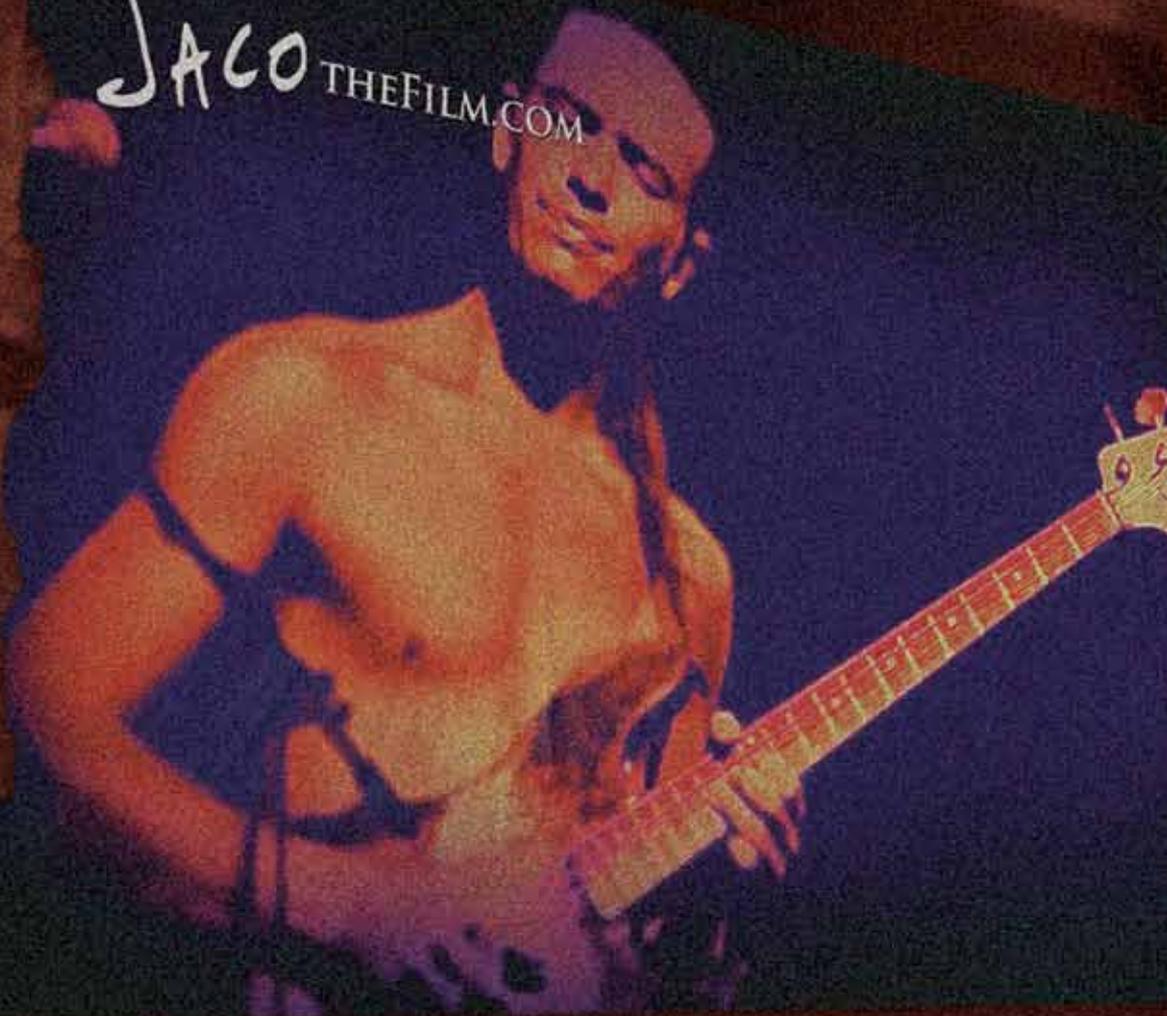


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JACO

THREE VIEWS OF HIS SECRETS

BY E.E. BRADMAN

ABOUT HALF AN HOUR INTO THE NEW documentary *Jaco*, there's a scene that reflects a crucial aspect of the Jaco Pastorius legend. It's the fall of 1975, and Blood, Sweat & Tears drummer Bobby Colomby has flown a virtually unknown Jaco from Ft. Lauderdale to New York to record his debut with jazz luminaries Hubert Laws, Herbie Hancock, Don Alias, Wayne Shorter, and Lenny White. The product of those sessions, the soulful, eclectic stunner simply titled *Jaco Pastorius*, would shake the bass world to its foundations, of course, but the album cover—with its bold lettering across a no-nonsense black & white portrait by Don Hunstein—might suggest that the unsmiling young maestro was overly serious about making a good first impression.

That wasn't true at all. "It was wild," says Return To Forever drummer Lenny White of the sessions in October 1975. "Basically, we would play, do a take, and go outside and play basketball." "We could have done it on bicycles with microphones, and he would have played it perfectly," remembers producer Colomby, still impressed four decades later. Far from nervous, in fact, 23-year-old Jaco was natural, relaxed, and in his element. "I walked into the studio, and Jaco's eyes were lit up because he had found home—this was the level he belonged on," recalls trombonist/musical director Peter Graves.

These quintessential *Pastorius* hallmarks—soulful virtuosity, athletic showmanship, and superhuman technique, with confidence to burn—are central



JEFF YEAGER

**Robert Trujillo
plays Jaco's Bass
of Doom.**

themes of *Jaco*. The new documentary, initially directed by Stephen Kijack but helmed since 2012 by Paul Marchand, was executive-produced by Bob Bobbing and produced and financed by Robert Trujillo. It uses three views—Jaco himself, those who knew him, and a host of admirers—to reveal the secrets of his wild ride. In two action-packed hours, it takes viewers from his South Florida childhood in the 1960s and meteoric rise to fame in 1976 to his '80s stint in New York and eventual murder in 1987. By skillfully weaving together several audio and visual elements, the filmmakers clear up myriad misconceptions, provide a visually stimulating timeline of Jaco's career, and show him as the complex and multi-layered human that he was, which is no easy feat.

ROCK STAR

Although rumors of Pastorius biopics have floated through the bass community for years, nothing ever materialized. In the late '90s, Metallica bassist Robert Trujillo, who had grown up on Jaco's music, befriended eldest son Johnny Pastorius. When the family faced bankruptcy while fighting to retrieve Jaco's 1962 Fender Jazz "Bass of Doom" from a collector in 2010, Trujillo bought the bass so that it could be among the four Pastorius kids—Johnny, Mary,

Felix, and Julius. A couple years earlier, Bob Bobbing, whose close friendship with Jaco dated all the way back to 1968, had released an acclaimed two-CD audio biography of Jaco's early years that lit a spark. "*Portrait of Jaco: The Early Years* [Holiday Park] was basically a starting point for the movie," says Johnny. "It's like a little movie in itself. That kind of integrity is where we wanted to go for the next thing."

Bobbing remembers talking to Trujillo about Jaco. "Robert told me, 'These jazzers think they own Jaco. Let me tell you something, man. Heavy metal is 99 percent attitude, and Jaco is attitude. He's the reason I play the bass.' I thought to myself, 'He's right. Jaco is a rock star!'" A week later, Bobbing, realizing that Trujillo represented a wider audience of fans who might be ready for a Jaco movie, invited Trujillo back to Florida to discuss the possibility of getting involved in the film. Once Trujillo accepted Bobbing's invitation to be a part of the team in 2010, it became clear that raising money, getting licensing, and getting the family's approval wasn't going to be a cakewalk. "Two or three years into it, there was an initial version of the movie, and everyone wasn't happy," says Johnny. "To his credit, Robert said, 'All right, let's get it right. We won't put this thing out without you guys being happy.'" Over

a five-year span, Trujillo worked closely with Kijack and then Marchand and director of photography Roger De Giacomi to make sure the movie found the right balance between respectful and realistic.

PACKED WITH GOODIES

Indeed, *Jaco* tells the story not only of Pastorius' mythical rise to fame, but also of his well-publicized descent into bipolar illness, exacerbated by drugs, alcohol, and family woes. The film contains footage of Jaco toward the end of his life that may make some fans uncomfortable, but for Johnny, it was important to show the whole story. "At the end of the day, he was a guy who loved his family, he loved life, and he loved music. And within that, there was a lot of tragedy, a lot of pain, and a lot of jokes and laughter," says Johnny, who was just entering his teens when Jaco was killed by a bouncer in 1987. "You gotta show the whole thing. Otherwise, it's just not honest, and that's the one thing I couldn't deal with."

Fortunately, "the whole thing" also includes compelling goodies. Brian Risner, best known among Weather Report fans for his engineering and live mix work with the band from 1972–83, brought world-class sound design and audio sweetening to the mix, smoothing transitions and making sure interviews and vintage audio are crisp and clear. Marchand's sure-footed editing moves the story along, deftly sequencing the archival visuals, from home videos of little John Francis Anthony Pastorius III, and actual portraits of first wife Tracy, to footage from the infamous Havana Jam and heart-breaking pictures from the New York years. Jerry Jemmott shines as a narrator and bookend, as does a dazzling lineup of bassists that includes Flea, Sting, Geddy Lee, Darryl Jones, Jonas Hellborg, Armand Sabal-Lecco, and Bootsy Collins. Alphonso Johnson clears up why he left Weather Report before Jaco joined; Wayne Shorter, the quiet mystic, stands up for Jaco like a champ; the love Peter Erskine and Bobby Thomas share for their fallen comrade is visceral and tangible. Herbie Hancock, Carlos Santana, Joni Mitchell, and Jaco biographer Bill Milkowski all add fresh angles to this many-sided portrait, and the brief moment Jaco's son Felix plays "Continuum" stands out as a highlight. By the time you've finished the second disc of extras—interviews with Nate Watts, Mark Egan, Anthony Jackson, Victor Bailey, Bob Moses, and 20 others—you can't help but have a 360-degree view of the life and times of

"the World's Greatest Bass Player."

Is *Jaco* perfect? It would have been cool to see more of Jaco's twin sons, Julius and Felix. Fender fans and Bass of Doom geeks might be disappointed that neither of Jaco's two main basses get dedicated screen time. But these are small complaints. *Jaco* is absolutely worth celebrating—and celebrating wildly—because it tells its complex story so fluidly and has enough to interest both Pastorius newbies and know-it-alls. Most important, it actually made it to the finish line.

"We got in the trenches. Blood, guts, and passion—it's all there," says Trujillo, who shepherded *Jaco* through the international film-festival circuit, did a Pledge Music campaign when funds ran low, co-produced Jaco's *Modern American Music ... Period! The Criteria Sessions* during filming, and arranged *Jaco* showings in several cities, including a star-studded show at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles last summer. "You take on the challenges, you do the best you can, and nine times out of ten, it becomes a reality. Jaco has been watching over us."

What was toughest about making *Jaco, Robert*?

Balancing the priorities of the filmmakers and the family. Johnny is one of the producers, and the opinions of family members like Mary and [older brother] Gregory were important, too. I had to make sure Paul Marchand was creating the way he needs to, and I also wanted to make my vision come to life. Jaco had a very spirited, influential life, and he was a family man, but then there was another side, which was more tragic. Finding the balance was the biggest challenge.

How did you first get involved with the film?

Bob Bobbing came to see Metallica, and he loved the show and the energy. He also loved the fact that I grew up listening to Jaco. We became friends, and eventually, he asked me to be part of the team. That was six years ago.

What made you decide to commit to making this movie happen?

At a certain point, I realized that making a financial commitment was the only way that we could make a quality film about Jaco that could compete with the Kurt Cobain documentaries or Amy Winehouse movies or *Searching for Sugarman*. This is what needed to happen, so I committed to financing it. And I don't mean "investing." You don't make your money back on a doc—that's very rare. I took this on because I wanted to share the story as best as I could.

Some people might wonder what the bassist for a million-selling rock band could possibly know about Jaco.

When I wrote songs with Infectious Grooves—pretty much everything, three albums' worth—every note I played on those songs was inspired by Jaco. There were other influences, like Larry Graham, James Brown, Parliament-Funkadelic, and Anthony Jackson, but Jaco was the main guy who motivated and inspired me to write those songs. A lot of people don't know that. They

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ELEGANT EXTRAS

As one might expect, the *Jaco* DVD is packed with classic Pastorius, right alongside period music that moves the story along. The film's 16-track soundtrack disc contains gems such as his own "Liberty City," Joni Mitchell's "The Dry Cleaner From Des Moines," and Weather Report's "River People," as well as "Longing" (with Jaco's daughter Mary Pastorius on vocals, Chuck Doom on bass, and Bobby Thomas Jr. on hand drums and drum kit). It also includes three evocative interpretations of early Jaco classics: "Come On, Come Over," by Mass Mental (featuring Robert Trujillo, Armand Sabal-Lecco, and Flea), "Continuum," by Rodrigo y Gabriel, and "Shine," by Tech N9ne, which uses a sample of "Kuru."

The second disc, "Outtakes, Anecdotes & Stories," boasts additional footage of interviewees from the movie, as well as unexpected insights and nuggets from Les Claypool, Nathan Watts, Mark Egan, Meshell Ndegeocello, Richard Bona, and Anthony Jackson. Interviews with Jaco collaborators from every stage of his career—including Ira Sullivan, Bob Moses, Joe Diorio, Tommy Strand, and Mike Stern—provide even deeper perspective.

Jaco sound designer Brian Risner recorded and mixed everything Mr. Pastorius ever did with Weather Report, and the band's new *The Legendary Live Tapes: 1978-1981* [Sony Legacy], produced by Peter Erskine (and reviewed by Chris Jisi on page 20), collects board tapes and room recordings Risner made during Jaco's tenure in the band. The four-disc box set, which includes two unaccompanied Jaco solos, puts bass front and center while showcasing some radical takes on Weather Report classics. Asked to describe how the Tapes versions differ from 8:30 (1979) and Live and Unreleased (2002), Risner says, "These recordings were made for us to listen to arrangements, for reference; [something someone played] might become the germ for a new song. And Peter, who was new in the band, used them to learn stuff." Sometimes, though, Risner found gold by capturing the band unaware. "It's different when the artist knows the tape is running. They'd say, 'Get that stuff outta here, we're not recording tonight,'" Brian laughs, "and I'd think, Yes I am, guys—I'm just not telling you."



think I'm this guy who's headbanging and playing quarter-notes all night long [laughs].

What music did you grow up listening to?

I had the good fortune to grow up with parents who were young and hip enough to turn me on to a lot of different styles of music, everything from Led Zeppelin and the Rolling Stones to Beethoven and the Ohio Players. At a certain point, I realized that it was the bass and drums that were moving me and driving me, and I really enjoyed the funkier side of music. There was a lot of James Brown in the house.

When did you get turned on to fusion?

Right when I was realizing that bass and drums were moving me, fusion and jazz-rock came around, and that was very exciting because bass became a prominent instrument. All of a sudden, there were bass solos! I remember my uncle had *Funk in a Mason Jar*, the Harvey Mason record, with a great Anthony Jackson solo on "Phantazia." I was at a Christmas Eve gathering, and I played that over and over so many times that my uncle just gave me the album. I still have it. Anthony signed it for me when we interviewed him for the film.

How did you find out about Jaco?

A friend of mine turned me on to Weather Report. "Teen Town" was the first thing I heard, and then *Jaco Pastorius*. Growing up a fan of the instrument and then all of a sudden hearing about this guy who went by one name, Jaco, was really exciting. He was a bit of a mystery: There weren't a whole lot of photographs, there was no internet—you had to buy the record to hear him. I loved Stanley Clarke's *School Days* and *I Wanna Play for You* albums, but there was something very mysterious about Jaco.

You finally got to see him when you were 14.

I saw Jaco for the first time at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium around 1978. It blew my mind! I liked the edge and the attitude that he brought to the instrument in performance. It was one thing to hear the instrument played that way, but it was another thing to see what Jaco was bringing to the performance and how he captivated an audience.

What was the crowd like?

There was a lot of diversity that night. I remember seeing friends that I knew from the skateboard community, and surfers. And Jaco reminded me of a beach person. We discovered that in the film, too: In a lot of the footage, he's on the beach, throwing a Frisbee or playing in the waves. Gregory told me they used to go bodysurfing during big hurricane swells. Jaco was a bit of a daredevil, too.

In the film *Dogtown and Z Boys*, the energy of those rebellious young skateboarders and surfers remind me of Jaco.

Jaco's energy was very similar to those guys. That's why Stanley Clarke called him "punk jazz," because punk is a fearless attitude of taking chances, and he was one to take chances, whether it was jumping off a cliff into a small body of water or doing backflips off structures, including his amp. The night I first saw Jaco

play, he slid into his bass like it was home plate. I had never seen someone do that. I don't even know whether he did it before that night or after. But he did it that night, and I was like, Man! He didn't just slide into home plate!

Did you get to see him other times, too?

I saw him at the Playboy Jazz Festival the next year, I saw him with the Word of Mouth Big Band at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, and I saw him with the scaled-down version of Word of Mouth with [keyboardist/vocalist] Delmar Brown and [guitarist] Mike Stern.

How'd you first meet the family?

I met Johnny through a bartender friend who recognized Johnny's last name on a credit card. The next time I came through Ft. Lauderdale with Ozzy Osbourne, we met and became good friends. And one of the first things I told him was, "Someday you gotta make a film about your father!"

What role did you play in getting the Bass of Doom back to the family in 2010?

I still don't know all the details about the situation—all I know is that there was a lot of sad, negative energy around the Pastorius family, and the legal bills were piling up. So I sponsored the money to get the bass from where it was. A lot of people think I hijacked the instrument, but nothing could be further from the truth. I'm not a collector. Right now, the bass is with Felix.

Obviously, Felix has bass magic in his DNA. Why don't we see more of him in the film?

Felix gave us what he felt comfortable with. It's important for me to be very respectful; my position was not to force anybody to be in the film, especially as painful as it can be. Johnny and Mary are older and had more time with their father, but even for them, it's not easy. For Johnny to watch the film is a heavy load. I give him credit not only for getting up in front of the camera and telling his stories, but for commandeering this as a producer.

How did Joni Mitchell get involved?

She's a perfect example of why I say this film couldn't have been made in a year. There were a lot of treasures that came along the way, including never-before-seen photos and recordings and that Havana Jam footage. Jerry Jemmott moves two miles from my house in L.A. and becomes a friend, and then we have to re-cut the film!

We didn't get Joni until about four years in. No one could reach her, and then spontaneously and miraculously, I met her at a Grammy party.

We became friends, and when she saw what I was doing with the film, she jumped on board with open arms and love and respect. Joni likes to keep to herself, and she's very particular about what she does and how she does it. So it was an honor and a huge blessing. She also helped me with the licensing of her songs—it's a very involved and really expensive process, and the fact that she was able to help us through that was amazing.

What did you learn during the making of the film?

I learned a lot. I learned about bipolar disease, and now I have a different take when I see homeless folks. I also feel like I went to the most incredible school of documentary filmmaking. And I'm amazed how Jaco got connected to so many people around the world, and how so many stories revolve around this person, this individual.

How did spending so much time with the film affect the way you hear his music?

Aside from being inspired by his passion, his commitment, and that great work ethic, I've embraced Jaco's compositions like "Portrait of Tracy" and "Teen Town" more than ever. But the main thing I get from Jaco is to take an influence, whatever it is, and put your stamp on it. With Infectious Grooves, Jaco's music made us feel like we could incorporate Slayer into James Brown grooves and have fun doing it. The rules are off the table. Jaco gave us the tools to be creative, but you're supposed to take it the way you want to and not really impose any rules on yourself.

Did you have a feeling that you'd be involved in the Jaco movie?

Ten years ago, before I was even part of the equation, I remember really wanting there to be a film about Jaco. A lot of people have tried, but for whatever reason, it didn't happen. We have given so much of our heart and soul to make this a reality, and I can honestly say from the bottom of my heart that I'm happy with what we've done.

What about all the great stuff that didn't make it into the film?

To get everything in there, you're talking about a ten-hour film or a series. We tried to passionately share Jaco's life the best that we could, and maybe someone else can commandeer the next mission. There are quite a few films about great musicians like Bob Marley, the Beatles, Neil Young, and Jimi Hendrix, and usually, there's a little more there each time. I commend anyone who can step up and take it further than we did! **BP**