

Enter Band, Man!

Robert Trujillo heeds the Call of Ktulu and trades in his seven-year Ozzy gig for a heavy home with Metallica. Meet the self-appointed Master of “Samurai Whiskey Kung Fu Warlord Bass” and, until now, the only bassist tough enough for Zakk Wylde.

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By E.E. Bradman

Robert Trujillo is one of heavy metal’s most aggressive performers, but the brawny surfer is a few notches mellower than his battle-hungry stage persona as he gets comfortable at Metallica headquarters just outside San Francisco. He’s alert, excited and a little bemused by all the activity—meetings, photo shoots, press conferences, interviews, phone calls, film crews—that’s happening around him, both in the wake of his joining the band just weeks ago and the impending release of Metallica’s long-awaited, decidedly *metallic* new album, *St. Anger* (Elektra). Watching him settle into the eye of the storm, it makes sense that one of Trujillo’s other passions might have something to do with his joining singer/guitarist James Hetfield, guitarist Kirk Hammett and drummer Lars Ulrich in Metallica.

“There’s a guy in the fan club that I took surfing for the first time about ten years ago,” remembers Trujillo (pronounced “troo-HEE-yo”). “He got Kirk and I to go surfing together last year. Maybe deep down, he thought something could happen, but it was cool because we got to know each other as surfers. We didn’t talk business, but that’s probably where the idea started.”

Longboard skills aside, Trujillo's resume—his rise to fame with hardcore monsters Suicidal Tendencies, his funky contributions to Infectious Grooves, and his seven-year stint with Ozzy Osbourne—is ample reason he was invited to join the world's flagship metal band. The general sentiment seems to be that Trujillo and Metallica are a match made in devil-chord heaven, and the 38-year-old bassist couldn't agree more. "Getting on the big stage and getting all samurai whiskey warlord medieval is my territory," he smiles. "I'm ready to fuckin' get all next-level with these guys!"

Trujillo's story starts long ago and far away, back when his mother grooved around their living room in hot pants and elevator shoes to Philly soul and James Brown. His father, meanwhile, was partial to Led Zeppelin and the Rolling Stones. Trujillo supplemented a steady diet of Motown bass stud James Jamerson, funk pioneer Larry Graham, and virtuoso Jaco Pastorius with generous portions of Black Sabbath's Geezer Butler, Ozzy's Bob Daisley, and Geddy Lee of Rush. He's been a proponent of diversity ever since. "I think it's important for young musicians to listen to as many styles of music as they can, to have a sense of history," he says. "In Metallica, Sabbath, and Ozzy's stuff, you can hear blues, classical, and even some elements of jazz and groove."

Trujillo was 25 when Suicidal's 1990 landmark *Lights, Camera, Revolution* first brought him to the attention of bassists around the world; Infectious Grooves' *The Plague That Makes Your Booty Move*, released a year later, cemented his rep as a badass equally at home with hardcore, metal, and funk. He stayed with both bands for four years, five albums, and several tours, including two jaunts with Metallica in 1993 and '94. By the late '90s, Trujillo had begun working with former Paul Simon bassist Armand Sabal-Lecco and Skindred vocalist Benji in Mass Mental, a project he can

describes as “me, Armand, drums, cool animation, and Benji doing Bad Brains-style hardcore vocals. It’s severely funky and brutally heavy.” He expects the first proper album—and the accompanying digital animation—to be released sometime this year.

For a kid who grew up on Sabbath, it was a dream come true to begin touring with Ozzy in 1996. Trujillo contributed to Ozzy’s most recent studio album, *Down To Earth*, and can be heard and seen on the DVD of last year’s *Live at the Budokan*; he also played on reissues of *Blizzard of Ozz* and *Ozzman Cometh*. Somehow, he also found time to collaborate with guitarists Zakk Wylde and Jerry Cantrell. When Jason Newsted announced he was leaving Metallica in 2001, little did Trujillo know his name would be on the short list of possible replacements.

“I remember being 15 years old at backyard parties playing Rush, Van Halen, Ozzy, and Black Sabbath songs. Every once in a while I’d be up onstage with Ozzy and I’d ask myself it was real. Now I’m going to look around at James and Lars and Kirk and ask myself, Damn! Is this real?”

EB: Congratulations. Was it a surprise?

RT: I heard rumors they were interested, but I put them out of my mind. When it actually went down, it caught me off guard.

EB: How were you invited to audition?

RT: I checked my messages from vacation in Tahiti over Thanksgiving, and Kirk and Lars were on my answering machine. I was coming home on a Friday and going to [Ozzy drummer] Mike Bordin's birthday party on Saturday in San Francisco, so it worked out perfectly. I came up, hung out with the guys on Monday, and had a night out with Lars, which can be quite adventurous, but when you have to play the next day...

EB: How did it go?

RT: It was weird for me because I only had a little time on Sunday to prepare. I had to dig deep, and maybe that was a good thing, because I wasn't nervous. We played that Tuesday, and I knew maybe two of the songs from memory. Usually, I would've asked for a couple hours with the CDs, but I was like, Bring it on! They were really impressed with that, and we ended up playing three or four extra songs. The idea was that I'd come back in a couple months, but I didn't hear from them, so I put it out of my mind.

EB: What happened next?

RT: Ozzy called me up in February wondering what was going on. Two days later, Kirk asked me to come back, and this time, I knew more songs, it felt really good, and the vibe was right. After the second audition, they were really excited, and I started thinking to myself, I might get this damn gig! They said they had to check out four more guys. It was a Wednesday, and they would call me Friday. I got a call Wednesday afternoon at 4 o'clock and it was Lars asking if I could come see the guys that night!

I walked into the lounge at Metallica headquarters the next morning, and everybody—from technicians to fan club employees— stood up and clapped. The band asked me to have a seat. They said they knew in their hearts that I was the new bass player for Metallica, and they wanted me to be part of their family—not a sideman, but a partner, a family member. I was buzzing! It was a major headrush.

EB: How did you break the news to Ozzy?

RT: That was hard. The first thing I did when I arrived in L.A. the next day was contact the Osbournes, and we had a meeting that night. It was very emotional, but Sharon gave me her blessings and Ozzy gave me his three days later. If they hadn't given me their blessings, I would've been crushed. They threw a big party for me in Las Vegas my last show. I have lots of love for them.

EB: How closely did you stick to Geezer Butler and Bob Daisley's bass lines with Ozzy?

RT: I used the original songs as my foundation, but it was important to be myself. I would never slap on an Ozzy song; I tried to keep it what it was and add little Trujilloisms. Daisley and Geezer's riffing styles allowed me to be myself, although they're very different players.

EB: How would you describe the difference?

RT: Geezer's style is more along the lines of John Entwistle or Jack Bruce, people he really looked up to. He's a very dynamic player, and he's also pretty busy; he knows when to throw in the riffage, but it's very tasty, very slinky. Daisley, on the other hand, is an amazing pick player, doing crazy shit with octaves, stuff on the upbeat, and a lot of runs. Daisley's funky and very solid; he's responsible for classic bass moments like "Crazy Train."

EB: Are you studying Jason Newsted and Cliff Burton's lines?

RT: Oh, yeah. When I was preparing for my second audition, I dissected a lot of that stuff. When Suicidal toured with Metallica in the early nineties, I was listening to a lot of classic records like *Ride the Lightning* and *Master of Puppets*, but I've been so busy that I haven't busted out my Metallica in years. Listening to them again opened my eyes to Cliff's playing as well as Jason's. Both guys are tremendous bass players and tremendous performers.

EB: How are the new bass parts?

RT: Challenging. [Metallica producer] Bob Rock did a fine job of playing bass on the album, and he got a big, fat, heavy tone. Bob is a totally different player than Jason and Cliff, but I have full respect for him. I think what he did was very tasty and heavy as shit.

EB: Do you feel ready for the technical challenges of this gig?

RT: Yes. It's a good time to do this because my skills are up, and I've learned so much over the years. With Metallica, there's obviously a shitload of speed and technique involved, and I'd say a lot of the training for that came from Suicidal Tendencies. I'm also able to learn a lot of material really fast. I have this psycho way of charting songs out I put together when I did Jerry Cantrell's album three years ago. All this helps, because the new music is especially challenging.

EB: You're charting out the new Metallica songs?

RT: We try to find time between interviews and photo sessions and three-hour meetings to work on the new songs, but usually, I have to learn the songs on the spot. The best way for me to do that is to chart them out. We're filming the rehearsals, and they don't want me to be the only one who doesn't know the shit. Because I write these charts, I can step up and take care of business.

EB: I'm assuming you'll be playing a lot more pick.

RT: Actually, I'm going back to my fingers for Metallica. It's different for me and it's different for them; it hasn't been done since Cliff Burton.

EB: Even for ferocious songs like "Battery" and "Whiplash"?

RT: The first time I auditioned, we did "Whiplash," but I didn't really know it, so I used a pick. The second time, I used my fingers.

EB: How are you playing clear, clean notes at those tempos?

RT: I started using this three-finger "tarantula" technique in Suicidal and Infectious for a galloping sound. I alternate picking with my index and middle fingers. I'm also working on a different technique where I strike the strings with the pad of my fingertips and hit the upstroke on the back of the nail. I go back and forth between those two methods.

EB: You used a pick with Ozzy, so why change now?

RT: Playing with my fingers feels natural to me. With the appropriate finger technique and the right gear, I can do a lot. My fingers are strong from so many years of playing; not using a pick with Metallica is natural for me, but I could see it being a nightmare for somebody else. And the band is stoked. They saw that I could do it, so they started asking me to do it on all the songs.

EB: Did you contribute any bass to the new album?

RT: Bob Rock had already finished the bass lines when I got the call. Bob has been a big part of the band's two-year journey in creating and recording this album, and it was important that he record the bass. I think that was something the band and Bob established way before they started looking for somebody.

EB: Tell me about the new music.

RT: It's brutal, it's heavy, it's thick, but it's also dynamic. There's a lot of speed involved, not just in the metal sense, but some of it has punk attitude. The rhythms and the groove factor are pretty different. The songs are long. It's hard, driving, and relentless.

EB: What do you think will surprise Metallica fans?

RT: I'm a fan, and I was blown away. It's almost like they picked up where ...*And Justice For All* left off.

EB: How does the "new Metallica" feel to you?

RT: These guys have really come together in the last couple years. They've been on a wild rollercoaster ride emotionally, and they've grown a lot. This band is feeling very collaborative and creative. For me to come in right now, when the music is heavy beyond imagination, is very groovy. This whole journey has been surreal and amazing. The first thing they told me was that this train is leaving, and they wanted me get on 'cause it's leaving and it's not gonna stop. They weren't kidding!

“Loud but True: Inside Trujillo’s battery of bass gear”

Aside from his flirtation with vintage Fender and Danelectro 4-strings for Jerry Cantrell’s *Degradation Trip* sessions, Robert Trujillo has been associated primarily with Tobias, Ernie Ball StingRay, and Fernandes 5-string basses on tours and in the studio with Infectious Grooves, Suicidal Tendencies, and Ozzy Osbourne. But he’s trying some new approaches.

“With Suicidal, I was originally using a Music Man before I switched to Tobias in the early days. The Tobiases carried me through Infectious Grooves, and with Ozzy I used a combination of Tobiases and custom-made Fernandes basses. With Metallica, I’m finding myself using everything from Music Man basses to MTDs, and the Fernandes basses are crushing! I recently pulled out the Music Man I played on the cover of *Bass Player* in 1994, and it sounded like a Mack truck. So now we’re tweaking out other StingRays; I’ll be using Fernandes basses, too.” And the Tobiases? “They’ve given me so many good years on the road and in the studio, so I’m retiring them.”

For Trujillo, Metallica’s low tunings are a special challenge. “Everything’s tuned down a whole step on the *E*, *A*, *D*, and *G* strings, and sometimes even down to *G#* and *A* on the *B*-string. It’s sub-sounding, and I’m using tighter *B*-strings now, so the low *B* is in full effect. And the Music Man and Fernandes basses sound good as long as we set them up the for low tunings.” Trujillo strings all his basses with medium-light Dean Markley SR-2000 4-string sets—.046, .063, .080., and a .102 *E*-string—and he reaches for an Ernie Ball 130 *B* string. Everything’s connected by Monster Cables.

Trujillo is using different amps as well. When performing with Ozzy, he used two SVT 3’s for tone, one SVT 4 for power, and a Hi-Watt 4x12 half-stack. Zach Harmon,

Metallica's equipment manager and Trujillo's bass tech, Robert is now using three SVT-2 heads with three Ampeg 8x10 Pro series cabinets and a Mesa Boogie Dual Rectifier head with two Mesa Boogie 4x12 cabs. Trujillo's effects include a Morley wah pedal, which he uses for everything from "For Whom the Bell Tolls" to newer material from *St. Anger*.

Harmon also reveals that Trujillo is using Tech. 21 products for distortion, Tech. 21 Sansamp products for additional bass tone, and Boss effects pedals for chorus and flange. For this summer's sanitarium tour, Harmon says he's putting "a trimmed-down version of the studio" into Robert's rack, including multiple DIs—one for Robert's clean sound, another for his full crunch tone and one for his blended signal. After 20 years in metal's frontline trenches, Robert says, "We're experimenting with a whole new sound."