



RICHARD BONA

Bands: Solo Artist, Pat Metheny, Joe Zawinul, Mike Stern, George Benson, Bobby McFerrin

Markbass Rig: Kilimanjaro and Kimandu Basses, Little Mark Ninja signature head, New York 122 Ninja Signature cab, Ninja 102-500 Signature Combo, Mark Vintage Pre

In an era when music is frequently driven by fame, money, social media likes, and the allure of being the next trending act, there are still those unique artists who create purely to express the sound that emanates from their soul. Bass virtuoso Richard Bona is one of these very artists. Born in the Cameroonian village of Minta, Bona began performing at the age of five and hasn't stopped since. From building his own humble instruments as a child to performing in the biggest clubs in France and New York, Bona quickly became a sensation of the jazz world thanks to his remarkable feel and his beautiful vocal abilities. Early into his career Bona's talents grew high in demand and he began playing alongside legends such as

Pat Metheny, Joe Zawinul, Harry Belafonte, Quincy Jones, Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, Steve Gadd, the Brecker brothers, Chaka Khan, Mike Stern, Bobby McFerrin, and many others. But what really put him on the map were the eight studio albums he released beginning with 1999's *Scenes From My Life*.

In 2011, Bona joined the Markbass family of artists and has since become one of their biggest advocates and one of their most frequent collaborators. With the release of the Ninja series of amps, cabinets, and combos, Bona showed that he was more than just an artist on their roster, as he worked tirelessly with Marco de Virgiliis to create products that met their collective high standards. In 2019, the two unveiled a new chapter for both Markbass and Bona with the Kilimanjaro and Kimandu signature basses. Spending years conceptualizing and creating their ideal model of basses, Bona and De Virgiliis were uncompromising in their pursuit of making a high end bass for serious performers, and a more a price-friendly model that would be accessible to players of all skill levels. Thanks to his work in creating his signature line of basses and amps, Bona now has his ideal set up in his home in Miami, Florida, where he is currently working on new music and has recently released his latest single titled "Afreekha." For a master musician who plays only what is true to his heart, it is only fitting that the instruments he uses also originate from that same place.

When did you first start playing Markbass amps?

I had played concerts with them when venues would provide them for me, but I never really got time to experiment with them except for sound checks. I remember loving the Little Mark head and after I played through one for a concert I knew that those were the amps that I wanted to use. About nine years ago Marco got in touch with me and we became very close very fast. I went out to their headquarters in Pescara a few times early on and we would spend hours just talking about ideas and things that we wanted to develop.

What was it about their amps that stood out to you?

What I like most about them is that they all have a very particular and special tone that is unique. They've developed their own sound and it's exactly what I want out of my amps. It's not too bright or too low; it just cuts through how it should. And the fact that everything is so light and portable is so important.

How did your line of signature Ninja amps come about?

I loved my first Little Mark, but I wanted something with just a little more power. So when Marco approached me about doing my signature amp I knew that I wanted the Little Mark sound, but something with a little more headroom, and he made it happen. With him, it was never about just putting my name on an amp, he really wanted my opinion and input. The next thing we set out to make was the Ninja Combo. Combo amps are great for all of us bass players who do a lot of gigs. It can be hard to carry two pieces sometimes, and it's so easy to just put your combo in your trunk and drive to the gig. You plug in one cable and you're ready to go.

Last year Markbass released the RB Kilimanjaro and Kimandu basses. What led to these signature models?

I had been playing really heavy basses for a long time and I started having a lot of pain in my back from them.



When you play every day for 10-15 years you start to feel the physical effects of them. Marco called me one day and asked what I thought about coming up with my own signature bass. I told him I would think about it because it had never crossed my mind. I thought about it and called him back and said, let's go Marco, let's do it! We met up, and then we met up again, and then again and again, and then we had the first prototype completed. We went back and forth so many times. We wanted to design something really amazing and we are both hard workers who won't stop until things are done right. So this took us a lot of years. We finally got the result we wanted and man, these basses sound so good. And they're light, so I have no more pain from playing, no matter how long I play them for. These instruments are really special.

It is a big honor for an artist to have a signature bass. How does it feel to have your name on these?

I'm really, really proud of these basses. We took our time on them and made sure everything was right, because you don't want your name to be on something that you're not going to love. I've been a musician my whole life and a bass player for so long, so I'm not just trying to sell an instrument. I want to make sure that anybody could play this bass and feel comfortable on it. I'm very passionate about these instruments. I even went to the NAMM show a day early by myself to tune all of the basses at the booth. I had to check every one of them to make sure they were feeling good. When your name is on something, you're invested in it. That's your name, that's part of you. It's not just an endorsement.

What are your first thoughts about the new Mark Vintage Pre?

The Vintage Pre is the best thing to happen in 2020. I just recorded with it yesterday. You literally just take this little box and go to the studio and plug it into your line out and that's all you need to do. The flat position is just killing. I played passive basses for so many years and I can get that exact feel with this. The tone that Marco has, I can't explain exactly what it is, but it comes through this small box the same as it does his amps. The tube sound is great on it and the middle position is perfect for slapping. I love that you can control all of this with just your foot too, because it's perfect on stage. And one of my favorite parts is that I can practice here at home or in a hotel room with this. I never have an amp on the road, and with this, I just plug in my headphones and I can play any time. Yesterday I brought it into the studio here in Miami and the producer asked if it was all I brought, and I said, yup. This is all I need. And sure enough it was.

Aside from their products, what makes Markbass special to you?

Their attention. Their attention to detail and the attention they give their artists. Marco and I talk every single week. To be honest, most companies only call you twice a year, maybe around NAMM, and that's it. Attention is everything. They're not just a company endorsing artists, it's a family. Marco is like a brother to me. Musicians are artists, and we function with emotion. It's not just about playing bass and making music all the time. We create with raw expression. We write music with our blood. You notice right away when you have a different kind of relationship with somebody in this industry, and that's how it is with Marco and Markbass. I have never experienced that with anyone else. **-MB**

