



The woodshed

Serbian bass-maker Zoran Pantic invites Joel McIver into his workshop

Serbia, a country finally emerging from the turmoil that racked it in the 1990s and beyond, is not a territory often visited by bass players in search of high-quality instruments – but Pantic & Son is on a mission to change that. Zoran Pantic, whose workshop is located in the town of Smederevska Palanka in central Serbia, got in touch with BGM recently and, as we're supporters of bass culture wherever it may be, we invited him to talk about his business.

"Where did I get the idea to create a guitar?" says Pantic. "I'd have to go back to my early childhood. As a little boy I watched my friend's father making a guitar, and what fascinated me the most was the moment that I first heard its sound. From that moment, the guitar was like a living thing for me."

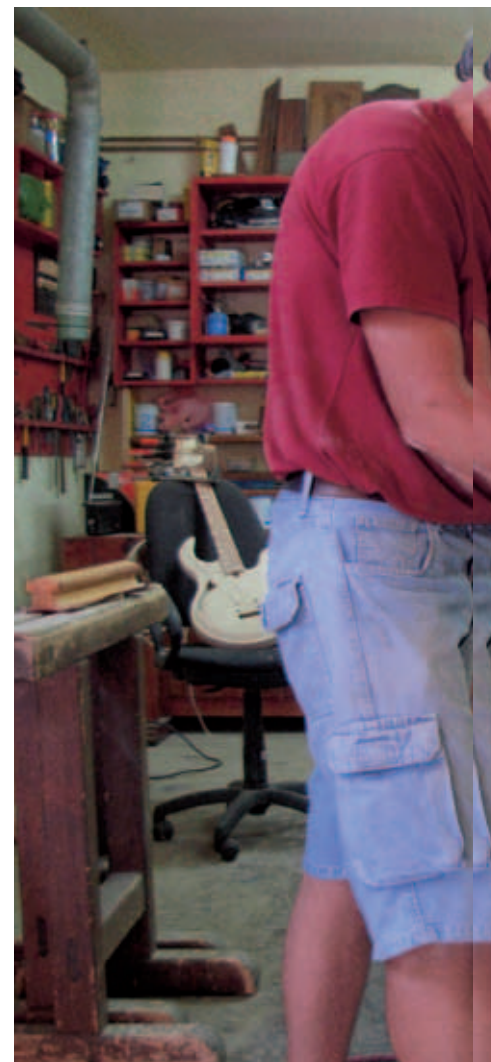
Asked how his career led him into bass-making, Pantic explains, "I was a geodetic engineer by profession [ie a chap who measures mountains, lakes and what have you – Careers Advice Ed] but I was always interested in art. I like creating art with wood and clay, and drawing with a graphite pencil. I worked for three years as a geodesist, and at the end of that time I decided to fully dedicate myself to the processing of wood. Initially my intention was to produce unique furniture."

Guitars soon took the place of household fittings, he adds: "I used to make furniture, and it was beautiful, but I always missed the sound of the guitar in my ears, and more and more I found myself thinking about building a guitar. One day I told my son, 'Daddy's going to make you a guitar', and he replied, 'It's not the same as

building a chair, you know...'"

Inspired, Pantic applied pen to paper. "I had to start drawing again," he says, "because I wanted my guitar to appear innovative, but also unlike any recognisable form that is already available. Designing the body shape took about six months. In that time I also bought the necessary tools, and modified other tools that I already had. Eventually the moment came for me to realise a dream that I'd had from my childhood."

Right off the bat, Pantic met with some success, presumably assisted by his background in art and engineering, the two disciplines essential for any luthier. "First I made a fretless bass," he recalls, "and soon after that, I built two more. I asked several musicians for their opinion of my guitars, and they all agreed that the instruments were pretty good. In fact, some of them even wanted to buy my guitars. That encouraged me a lot, and really





gave me the strength to continue."

As the photos display, Pantić has built a professional workshop: no mean feat when your business isn't located near a major commercial centre. As he explains, his basses are assembled by a combination of machine and manual work. "The process of making a guitar is quite long," he says, "and usually lasts for about a month. I do the final work by hand, and this is the part that gives me the most satisfaction out of the entire process. I use materials from the local environment, such as ash, maple, walnut and cherry wood. The front panels of my basses are made from ash, while maple makes up the middle section, and finally I use cherry or walnut for the rest of the body."

But as all bassists know, the neck design of a bass often has the biggest impact on how comfortable it is to play, and Pantić has definitely not neglected this fact. "The necks are usually made of maple," he continues, "or sometimes I combine maple with ash. I use wild pear tree wood for the fingerboards. For the decorative details, I work with mahogany and semsir, which is a local European tree. The bodies of all my guitars are hollow, so that the middle part of the solid material, and the left and right chambers, have openings. The neck and body are assembled with glue to make one unit: the neck on all my guitars is a V shape. To finish, I use nitrocellulose lacquer, and sometimes a special oil when I want to emphasise the beauty of the wood."

Finally, Pantić's guitars come to life in the last stages of the manufacturing process, he tells us. "When the neck is completely functional, machine heads are installed and I add the bridge and strings. From that moment on, the guitar comes alive, and you can hear its character. I then determine the final position of the pickup magnets so that they'll produce the best possible sound. Also at this time, I usually get the name of the guitar in my head, and this creates a final image of what it should look like."

So where can BGM readers buy Pantić basses? Zoran can be contacted directly at pantic.zoran@yahoo.com. Readers in Japan can purchase his basses via www.apollonmusic.com/pantic, but UK distribution is still needed. Drop him a line, distributors! ■