



SARLOU BASS

Studied: Musicians Pathway playing bass

Graduated: 2023

A question-and-answer session to hear about Sarlou's recent opportunity in musical theatre.

“You can't just expect the amazing big things to just come to you,” she says.

Sarlou Bass did the 2-year accelerated degree, the music, music industry practice as it was then, with bass guitar specialism. So would you say it's important to understand the industry as a musician?

“Yeah. Well, that's it. The options were doing the music pathway, or what was the creative artist. If you want to master your instrument and find your place as a musician then it's the music pathway. If you want to be, you know the songwriter you go for the creative artist route. Realistically, my first love is bass. So, it was a no-brainer for me.”

You already had your job offer before leaving.

“Yeah. As if I didn't have enough to be doing. I was told throughout my degree: to reach out to people, network, and send messages. Put yourself out there.

“Tutor Ben Scott told me if I was interested in musical theatre to message Katie Richardson, a musical director in the West End. So, I shoot my shot, not expecting anything to come from it, and the next day I get a message back:

“Oh, Hi! Nice to meet you. I'm looking for a bassist for this new musical that we're putting on. Everyone else is busy with other jobs, and we're specifically looking for a female bassist. It's this punk rock musical. And you know it's all-electric.

“So, I said, ‘Yep, great I'll do it. And then, of course, I have to start working towards it while doing all my other modules, the exit specialism and my dissertation. It was insane because I had to learn 26 songs of a musical theatre score. And I'm not a sight reader. It takes me a while. I must sit down with something because I only started learning to read

music through ACM. It was also a tough score to learn because it was written by a bassist, Everything was notated; every tiny little detail.

“But I did it. And yeah, I've just literally finished the tour!

What was the musical called?

“It was called Lizzie. It's based on the life of Lizzie Borden, which is not an urban legend, but kind of an old murder mystery, from the States where a young girl was tried and acquitted of murdering her father and stepmother with an axe. So, it's kind of the nursery rhyme of Lizzie Borden.”

And how did the audience receive it? How did you feel playing to a live theatre audience?

“They loved it. It was an all-female cast and an all-female band. And it was ex-actresses from the production Sixth, supervised by Katie Richardson who'd done Sixth, and they loved it because it was so different to things that had come before it. It was a true crime story and murder mystery. It was musical theatre and a rock gig and punk.”

In a sense, you did two dissertations, one written and one practical.

“It was a lot because I had a learning curve with my site reading. I had to learn about working with a musical director. I also had to learn about working with the musical theatre setup where you have a chair, basically like, not a physical chair, but you literally have a station where everything is set up for you. And in terms of my equipment as well. I had so many things break and go wrong, but once the show starts, there's no stopping. You learn to fix things and just be adaptable to everything. If you make a

mistake or a wrong note, you can't just go, "Oh, can I start this song again?" You must go with it, but you learn so much from being thrown in at the deep end. Hard as it was.

"I had to pack up all my things, load them onto a lorry, and then not see it again for a few days, and trust that, you know, things would get to the end destination. And I'm a bit of a control freak too. People who know me know that I have anxiety. There was a lot of having to trust that all the myriad of pieces would fit together.

So essentially no matter how much you learn, the real learning comes when you get out there at the end of your degree.

"Absolutely. And I did not expect to finish my degree and jump straight into a professional situation like that, where the expectations and the standards are so high, I expected to struggle for work. But I took the advice given. And out of all the messages I've sent I haven't heard a thing from 99% of them. I remember being told. that you must send messages and get your name out there, because in one instance where someone will find you at the right place at the right time, and that is what happened to me.

"Now I've finished with the Lizzie Tour. Next, I'm joining a Shania Twain Theatre Tribute. And all this has come from being given the confidence to shoot your shot and just go. I'm really into this. Hear the skills. This is me. Here's my portfolio/website. That's how I got the Lizzie job. I didn't audition for it. I sent her the portfolio that I've been spending months putting together for the final modules.

What were your highlights at ACM?

“Highlights! God! The biggest has been having the safe space to find my feet and my confidence because for years I had just awful stage fright and self-consciousness and real imposter syndrome about my bass playing, I knew barely any theory when I started. ACM. I couldn't read a dart. And I was stuck playing the same style of music all the time. I've been playing for 25 years plus. I needed the encouragement and opportunity to start branching out outside of my comfort zone. So yeah, the biggest thing has been being exposed to more opportunities, more styles of playing, more genres, and just seeing what else is out there other than toilet circuit pub gigs.

“I would have never imagined myself getting to the point of being able to play musical theatre because from where I was to where I needed to be was such a big gap. But over the two years it's like every module has been like a little bit of a step up, you know, in knowledge and confidence, and just kind of believing in myself enough to know that if I put the work in, I can achieve the things that are up here. It just takes effort and humbleness to know that you must work at it. You can't just expect the amazing big things to just come to you.”

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