

# BASS

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# DAN ANDRIANO ON PUNK PRODUCTION

by **Contessa Abono**

Since 1996, Alkaline Trio has practically lived on the road, garnering a rock-solid support base of fans. But that doesn't mean the band has ignored the studio. This year, the Chicago-bred group released its seventh studio album, *This Addiction*, on its own imprint, Hearts and Skulls. Here, bassist Dan Andriano talks about the band's songwriting method and production concept.

## How would you characterize your production aesthetic?

We've always wanted to experiment, and we'll try anything we think might sound good. We've even overdubbed strings and keyboards—which sometimes ended up sounding fairly grandiose. For *This Addiction*, we didn't set out with the intent of stripping all of that away—we just wanted to write songs that would stand more on their own, no matter what the production values might be. Our goal is to write songs that sound good with just the three of us playing. Also, stripping down the arrangements makes the songs easier to get across live, as we don't have to play with sequenced tracks. It can be fun having lots of crazy sounds going on, but it's nice not to worry about it.

## What's the band's songwriting process?

Generally, Matt [Skiba, Alkaline Trio guitarist] or myself will write the skeleton of the tune—maybe just a verse and chorus—but we don't really structure the songs until we get together with Derek [Grant, drums]. Derek is really good at putting song structures together in interesting ways. We live in different cities, so we share music and ideas online. That has worked out pretty well, but it's not until the three of us are in the same room that the songs really come together.




Dan Andriano.

CONTESSA ABONO

## In your years playing with Alkaline Trio, what are some of the things you've learned about getting the most from your gear in the studio?

When we worked with producer Jerry Finn on *Crimson* [2005], I played his '62 Fender P-Bass, which was the nicest bass I had ever played. It was all worn out in all the right spots! As soon as we finished making that record, I bought two Fender '62 Reissue Precision Basses, and I sanded the finish off the necks to give them a worn-in feel. Now I do that to all my basses—including my GPC Signature bass.

Onstage, I play through an Orange AD-200B head and Orange 4x10 cabs, but the amp I like to record with is a 1971 Marshall Major head. It's the best sounding amp I've ever played through. I don't know why more people didn't get into them. It's a 200-watt head, so maybe it's that guitar players can't get them to break up very easily. But with bass, it sounds perfect. It gets pretty gnarly, but it stays smooth. It's almost like getting a naturally compressed sound. 

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## Is Minimalism Punk?

Production concepts aren't required to involve massive overdubs, orchestras, layered beats, and startling onslaughts of signal processing. In fact, stripping a recording down to its basic elements is just as much a viable approach to audio production as filling 500 tracks with myriad vocal and instrumental parts. It all comes down to how you want the song portrayed to an audience—in other words, how you wish to “cast” the sonic spectrum—and what is truly comfortable within the unique stylistic imprint you've developed for your band.

So whether you're rocking punk, metal, country, or jazz, choose your production “skin” based on what enhances the song and your talent. You don't have to clone production approaches that are currently in vogue, or stick with proven techniques for your particular stylistic market. You can go any direction you desire—and the celebration of individualism may be the only “punk” aspect of any production style you choose. —Michael Molenda

