.