

Victor Wooten

Profile

Victor Wooten redefines the word “musician.” Regarded as one of the most influential bassists since Jaco Pastorius, Wooten is known for his solo recordings and tours, and as a member of the GRAMMY-winning supergroup, Béla Fleck & The Flecktones. He is a brilliant technician and innovator on the bass guitar, as well as a talented composer, arranger, producer, vocalist and multi-instrumentalist. But those gifts only begin to tell the tale of this Tennessee titan.

Wooten is the loving husband and devoted father of four; the youngest sibling of the amazing Wooten Brothers (Regi, Roy, Rudy and Joseph) and the bassist in their famed family band; a student of the martial arts and nature survival skills; and a teacher of hundreds of students at his camp.

Victor Lemonte Wooten embraced the musical life early, growing up on the West Coast in a military family in which his older brothers all played and sang. By age 3, he was learning bass riffs from his oldest brother Regi, and at age 5 he was performing professionally with the Wooten Brothers Band. “My parents and brothers were the foundation,” he recalls. “They prepared me for anything by teaching me to keep my mind open and learn to adapt.” While still on the West Coast, the band opened for high-profile acts of the ‘70s like Curtis Mayfield and War, and then headed east to eventually conquer new territory.

Victor was influenced by bass mentors Stanley Clarke, Larry Graham and Bootsy Collins, and at the same time learning about the music business at a wildly accelerated pace. By the early ‘80s, after the family had already settled in Newport News, Virginia, the brothers became mainstays at Busch Gardens theme park in nearby Williamsburg, making numerous connections with musicians in Nashville and New York.

In 1988 he moved to Nashville, where he worked with singer Jonell Mosser and met New Grass Revival banjo ace Béla Fleck. A year later, Fleck assembled Victor, his brother Roy (a.k.a. Future Man) and harmonica-playing keyboardist Howard Levy to perform with him, and the Flecktones were born. After three highly successful albums, Levy left the Flecktones in 1993, and the band’s new trio format enabled Victor to develop and display a staggering array of fingerboard skills that turned him into a bass hero of Pastorian-proportions and helped earn the band their first GRAMMY Award.

With the Flecktones in full flight, Victor set his sights on a solo career, first forming Bass Extremes with fellow low-end lord Steve Bailey, and finally releasing his critically-acclaimed solo debut, *A Show of Hands*, in 1996. Soon after, Wooten took his solo show on the road with drummer J.D. Blair. The momentum escalated and the acclaim grew louder with each successive album – *What Did He Say?* in 1997, the GRAMMY-nominated *Yin-Yang* in 1999 and the two-disc *Live In America* in 2001 – and the rigorous touring that accompanied each release.

Wooten won two Nashville Music Awards for Bassist of the Year and is the only three-time winner of *Bass Player* magazine's Bass Player of the Year award. With the honors came scores of session and sideman calls, leading to recordings and performances with artists like Branford Marsalis, Mike Stern, Bruce Hornsby, Chick Corea, Dave Matthews, Prince, Gov't Mule, Susan Tedeschi, Vital Tech Tones (with Scott Henderson and Steve Smith), the Jaco Pastorius Word Of Mouth Big Band, and the soundtrack to the Disney film *Country Bears*.

After a four-year hiatus from solo recordings, Wooten released *Soul Circus* on the Vanguard label in 2005. The recording included a small army of guest players: the Wooten Brothers, Bootsy Collins, Arrested Development rapper/vocalist Speech, Howard Levy, Dennis Chambers, Sandra Williams, J.D. Blair, Derico Watson, Flecktone Jeff Coffin, and a who's-who of bassists, including Steve Bailey, Oteil Burbridge, Will Lee, Rhonda Smith, Christian McBride, T.M. Stevens, Bill Dickens and Gary Grainger.

Wooten joins the Heads Up label in the spring of 2008 with the April 1 release of *Palmystery*, a twelve-track set that embraces a range of styles – jazz, funk, pop, soul, gospel, world music and more – and boasts a diverse guest list that includes Mike Stern, Richard Bona, Keb' Mo' and several others. The result is an amalgam of voices, styles and grooves, but one that never fails to hold together at its rock-solid core.

Simultaneous with the release of *Palmystery*, Berkley Trade Paperback (The Penguin Group USA) will release Wooten's debut novel, *The Music Lesson*, the story of a struggling young musician who is unexpectedly visited by a mysterious, seemingly mystic music teacher who guides him through a spiritual journey of higher education in both music and life.

Whether his medium is music or the written word, Wooten sees the creative process in the context of the eternal question about whether a tree falling in a forest really makes a sound if there's no one there to hear it. "A song is just an idea until someone brings it into the world," he says. "That's the great mystery of music or any creative endeavor. The power is in the palm of your hand. You just have to release it to the world."