

Ellis Nolan
Fourth Year Arts Award Outcome Statement
Faculty Advisor - Pete Spaar

Purchasing an Upright Bass

As I stated in my project proposal, I wanted to purchase my own upright bass so that I could have an easier time practicing for ensembles and so that I could record and play gigs on upright. Unfortunately but probably expectedly, I should preface this statement by saying I wasn't quite prepared for where this project would take me and how much time it would take. Nevertheless, I'm very happy and excited about where I ended up.

My original plan was to visit two well-known double bass dealers, Kolstein's and David Gage, while I was visiting my family in New York over summer break, and purchase an upright bass at one of those stores. However, the first bass I played and considered purchasing was while I was in Nashville, at a guitar store called Carter Vintage. The bass I tried was a 1940s Kay M-1, which I thought played very well and sounded very good, but I was hesitant to purchase it since I was pretty far from home (in case I needed to return it) and since at the time it seemed like a bad idea to purchase the first bass I tried! Later in the summer, I visited Kolsteins, which didn't have any basses in my price range, but was helpful in that I was able to play many different basses and got a better idea of what I was looking for. That being said, on that same trip, David Gage had a few basses I could afford made by Samuel Shen. I ended up taking one Shen back to Charlottesville with me on loan so I could show my bass teacher and advisor, Professor Spaar. Although I liked the sound of the Shen, Professor Spaar told me he thought the neck was a little bit too big for playing jazz, and noted a couple issues with the tone of the bass, which I took into account and ended up returning that bass.

Ironically, when I went to David Gage, Matthew, the luthier who I ended up working with to purchase that first bass, showed me a bass that he had sold recently but he thought would have suited my budget and specifications. What kind of bass was it? A Kay M-1 of course. Professor Spaar also told me he thought a Kay would be good for my budget and playing specifications when I mentioned I had played one in Nashville. Thus, I kept my eyes out for my further searches. Once the school year began, it became a lot more difficult to search for basses. I regularly checked the websites of two bass dealers I found out from Randall Pharr, a bassist in Richmond/Charlottesville, as well as Craigslist and Reverb. At one point I was going to visit one of the bass dealers in Plains, Virginia, as they had a Kay for sale, but unfortunately it sold before I could visit and try it out. I ended up going to David Gage again and trying some other basses they had newly acquired over winter break, but unfortunately none of them were very comfortable to play. Finally, in February, I saw a listing on Reverb for a 1944 Kay C1 (similar to the M-1) in Fredericksburg for \$1500, which I ended up purchasing after playing it for a while a few days later.

While the bass I ended up purchasing sounds and plays very well, I still need to have some work done on it (as is common with pretty much every upright purchase to my knowledge). Thus

far, I've been able to practice and record with my new instrument, but unfortunately it needs a couple components installed before I can gig with it. Furthermore, with classes and other gigs happening I haven't been able to spend multiple days in a row to have the work done on the bass. That being said, I'm hopeful that I will have some more recordings and gig pictures with the bass to present for my outcomes presentation, since as I'm writing this I have an appointment later this week to have my bass worked on by a luthier at Bass Violin Shop in North Carolina. Overall, I'm very excited to now own such a unique and vintage instrument that will help me improve as an upright bass player!

Here are some videos and recordings of me playing my bass:

<https://youtube.com/shorts/s7-1Z8su020?feature=share>

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wjcAkKglauot9bNC0vInhW5Ej8CiCmxw/view?usp=share_link

Final Budget

1944 Kay C-1 Upright Bass - \$1,578

Thomastik-Infeld Spirocore Upright Bass Strings (Standard upright strings for jazz) - \$260

Endpin - \$180

Endpin Installation - \$60

Bridge Adjusters Installation - \$250

David Gage Realist LifeLine Upright Bass Pickup - \$240

Radial ToneBone BassBone OD Dual Channel Bass Preamp (preamp for running upright bass through an electric bass amp and for switching between upright and electric bass) - \$460

I have now been able to accept multiple recording opportunities due to having my own upright bass, and as I stated earlier I have been able to practice a lot more due to having a bass in my living space as well as being able to take it home over breaks. I have no doubt that this resource will continue to help me become a better upright bass player and a better musician, as well as leading to me being able to say yes to more music gigs. I wouldn't have been able to take advantage of any of those opportunities without the generous support of the Miller Arts Scholars program, and for that I am endlessly grateful.

Pictures



My 1944 Kay C1

NYC



Playing a John Juzek bass at David Gage in



A 1941 Kay M1 at Carter Vintage



Playing more basses at Kolstein's!