

## **Modern gospel bass pioneer Andrew Gouché**

“The Ambassador,” September 2001

By E.E. Bradman

***“Most people thought the bass was nothing but the keyboard player’s left hand.”***

Watching Andrew Gouché navigate snarled L.A. traffic, one ear to a cell phone and an eye on his dash-mounted DVD screen, you get the idea he’s completely at home in the midst of chaos. At 42, Gouché has learned how to stay true to himself while doing what he does best: high-profile session and touring bass work, production, and musical direction for a cavalcade of best-selling artists. For more than 20 years, he has been an A-list pop and R&B player and the most widely known bassist in gospel. “I never wanted to be like anyone else,” he says. “I did what I felt. I’ve been fired off more gigs than anyone I know, but it took a while for me to understand: Not everyone’s ready for me. And that’s cool. Some people think I play too many notes, but I did what I had to do to change how people thought about gospel bass.”

Like most gospel musicians, Andrew grew up in church, but his roots stretch further than most. As a boy, he sang in the choir of Rev. James Cleveland, who revolutionized African-American praise music in the ’50s and ’60s by using soul, R&B, and jazz in church, creating the template for today’s gospel/secular fusions. Within a year of receiving his first bass at age 14, Gouché began training at the left hand of Cleveland and his pianists. “The greatest thing that ever happened to me was that Rev. Cleveland and his church was here. Playing with James at his Gospel Music Workshops was the

ultimate promotion. That helped me learn all about music, especially chords. James always had the greatest piano players.”

Outside the church, Gouché was heavily influenced by players such as Larry Graham, Stanley Clarke, Alphonso Johnson, and the Gap Band’s Robert Wilson. By the late ’70s, his gig with Cleveland had opened many other doors. “There was a time when I was playing with the Hawkins Family, James Cleveland, the Jazz Crusaders, the Winans, and Andrae Crouch all at the same time. I was working a lot with James, visiting cities around the country four or five times a year, and I got to know a lot of people. That was a great time for me—I was doing everything, paying dues by playing in church on Sundays for \$40.”

As much acclaim as he enjoyed—including an appearance in the classic 1982 documentary *Gospel* with Cleveland and others—Gouché was itching to expand his parameters. Never one to shun secular work, he began doing disco and R&B gigs throughout New Zealand, Australia, and Japan at the dawn of the ’80s with artists such as Cheryl Lynn. “It’s a job,” he says about working with non-Christians. “Are you not going to work at the post office just because your co-workers aren’t Christians? It’s about being a light wherever you go.” Though he does have his limits. “I sang on Madonna’s *Like a Prayer*, and they wanted us to do the video. But at a certain point she was supposed to be making love to Jesus, and that’s where I drew the line.”

The diversity of Gouché’s listening and playing habits marked some of the earliest marriages of bright, modern bass tone with African-American sacred music. “Most people thought the bass was nothing but the keyboard player’s left hand, and that it was all about paying attention to the kick drum. People did not look at the bass as an

instrument that could set the tone—especially in gospel, where the singer comes first, then the keyboardist, and everything else follows.”

Gouché also credits several contemporaries with influencing the role of gospel bass, including Tim Linzy, bassist for preacher/pianist Richard Smallwood, who passed away in 1998. “He never got the recognition he deserved. Tim was one of the greatest players nobody ever knew about.” Others include Chicago-based Steve Huff, Atlanta’s Rick Carter, and L.A. session stalwarts Jimmy Neuble and Freddy Flewelen. But his favorite—on bass and drums—is Joel Smith [featured in April ’01]. “No matter what I was doing, I dropped it to go to Ed Hawkins’s Music & Arts Seminar in Oakland for one week a year. I learned so much from playing with Joel every time I went up there. It broadened my whole perspective.”

By the mid ’80s Andrew’s session and tour schedule had caught up with him, and he pulled away from the music world. “I decided I didn’t want to play music anymore, even though people kept calling me to do stuff. I got a job in a pawn shop. But I didn’t like getting up every morning and having to go to work. I quickly regained an appreciation for playing.” He went on to work with juggernauts such as Michael Jackson, Julio Iglesias, and Madonna; by the mid ’90s he was working with rap and hip-hop artists such as Coolio, Warren G., and Montell Jordan in addition to R&B and soul stars Gladys Knight & the Pips, Billy Preston, and Donna Summer. Meanwhile, his discography of several hundred gospel albums grew to include dozens of sessions with Cleveland’s Gospel Music Workshop Of America, Ben Tankard, and John P. Kee.

Almost inevitably, Gouché began to burn out again—but this time things were different. “I never wanted to lose my love of playing. I’m a Christian and believe that God will take care of me, so I quit Gladys Knight without any other gig lined up. Every

year since I left that gig, I've made more money than I made the year before." He returned in a different capacity—as a musical director, arranger, and producer for large-scale productions like the gospel play *His Woman, His Wife*, the Knott's Berry Farm Gospel Festival, McDonald's GospelFest, and his church's Easter Sunday services—held at the L.A. Forum, attended this year by 16,000 people. "I still play a lot, but you're not going to see me play behind a gospel artist unless I did all the arrangements and put the whole thing together. Now, when people call me for gigs, I refer them to one of the young cats."

Of his current projects, Gouché is most excited by Prayze Connection, a top-notch ensemble featuring jazz/classical violinist Karen Briggs, former Earth, Wind & Fire drummer Gordon Campbell, and Eric Clapton keyboardist Tim Carman. The debut recording of the band's exciting, up-to-date mix of rock, R&B, and gospel is scheduled to hit stores and video channels later this year. "I've realized in the last few years that I'm a leader, and a lot of people never get to that point. I've been blessed to be given my own stuff. I love doing my own gig, because nobody can tell me I'm playing too much or that I'm too busy."

More than 25 years after he first played in church, Gouché looks back on the on-again, off-again popularity of his chosen genre. "I've been playing long enough to see it come around again, and that's cool. Gospel's going through a phase where it's real popular. The thing is, if you're calling yourself a gospel artist, God has to get the glory out of what you're doing. It's not about you; it's about God. That's what makes the difference."

## Mo' Light

Gouché's two main basses are both MTD's—a 535 5-string and a 635 6. He uses Dean Markley SR 2000 strings, .044, .060, .080, and .095, with a .110 *B* and .030 for high *C*. “I play a lot of gospel ballads, and I like the vibrato to sound warm and pretty,” he says. Gouché also has a soft spot for high end—around 8k—and his low *A* matches a piano's lowest note. “I've been tuning down a whole-step since the '80s, because I had to play so many songs in *Eb* on my 4-string. When 5-strings came out, my ears were already used to it, so I tune my *B* down to *A*.” His rig is all SWR: a Goliath Sr. 6x10, two Goliath III 4x10s, a Mo' Bass head with a Mo' Control footswitch, an SM-900, and a Bass 750. He also uses a Raven Labs True Blue EQ. Gouché's home studio includes a host of Roland gear—two VS-1680 hard disk recorders, a JV-2080 synth module, an Alpha Juno-2 synth, a D-50, and a D-550. He also owns three Alesis ADAT LX-20s, an Alesis Masterlink ML-9600 hard disk recorder, an Akai MPC-2000 synth, and a Yamaha AN1-X analog synth.

Gouché's take on gear is straightforward and succinct: “It's not the bass—it's the player.”

## Gettin' Busy

“As musicians, we always hear certain licks we like—but I was always into melodies more than crazy licks.” Gouché showed his mastery of both melody and chops on Mary Mary’s version of the traditional spiritual “Wade in the Water,” from *Thankful*. (Andrew mistakenly received songwriting credit, but he did arrange and produce the track.) His initially sparse bass line (Ex. 1) outlines his reharmonization of the main verse while leaving space for the snare hits. His increasing embellishments propel the groove along while providing melodic counterpoint.

Ex. 2 shows the busy shuffle ostinato Gouché played behind the Gospel Music Workshop Of America National Mass Choir’s “You’re My All,” from *Live in Chicago—Dawn of a New Era*. The bubbling triplets might be too many notes for some, but on this track, they’re the power generator behind the track’s energetic feel. On “Lift Him Up,” from Rev. James Moore & the Mississippi Mass Choir’s *Live at Jackson State University*, Gouché’s line (Ex. 3) appears to be blisteringly busy slap-funk. However, the busiest parts of the line fit exactly with the melody line’s held notes and rests, so Gouché’s part enhances and responds to the choral melody without stepping on it. “Some people think I play too many notes, but I’ve learned not to trip off that. A lot more people like my playing than don’t. Hey, not everybody likes steak—some people like chicken,” he laughs.

Gouché takes another approach to gospel slap-funk on “He Lives Today,” from L.A. Mass Choir’s *Give Him the Glory!* Ex. 4 shows the line at the beginning of the verse. Gouché leaves more space for the singer at the start of the heavily shuffled 16th-note groove, but as the phrase progresses and the chords suggest an accelerating motion,

Gouché enhances the effect with syncopated note pairs that push the song into high gear.

Andrew, who represents gospel bass to many in the secular world, recalls being approached by a Berklee student with transcriptions of classic Gouché lines. “He was looking at the music, asking, ‘What were you thinking about when you played this?’ I just laughed. I’ve never been that kind of player. Whatever I played is what I felt at that moment, and if I played the lines today, they would be entirely different.”

**—Bill Leigh**

## A Selected Discography

**With Mary Mary:** *Thankful*, Columbia. **With Rev. James Cleveland:** *And the L.A. Gospel Messengers*, Savoy; *The Best of Rev. James Cleveland and the Gospel Music Workshop of America Mass Choir*, Savoy. **With the Gospel Music Workshop Of America:** *Torchbearers of Excellence: Live in Atlanta*, Verity; *Recorded Live in Chicago*, A&M; *Live in Washington D.C.*, Savoy. **With the Gospel Music Workshop Of America Youth Mass Choir:** *What He's Done for Me: Live in Philadelphia*, Majestic. **With the GMWA National Mass Choir:** *Live In Chicago: Dawn of a New Era*, Benson. **With the New Jersey Mass Choir Of GWMA:** *Soon I Will Be Done with the Troubles of the World*, Savoy; *Heroes*, Light; *Look up & Live*, Light. **With Michael Jackson:** *Bad*, Epic. **With Coolio:** *Gangsta's Paradise*, Tommy Boy. **With Andrae Crouch:** *Pray*, Warner Bros.; *Mercy*, Qwest; *No Time to Lose*, Warner Bros. **With Full Gospel Baptist Fellowship Choir:** *Bow Down and Worship Him*, Interscope. **With Anita Baker:** *The Songstress*, Elektra. **With Madonna:** *Like a Prayer*, Sire. **With Ladysmith Black Mambazo:** *Heavenly*, Shanachie. **With Edwin Hawkins:** *Music & Arts Seminar/Chicago Mass Choir*, Polygram. **With Tramaine Hawkins:** *The Joy that Floods My Soul*, Sparrow/Capitol. **With Julio Iglesias:** *Non Stop*, Columbia. **With Montell Jordan:** *This Is How We Do It*, Def Jam. **With John P. Kee:** *Wait on Him*, Jive. **With the L.A. Jazz Syndicate:** *L.A. Jazz Syndicate*, Ichiban. **With the L.A. Mass Choir:** (all on Light) *I Shall Not Be Defeated*; *Can't Hold Back*; *Live! Give Him the Glory*. **With the L.A. Gospel Messengers:** *We Haven't Forgotten About You*, Savoy. **With Philip Bailey:** *Family Affair*, Sony. **With Randy Crawford:** *Best of Randy Crawford*, Warner Bros.; *Don't*

*Say It's Over*, Warner Bros. **With Rev. James Moore:** *Live at Jackson State University*, Savoy. **With Ben Tankard:** *Play Me in Your Key*, Verity. **With the Voices Of Watts:** *Power*, Ichiban. **With the Winans: (all on Warner/Qwest Alliance)** *Back 2 Back*; *Decision*; *Let My People Go*. **With BeBe and CeCe Winans:** *Different Lifestyles*, Sparrow/Capitol. **With Vickie Winans:** *Be Encouraged*, A&M/Platinum. **Original cast recording:** *His Woman His Wife*, Interscope. **With various artists:** *Tribute to James Cleveland, Vol. 1*, A&M; *Tribute to James Cleveland, Vol. 2*, A&M. **TV appearances:** *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*; *Amen*; *Keenan*; *Vibe*; *Arsenio Hall*; *Saturday Night Live*; *MTV Awards*, *Soul Train*; *The Rosie O'Donnell Show*, *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*; *Soul Train Music Awards*; *Good News*; *Sinbad's Soul Music Festival*; *The Pat Sajak Show*, the Grammys; Diana Ross's 1987 special "Red Hot Rhythm & Blues"; Gladys Knight's 1997 command performance at the White House. **Films:** *Gospel*, 20th Century Fox.

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