



311

P-Nut Lively Up Yourself

BY FREDDY VILLANO | PHOTOGRAPH BY JIMMY CANNON

THREE YEARS IS A LONG TIME BETWEEN RECORDS in 311’s world. Their previous album, *Stereolithic* [311 Records], came out in 2014, so they had more time than ever according to Aaron Wills, a.k.a. P-Nut. “Every album, if it doesn’t break us, sinks us down into possible heritage territory,” he explains. “We think of ourselves as still having fresh ideas, so we took as much time as we needed. We didn’t want to rush it. We knew that this was really important.” So important that the band even sourced outside writers for the first time and enlisted producer John Feldmann (Blink 182, Disturbed) on five songs for *Mosaic*, including the lead single, “Too Much to Think,” which became a *Billboard* Alternative Songs Top 20 charter.

Readily apparent from this infusion of creative forces is how aggressively mixed P-Nut’s bass tone is on *Mosaic*. Songs like “Too Much to Think,” “Extension,” and “Wildfire” demonstrate his versatility as he bounds effortlessly from dub-like grooves to aggressive and gritty tones conjured from his ’70s Rickenbacker—but the bass-heavy mix is the real game changer on *Mosaic*. “You can hear it in the first single. It feels like for almost the first time ever, someone really understands how this band can sound absolutely awesome with the bass mixed at an aggressive level.” The observation may seem surprising coming from a guy who was at the forefront of the rap-rock/funk-metal scene in the ’90s and adorned BP’s October ’97 cover. But as eclectic as 311’s music has always

been, and as popular as P-Nut has been since the band’s inception, no other record presents his undeniable skill set quite like *Mosaic*.

Do you have your bass lines mapped out before you go into the studio?

Seventy percent mapped out. If anything needs adjustment, it’s usually because I strayed too far from the template, if there is one, and I need to be wrangled in. It also depends on whether Tim [Mahoney, guitar] recorded before me. Sometimes that’ll change things, because he’s got a different idea of where things should go. He’s had to follow me around most of the time, so it’s fun to trade places and re-learn ideas because he played them a different way. It’s just part of being in a band.

Songs like “Extension” demonstrate a strong command of reggae in your playing. Where does that influence come from?

Aston “Family Man” Barrett wrote the whole book on it. We used to cover Bob Marley’s “Lively Up Yourself,” so it was kind of mind-blowing to realize you can break the rules and still be super melodic and play to the song by playing outside of it. It felt like when I was attaching myself to Flea’s ideas. It’s still a great song and you can hear it on the radio, but the reason you’re rocking out is because the bass player is destroying it.

You seem respectful of the genre both in performance and attitude.

I give a shit. I’m not really trying to do anything different with it. If it’s a reggae part, the bass has to reflect that in a huge way, and if I do anything different, hopefully it’s adding a good page to the book and not a cultural re-appropriation. I want it to add to the lexicon of reggae bass and not be just a rip-off. Reggae is born of bass players, and if you’re not playing those lines, you’re missing out on a whole language of touch and feel and give and take and ideas that live in the subs.

Your tone is really present right from the opening track, “Too Much to Think.”

That’s my Kala U-Bass. It sounds more like palm-muting, which is what I’ll be doing onstage. It’s so opposite of what my normal sound is. It’s cool to be playing this long and have a new instrument come out and connect with it so much.

“Wildfire” is equally present, but with a much grittier sound.

That’s my 1974 Rickenbacker. As dirty as that instrument is, we still used a SansAmp and squeezed a lot of the high mids and crunchy overdrive out of it.

Have you been working on any new techniques?

I got into looping. I’m trying to make good ideas out of improv and then stack them on top of each other. That’s the goal. It’s fun to be in the process. I look up to all kinds of loopers, most especially [*The Late Late Show with James Corden* bandleader] Reggie Watts—and he does it all with his voice. I’ve been playing bass for 32 years now, and it’s fun to have people outside of the instrument to look up to.

Is there a universality to 311’s music?

We’re telling people that this life is tough and we’re frustrated, too, but there’s more to come and don’t give up on this experience. We fly that flag for so many people. You don’t have to feel alone. We’re all in it together. The music is bigger than the sound that it generates. **BP**



INFO



311, *Mosaic* [2017, BMG]

Basses Warwick P-Nut III Signature 5-string, Warwick Star Bass II, 1974 Rickenbacker 4001, Kala U-Bass

Rig (all Warwick Hellborg) PR40 Pre-Amp, MP 500 Power Amps, Big Cab 215, High Cab 212

Effects Big Muff (Russian), Diamond CPR-1 Compressor, EBS BassIQ Triple Envelope Filter, Electro-Harmonix Small Stone Analog Phase Shifter, MXR M169 Carbon Copy Analog Delay, MXR M288 Bass Octave Deluxe, MXR M82 Bass Envelope Filter, **Strymon TimeLine Multi-dimensional Delay**



Strings GHS Bass Boomers (.040, .060, .080, .100, .130)

- Check out P-Nut tearing it up on his custom Warwick 10-string.
- Watch the official video for “Too Much to Think.” [bassplayer.com/september2017](https://www.bassplayer.com/september2017)



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