

BASS OF TOMORROW

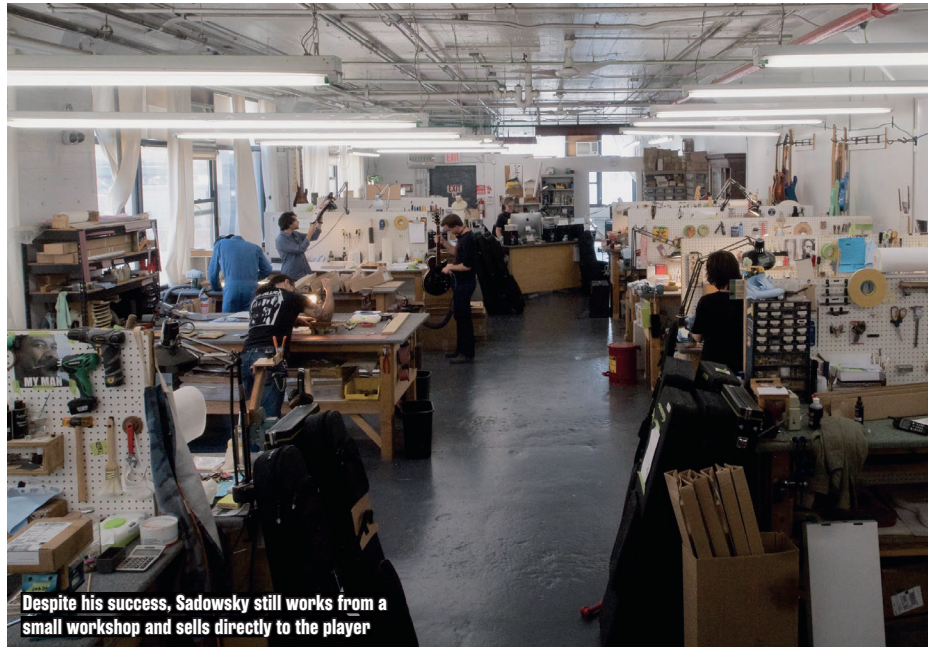
For close to 50 years, the great Roger Sadowsky has crafted instrument after wonderful instrument — and his hunger to create is still far from satiated. Hywel Davies catches up with the master

There are legends of the bass game, and then there's Roger Sadowsky. A lifetime at the worktable has garnered him a reputation that most of us could only dream of. Starting up back in the early 70s making acoustic guitars with Augie LoPrinzi of LoPrinzi Guitars, it was in 1982 that he began to make basses for the first time, having worked on a Fender Jazz for a 17-year-old Marcus Miller two years prior. His mantra is simple, direct and elegant: "Roger... don't fuck up!"

"Marcus asked me to make his '77 J-Bass the best it could be," recalls Sadowsky. "I suggested we retrue and refret the fingerboard, put on a better bridge and install an active tone circuit. He gave me the green light and I like to say that the rest is history. I owe a lot to Marcus as well as to Will Lee for putting me on the map in the bass world."

"I think the most important thing I learned back then was how important proper jigs, templates and power tools are to make a consistently fine instrument," he adds. "One needs to keep notes of what you did at every step so you can go back and look at what you did when you build the next one."

Have CITES regulations affected him significantly? "I used to love to use mammoth ivory or fossilised walrus ivory for nuts, but they're now banned in New York State, as part of the elephant



Despite his success, Sadowsky still works from a small workshop and sells directly to the player

ivory ban. It was a bit of a pain to apply for the master permit, but now that I have it, getting approval for the CITES shipments is not that difficult. The good thing is that there are many great alternative woods and they are now being used more and more."

Picking a defining career moment or a most important instrument is not a black-and-white issue for Sadowsky. "That's like saying, 'Which of your children is most important to you?'" he answers, adding that: "I had an epiphany about 40 years ago. As much as I love the process of building an instrument, in the end, it's an inanimate object that cannot love me back. The 'cheese' at the end of the maze is the person who's receiving the instrument I made. That is why I try to deal directly with my clients as much as possible. The smile on their faces when they play, the email I get a week later, the post I see on Facebook — that is where all of the satisfaction from my work comes from."

That satisfaction must be a heady drug, because the Sadowsky is showing no sign of stopping. It's his fifth decade as a luthier, but slowing down has never been on the cards. "I just plan to stay healthy and continue to do what I'm doing until I drop dead at my workbench. I don't understand retirement. I love what I do. I don't like Florida and I don't play golf!"

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Sadowsky's hallmarks are clean, classic design, unrivalled quality, and a mastery of both woodworking and electronics

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