

Melvin Lee Davis

The lights go down, and the praise goes up, as the music begins. Once you hear and feel the notes surrounding and embracing you, all you can do is sit back, smile, and allow your spirit to be nourished. For most people, a musical instrument is a means for creating music. However, for bassist Melvin Lee Davis, his contrabass guitar serves as a vehicle of praise. Those who are in the room when Davis performs are not just an audience enjoying music – they are witnessing a man engaged in the highest form of praise. Davis cannot be defined by a genre. He can only be defined by his love for God, which flows out of him in various forms, such as gospel, blues, jazz (swing, bebop and contemporary), R&B, pop, soul, funk and hip hop. Davis is someone who can never be accused of neglecting the gifts that are within him.

Ask Southern California native Melvin Lee Davis when he began playing music, and he'll tell you he started the moment he came out of the womb, because he was destined to be a musician. Influenced by his surroundings, where music was constantly present, Davis began playing the violin when he was four years old. By the time he was six, he had switched over to the saxophone, which he played until his junior year in high school when he picked up his first guitar. His long fingers hindered his use of the pick, but they proved to be beneficial once he discovered the bass. Like many successful musicians, Davis went on to play in the band at his church.

When Davis was 16, a horn player from Buddy Miles's band saw him play at a local club, and recommended him to Miles for an audition. Miles flew Davis out to New York for the audition and hired him on the spot for his touring band. Davis was introduced to Don Cornelius through Ron "Have Mercy" Kersey, a staff producer at A & M Records. That led to him working as a staff bassist for Cornelius in 1978. Cornelius introduced Davis to a number of the top recording artists. As a result, Davis began writing music and performing with R & B singer O'Bryan from 1980 to 1987 through a record deal put in place by Cornelius, which included Davis writing the theme song, *Soul Train's A Comin'* for Cornelius' weekly television show, *Soul Train*.

Davis has since become a skilled master bassist, composer, producer, and educator who is continually in high demand. He has worked beside, toured, and recorded with some of the music industry's most distinguished artists, including Lee Ritenour, George Duke, Gerald Albright, David Benoit, The Russ Freeman Project, Jeff Kashiwa, Diane Schurr, Will Downing, Lalah Hathaway, Patti Austin, Ledisi, and Angie Stone. He's played bass on a few of Lee Ritenour's albums, including *6 String Theory* (2010) and *A Twist of Rit* (2015), and was also part of the 2017 all-star tour, *Lee Ritenour & Japanese Friends*, featuring Naoko Terai, Akira Jimbo, Masato Honda, and Otmaro Ruiz. Davis has also played on a number of Will Downing's releases, including *Euphoria* (2014), *Black Pearls* (2016), and *Soul Survivor* (2017). He has served as Chaka Khan's Musical Director at various times throughout his career; most recently, during her European *Night of the Proms* (2015) and *Art On Ice* (2016) tours. Davis performed at the 55th Annual Grammy Awards (2013) and was a member of the Pre-Telecast Grammy Awards band from 2008 to 2014. He has been a member of the Technical Excellence & Creativity (TEC) Awards band since 2008.

Davis actually visualizes a song before he sits down to write it, carrying it around with him until he is given the opportunity to have sufficient time with his keyboard and bass, so the creative process can begin. He knows himself, and therefore, knows how to create the melodies that produce an emotional response in him. This is how Davis gives of himself – by weaving love, reflection, tears, laughter, and the other emotions and expressions of humanity, with the spiritual rhythms that have been placed into him by none other than God Himself. This is what sets him apart. His gift from God is his purpose. His purpose is his life. His life is his story. His story is his music. His music is for all.

Davis, who is called "Keeper of the Low Notes" due to the low register of his contrabass guitar, teaches master classes and clinics. As a clinician, he conducted a bass clinic tour in Asia (2016), and performed as both a clinician and guest artist at the *Crown of the Continent Guitar Festival* in Bigfork, Montana (2012 – 2015). He also works with youth and adults privately. Davis's program includes lessons in Music Theory, Classical, and Jazz. His vision and desire is to see music added back into the curriculum in economically challenged schools. He also desires to see the day when any child who wants to learn an instrument is given the opportunity to do so. However, his ultimate career goal is to leave a legacy of creative music that will make his children proud whenever they hear anyone utter their father's name.