

GROUNDBREAKERS AND SHAKERS

Music Man 25th Anniversary HH five-string & Big Al basses

BY ED FRIEDLAND

TO CELEBRATE 25 years of Music Man, Ernie Ball has released two new bass models that combine traditional elements with brand-new developments that make them cooler and more versatile than ever. The 25th Anniversary bass is a limited-run instrument, available in four- and five-string models with several different pickup configurations. The Big Al is a bass version of the Albert Lee guitar, and it's one of the most radical-looking and unique tone machines around.

FEATURES

THE BIG AL AND the 25th Anniversary share two brand-new features: an elegant and efficient four-button switching system and passive operation with a separate passive tone control. The 25th bass is available in H, HH, and HSS (another new development) configurations, while the Big Al has three single-coil pickups with phantom coils for silent operation.

The Big Al features an alder body, a bolt-on maple neck with 22 high-profile wide frets, maple fingerboard (rosewood and pau ferro fretless are optional), five-bolt neck joint, compensated nut (1 1/2-inch width), four-band active/passive preamp, and three Neodymium magnet single-coil pickups. The Big Al offers a wide range of tones, from pure organic passive chunk to ultra-modern edge, and the new switching system allows access to the three pickups individually or in any combination: in Active or Passive mode, and with coils one and two in Series mode. There is a tone for every gig in this bass.

The 25th Anniversary model is based on the Axis guitar, and like the Big Al it makes a strong visual statement. The body is ash with a bound and bookmatched flamed maple top (quilted maple is an upgrade) in a juicy Venetian Redburst stain with matching headstock. Buried under this sexy top is a mahogany tone block that adds depth, clarity and sustain. The five-bolt, gun-stock-oiled maple neck, maple board (rosewood and pau ferro fretless optional), 22-frets, compensated nut and standard Music Man bridge are all typical features. But the ceramic humbuckers, four-band active/passive preamp and series/parallel switch (H and HH models only)



LIST PRICES: 25th Anniversary HH, \$3,350.00; Big Al, \$2,400.00

MANUFACTURER:

Music Man, music-man.com

BODY: Big Al: alder; 25th Anniversary: ash/maple top/mahogany tone block

FRETS: 22 high-profile wide (both)

NUT: Big Al: compensated 1 1/2-inch; 25th: compensated 1 3/4-inch

NECK: Maple, bolt-on (both)

PICKUPS: Big Al: three neodymium single-coils with phantom coil; 25th: two ceramic humbuckers

EQ: Active: bass/treble, low mid/high mid; passive bypass with passive tone control (both)

SWITCHING: Four-button pickup/preamp selection; 25th, series/parallel switch (both)

The 25th Anniversary's looks will stop your heart, and the tone will get it pumping again.

The four-button switching system is both elegant and practical.

give this ax many new voices in addition to the familiar Music Man tone. The 1 3/4-inch nut is a comfy width, and the 17.5mm string spacing at the bridge leaves plenty of room for slap and fingerstyle playing without feeling bulky. New lightweight tuners and a smaller headstock are employed to help with balance due to the shorter top horn. A Music Man five-string is a reliable choice for clear, articulate B strings, and the 25th is no exception.

PERFORMANCE

BOTH BASSES EXHIBIT remarkable tonal consistency between Passive and Active modes when set flat. The Big Al is a major departure from the past. With all three coils in Active mode it produces a new modern slap tone that's complex, full range and punchy. The middle coil gets surprisingly close to the P-Bass chunk but with a little more edge. The neck pickup is similar to a single-coil-style P—more open, and more girth. Combining the neck and middle coils delivers a great blend of thickness and edge. The surprise tone is with the middle and bridge pickups in Series mode. This gives you a well-focused kick, not unlike the MM Sterling.

The 25th Anniversary HH has four distinct personalities. Without the preamp, the pickups have an earthy quality that will satisfy the most devout passive purist. Active mode allows you to accentuate or de-emphasize frequency ranges with precision, while Parallel mode gives you access to the classic Music Man tone palette: shimmering highs, pumping lows, and focused mids. Series mode adds the low-mid punch that hard rockers require to carve their way through the sludge of detuned guitar madness. Combining Active and Series modes makes this baby grind.

THE BOTTOM LINE

THESE INSTRUMENTS represent a new direction for Music Man. The 25th has the classic tones covered and much more, in a very sexy package, while the Big Al redefines how a Music Man bass looks and sounds, and is potentially a classic in its own right. ✨

| PRO | CON |
|---|------|
| PASSIVE MODE DOUBLES YOUR OPTIONS; NEW PICKUP CONFIGURATIONS OFFER NEW TONES; EXCELLENT BUILD | NONE |