

# **Annotated Bibliography – John Francis Pastorius III** **– aka “Jaco”**

## **Books**

**Milkowski, Bill. *Jaco : The Extraordinary Life of Jaco Pastorius*, Backbeat Books, San Francisco, 1996**

*“My name is John Francis Pastorius III, and I’m the greatest electric bass player in the world.”* This is the opening statement of this 300+ page book. It is the only biography available on Jaco and it portrays a personal account of the good, the bad and the ugly parts of his life. For me it was fascinating to get my first glimpse into the mind of such a great innovator of jazz. Milkowski writes in a true and thoroughly entertaining way covering everything from the early days in Florida to Jaco’s sad and premature demise. It contains a chapter entitled 63 views of a secret (reference to track entitled “3 Views of a Secret”) where musicians, colleagues and friends reflect on the life and times of “the world’s greatest bass player”. It did spurn some controversy however in regards to its authenticity and is not endorsed by the Pastorius family.

## **Compact Discs – Audio Biography**

**Bobbing, Bob. *Portrait of Jaco: The Early Years 1968 – 1978*, Holiday Park Records, Florida, 2002**

This 2 CD disc set and accompanying booklet is an amazing collection of personal accounts and audio clips recorded by friend Bob Bobbing. Preserved for 20 years and then released as a tribute to the man, this audio biography is endorsed by Jaco’s family (unlike Milkowski’s book – Jaco) and includes footage of Jaco’s father, first wife Tracey Lee, as well as personal accounts by Matheny, Zawinul, Hancock and many more. It contains Jaco’s earliest recording where he was playing drums as well as material recorded when he was playing with Tommy Strand and Wayne Cochran and the CC Riders. I think it is amazing that Bobbing had the foresight to make these recordings, especially considering the portability (or lack thereof) of the recording equipment of the time.

## **DVD’S**

**Pastorius, Jaco. *Modern Electric Bass*, Warner Brothers Pub, 2002**

This is a study in which Jaco demonstrates hand technique, fretless bass playing, scales and arpeggios, harmonics, finger exercises and study concepts. According to biographical and periodic evidence of the time, Jaco wasn’t on top form when he recorded this DVD (VHS Originally) and was alleged to have been confined to his hotel room prior to this recording so he would behave himself! However I think it is an excellent example of his approach to bass and jazz in general. He clearly states that there are no shortcuts in becoming a great player, instead thorough work on technique, melodic consideration (even for a bass player) and harmony are required. Jaco also performs some classic solos and there are exciting group performances with John Scofield and Kenwood Dennard, one in particular in which Jaco throws his bass to Dennard in the final bar of one track, yet another demonstration of Jaco’s ability to entertain!

## **Articles**

### **Glenn, Dann. Storm Chasers, Bootleggers and The World's Greatest Anthology, Bass Guitar Magazine (UK), Jan/Feb 2004**

In this article Glenn focuses on how the media love to pounce on trouble and certainly did with Jaco, but the interesting point this article has to make is a reminder that a lot of the bootleg albums that have been released since Jaco's demise don't do him justice or come anywhere close to reflecting his talent as a performer. For some reason tapes of Jaco's later playing that would normally only circulate amongst traders and collectors, have found their way as essential releases in music stores.

### **Miller, Marcus. Perspectives on Jaco and About Jaco, <http://www.marcusmiller.com/faq.html?category=5andfaqid=96andcolor=9>, 2002**

Miller writes about his relationship with Jaco, stating what he learnt musically during his time with Jaco. It is the only article that I have found with reference to Miller's concept of Jaco's approach to soloing. Marcus writes, "Jaco couldn't improvise those perfect solos – he used to compose and then perform them". I think if this is true it would have been not from a lack of skill from Jaco's part, but merely his desire to strive for musical perfection. He then goes on to describe how Jaco tried to play bass from a vocal perspective, trying to emulate his favourite singer, Frank Sinatra.

### **Murray, Charles Shaar. Jaco Pastorius, The Independent (UK), 1998**

An excellent article exploring social behaviour amongst the artistically gifted such as Charlie Parker, Jim Morrison, Peter Sellers and Jaco. It briefly touches on mental health issues as Murray argues that if Pastorius hadn't become the virtuoso bass player that he did, maybe his manic depressive tendencies would have been noticed earlier. He states that as an artist his weird manifestations might have been attributed to "artistic temperament" or "genius-type waywardness".

## **Interviews**

### **Williamson, Clive. Weather Report UK Tour, Hammersmith Odeon, BBC Interview, 1978**

An entertaining BBC radio interview by where Jaco talks about how he first met Zawinul and declared himself "the best bass player in the world", and how he recorded with Joni Mitchell and joined Weather Report without knowing the music first! Jaco's solo album had not been heard in the UK (or even by Williamson) at the time Weather Report were touring there in 1978 so there is a great paragraph where Jaco is promoting that too! The interview also discusses some of the arrangements of the "Mr Gone" album, where he recorded on Drums as well as sang!

### **Coryell, Julie. Jazz-Rock Fusion – The People, The Music, Interview with Julie Coryell, Dell, 1978**

An interview where Jaco talks fondly about his love for his Florida roots. He discusses how his (self taught) musical education wasn't limited to style, "there are no musical prejudices, I heard Steel Drum Bands, Cuban Bands, James Brown, Sinatra, the Beatles, and whatever I liked, I liked!". He also states that he only actually practised the bass for

about a year, and the rest of the time he just kept his ears open. He states that most of his musical experience was gained from playing.

### **Rosen, Steve. Portrait of Jaco Interview, 1978**

I like this interview mainly because of one question where Jaco talks about how he learnt to read music, he was offered a reading gig and had to learn as it was the only way to make money, "Then you learn how to read overnight, that's how I learnt" – he said; I take my hat off to him for that! He also discusses his influences including Charlie Parker, Frank Sinatra and the Beatles.

### **Websites**

#### **Pastorius, Ingrid. Ingrid's Jaco Cybernest, <http://www.jacop.net>**

Ingrid Pastorius maintains this site now after Felix, Julius, John and Mary Pastorius collaborated to form the official site listed below. In my opinion this is the richest source of Jaco memorabilia on the web, containing literally hundreds of photos, letters, Jaco "Art", transcription, scribbling, interviews and much more. Although this site is badly designed its content makes up for it ten fold. There is both personal and musical content relating to Jaco's immediate family in this site, you really could lose a whole day here!

#### **Pastorius Mary, John, Julius, and Felix, and Young, Eric. Jaco Pastorius, the official website, <http://www.jacopastorius.com>**

This slickly presented website is undergoing another design change since its last service in 2002, this promises to include more features and content. This site features a page called shout outs, which includes accounts from musicians such as Shorter, McBride, and Erskine to name but a few. I look forward to the new content with interest!

### **Selected Discography**

#### **Bley, Paul. Jaco, Paul Bley's Improvising Artist Label, 1974**

This was controversially entitled "Jaco" by Bley and is the first Album to feature the bass player. Bley was accused of trying to cash in on his sudden fame using his name as a title and using a silhouette of his profile as an album cover. Jaco's attorney contacted Bley soon after the release and requested a design change, as Pastorius was not consulted. This album also features Pat Metheny although apparently the guitar sounds muddy in the mix, I have not heard this album yet (in the post) but it is important to recognise that it was an album that featured Jaco much more than him just playing as a sideman as he gave the project a large amount of creative input.

#### **Metheny, Pat. Bright Size Life, ECM, 1976**

Pat Metheny and Jaco's debut albums arrived the same year, 1976. This album, featuring the trio of Metheny, Jaco and drummer Bob Moses, was not only Metheny's debut, it is also one of Jaco's earliest recordings.

### **Pastorius, Jaco. Jaco Pastorius, Epic, 1976**

The album that started it all – Jaco's debut solo album. Features a great rendition of Charlie Parker's Donna Lee and two of the tracks that changed bass playing forever: Continuum and Portrait of Tracy. This is a truly groundbreaking album, in Jaco's words "I'm here to make this non-instrument an instrument!!", and he did!

### **Weather Report. Heavy Weather, Columbia Records, 1977**

Weather Report's best-selling album is also Jaco's first as a co-leader. Here, Zawinul's mega hit "Birdland" starts the album, followed later by Jaco's lyrical fretless work on Jaco's own "Teen Town" (with Jaco on bass and drums). Jaco was nominated for a Grammy as Best Jazz Soloist for his work on this album. This is my favourite Weather Report Album.

### **Mitchell, Joni. Mingus, Elektra/Asylum, 1979**

Charles Mingus had called upon Joni Mitchell in the last months of his life to work on a musical version of T.S. Elliot's Four Quartets; a project which was later scrapped but served as the catalyst to Joni's "Mingus" album. Initial recordings for this album were done with other musicians, but Joni settled upon an all-star cast of Jaco on bass, with Hancock, Shorter, Erskine, Don Alias and others. Personally the track "The Dry Cleaner from De Moines" is one of the funkiest tracks ever recorded and is played again live at the Shadows and Light Concert with Brecker on Sax instead of Shorter due to contractual obligations with Weather Report.

### **Mitchell, Joni. Shadows and Light, Elektra/Asylum, 1980**

Recorded live at the Santa Barbara County Bowl, September 1979, Joni Mitchell assembled an incredible band - Metheny on guitar, Mays on keyboards, Brecker on sax, Don Alias on drums, and Jaco on bass. This recording includes the famous Jaco bass solo where he uses an echo pedal set to infinite repeat as an accompaniment for his own improvisation, a very effective technique.

### **Pastorius, Jaco. Word of Mouth, Warner Bros, 1981**

This is my favourite album; it is SO rich in content. While still with Weather Report, Jaco created the Word of Mouth Big Band, featuring Toots Thielemans on harmonica as well as an all-star cast made up of Hancock, Shorter, Erskine, DeJohnette, Brecker, Don Alias, and others. There is nothing like these versions of 3 Views of a Secret and Liberty City, both fantastically orchestrated and lyrically composed pieces of music. The whole album is incredibly diverse in style and feel.

### **Pastorius, Jaco. Holiday for Pans, Sound Hills, 1982**

This is a very interesting album because it is alleged that Jaco didn't play on it at all! The album consists of eight tracks featuring steel "pan" player Othello Molineaux. It is said that Jaco gave the tracks to Jackel (his engineer at the time) as payment for studio time. Jackel subsequently had a session player lay "counterfeit" Jaco bass tracks on tape as they were unfinished. This is a bootleg album and is one of the many that is referred to in Dann Glenn's article Storm Chasers, Bootleggers and The World's Greatest Anthology.