

MICHAEL FRANTI & SPEARHEAD

Carl Young Breaking Down Barriers

AN act as diverse, intelligent, and passionate as Spearhead requires a bassist with those same qualities. In a band that breaks down genre barriers from hip-hop to folk to rock, R&B, and reggae, Carl Young draws on a lifetime of musical experiences that allow him to contribute as bass player, background vocalist, and co-songwriter on the band's iMusic album *Everyone Deserves Music*.

At the root of Carl's style is a lyrical funk approach. "I definitely get the groove element from Bootsy and Larry Graham. I swear to God, if it wasn't for Larry Graham I probably wouldn't be playing bass right now. When I first heard Sly & the Family Stone it blew my mind! And sitting down and learning Jaco's stuff helped me step up and go through the spectrum of the chord and the scale instead of just hitting the root note."

Young elaborates on his playing technique: "I use my fingers a lot and use my thumb for muted things, like ballads. I have a strong jazz background from being a woodwind, sax, and piano player. Not that I'm all that great with those instruments, but that's where my head is playing from, and those are the voicings I use." Young's style plays a prominent role in Spearhead. He co-wrote about three-fourths of *Everyone Deserves Music* while fulfilling a lifelong dream to work with reggae legends Sly and Robbie, who produced two tracks on the CD. Young gushes, "The groove that those two cats produce, and the vibe that they have, are unreal!"

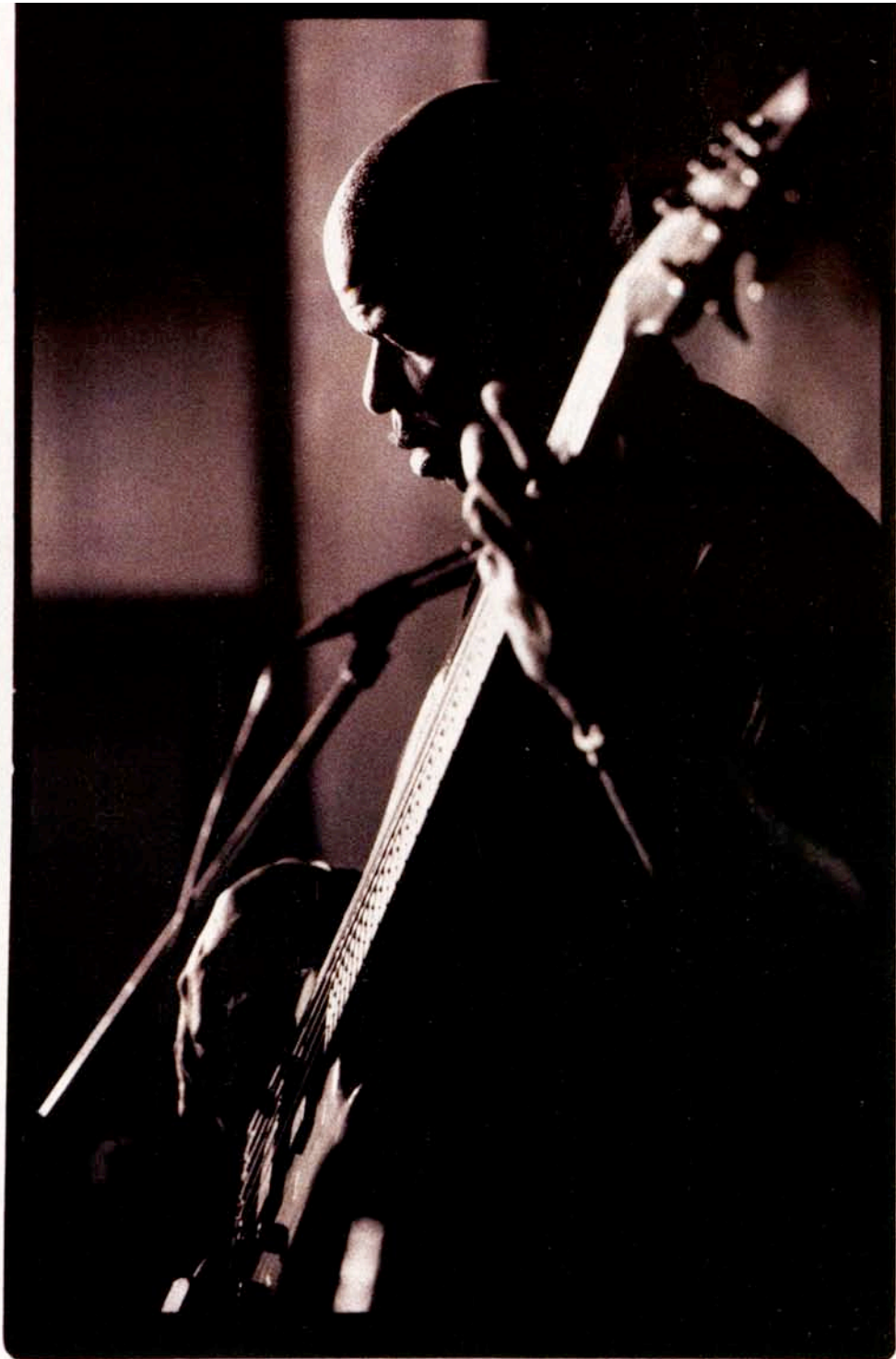
Carl lays down his grooves with Modulus 4-, 5-, and 6-string basses. "Lately, my favorite is the Modulus VJ4 4-string with Villex passive J pickups. I'm using a Modulus Quantum 5 as well." His road to Modulus was a gradual one. "I started playing on a '64 Fender Jazz Bass with bright strings. That's the sound I grew accustomed to: deep with a bright edge. When the 5-string started happening, I bought a Heartfield, which had a graphite neck with an alder body. It was good for funk, rock, reggae, anything—an all-around even

tone—and I hadn't been able to find anything like it. Then I discovered Modulus, which also was a graphite neck mixed with the wood." Carl strings all of his basses with medium-gauge DR Low Riders and sends his signal through a Boss GT-6B multi-effect and into an '89 Ampeg SVT. "I use a Crest 901 power amp to give me a boost. My speakers are four stacked Wayne Jones 2x10s—the sound is amazing."

Fresh out of the Navy, Young jumped head-first into L.A.'s world music scene, playing with Ricardo Lemvo and Louis Wasson & Combo D'Afrique before making the stylistic leap to the black rock scene. He was signed to Capitol in '91 along with singer Cree Summer in a band called

Subject To Change, but they were dropped from the label almost immediately after the record came out. The silver lining for Carl was that singer/poet Michael Franti was on the same label at the time and needed a bass player. Young recalls, "They flew me up to San Francisco for the audition, and I've been working with them since '94."

Does working with an artist as socially active as bandleader Franti add an extra challenge to the band's musicians? "Absolutely. Michael speaks from the heart, and the people who come to see us are wholeheartedly into the message—and that really affects my playing. They just draw it out of me. They're dying for it, and I give it to them the best I can every night." —Jimmy Leslie



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