

Cameroonian virtuoso Richard Bona

“Road Report,” August 2001

The player: Richard Bona, who first picked up bass in his native Cameroon after hearing a club owner’s copy of *Jaco Pastorius* [Sony]. Since his arrival in Paris in 1988 and subsequent move to New York in 1995, the 34-year-old has been a busy session and touring star with Joe Zawinul, Manu Dibango, Bob James, Harry Belafonte, and others.

The tour: Bona’s band—Israeli guitarist Oz Noy, Suriname native Etienne Stadwijk on keyboards, Brooklyn-born drummer Nathaniel Townsley, and Seattle-based saxophonist Aaron Heick—hit Santa Cruz, California, after five nights in Seattle. The Kuumbwa Jazz Center was the second stop on the group’s April-to-August U.S. tour.

The show: The band arrived at 11:30 the morning of the show, soundchecked just after noon, and performed before an audience of over 150 grade-school students at 1:30. The hour-long show was the center’s first music workshop aimed at “exposing children to the creative and imaginative aspects of music performance,” and the kids loved it. Twelve-year-old Britney put it best: “I like the music, and I like the beat. When they do a CD, I’m buying it.” The audience that packed Kuumbwa later that evening for two sets—the first at 7:30—expressed the same enthusiasm for Bona and the band.

The gear: Bona ran his Fodera 5 and fretless Pensa-Suhr 4, both strung with DR Hi-Beams, through Kuumbwa’s house system, an SWR 350 head, and SWR Goliath III 4x10. He made colorful use of an Akai Headrush E-1 Tape Echo, Ernie Ball volume

pedal, Boss LMB-3 Bass Limiter/Enhancer, Ibanez Tonebok DE-7 delay pedal, and a Prescription Electronics Depth Charge distortion pedal. Bona tuned up with an Akai T1 Tune Lock.

The style and sound: Clearly inspired by Jaco, Bona's punchy, back-pickup sound is well complemented by his soaring, angelic singing voice. He also makes great use of thumb-muting, slapping, harmonics, tapping, percussive finger work, capo, and chordal techniques; he effortlessly segued between odd-time West African grooves, blazing bebop, tumbao, reggae, straight-up funk, and solo accompaniment. Bona's humorous interludes, audience interaction, and dazzling chops kept the audience intrigued and laughing until the band left the stage around midnight.

The future: Bona remains tight-lipped about his highly anticipated second solo album, due in September. He'll also appear on upcoming releases by Bobby McFerrin, Pat Metheny, Mike Stern, and Randy Brecker.

—E.E. Bradman