

# Fiddlesticks!

**Clifton Mini-Upright Bass Mk2:** A compact hand-built upright four-string bass from one of the UK's top luthiers.

**O**VER THE PAST FEW YEARS, many professional and amateur bass guitarists have taken the plunge and bought double basses. Despite the sometimes huge initial outlay, there's an obvious economic reason for this: more people want to hear or see this fascinating and unique-sounding instrument in bands and shows. Every area of music, from drum'n'bass to rockabilly to Glenn Miller now cries out for one; it's that simple. What isn't so simple is the long process of trying to learn a whole new technique, covering a much longer string length on a large, bulky, upright instrument. The double bass is also notoriously difficult to amplify successfully, plus you'll definitely want to use a bow at some point. Any answers?

Well, one way to get around the problem seems quite acceptable – use an electric upright bass with the same string length as a double bass. But what if you're a bass guitar player first

and foremost; someone who longs for the look and sound of a double, but are put off by the leap from 34 to that big old 42-inch scale? Enter Mo Clifton.

## Short but sweet

The Clifton Mini-Upright bass is a compact, four-stringed instrument with a comfortable 36-inch scale, which is an easy reach for most bass guitarists.

It's only a couple of inches longer, after all, but as the Renault girl seems so eager to let us know, those extra millimetres give more v-v-voom. Well, more resonance anyway, particularly on the bottom string.

On this model, the headstock is a simplified 'boxed' version of the usual double bass scroll, with added flamed maple side panels and Schaller machineheads – the design makes access very easy for tuning and changing strings. This bass comes with 1/4 size Thomastik Spirocore strings as standard, which more or less guarantees a real double bass growl. An ebony nut is used here, which means that all the component parts match the best found on double basses. The top-grade

ebony fingerboard can be made more bass guitar friendly by the addition of dots and/or lines, either along its side or down the face – double bassists wouldn't thank you for any marks on their 42-inch fingerboards, but for some reason shorter-scale instruments seem to benefit from help of this kind.

The D-shaped rock maple neck is attached to the body with six bolts, making a very tight fit with a rubber between the back of the neck and the body. A body support is supplied and this can be angled to the position that best fits the player's body, to stop the bass from rotating while you're playing.

The strings go over an adjustable, mini double bass bridge to a short ebony tailpiece. This is then attached to the tubular stainless steel endpin assembly by a steel hawser. A channel for the endpin is left on view at the back of the mahogany body, though I think

a cover over the routing would finish the job a lot better. Of course this also means that less hardwood is used in the construction of the body, but whether this has any discernible effect on tone is hard to say. I particularly like the flamed maple facing on this example, though.

One ingenious addition to the bass is a small bracket at the top of the body under the support. This can be rested on a small hook that fits onto any standard mic stand. Figuring out where to rest a double bass can be the



Side markers help you find your way around the fretless board

Sliding pickup helps you achieve your preferred sounds





Clifton's distinctive 'box' headstock with Schaller tuners

## CLIFTON

PLAYABILITY	●●●●●
SOUND	●●●●●
VALUE FOR MONEY	●●●●●
VERDICT	●●●●●

**WE LIKED** Excellent build quality, superb pickup tones, easy transport.  
**WE DIDN'T LIKE** Open channel in the back.

player's life, but this support means you can safely leave the instrument out of harm's way.

### Rail travel

When Mo Clifton approached Kent Armstrong to build a custom pickup for the original version of this bass, he asked him to mould one with holes in so that it could be placed on rails – the idea being to find the optimum position for the pickup between bridge and neck. As there were several different usable tones that resulted from being able to move the pickup easily, Mo decided to offer Kent's sliding pickup as standard. So, with just one pickup you can quickly change from a deep, percussive double bass thump to a singing fretless tone with the minimum of hassle – be careful not to force the pickup to either end of its travel on the rails, though. Some of the early Dan Armstrong bass guitars (Dan was Kent's dad, if you weren't already aware of

The body support stops the bass from swivelling away



the Gibson Grabber, so it's not a far-fetched or new-fangled idea.

Mo Clifton's craftsmanship is always excellent and this bass is a 'Mini' work of art.

### Fiddlesticks?

The Clifton Mini-Upright would be the answer to a lot of musicians' needs – perhaps even a guitarist who wanted to try bass in a rather less conventional way. One of the few upright basses that plays consistently well across its range, the instrument can also be bowed nice and easily – so at the other end of the scale, perhaps this would be a good stepping-off point to a 'proper' double bass.

At just £1,420 it's fantastic value, but the best thing about the Clifton is that it's a convincing bass in its own right. And what more could any bull-fiddler wish?

Guitarist would like to thank Mark Sutton for the loan of this instrument.



This bracket turns a standard mic stand into a bass stand

### Spec check

#### CLIFTON MINI-UPRIGHT BASS MK2

- ORIGIN:** UK
- BODY:** Mahogany with flamed maple facing
- FINGERBOARD:** Ebony with optional dots or lines on edge or face
- MACHINEHEADS:** Schaller
- NECK:** Maple
- PICKUPS:** Custom magnetic by Kent Armstrong (on rails)
- NUT:** Ebony
- TAILPIECE:** Ebony
- GIGBAG:** Woven, padded and showerproof
- SCALE LENGTH:** 36" (914mm)
- WEIGHT:** 6 kg (14lb)
- CONTACT:** Mo Clifton: 020 8858 7795
- EMAIL:** mo@cliftonbass.freemove.co.uk

### The rivals

- NS-CR4 UEB2 **£1495**
- Basslines Universal **£1950**
- Vektor Bassett **£2650**