

# GOLDEN YEAR

## Fender 50th Anniversary Jazz Bass

\* ED FRIEDLAND

**I**N 2010, MANY of rock and roll's biggest names will turn 50, including Bono (May 10), Steve Vai (June 6), Joan Jett (September 22)—and the Fender Jazz Bass. In 1960, Leo Fender wanted to offer a deluxe bass model to complement his proven workhorse, the Precision. Thus, the Jazz Bass was born. An alluring offset waist, a sleek neck and dual pickups made the Jazz the Lamborghini to the Precision's Camaro. Remarkably, the instrument's basic design has remained unchanged since 1962, when Fender gave up on the original concentric stack knob controls. The simple perfection of the Jazz Bass is confirmed by the undying loyalty it has earned from the world's top players.

To celebrate this trendsetter's birthday, Fender has released the 50th Anniversary Jazz Bass with a feature list spanning the history of the instrument. If you think turning 50 years old isn't cool or sexy, take a closer look.

### FEATURES

**RATHER THAN SIMPLY** produce a reissue of the 1960 Jazz bass (though, that would be nice too), Fender chose design elements from great Jazz basses of the past and combined them in a once-in-a-lifetime package. Alder is a traditional choice for a Jazz bass body, and the 50th exhibits the firm bottom and detailed mids you expect from that material. The nitrocellulose finish in Candy Apple Red (with matching headstock) was one of the very first custom colors offered in 1963, and it's still a head-turner, especially when paired with the three-ply white-black-white pickguard. The maple neck has 20 medium jumbo frets in a rosewood slab fingerboard with block pearloid inlays. The blocks first showed up in 1966, typically accompanied by fingerboard binding. Fender decided to forgo the binding, and the result resembles the neck of the closely related Jaguar bass. Tightly grained maple combined with graphite Posi-flex reinforcement rods gives the modern C-shaped neck a reassuring solidness.

The 50th Anniversary Jazz uses the typical volume/volume/tone arrangement and has two 75 Vintage single-coil J pickups placed in the Seventies position (the rear pickup is about a

quarter-inch closer to the bridge than the Sixties models). The cloverleaf tuning pegs look classic from the front, but they are modern Fender/Hipshot lightweight gears. The High Mass Vintage bridge allows you to fine tune your string spacing and gives you the option of top-loading the strings or stringing through the body. In addition, Fender has placed the finger rest in the Seventies position—closest to the E string, where it functions as a thumb rest. Originally located below the G string, it was meant as a tug bar for the fingers to grab while the player plucked with the thumb.

Fender has dressed up the 50th with vintage chrome pickup covers and included a rubber mute strip with instructions on proper installation under the bridge cover, if you want to make the bass sound thumpy—the way Leo intended. Also included in the case candy package are four individual felt string mutes, a curious feature that became extinct after 1962. Installing the mutes would require drilling screw holes in the body, but it doesn't matter because they won't fit with the Seventies pickup spacing. A black Tolex hardshell case is included with a full complement of extras, including a truss rod wrench, skinny-style strap and commemorative booklet.

### PERFORMANCE

**THE JAZZ BASS** is produced in a variety of price ranges, but you can tell that the 50th is a high-quality ax as soon as you pick it up. The fit and finish compare favorably with Fender's more expensive Custom Shop offerings. The fundamental tone is solid all through the range, and the feel is everything you would expect from a great Jazz.

The Seventies pickup spacing gives the blended tone a little more focus than a Sixties model and works particularly well for slap. The front pickup has that open, hollow depth that fills out the rhythm section nicely, and the bridge pickup alone gives up the tight, articulate tone that makes your bass solos jump to the frontline.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

**THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY** Jazz Bass is a beautifully put together example of one of the world's favorite basses. It is a limited-production run, so if you're thinking about getting one, don't wait too long. **SC**



QUALITY & DESIGN

### SPECS

**LIST PRICE:** \$2,799.99

**MANUFACTURER:**

Fender, [fender.com](http://fender.com)

**BODY:** Alder

**NECK:** Maple, bolt-on

**SCALE:** 34 inches

**FRETS:** 20 medium

jumbo

**FINGERBOARD:**

Rosewood slab, 9

1/2-inch radius, block

inlays

**PICKUPS:** Two Fender

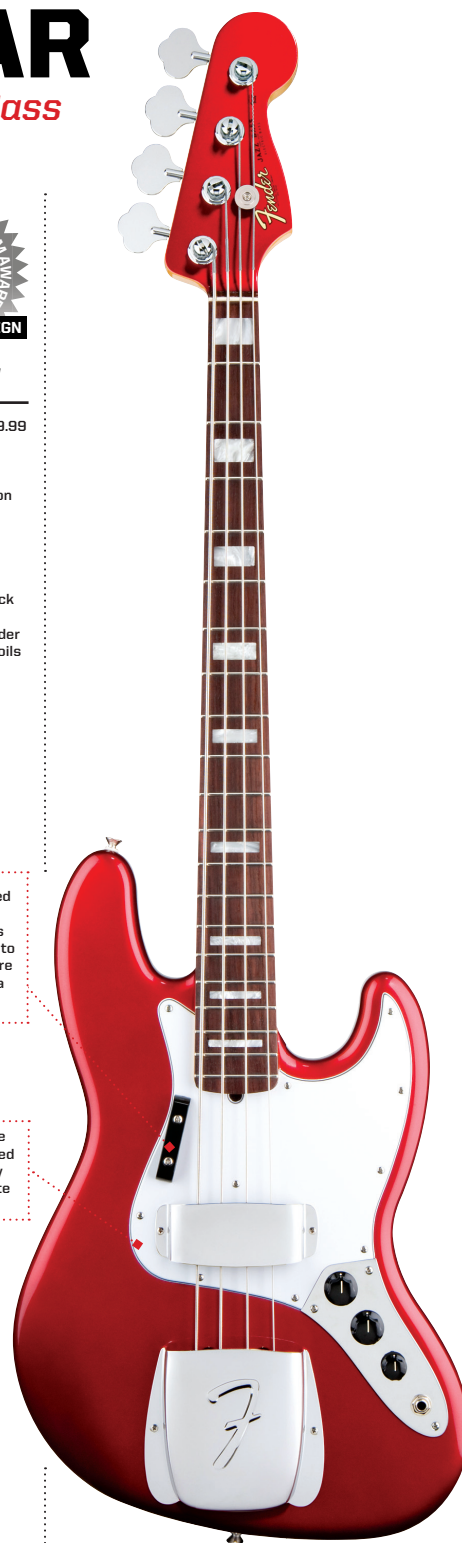
75 Vintage single-coils

**CONTROLS:** Two

volume, one tone

Fender has placed the finger rest in the Seventies position—closest to the E string, where it functions as a thumb rest.

The Candy Apple Red finish is paired with a three-ply white-black-white pickguard.



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A GREAT EXAMPLE OF THE JAZZ WITH A COOL MIX OF FEATURES	NONE