

Ellis Nolan
Miller Arts Scholars Fourth Year Arts Award Application
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Purchasing a high-quality Upright Bass

Playing the upright bass has been my main musical performance focus for about two years now. As an instrument that's pretty tall and has a low voice, I think I relate to it on a personal level. Before I played upright, I played electric bass, and I primarily played jazz music, and pretty much every time I was offered a gig, I would get asked "do you also play upright?" and, of course, at the time I had to say "no." I'm really glad I started learning since then, though. I've found the upright bass fits in much better with the types of jazz I usually play, and contrary to what I expected I've found it a lot more ergonomic and comfortable to play than my electric bass. I also think having to practice upright technique like Simandl has improved my electric bass playing astronomically. While I've been back on Grounds, I have been taking upright lessons with Pete Spaar, playing in the jazz Big Band, and playing in Mike Rosensky's Friday small group. For all of those activities/ensembles, I use one of UVA's basses that has a pickup installed so I can play the bass through an amplifier.

The issue that I've run into is that whenever I've had a gig opportunity to play jazz or something else conducive to upright bass (for example, I play bass in the Salsa club band) I'm not able to use the school bass, and thus have to use my electric. Furthermore, in my current situation, I can only practice when I'm able to get into Old Cabell Hall, where the school bass is. When I'm back home in New York, I have to rent a bass to be able to practice, and while I've found some good options, most of the basses I've been able to rent have action (string height off of the fretboard) so high it renders the bass almost unplayable, especially for jazz pizzicato. Moreover, I can't usually add a pickup to those basses, and if I can, they usually don't sound very good, which then brings me back to playing my electric bass for recording or gigging at home, even if playing upright would be more suitable. Finally, as Professor Spaar has told me in our lessons, being able to play the same instrument from rehearsal to rehearsal, practice session to practice session, etc. actually helps players' intonation develop, because you get to know where your thumb needs to stop for each position on the same bass neck every time you play.

It's for all of the above reasons I am applying for this Arts Award so that I can buy a good quality upright for my own use here at UVA, at home, at gigs, and for recording. This purchase will allow me to practice on a more consistent basis, as well as put to use the technique and new skills I've been learning these past two years outside of just UVA ensembles. Furthermore, in all my playing with this new instrument, I won't have to guess as much with intonation, since I'll have been playing the same bass in the practice room as in the rehearsal room or on stage.

Should my application be approved, my plan is to visit David Gage String Instruments in New York over the Summer (upon Professor Spaar's recommendation) to "test-drive" some basses, ideally for at least a couple days before making any final decisions, and then purchasing one, hopefully in late May, when I'll be back in New York. That way, I'll be able to play the bass in any gigs I have or any recordings I do over the Summer, and I'll also have it ready when UVA Jazz Small Groups and Big Band start up again in the Fall.

From doing some research of my own, as well as talking to Professor Spaar and other upright players I know who have their own uprights, it seems that basses around the \$3000 mark are sufficient for a player such as myself in that they will have a good setup, a consistent, quality sound, and will be consistently playable. Unfortunately, I think the nature of musical instruments and how different instruments connect with different people prevents me from nailing down a more definite cost, but around that price point seems to be what I should be looking at. Furthermore, if my application is approved and I purchase a bass, I would also want to install a pickup in it, as well as get a case for it if one is not included, which I have accounted for in my budget (In my budget I've chosen the Fishman Full Circle Bass Pickup, as it has stellar reviews online and I've played other bassists' basses with that pickup installed and enjoyed the sound greatly). Of course, should I go over-budget, I would pay any expenses past \$3000 out of pocket.

For my outcomes presentation, I would record myself playing a few tunes or solo pieces, as well as show videos of myself playing at gigs with the bass or with the Big Band/Small Groups.

Timeline

Summer 2022 (Likely around May 12-28)

- Drive back home to New York
- Visit David Gage Stringed Instruments and try different basses
- Purchase upright bass (If not in May, continue looking in New York or Charlottesville later in the Summer. Also I have transported upright basses in my car before and so that won't be an issue)
- (If bass purchased in May) Play bass at gigs with Recorda Gang (my personal jazz quartet) in New York/Northern Virginia, for Bolling Suite in Charlottesville, and Charlottesville jazz gigs
- Practice with new bass!

Fall 2022

- Play new bass in Jazz Big Band and Small Groups, as well as in private lessons and practice
- Record some playing samples for Outcomes Presentation

Spring 2023

- Continue to play new bass in Jazz Big Band and Small Groups, private lessons and practice
- Present recordings in Outcomes presentation

Proposed Budget

Item	Cost
¾ Scale Upright Bass	≈\$3000
Fishman Full Circle Upright Bass Pickup	\$239.95 from Sweetwater (Link)
Upright Bass Case (If not included in cost of bass)	\$172.50 from Gollihur Music (Link)

Total ≈ \$3412.45

(To reiterate, I would pay any costs over \$3000 out of pocket)

Evidence of Participation in the Arts

Since my first year at UVA I've played in the Jazz Small Groups, first playing guitar and electric bass and now upright bass. This past semester I performed on upright and electric bass with jazz small groups organized by Michael McNulty at both the Music Library and Alumni Hall. I have also taken private lessons almost every semester that I've been at UVA, first starting on guitar, and then switching to Upright bass while I was at home quarantining. In Winter 2021, I started playing with the University Salsa Club House Band, playing electric bass. Furthermore, starting Fall 2021, I've rehearsed and performed with UVA's jazz Big Band on upright. Also starting Fall 2021, I've played electric bass professionally with various bands such as Orion and the Melted Crayons at Charlottesville venues such as Crozet Pizza and Hark Vineyards.

Additionally, I've had a strong interest in recording since my first year, and since being at UVA I've posted numerous recorded music projects on my YouTube channel and Bandcamp page. I also recently started another project recording Charlottesville artists playing stripped-down live sets in the WXTJ Student Radio studio (reminiscent of NPR's Tiny Desk Concerts). Finally, I am a music major, and I have also applied to create a Distinguished Major Project in music, where I would be recording jazz-inspired songs to tape.

As far as my participation in the Arts Scholars Program, I had the pleasure of taking CASS 1010 in the Fall of 2021. Since then I've regularly gigged and collaborated with fellow Arts Scholars Elie Bashkow and Michael McNulty, and I'm currently working on the composition team for

Max Tankersly's project "Bardic Inspiration." I'm planning on taking CASS 1011 in the Spring of 2023 due to a class conflict I had this semester, and I'm looking forward to having more discussions with my fellow Arts Scholars!

I am endlessly grateful for the opportunities I've had through participating in Miller Arts Scholars, and to the committee for considering my application. I'm very much looking forward to hearing from you.