

Mouradian Guitars

Shaun McNamara

“December 1974, – YES came to town. They were the 4th largest draw in the country.” Eating dinner on the same block as his Cambridge shop, Jim Mouradian presented this impetus, but definitely not the complete tuning that created an awakening and steady resonance, eventually becoming Mouradian Guitars.

At a young age, Jim was found in his parent’s basement tinkering with abandoned stereo components, bringing them back to life, and into his vision of what they could be. A desire to create the low-end sounds coming through his stereo propelled Jim toward bass playing; so did his sisters’ screams at the Beatles appearance on TV. A thirteen-year-old Jim thought, “This is great; I have to do this.”

Attending college in the late sixties, Jim pursued studies to one day take over his family’s rug business, for which he had little passion. He was listening to fresh releases from Cream and Led Zeppelin, fueling his love of the bass and fine tuning his own bass through trial and error. Introduced to YES by a friend, Jim quickly became passionate about the band. “It’s almost all I need for music,” says Jim. The 1974 concert came; Jim took the day off to attend. Mouradian also made a rug complete with YES logo. He wanted to present the rug as a gift to the band, and he made his way to the service entrance, accidentally mixing into the mêlée of road crew advancing on the Boston Garden. Looking like the rest of the crew, no one bothered to question him until he was standing in the middle of the Garden, surrounded by crew and eventually YES’ manager, Alex Scott.

Mouradian’s artistry in creating the rug replete with YES logo gained him an audience with the band and a dinner invitation. Friendships developed and 2 years later bassist Chris Squire asked Jim to create a large rug for their new stage. He took 7 days off from the family business (and a very discontented father) to work with the band.

In 1978, Jim showed Chris an original bass design, which evolved into the CS bass that Squire often uses in concert and for the video, “Owner of a Lonely Heart”. “Wouldn’t this represent YES’ personality, (reminiscent of Roger Dean’s artistry on such albums as Fragile)?” Squire’s reply was, “Make it.” Jim contained his fears of building a bass for the legendary bassman, and never mentioned that this would be the first guitar he ever made; he spent three months creating his monster in a garage, which was to become his Winchester shop. Mouradian Guitar shop evolved as local players heard that there was someone nearby working on guitars; knock, knock, knock the clients would come and Mouradian’s move to Cambridge in the 80s infused more customers.

Squire turned people on to Jim’s original guitar design, but unfortunately for guitarists, deviation from the original concept forced him to walk away from companies and investors. Luckily for guitarists, Mouradian is more enamored with repairing guitars than repetitive guitar production. Early offers for development of the CS bass from Warner Bros.’ Lee Abrams, currently of XM fame, prompted Jim to cast off the final restraints of

the family business. The deal fell through in the early 80s due to Warner Bros. pooling resources for the advent of cable; Jim needed to redirect his vision. At his Winchester shop Jim created CS basses and LS guitars as well as repairing and customizing for the public.

So, why not seek fame as a bassman with help from YES? After all, he's also Aerosmith's luthier; he's worked on guitars for Bonnie Raitt, Kurt Cobain, and Smashing Pumpkins. Jim's answer: "In the realm of players, I don't see myself as much more than proficient; I know how to find that little pocket and make the bass do what it's supposed to do. What I do at the shop allows me to genuinely offer something to music because it seems that people don't get how to do what I do. Guys come into my shop whose playing totally astounds me and they have no clue how to fix their guitar. It's two different ways of thinking about one object. It's better if I'm up there working on guitars."

It's about the feel of everything from guitars to experiences in life. You'll never see Jim use rulers or gauges to adjust guitars. Adjusting or reworking is based on feeling. "On a guitar, every adjustment is contingent on every other adjustment; none of those numbers or gauge values live in their own little world. They're affected by and effect every other adjustment; it's about paying attention." Jim and his son/partner John pay attention because their allegiance is to the guitar you bring in, whether you're Joe Perry or the guitarist reading this article in your basement.

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