

## Studio pro Matt Bissonette

“Diving Deep,” July 2000

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‘You know how it is with jazz-fusion records,’ says Matt Bissonette. ‘You can pretty much light yourself on fire and it doesn’t matter. So we said, ‘Let’s just light ourselves on fire and see if anybody likes it!’” The result, drummer Gregg Bissonette’s *Submarine* [Favored Nations], is a track-by-track collaboration with ten of the brothers’ favorite guitarists—and a showcase for the diverse grooves and songwriting skills of Matt, who wrote the music and lyrics, sang backup vocals, and produced the album.

A Detroit native who studied classical and jazz bass at North Texas State in the late ’70s, Bissonette got his first big break with Maynard Ferguson in ’81. He subsequently toured with Sheena Easton and David Lee Roth, worked at Island Records as a staff composer, and recorded with Julian Lennon, Christopher Cross, and Bette Midler. Both brothers appeared on guitarist Joe Satriani’s *The Extremist*, *Time Machine*, and *Joe Satriani* albums, all on Relativity.

*Submarine* includes the psychedelic pseudo-standard “Lum Lum” (on which Matt plays his ’61 Kay), the Robben Ford-drenched blues of “Cloudy Day,” the 16th-note burner “So Many Notes & So Little Time,” and Latin big-band swinger “No Hay Parqueo,” featuring the Break Wind and Fired Horns—Matt on trombone and Gregg on trumpet. Matt uses a wide spectrum of tones to support each guitarist, from his grinding, picked line on the title track to the fretless double-stops on the closer. Together, the brothers negotiate tricky time-signature and dynamics changes with

authority—testament to the thousands of gigs they’ve done together since their mid teens. Matt overcame a different kind of challenge when he recorded and overdubbed the beautiful bass/piano duet “12 to 3”: “I wrote that tune on piano, and the hardest thing was trying to play the piano line so it sounded like it was out of time—but playing with a click so I could overdub the fretless and so it would go into the next tune. That was about the most brainiac thing on the album. Everything else was just jamming,” he laughs.

“Gregg likes variety. One of the things we love most is not being locked into one kind of music,” says Matt, who helped recruit Satriani, Michael Landau, Steve Vai, and others for *Submarine*. “We knew who’d be right for certain tunes, but one of the hardest things was deciding which song to give to which guitarist. Any of those guys could have smoked on any of them.”

Bass and drum tracks for *Submarine* were recorded in one day, mostly with Matt’s early-’80s fretted and fretless Yamaha BB5000s. To cut through the wall of guitars, he used a heavy pick on some tunes. Bissonette also plays a ’64 J-Bass, a ’67 Hofner, an Epiphone Viola bass, a ’91 Chris Squire Limited Edition Rickenbacker 4001CS, and a mid-’70s Rickenbacker 4001, all strung with medium-light Dean Markley American Flyers. He usually records direct. On the road, he uses an Ampeg SVT head with a 4x10 and 1x15; for smaller gigs, he prefers a Walter Woods 1,000-watt head and a 4x10, all connected with Whirlwind cables. He’s been using a Bossa 5-string on tour with Rick Springfield.

For all his formidable technique, Bissonette remains humble about his career and goals. “I never really wanted to be the world’s greatest bass player. I just wanted to excel at songwriting and work as much as I could. My goal was to be able to play anything and

not be embarrassed that I couldn't do it. I thank God every day that I can support myself and my family playing bass.”

—***E.E. Bradman***