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[Sandarac Bass](#)

... I've been gigging the Courtney Pine's Traditions in Transition music with "Sandy" - one of Sandarac's "Rubner" class basses, www.sandarac.co.uk



Sandarac is the exclusive distributor for Kremona Basses of Bulgaria, and a while ago he invited me to try a bass. As well as violin, viola, cello and classical guitar, Sandarac has three models of bass available: The entry level Dragonetti, the mid-range Mayer and the Rubner. I had the Rubner for a month, working with Courtney Pine, which I think is about as tough a test as you can put a bass through! Courtney Pine's marathon 2 hour sets are the stuff of legend, and I can say from experience that there is no let up in the walking bass, bass grooves, and even bass solos! It's one thing to try an instrument out in the controlled environment of a shop or studio, but how it responds with 500 people watching under full stage lights and amplification 15 nights in a row, is what I call an acid test.



And although the music is fast, my action (the height of the strings from the fingerboard) remains high, to get that driving powerful pulse, which means digging in hard. I found the bass handled this comfortably. The weight of the wood involved means that the bass can take a licking and keep on ticking! The bass was fitted with medium Thomastik Dominant strings for the tour, although I felt that the instrument was sturdy enough to support an even heavier string for that real thumping, punchy bass sound.

Of course having heavy strings is only one part of the equation; you also have to have a bass that can resonate with the string and pay respect to the vibrations produced. This was the most satisfying element of playing the Rubner bass for me. I've seen a lot of vague descriptions about "tone" in bass reviews, so I will explain to you specifically what I mean. To me, "Tone" is the

character of an instrument, the nuances, the vibrations of the whole instrument that can be heard irrespective of volume or amplification. It is in essence a fingerprint of the instrument's manufacturing process.



It is a testament to the Sandarac bass that through varying styles of music – Tango, Polka, bebop, South African Township, jazz ballad and more - the tone of the bass was pleasant, and could be heard. What I mean by this is this: I could hear the same frequencies and timbres whether Robbie Fordjour's cymbals were splashing away, or whether Omar Puentes's Electric Violins were turned up to the max right beside me, or whether Alex Wilson was playing an intricate reharmonisation at quarter volume on Yamaha grand piano.

My Mark Bass "Traveller" 2x 10 Cab and Little Mark II Amp combined to reproduce the tone faithfully because it was there to be reproduced. On most of the gigs I was able to leave the EQ flat, or in fact, roll off a little of the bottom end. It wasn't needed. There was enough character and

presence in the mid range of the instrument without it being nasal. This also meant I didn't need all the power of my 4×10 cab, which I had used on previous tours, which of course made loading in and out even easier!

The best was yet to come. You can typically find this tonal characteristic on one or two areas of any bass – typically in ½ position to 3rd Position on the upper strings. The Rubner (“or Sandy –we’ d begun to get intimate by this stage!) produced this characteristic pretty much all over the bass, including fifth and sixth position on the E and A Strings, and beyond. This is an important place to check for “wolf notes” – notes which don't resonate as clearly as others, despite same or similar pressure being applied.

There was more. In his compositions Courtney Pine has written a fair amount of both Arco and glissando playing. I was pleased to find that the Rubner sustains individual notes very well in all registers, which enabled me to double-stop slide from ½ position into sixth position and beyond without the volume of either note decreasing. The notes that I ended on would also sustain comfortably. This was also evident in the arco playing, which meant that I could concentrate on keeping the bow moving fluidly, rather than worry about whether the upper register would speak!

For the bulk of the tour I used a Fishman Full Circle Pickup with A Mark Bass Little Mark II amplifier and a Mark Bass 2×10 standard Cab. I found this particular combination to be very satisfying. More than a step in the right direction, it represents a quantum leap for me in terms of finding that Taylormade tone.

But it's not all about me. It's about making everybody else's job easier. And by common consensus, the bass did this. Having a sustainable tone independent of volume, meant that 1) the band could play quieter, and everyone could still hear themselves which means 2) the on-stage sound engineer can drive the monitors a lot quieter, and there are less frequencies to cut back 3) the Front of House engineer has less interference from the on stage sound. Well, that's it for now.