

All About That (Earl May) Bass

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- If the upright bass of jazz legend Earl May could talk, it would have 165 years of history to relate. That's a lot of storytelling. This is the bass that Charlie Mingus asked May to use when playing on all his albums. This is the bass that played on John Coltrane's 1958 album *Lush Life*, widely regarded as one of Trane's most outstanding achievements in music. Knowing that her husband's bass is part of the remarkable and unique history of jazz, May's widow Lee wanted the instrument to be preserved. So she gifted the bass to New Jersey musician and teacher Mike Griot. Griot realized that restoring the instrument would be expensive, but as he explains it, "When I touched it, it sang to me."

Recognizing that the instrument needed love and attention if it was going to be restored to its glory days, Griot contacted New York City craftsman David Gage, who is the professionals' go-to guy for bass restoration and repair. Gage discovered that the bass needed to be opened up for the repair work, and that there was a crack in the wood. Gage has committed his efforts to making a full restorative repair to the instrument once sufficient funds are raised. In order to keep the story going, Griot has launched a [Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign](#) to raise at least \$7,925 by May 9. If the money is raised, the vintage bass will once again be a studio- and concert-worthy instrument, with the potential to be an authentic museum artifact.

By undertaking this crowdfunding endeavor, Griot has pledged himself to the preservation of a musical instrument that's part of the heritage of jazz. But—with apologies to Meghan Trainor—although "It's All About That Bass," there's even more to the restoration of Earl May's bass than the instrument itself and its potential worth to jazz aficionados. Jazz has a heritage that's uniquely American; in fact, it's regarded as an original American art form. Rooted in the African-American community, jazz tells the story of a people whose creativity triumphed over enslavement, adversity, bigotry, and segregation. But the music, whose improvisational nature is said to have



originated from the work songs heard on Southern plantations, invokes a sound that celebrates a universal spirit. Jazz evokes freedom and rhythm, and its originality was able to cast off the chains that brought the fathers of jazz from countries and a continent far away to American shores.

Griot, himself a sought-after bass player in a [variety of musical genres](#) that include the blues, funk, gospel, rock and of course, jazz, has been traveling the world for several decades bringing his sound to cities as diverse as Frankfurt, Dubai, Paris, and Amsterdam. He's a producer of such world-class cultural events as the ValleyArts Hat City Streets Festival, the founder of the Essex County/South Mountain International Blues Festival, and curator of the immensely popular BLUES IN THE LOFT series at the South Orange Performing Arts Center. In his role as an educator, through ValleyArts, Griot has been the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Our Town grant which made it possible for him to deliver music instruction and history to the students in the Orange Public School System. As an adjunct professor, he has taught Music Business, Laws and Practices at IADT in Tampa Florida and is credited with designing Essex County College's digital music curriculum.

Griot is still stunned by the gift. "Why," he asks, "would anyone give me the bass that recorded on hundreds of recordings throughout jazz and blues history?" Maybe it's because Lee May wanted the story to [continue to be told](#), and she recognized, in Griot, the storyteller. Griot acknowledges, "All I could do was accept, and be thankful."

And turn to crowdfunding so that the instrument can continue to play its part in the history of music.

About Mike Griot

New Jersey music man Mike Griot (www.mikegriot.com) knows that jazz history is always moving toward the future because the sound never forgets its past. Whether Griot, the bassist and founder of PWI Entertainment, is in a recording studio, a producer's chair, or in front of a classroom, he has a reverent regard for the legends of jazz. That's why he has committed himself to a Kickstarter campaign to repair the bass of the late Earl May, and return the 165-year old instrument to museum quality

Denise Stennett

Mike Griot

www.mikegriot.com

email us here

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