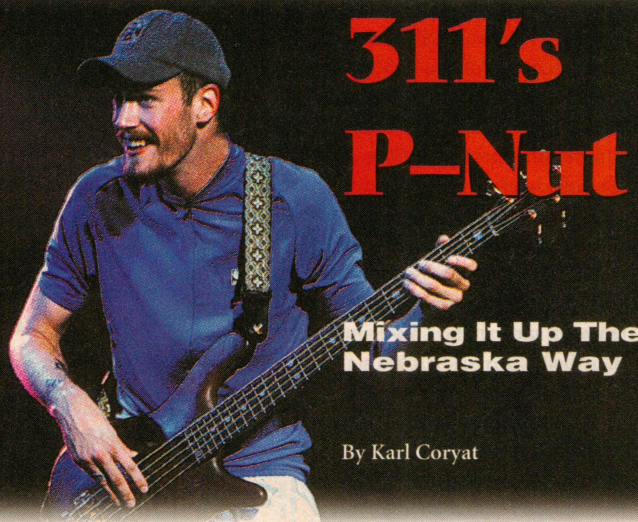


# BassNotes



## 311's P-Nut

Mixing It Up The  
Nebraska Way

By Karl Coryat

When you think of thrash-funk, hip-hop, or reggae, one place that probably doesn't come to mind is Omaha, Nebraska—yet that city gave birth to 311, one of the freshest and most effectively pan-stylistic bands on today's alternative scene.

"We weren't pushed into specific musical niches," says 21-year-old bassist P-Nut. "If we had started in L.A., we would have had to play clubs on funk night, or something like that, and people would have come to see a specific style. That

doesn't happen in Nebraska, so we had the opportunity to do our own thing." After getting the attention of Capricorn Records, the band played a farewell show for their mutually appreciative Omaha crowd and relocated to L.A., where they've recorded three albums to date. The most recent, *311* [Capricorn], has been enjoying considerable airplay on modern-rock radio and has swelled the ranks of the band's loyal following.

Whether it's a slow, greasy reggae groove, a slammin' rap assault, or a noisy yet melodic pop anthem, the 311 boys love to mix it up. At a recent sold-out show in San Francisco, throngs of moshers crowded toward stage-left screaming "P-Nut!" at the happy bassist. "That seems to be the one thing people usually yell out," he says. "It's odd; I think it's just because it's a good thing to scream.

It sounds good yelled." P-Nut's tight, highly syncopated style may have *something* to do with it. Although he can out-chop the best of 'em with flashy thumbstyle fills, most of the time he prefers to throttle the bottom with nimble finger-funk or fat, soulful dub lines. On the heavier tunes, he often matches the quirky, offbeat power-chord lines of guitarists Nicholas Hexum and Timothy J. Mahoney note-for-note with an almost unreal tightness, resulting in unusual textures rhythmically based more on the guitars than the drums. "A lot of that comes from [drummer] Chad Sexton's style of writing," says P-Nut. "He writes in a syncopated shuffle or half-shuffle kind of way. He plays acoustic guitar like a bass, with two fingers of his right hand. We learned that writing style from him, and now we all write like that."

At age six, P-Nut (then named Aaron Wills) began to learn the violin via the Suzuki method. "I was



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starting to get strong enough to play well and think and everything when I decided to quit," he remembers. "My teacher made me cry, because she thought I was really turning into something." At age 11, Aaron decided to start taking guitar lessons in the mall down the street, but almost immediately his ear wandered toward the bass. "I knew the 4-string instrument was for me. Plus, everybody my age was picking up the guitar at that time." His first axe was a Phantom P-Bass copy, which was followed by a Fender Jazz Special. Aaron—who by this time had been nicknamed P-Nut for the unusual shape of his head—installed EMGs in the Fender and has been a die-hard user of active electronics ever since.

While in high school, P-Nut's older brother was friends with SA Martinez, 311's current turntable spinner/vocalist, who was roommates with Chad Sexton; Chad and P-Nut began to play and write songs

together in January 1990. Following a brush with the law, their guitarist pal came up with the band's numerical name, the police code for indecent exposure. After a few personnel changes, 311's lineup solidified in 1991, and they began to build a solid local following. They landed an opening spot on the first Smashing Pumpkins tour, and they played a free showcase gig for Capricorn at the same club where they debuted, when they opened for Fugazi. With Capricorn's encouragement, they moved to L.A. and were signed by the label six months later. Their first CD, *Music*, was released in 1993; *Grassroots* came the next year.

A genuine bass addict, at any given time P-Nut is probably either playing or listening to music. Since moving to Los Angeles, he's been able to immerse himself in reggae; his favorite artists include Born Jamericans, Daddy Freddy, and Terror Fabulous. Lately he's also

been revitalizing his Steve Harris influence by digging out his old Iron Maiden records, and he's been listening to a lot of Jamiroquai ("God! Stuart Zender's good!"). [Ed. Note: Zender was profiled in May/June '95.] For a change of pace, every now and then he needs a fix of his favorite band, the wacko Pennsylvania duo Ween. ("It's a nice escape. It's like anti-music or something.")

Like Stuart Zender, P-Nut is a confirmed Warwick devotee. He currently owns four of the German-made basses: two Streamer Stage II 5-strings with neck-through afzelia bodies, one bubinga Streamer Stage II 5-string, and a fretless bubinga Thumb Bass 5-string. "I'm still learning how to play that one," he says. "I'm not going to whip it out onstage until I'm a genius on it. I don't know if that will ever happen—but I've been amazed at what levels I've been jumping to since I've been playing 150 shows a year." A big fan of weighty woods, P-Nut wants to get

Warwick to build him a bass made of purpleheart. "That would be really cool—it would be heavy beyond belief! I can't even play maple basses anymore." His amp rig is an SWR SM-900 head driving two SWR Goliath II 4x10s and two Big Ben 1x18s. Occasionally he'll kick in a DOD fuzz pedal for a "really deep, fat sound." His wireless is a top-of-the-line Nady 950GS.

For now, touring constitutes 100% of P-Nut's immediate plans. "We're going to ride out this album for a little while before we go back into the studio. We're gonna give it all we've got—especially when we go out with Cypress Hill for five weeks." What makes for the perfect live show? "It isn't good if it isn't sweaty—and they're *all* sweaty. There's nothing like playing onstage; I'd put it right up there with pot and sex. I can't imagine myself not being able to play live. If I had to, I'd set up on the street and play. I want to play until they bury me!" ♫



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