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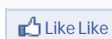
Features

## Top 10 Bass Players Who Handle Lead Vocals

Russell Hall | 07.08.2013



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It's remarkable how uncommon it is to see a bass player handling lead vocal duties. Fifty years ago Paul McCartney set a precedent for the dual-role, but more often the bass player lingers in the shadows, holding down the rhythm section while maintaining a low profile. Below are ten sensational rockers who've sang lead while plucking four strings. Be sure to chime in with other bassist-singers in the comments section.

### Gene Simmons (KISS)

Simmons' pragmatism – he's the main force behind KISS's marketing empire – figured into his decision to take up the bass. "I could see clearly that if I wanted to be in a band, maybe I should play bass, since there were fewer bass players [than guitarists]," he told *Gibson*, in 2012. "Of course, some of the bass players for the biggest bands in the world started out as guitar players. Being able to play guitar gives you a different perspective as a bass player."

### Phil Lynott (Thin Lizzy)

Combined with the band's dual-lead guitar format, Phil Lynott's singing, songwriting *and* bass-playing gave Thin Lizzy their distinctively exciting sound. To this day, "The Boys are Back in Town" and "Jailbreak" remain staples of classic-rock radio. Fittingly, a life-size bronze statue of Lynott was unveiled in his native Dublin in 2005.

### Greg Lake (Emerson Lake & Palmer)

After first making his mark with King Crimson, Greg Lake spearheaded the prog-rock movement with his pioneering work in Emerson Lake & Palmer. Though primarily a bassist, he also played acoustic and electric guitar, wrote the trio's best-known songs and handled all production duties for the band. "From the Beginning" remains essential learning for all aspiring acoustic players.

### Sting (The Police)

Sting's celebrity status and his musical eclecticism sometimes overshadow his skills as a bassist. He once explained his philosophy about the instrument to *Bass Player* magazine. "On the bass you lead the band dynamically ... harmonically," he said. "So I can have a lot of power without feeling like I'm dictating. It's not apparent to a lot of people what the bass does; if you listen superficially, you might not even hear it. But once you've played the bass in an ensemble, you realize exactly what it's doing."

### Benjamin Orr (The Cars)

Ric Ocasek gets the bulk of attention, but the role Benjamin Orr played in the success of The Cars cannot be overstated. "Just What I Needed," "Let's Go" and "Drive" are among the classics on which he sang lead vocals, often with a poignancy that contrasted with Ocasek's sense of irony. The outpouring of tributes that came in the wake of Orr's death – he succumbed to pancreatic cancer in 2000, at age 53 – attest to the mark he left on fans and peers.

### Lemmy Kilmister (Motorhead)

Lemmy Kilmister's distinctive bass playing – which derives partly from his early experience as a rhythm guitarist -- helped shape the direction of thrash-metal and punk rock. Often modifying his bass with Gibson Thunderbird



pickups, the Motorhead veteran embraces volume (as in "loud") as a primary sonic doctrine. Expressing his admiration for Kilmister, Foo Fighters' Dave Grohl once said, "Lemmy's the king of rock and roll. He's a living, breathing ... legend. No one else comes close."

### Geddy Lee (Rush)

Metallica's Cliff Burton and Iron Maiden's Steve Harris are among the many bassists who've cited Rush's Geddy Lee as a primary influence. "In the past, I wrote bass patterns that were connected to the vocals in a way that allowed me to do it live without killing myself or tying my brain into a pretzel," Lee told *Premier Guitar* last year. "For *Clockwork Angels* [Rush's latest album], I let that go because I just felt it was better for the music to go where it needed to, and worry about the best possible vocal melody for the song afterwards."

### Jack Bruce (Cream)



If Jack Bruce's career had consisted of nothing more than his work in Cream, his preeminent place in rock history would still be assured. Classic tracks such as "Sunshine of Your Love," "White Room" and "I Feel Free" remain essential touchstones for anyone who aspires to play heavy blues-rock. Playing his Cream-era Gibson EB-3, Bruce deeply impacted players as diverse as Sting and Geddy Lee.

### Roger Waters (Pink Floyd)

Following the sad melt-down of original Pink Floyd frontman Syd Barrett, Roger Waters stepped up to become the band's conceptual leader and driving force. Fans of Floyd tend to fall squarely into either the Waters camp or the Dave Gilmour camp, but the band's best work was done when chemistry sparked between both men. Subtle and never flashy, Water's bass playing was to prog-rock what Bill Wyman's was to rock and roll.

### Paul McCartney (The Beatles)

It's a safe bet that Paul McCartney, more than any other musician, inspired legions of aspiring rockers to gravitate to the bass. No bass player has ever been more adept at serving the composition at hand with fluid, melodic lines, while never losing sight of the instrument's main role in the rhythm section. Simply put, every player who's emerged in the last 50 years owes an incalculable debt to the former Beatle.

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 **Billy Slick** 4 days ago


Rick Danko from The Band sang lead vocals on Stage Fright and sang great harmonies, but I definitely have to give big praise to the man, Glenn Hughes..... I recently worked a benefit gig with him at the Whisky a Go Go and he still belts it out like a badass, also I have to give praise to Tim Bogart from Vanilla Fudge, that guy has no equal, and then there's Dusty Hill from ZZ Top he's been known to do some lead vocals now and then, and of course James Dewar from the Robin Trower Band, he deserves all the respect in the bassist/vocalist world.

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 **richiebub** 4 days ago

Yep, remembering Entwistle singing "My Wife" from Who's Next ...

6 people liked this.  

 **richiebub** 4 days ago

Just realized that Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys also wasn't mentioned. On stage, he was the bass player in the 60s