

# Jaco Pastorius — 'Modern music is made on the road'

By BOB BLUMENTHAL  
Rolling Stone

BOSTON — It's a miserable Thursday afternoon, with freezing rain falling on snow that might have been picturesque four road sandings ago.

Jaco Pastorius, the 25-year-old electric bassist-composer whose debut album on Epic was the jazz-rock surprise of 1976, ought to be in California playing prestigious studio gigs (like Joni Mitchell's "Hejira," where he appears on four tracks) or resting at home in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., in preparation for the Weather Report tour that coincides with the release of the band's "Heavy Weather" (Jaco joined Weather Report last April).

Instead he's sitting in a suburban Boston motel room, explaining why he accepted Herbie Hancock's invitation to spend a couple of months on tour, and why he found only three months last year to be with his wife and children.

"If the studio cats want to sit in LA making \$200,000 a year on those nice little records that all sound the same, that's okay," he said. "But the cats who are making modern music are out killing themselves on the road, having to struggle to keep their families together. That's why their music is so strong, and why studio music will always sound like copy music."

Even in this era of unprecedented eclecticism, Jaco's background is amazingly diverse.

Almost from birth, he was exposed to the Frank Sinatra-Tony Bennett school of pop balladry through his father, a professional singer and drummer in Fort Lauderdale. "I was exposed to all types of music, and no one ever told me what to listen to," he said. "You could still get radio broadcasts from Cuba for a couple of years, and my mother would take me to see steel bands and all the bad calypso cats. And, of course, all those funk rhythms come from Florida and Georgia."

Jaco followed his father's lead and by 13 was playing his first gigs as a drummer. At 15, he was kicked out of one band and quickly found another that needed a bass player. He dropped his bank account, earned selling newspapers, on a Fender bass and started playing the same night. "I've always been pragmatic," he said.

In a short time Jaco found himself working black music gigs, an unusual situation for a white teen-ager in the still highly segregated South. And on the

cruise boats so popular with older tourists, he learned to play "Cabaret" in every key. For further variety, Pastorius joined Wayne Cochran's C. C. Riders for seven months of one-nighters.

After taking some time off to practice in 1971, Jaco met legendary jazz instrumentalist Ira Sullivan and began his three-year association with Sullivan's quartet and big band, the Baker's Dozen. Players like Herbie Hancock and Weather Report's Joe Zawinul were starting to hear of Pastorius.

But the big break ultimately occurred at Bachelors III in Fort Lauderdale. "Blood, Sweat & Tears were playing there, and everybody — including my wife, who was working there as a waitress — kept telling Bobby Colomby he had to hear this fantastic bass player. After I played for him, he set up a New York audition where I played solo bass in the Epic office."

The resulting album, "Jaco Pastorius," contains a little of everything Jaco has encountered, from Charlie Parker to Cuban religious music to Sam & Dave to steel drums. With no plans for a follow-up album at the moment ("I got lots of music, but business has to be right"), all of Jaco's current energy is invested in "Heavy Weather."

"The album is very creative and modern, but very entertaining. As opposed to all that 'typewriter music' being played today, it's very warm and romantic. Of course, Wayne Shorter and Joe Zawinul are masters."

Listeners familiar with Jaco's fleet, Grammy-nominated solo on "Donna Lee" from his own album, or his stunning contributions to Joni Mitchell's "Hejira," where he drops ringing chords into his bass lines and comments with the free lyricism of a lead guitar, will be surprised to learn that he has never studied formally or listened closely to other bass players.

"My two biggest influences are Charlie Parker for his incredible virtuosity and Miles Davis for the beauty of his improvisations.

"But I have very few records. I never studied music in high school because what they were playing sounded like a joke. Technically maybe I couldn't play what the fifth trumpet was playing, but I already knew so much more than that just from watching TV. You can hear all the counterpoint and harmony you need on the 'Wonderful World of Disney' or the 'Dick Van Dyke Show'; everything has music."

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