

# KALA

## U-Bass Journeyman

The small bass with the big sound is given a visual tweak: Will the girls go crazy for this Sharp Dressed Man?  
Mike Brooks finds out

Kala Brand  
www.kalabrand.com

\$359.99

This recent iteration of the Kala U-Bass is a deviation in aesthetic terms, but it retains the intrinsic qualities that have made the brand such a success. The instrument's diminutive dimensions may lead it to be seen as a novelty, but the actual bass tones have garnered many favorable reactions—just look at the extensive list of artists employing a U-Bass in their arsenal. So is the Journeyman a bass crossroads, or a case of 'uke can't touch this'? Let's take a look.

### Build Quality

The rounded mahogany body and neck, ebony fingerboard, cream binding, and F-hole decor give this U-Bass variant a tastefully organic appearance. The front facing sports a visually impressive flame grain and the satin finish on the neck and body creates a natural feel. With only a single lower cutaway, access to the upper frets is limited—but the frets are so closely spaced at the dusty end of the ebony fingerboard that you may find your excursions to that area restricted in any case.

As an acoustic bass, the Journeyman uses a Shadow piezo system at the bridge, paired with a UK-500B preamp, offering volume, a three-band EQ, and a chromatic tuner, and display. The neck has a slightly chunky profile but this works in its favor based on the overall dimensions. The fretwork is commendable, with no sharp frets along the neck. As you can imagine, your fretting hand isn't going to be subject to any discomfort on a neck of this size, and the 44mm width of the neck at the nut gives it a certain familiarity. Access to the battery is via the flip panel on the jack socket on the lower body edge. The die-cast machine heads turn smoothly and feel appropriately sturdy, and across the board the construction is of a high standard.

### Sounds And Playability

The unplugged tone is fairly uninspiring, as the strings produce little more than a muted thump—initially, you may be forgiven for not feeling any U-Bass love. Plug the Journeyman in and it's a



different story, though. Warm, rounded bass tones emanate immediately. The fullness of the tone is quite surprising, even before adding any additional EQ, while the acoustic nature of the instrument, and the piezo system, gives the tone a breathy quality, without being boomy, or overpowering.

You'll find your playing technique needs a little adjustment as you become acquainted with the Aquila Thundergut strings, whose texture is quite different to standard metal strings. They produce an almost keyboard-like squelch, so slapping is pretty much a waste of time, although fingerstyle and pick playing are readily conveyed without much fuss. The upright bass-like nature of the tone is very pleasing, with a degree of string noise to accentuate that likeness, but adding some mids and treble gives more bite and attack to the tone. The bass EQ gives the signal some much-needed power and warmth, but you would be advised to add this sparingly; too much and feedback swamps the signal.

Getting used to the U-Bass's limited dimensions takes a while, especially

when seated. Your natural tendency is to place it on your thigh, which then requires you to lean over it to support the body. Eventually, how to hold it and play it becomes second nature. The spacing of the 16 frets is a little tight but again, after having played the U-Bass for a while, it becomes familiar. There are several playing applications that would suit this bass perfectly and it could prove to be a useful addition to your collection for recording purposes, without taking up much room into the bargain.

### Conclusion

Far from being a novelty, the Journeyman is a fine instrument that achieves its goals. Despite its modest physical dimensions, it plays very well, and has an eminently useable palette of tones. The price is far from prohibitive and although the Journeyman is unlikely to replace your regular bass instruments, it's still an attractive proposition in its own right. It offers a sound all of its own, one that could well plug a gap in your tonal library. ■



## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

- Price** | \$359.99  
**Made in** | China  
**Color** | Natural  
**Body** | Mahogany top, back and sides, satin finish  
**Neck** | Mahogany, 21" scale, satin finish  
**Neck Joint** | Set neck  
**Nut Width** | 44mm  
**Fingerboard** | Ebony  
**Frets** | 18  
**Pickups** | Shadow piezo system  
**Electronics** | UK-500B system  
**Controls** | Volume, bass, middle, treble, tuner  
**Hardware** | Custom black die-cast machine heads, ebony bridge  
**Weight** | 2.4lbs  
**Left-hand available** | Yes  
**Gigbag/case included** | Padded gigbag

## WHAT WE THINK

- Plus** | Well voiced, easy to play, sensibly priced  
**Minus** | Requires some effort to master  
**Overall** | Very interesting, useful, and well worth checking out

## BP RATING

