

Chadwick Folding Bass

Go-Anyplace Collapsible Upright

In terms of its signature sound and the undeniable impact it makes on music, there is no substitute for the acoustic upright bass. But to players obsessed with its powerful charisma, this blessing can all too often become a curse when faced with the difficulties of traveling with their instrument. Nobody understands this better than Nashville's Charlie Chadwick, who decided to do something about it by creating the Chadwick Folding Bass, offering bassists a full-bodied true acoustic experience in an ingeniously engineered collapsible package.

Chadwick is a professional bass player with plenty of first-hand experience in the frustrations of travel with such a large and fragile instrument. Touring with the likes of Suzy Bogguss, Pam Tillis, Shelby Lynne and Crystal Gayle, he encountered space limitations, baggage fees, damages and the dreaded loaner or rental bass. Although there were already numerous travel bass options available, such as electric uprights and reduced-size acoustics, none offered the same feel and tone as a standard $\frac{3}{4}$ -sized bass. Chadwick was convinced that there was a demand for a better solution. "I knew there was a need, and I was waiting for someone to do it, but no one did, so I just built one myself," he said.

A tinkerer at heart, Chadwick built his first travel bass in 2003 with a removable bolt-on neck design and actually played it for several years. The drawbacks to this design are that it utilizes separate parts and also requires tools for assembling and disassembling. Chadwick felt there was a need for something more effective, and in 2006 he envisioned the swinging neck design, which uses a hinged joint that allows the neck to fold directly into the back of the bass via a removable panel on the back. Chadwick continued to tweak his new design until a chance meeting with Chinese instrument manufacturer Sam Chen led to the idea of putting this innovative technology into full production.

The Chadwick Folding Bass began actual production in 2009 and utilizes a modified version of Chen's top-of-the-line laminate model SB-100. There are several key features that Chadwick felt were essential to his design, the first being that the instrument should sound and feel exactly like an upright bass. To accomplish this, the body cannot be reduced in size. In addition, assembly/disassembly should be quick and easy without the need for any tools. Lastly, the instrument should be reduced to the smallest possible size without any separate parts to carry. Chadwick solves all these problems in spades with his impressively clever engineering.



Charlie Chadwick demonstrates the folding/unfolding process.



The bass collapses down to the $\frac{3}{4}$ -size body chamber and is stored in a rugged travel case designed to fit snugly to the instrument. Assembling the bass is surprisingly simple and can be completed in minutes. The back has a removable strip that allows access to the neck, which swings out and locks into place. Also stored inside the body are the fingerboard, endpin and tailpiece along with a removable travel brace to help prevent damage while traveling. After locking in the neck, the ebony fingerboard is quickly attached using slotted connectors and then the tailpiece and endpin are placed onto the bass. The strings are held firmly into place at both the tailpiece and nut so that they do not detach or become tangled. The final step is to position the bridge at the pre-designated markers, tune the instrument up and start playing. I found that it takes about three

passes across the strings to get them up to pitch and stable. There is no doubt that this instrument feels and plays just like an upright bass. In fact, it is totally capable of being played acoustically without a pickup, but Chadwick will install a pickup system of your choice if it is needed. Although the thought of cutting the back of the instrument to make the folding-in process possible may seem a bit scary, Chadwick stresses that it has a minimal impact on the overall tone of the instrument.

The Chadwick Folding Bass is a true marvel of immaculate engineering and a great solution for bass players on the road. At just under 50 pounds, it does not incur overweight fees at the airport and has been described by players as a "life changer" for touring. Chadwick offers the all-laminate model for \$3,800 including custom setup, your choice of strings and shipping. A hybrid solid-top model is available for an additional \$400. This may not replace your 100-year-old carved German instrument, but as Chadwick reminds us, "When you can play the same bass every night, it changes everything."

—Keith Baumann

Ordering info: foldingbass.com