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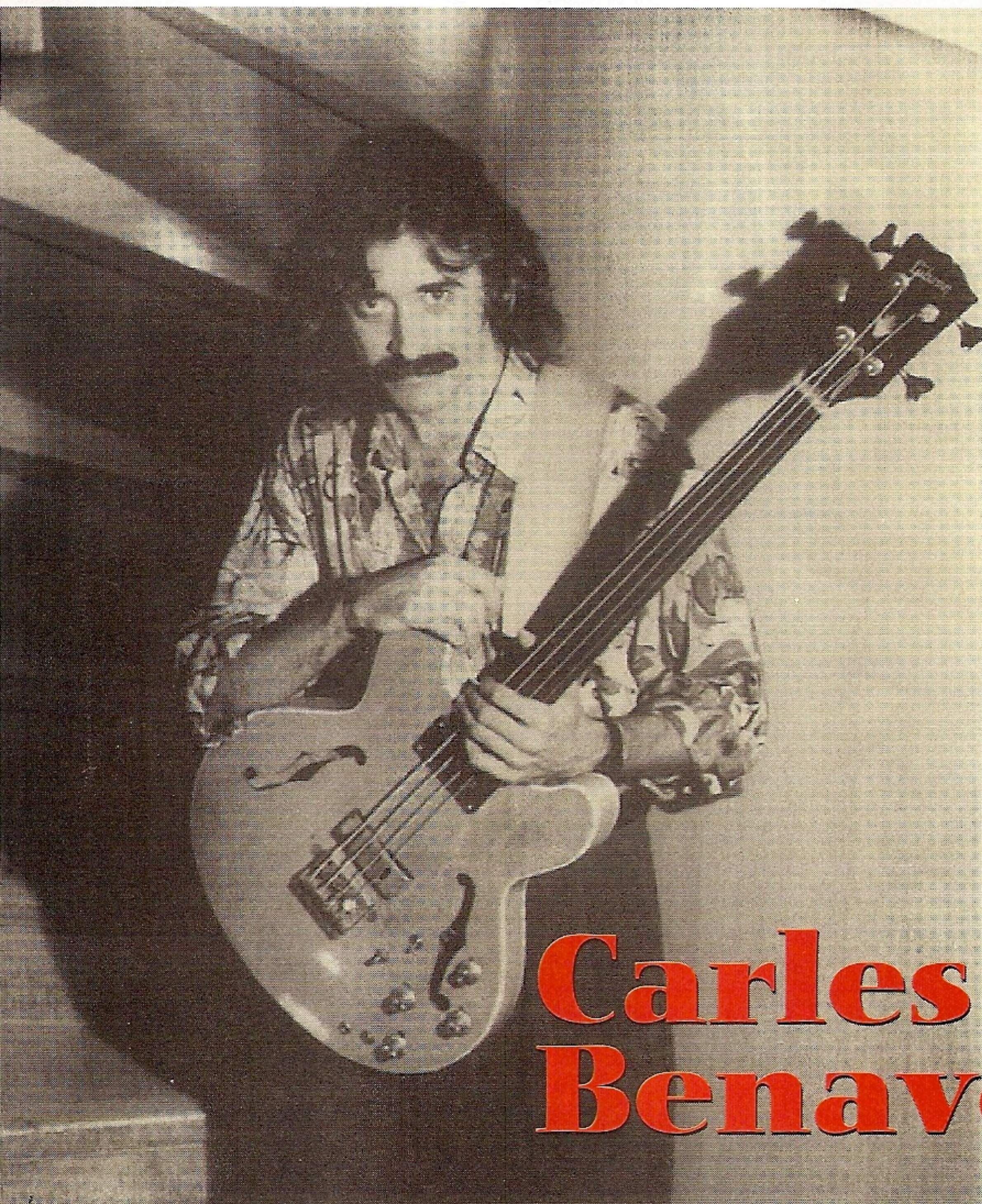
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# BassNotes



NEUVOS MEDIOS

## Carles Benavent

### Spain's Fusion Of Old And New

By Joe G. Lewis

The last 15 years have seen some exciting musical developments in Spain—particularly in the province of Andalusia, where traditional flamenco music has been mixed with blues, jazz, rock, salsa, and even reggae. An important exponent of this “New Flamenco” movement is Carles Benavent, who is credited with one of the first electric bass performances on a flamenco recording: a *bulería* on Camaron de la Isla’s *Calle Real* [Philips]. Benavent has almost single-handedly invented flamenco bass playing—and since his emergence, the electric bass has become

a standard fixture in New Flamenco, an updated version of Spain’s most representative folkloric tradition.

Flamenco’s roots can be traced back to the Moorish dominance of Spain many centuries ago. This old art typically includes the *cante jondo* (deep singing) vocal style accompanied by lyrical acoustic-guitar soloing, with rhythm guitars and various forms of percussion. Flamenco’s wide stylistic range depends largely on the rhythmic and melodic mood or feel of each song; *bulerías* tend to be upbeat and aggressive, for instance, while *tarantas* are soft and sad. New Flamenco is more versatile than the traditional form, yet it aims to preserve the deep expression of emotions for which flamenco is famous.

Traditional flamenco has never had electric instruments, and in try-

ing to break new ground with so foreign an instrument as bass, Benavent ran the risk of antagonizing the conservatives. “Sometimes people in the audience would yell, ‘Hey you—the one with that weird guitar—get off the stage!’” he says. Trained in jazz, Carles credits guitarist Paco de Lucía, whom he met in 1979, with teaching him the essentials of the style. Most of the flamenco Benavent has played with de Lucía is unwritten music, so he has had to memorize many complicated arrangements.

Benavent, 41, started playing at age 12 with ’60s rock and blues; he later moved on to jazz fusion before exploring the depths of flamenco. Flamenco is complex music, and it’s often hard to understand at first—yet it has much in common with jazz, since both allow for a wide range of

### WEB WATCH

• For some cool bass-related stuff, including a history of the early days at Tobias Guitars, visit the home page put together by Bob Lee:

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# BassNotes

Carles Benavent *continued*

expression and experimentation. "To me, jazz suggests freedom—something open," Carles explains. Both flamenco and jazz also share a rhythmic and melodic intricacy, which has allowed Benavent to fuse them together smoothly in his extensive work with leading musicians from Europe, Japan, Australia, and the Americas.

Paco de Lucia's *Solo Quiero Caminar* [Philips, 1981] is a must for flamenco-guitar enthusiasts—and as one of Benavent's earlier works, it's an *opera prima* of the New Flamenco genre. In addition to Benavent's extensive work with de Lucia, Camaron de la Isla, and other flamenco celebrities, he can also be heard in his jazz element with Miles Davis on *Miles & Quincy Live at Montreux* [Warner Bros.] and with Chick Corea on *Touchstone* [Stretch], to name just two titles from his lengthy discography. For his latest solo release, this year's *Agüita que Corre* [Nuevos Medios, Spain], Benavent compiled a fresh and inti-

**ATTENTION YOUNG BASSISTS!**  
THE RICHARD DAVIS FOUNDATION FOR YOUNG BASSISTS, INC., HAS ANNOUNCED ITS THIRD ANNUAL BASS CONFERENCE, WHICH WILL TAKE PLACE ON APRIL 4-5, 1996, AT THE HOLY NAME CATHOLIC CENTER IN MADISON, WISCONSIN. CLINICIANS SCHEDULED TO PARTICIPATE INCLUDE **JEFF BRADETICH, EVA BRAUNINGER, RICHARD DAVIS, VIRGINIA DIXON, PETER DOMINGUEZ, MILT HENTON, THOMAS KNIFIC, DAVID MURRAY, PAUL ROBINSON, HELEN STEVENSON, BRIAN TORFF, AND DAVID WALTER.** FOR MORE INFO, CALL THE FOUNDATION AT (608) 255-6666.

mate musical diary during his travels. Recorded between gigs, the album features duets with his musical associates from different countries, covering a broad range of styles from flamenco to jazz to new age.

Benavent's unusual technique and style are striking. He plays a fretless with a large, heavy-gauge pick; it's how he began playing, and he's never changed. His style is marked by precision and aggressiveness, yet he never strays from the pocket of the flamenco percussion. Benavent often doubles guitar and flute solos. "I try to surprise the audience, instead of remaining in the traditional bass role," he says. Some of his favorite seasonings include contra-

puntal harmonic slides, ghost notes, lightning-quick runs, and a wealth of chords and arpeggios. Benavent's playing is fluid in feel and up-front in tone, yet he's never overbearing. "I go for the maximum expression I can get," he explains. "My playing is about contrasts, high and low."

For many years, Benavent's main instrument was a semi-hollow Gibson EB-2; he now plays Francesco Jordan basses from Barcelona, custom-made to emulate his weathered Gibson. "The neck is very narrow; I'm really used to the Gibson's shape after all these years," he says. Carles plays his 4-string Jordan primarily, but he also uses a 5-string in EADGC tuning. Both

instruments have Bartolini J-style pickups and are strung with GHS, Rotosound, or DR roundwounds. For stage amplification, Benavent usually rents two 100-watt amps and runs in stereo; he prefers setups by Gallien-Krueger or Warwick, which seem to work best with his punchy, midrange-heavy sound. He uses a volume pedal ("to kill the attack") and a Zoom 9050 signal processor for octaver, delay, and chorus effects. Benavent also plays the mandolin and the mandola, an instrument of the same family; these can be heard on several of his recordings.

When asked to explain his success, Benavent says, "Fortunately I've had the opportunity to play with many talented musicians—all of whom have always pushed me higher." Despite his outstanding career and the many challenges he has faced, Carles remains humble, much in the fashion of his fellow flamenco musicians—an attitude as admirable as his music. ♪

Thanks to Gerhard Schlanzky for his help with this article.

**When I read "The Ampeg Story" in March '95, I discovered that my Ampeg Baby Bass is made from plastic. My problem is this: Someone repainted the bass black, and small areas of the paint have rubbed off to reveal the instrument's original turquoise color. How can I remove the black paint without destroying the plastic?**

**Mike Arnold  
San Francisco, CA**

Ampeg's Baby Bass, which was produced in the '60s, featured a vacuum-formed, molded body made of a clear plastic material called Uvex. The paint was applied to the inside of the shell. In your situation, here's what BP columnist Rick Turner suggests: "I wouldn't use any solvents to remove the paint, because you don't know how the plastic is going to react to the chemicals. The safest method would be to carefully sand off the paint with a fine grade of 3M's Imperial Free-Cut Micro-Finishing Film on an air-powered, orbital sander. I'd then take the bass to a luthier who knows how to buff out plastics with



**a stand-up power buffer."**

**The speaker in my combo amp rattles and breaks up only when I play E on my P-Bass. I have a similar problem with my larger amp, a stack, when I play C on my Modulus. What's causing this?**

**Dereck Werner  
U.S. Navy Band, 7th Fleet  
Japan**

Before you assume there's something wrong with both of your amps, try using an outboard parametric EQ to cut the offending frequency area. Every enclosure has a resonant frequency—if you send too much signal into that area, it could cause a rattling or cracking sound. Try this remedy: Plug an equalizer with an adjustable Q (bandwidth) control into the front of the amp or the effects loop. Set the Q to a very narrow

width, boost the EQ's GAIN knob by 5dB or so, play the note that's causing the problem, and sweep the EQ's FREQUENCY knob until the rattle gets worse. You've pinpointed the frequency that's causing the problem; to get rid of the rattle, turn down the GAIN until it stops.

**What kind of bass is Pearl Jam's Jeff Ament playing on the cover of your April '94 issue?**  
**Jeff Werner  
Yardley, PA**

Ament's cover axe is a late-'70s Music Man StingRay (pre-Ernie Ball) with a maple neck and natural finish. It sports the name "Barkley," which is a tribute to one of Jeff's favorite basketball players, Charles Barkley of the Phoenix Suns. (It also might be a description of the instrument's "barky" sound.)

**Got a question? Send it to:  
Q&A/BASS PLAYER  
411 Borel Ave., Suite 100  
San Mateo, CA 94402**