

Ellis Nolan

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Fall 2022 Minigrant Proposal

5 String Electric Bass

The role of a bassist in most contexts is defining the chord, i.e. playing the root note or playing a note that implies a different chord based on the notes the guitarist or pianist is playing. However, the range of a 4 string electric bass can be limiting towards this goal. If I'm playing a song in Eb, for example, "I Wish" by Stevie Wonder, if I want to play the root note of the song, Eb, I'm playing in a range that potentially is interfering with the range of the guitar or the piano. This can be useful for certain musical moments; I've learned over my time playing that usually playing the higher octave of certain notes in quieter moments of songs makes playing the lower notes more impactful when the band gets loud again. The question then becomes "what if the lowest note is Eb or Db or C?" and so on and so forth, since the lowest note on a 4 string bass is an E. 5 string basses solve this issue to a large extent by providing a low B string below the low E string, while also preserving the higher register that bassists use for double stops and soloing.

Recently, I had the opportunity to borrow one of my friends' 5 string bass, since I recently started playing in a church band, where almost every song is in Eb or Db. I've found that having an extra string doesn't mess with my technique that much, and being able to hit a low Eb or Db in important moments makes the ensemble sound a lot better. There's also something about the bass being able to go into lower frequencies that seems to let the bass "get out of the way" of guitars and piano mix-wise, meaning the frequencies each instrument produces don't clash. I've also found 5 string suits particular recordings better as well, partially because it tends to sound more "modern" than a 4 string, which certain sub-genres of RnB, Rap, Rock, and even Jazz call for. Of course, a skilled bassist can get a 4 string to work even where a 5 string would be more appropriate, but that's more to the point of what having multiple instrument options is about - certain jobs call for certain tools, and having the right tools for the job is the first step to doing great work.

There are a lot of high quality, giggable 5 string bass options available in the \$500 range. I regularly see Fender Standard Jazz Bass V's on Reverb (an online used musical instrument marketplace) for \$450-\$500. I've also played basses from Music Man's Sterling series that are around \$400 new; Ibanez also has a lot of high quality 5 string basses. That being said, the advice I always have been given and that I always give about purchasing a new instrument is to always play it before purchasing. This is particularly important for me since 5 string basses can be quite a bit heavier than 4 string basses, and the necks can be varied in how they're shaped -

two qualities that only really can be judged in person. Thus, my plan is to visit a few music stores in Richmond or while I'm home in New York, play a lot of different basses and then make a decision after that.

I plan on continuing to learn more about bass from Professor Spaar, practicing, and playing in ensembles with my friends. I'm happy to have had a lot of opportunities to play electric bass this past year and I think that purchasing a 5 string bass will help me better serve many of the groups I play with. I am very grateful to the committee for considering my proposal, and I look forward to hearing from you!

Budget

5 String Electric Bass - \$500*

Based on these examples (recommended by other professional bassists):

<https://www.sweetwater.com/store/detail/MMV35TS--sire-marcus-miller-v3-5-string-bass-guitar-tobacco-sunburst>

<https://www.sweetwater.com/store/detail/RAY5HHLBM--sterling-by-music-man-stingray-ray5h-h-bass-guitar-lake-blue-metallic>

<https://www.sweetwater.com/store/detail/TRBX505TWH--yamaha-trbx505-trans-white>

*Any amount over \$500 to pay for a bass I would pay out of my own pocket.