



MOETAR

## Tarik Ragab Canvas of Sound

BY JON D'AURIA | PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVE LEPORI

### AS A BASSIST AND AN ARTIST, TARIK RAGAB LIKES TO PUSH

the boundaries of creative ingenuity whether it's through his colorfully imaginative artwork prominently displayed around the Bay Area, or through melding progressive rock and theatric pop music with his band MoeTar. After forming the band in 2008 with his wife, vocalist Moorea Dickason, Ragab began composing songs with a strong bass focus that feature blazing fast licks, funky foundational grooves, and odd-timed runs where he matches guitarist Matthew Heulitt's riffs note-for-note.

Ragab and his bandmates have just completed their sophomore album, *Entropy of The Century*, which features an even larger role for the bass player, who has stepped up the technical level of his playing on tracks that demands enormous finger dexterity, while also lending deep support. Songs like "We Machines" and "Where the Truth Lies" exhibit arduous bass riffs that are powerfully paired with [current BP Senior Contributing Editor] Jonathan Herrera's synth bass to create an even more powerful bottom end. But even while blazing through songs with a high volume of notes per bar, Ragab makes sure that every note, like a brush-stroke, plays an important role toward the bigger picture.

### What were your goals for bass on the new record?

With this band I've always liked the bass being in unison with the guitar

and there's definitely some of that. I often write lines that are busier than a normal bass line would be, but in a way that accents the whole orchestration of the tune. Part of my writing process with MoeTar is to look at the band as a small chamber orchestra that happens to play rock instruments. My background is in jazz, rock, and 20th-century classical, so I like to use all of those influences in my playing.

### What are the most important elements for bass in complex music?

I tend to see it as laying down the foundation and the groundwork first. But in doing that and fulfilling that role, the bass can be playful and do more. I'm a big fan of Jaco and I love the busy thing, but I also like the solid playing style of someone like Pino Palladino. I feel like there's a time and a place for everything and sometimes the bass can stretch out and expand. But in any genre, above all, you have to lay it down.

### How important to your sound is your playing technique?

Very. I try to play as controlled with my left hand as possible. I had some great teachers early on, and one told me to imagine an invisible wall above your left hand that your fingers can't go above, so that you keep your hand hovering directly above the strings. With my right hand I learned early on to play with a metronome slowly and with an even attack. Over the years I've developed a relationship between my two hands where if I want to play a fast 16th-note run, both hands are jiving together subconsciously.

### What period of practicing led to the greatest advancement in your playing?

I think it was a specific time of woodshedding between the ages of 15 and 18. I had a period where I would practice for five or six hours a day with a click and I would go over really boring chromatic finger exercises. At first it's like looking at Mt. Everest, but if you stick with it you make huge leaps in your playing. It's something that still takes a lot of effort even at this point.

### What similarities do you find between playing bass and painting?

In terms of what's going on in my head, it's all very connected. They seem like two sides of the same coin to me. I get a lot of musical ideas and inspiration from painting and vice versa. The color spectrum to me has an emotional quality and you can push those buttons in the same way that you can with certain chords and notes. The two have always been closely infused in my mind. BP

### i INFO



MoeTar, *Entropy of the Century* [Magna Carta, 2014]

LISTEN

EQUIP

**Bass** 1979 custom-ized fretless Fender Precision; 1975 Fender Jazz; 1979 Fender Precision

**Amp** Hartke HA5500, Hartke 410XL

**Pedals** Boss OC-2 Octaver; MXR M288 Bass Octave

**Strings** D'Addario XL Nickel Wounds