

Review: MTD Lynn Keller Signature 532-24

JONATHAN HERRERA · MAR 8, 2018

Lynn Keller has had the sort of long, productive, and diverse career that characterizes a true working bass pro. Raised in Illinois, Keller started on piano and flute but found herself drawn to bass in college. Doubling down on her love for her new axe, Keller moved to Austin and started her professional career. While she thrived there, her mid-'80s move to L.A. saw her fortunes rise, eventually landing gigs with the Original Fifth Dimension, Michelle Shocked, Rita Coolidge, Diana Ross, and more. Her performing career has since expanded to theater, where she's been in the pit orchestra for a spectrum of touring Broadway productions. Among the many challenges women musicians face, the size of a full-scale bass can be a particularly intractable obstacle. Fortunately, the recent resurgence of shorter-scale basses has substantially increased the options for more petite players. Historically a lot of shorter-scale basses tended to either be re-releases of clunky vintage models or entry-level instruments aimed at the kids' market. But as the Lynn Keller Signature reviewed here demonstrates, those days are over.

Woodstock, New York-based Mike Tobias is one of the most renowned luthiers in our industry, and each instrument he designs and hand-makes is a singular work of art. Tobias has long been one of the most ambitious and knowledgeable luthiers when it comes to devising a cocktail of body woods to achieve a desired tone—he also has some of the prettiest stock I've seen on hand. Our striking Lynn Keller Signature tester was decked out, featuring a mahogany body, myrtle-burl top, maple neck, and chechen fingerboard. The color-matched wood knobs add a tasteful bit of luxury to the aesthetic. The 532 has the same basic contour as Tobias' legendary 535 model, just slightly reduced in size. The neck is relatively narrow, but I quickly adapted and found there was enough room to dig in and slap comfortably (a requirement Keller specified to Tobias during the instrument's development).

The MTD's construction was flawless, as one would expect from a bass of its price. The fret-work was impeccable and the hardware of the highest quality. The Bartolini preamp was no less well installed, and lives in a well-shielded control cavity to reduce noise. Bartolini custom-tuned the preamp and J-style pickups to best suit the instrument's voice, shorter scale, and smaller body. The strings come courtesy of La Bella, and they, too, were specially designed for the 32" scale length.

While the benefits of the 532 are obvious for smaller players, that doesn't mean it's *just* for them. One of the things I noticed when the bass arrived was that it was in a guitar gig bag. Having endured the fear of not being able to carry-on my bass on countless flights, it's a big deal being able to use a guitar bag that's much less likely to engender the disapproving eye of a militant gate attendant. Removing the MTD from the bag, I was beguiled by its light weight and smooth, sinuous lines. On my lap or on a strap, the instrument was exceptionally comfortable and well balanced, and I quickly adapted to the shorter scale. This is subjective, but personally, I dig the way shortening the scale loosens the strings' tension. There's something about the increased flexibility that inspires me to be a bit more expressive with my left hand.

I tested the Lynn Keller Signature in my studio and on a gig with a few high-end preamps and an Aguilar rig. With the tone controls flat and the pickups blended, the MTD's tone was rich and full-bodied, with a ton of high-end zip and the sort of throaty midrange that distinguishes shorter-scale basses. The crystalline treble response helps the bass speak in a mix, but I found myself favoring the sound with the well-voiced treble control slightly rolled off. In the bridge position, the MTD burps with Jaco-esque J-style punch, and it's especially fun to fly around the diminutive neck with the articulate and precise back-pickup tone. The soloed neck-pickup sound has a more woody bark with greater focus on the instrument's bountiful bass response. Most notably, while some may decry a 32"-scale 5-string's ability to have an effective *B* string, that wasn't the case with our tester. The *B* was taut and controlled, with excellent low-register pitch definition and color.

Now that heavyweight luthiers like Mike are in the short-scale bass game, it's officially a fully matured trend. While the Lynn Keller bass is exorbitantly expensive, you'd be hard pressed to find a better-put-together 32"-scale bass. Any player with the budget who digs the many advantages of a smaller instrument should give MTD a call.

SPECIFICATIONS

MTD

Lynn Keller Signature 532-24

Street \$5,600

Pros Flawlessly constructed from topnotch materials; superb sparkly tone; excellent ergonomics

Cons None

Bottom Line There are few more luxurious and better built instruments out there, much less 32"-scale basses.

SPECS

Construction Bolt-on

Body Mahogany

Neck Maple

Fingerboard Chechen

Tuners Hipshot

Bridge Hipshot

Pickup Bartolini humbucking J-style

Tone controls Bass, mid, treble

Weight 7.7lbs.

Scale length 32"

Made in U.S.A.

Contact mtdbass.com

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