

* Dean Jarvis Charts The Course With Nelly Furtado

Going deeper

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By E.E. Bradman, Bass Player Magazine

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Dean Jarvis is in control. From his carefully tied ponytail to his clean, mean road gear to his speaking voice, which barely rises above confident whisper, Jarvis is the archetype of the smoothly efficient musical director - a post he has held for two years with Canadian singing sensation Nelly Furtado. Fortunately for the singer and the rest of the eight-piece band, Dean is also warm and personable. His rock-solid lines adds a luscious subtext to songs from Furtado's two-year-old Dreamworks debut, *Whoa, Nelly*, while bringing fresh flavors to the airtight stage show. Dean's parts also reveal a relationship with the music that's deeper than familiarity and technique: He fell for the music the moment he first heard it. "I have to really like a project to do it; I don't just do a job because the money is good. Once I heard the record, I told the label straight out that I had to have this job. The bass playing on the album [by studio pros Mike Elizondo and Robert Occhipinti] is great - it touches on everything from funk to Latin to dub. You need a lot of experience to do it right, and I knew I could pull it off." Jarvis, the great-grandson of Sierra Leonean immigrants, grew up in a musical household that specialized in "bass-oriented music": Rick James, Parliament-Funkadelic, and Earth, Wind & Fire. Seeing Bootsy Collins live and digging deep into 1978's *AhhÉ The Name Is Boosty, Baby* made Jarvis want to be a bass player. In high school, he related the theory exercises in Mel Bay books and Rufus Reid's *Evolving Bassist* method to the music he was playing in R&B and Jamaican ska bands. A turning point in his career was an incident that made even the unflappable Jarvis sweat.

"George Clinton came to a club I was playing in Toronto, and I could feel him watching me. Then, as I was playing, he came onstage, put his chair in front of my amp and said, 'Go!' I just played - I was dripping sweat, but he liked it and asked me to play with him."

Dean eventually did several gigs with Clinton, supported the Backstreet Boys on Canadian TV, and landed the musical director slot for an early '90s tour featuring soul legends Solomon Burke, Percy Sledge, and Ben E King. His secret to getting and keeping the gigs are basic: "Being punctual, and not smoking or drinking. I take what I do very seriously, and I only hire people who take it seriously so they don't embarrass me." (He fines band members \$2 for every minute they're late to soundcheck.) Jarvis got the Furtado gig three months before *Whoa, Nelly* was released. He immediately held auditions to find the right personnel - a back singer, DJ, drummer, guitarist, and two keyboardists - by testing their ears and reading ability. "I played certain passages and then put the music in front of them. If they nailed it, we went to the next page." He also places a premium on personality ("Someone can be great player, but if their personality sucks, I don't want them") and the ability to read. "Sometimes, musicians want to interpret the charts, but I tell them I don't want their interpretation. I want what I wrote because someone else is doing something that accompanies that part."

As the man responsible for onstage cues and chaos preparedness, Jarvis has tightened his gear to include little margin for error. A microphone transmits his instructions to every other musician, and his setup allows eye contact with techs, Nelly and bandmembers. "If something goes wrong onstage, I give the tech guys a look, they fix it, and I buy them a drink later," he laughs.

Except for a NS Design CR-5 electric upright with Spector strings, Dean's basses - Spector 4 - and 5 -stings, and Ernie Ball/Music Man StingRay 5, and a Washburn 5-string acoustic bass guitar - are tuned with a Boss TU-2 chromatic tuner and strung with Ernie Ball Slinkys. His rack is packed with two Eden WT-800 heads, a Line 6 Bass POD Pro, an Avalon U5 DI (supplemented by a passive JDI DI), a Shure U4D wireless, and a Furman PL-Plus Power Conditioner. Two Eden XST 4x10s and two D-210MBX wedges faithfully reproduce his modern tone. Jarvis gets almost all the effects he needs with a ProcCo Turbo Rat distortion pedal, an Electro-Harmonix Bass Balls envelop filter, Boos Octave and Synth Bass pedals, a Line 6 Filter Modeler, and a DigiTech Whammy pedal. "Those are my favorite ones right there," he says, pointing to twin custom boxes he calls "the subsonic pedals." The two low pass filters go down to 20 HZ and have been known to produce ecstatic reactions in the front row. He controls his effects with help from a Line 6 PB4 channel selector, a Rack Systems Ltd. Power supply, a custom voltage buffer (underneath his tuner), and an Ernie Ball volume pedal. He keeps cables handy as a backup to his wireless.

Like any high-profile sideman, Dean understands his job isn't forever - although he hopes Grammy -winning Furtado will use the group for her next album and tour. Between shows, he studies chord theory; during an August break, he plans to get tight with his upright. Jarvis is justifiably proud of the band, which keeps the music fresh every night by forsaking cheesy productions for dynamics, diverse textures, and strong hooks.

"This is a great bunch of people. As a music director, I'm there for the band 24/7, personally and musically. As a bass player, I'm constantly striving to get better. You never know what your next gig is going to be."

Dean's Lists

Audition Tips for High-Profile Gigs

1. Come prepared with a bio, photos, and every contact number you have. If you've made a good impression, you want the artist to see how easy it is to get a hold of you at short notice. This will come in handy when last-minute gigs pop up. It will also show your professionalism.
2. Audition with the gear you'd used on the gig; this shows you're ready to go.
3. Show whatever talents the gig requires. Multi-instrumentalist are always more attractive.
4. Attitude, attitude, attitude! No one needs bad vibes.
5. Look the part you're auditioning for - show how easy it is for you to slide right into the gig.

Hints for Aspiring Musical Directors

1. Know at least a little about several instruments.
2. Always be prepared for rehearsals.
3. Set goals, have a schedule, and meet artist and label deadlines.
4. Understand music theory and how it applies to different music styles.
5. Be able to read and write music. I guarantee it's going to confront you at some point. I had to make last-minute changes to Nelly Furtado's "I'm Like a Bird" for Aretha Franklin's 52-piece orchestra at VH1's Divas Live 2001 event.