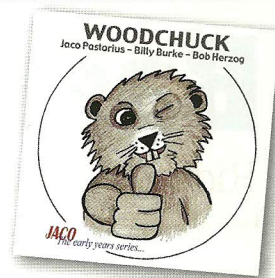
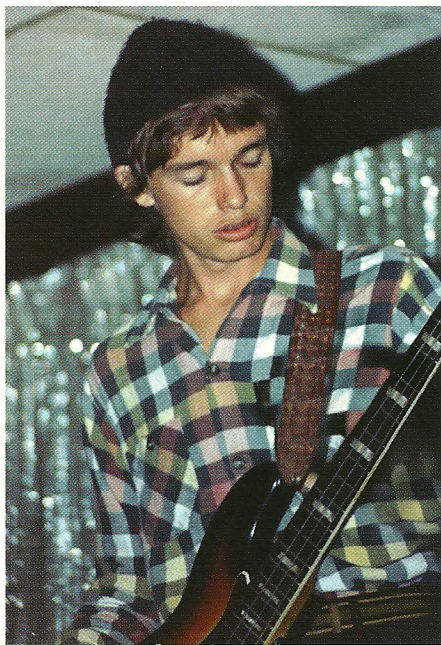


# Jaco Pastorius: The Teen's In Town



Two new releases kick off the Jaco 'Early Years Series'



It's been more than three decades since a 24-year-old Jaco Pastorius took the music world by storm. Although the skinny kid with the odd name and mind-boggling technique seemed to emerge overnight, Jaco had, in fact, spent all of his late teens and early 20s developing his amazing chops, playing night after night in music clubs around Florida.

By 1976 his local reputation as a 4-string phenomenon had exploded into international acclaim, and Jaco was suddenly the new revolutionary of modern jazz bass.

In 2003 producer Bob Bobbing released a few of his own personal recordings of a young Jaco from back when their friendship as teens first began. Bobbing's *Portrait Of Jaco - The Early Years* helped to fill in many of the blanks in Jaco's performance timeline, and gave first-hand insight into his rapid development as a player. Now, six years on, Bobbing has once again pressed the Pastorius rewind button with the launch of two new additions to the Jaco early years series: *Woodchuck* and *Tommy Strand & The Upper Hand Featuring Jaco Pastorius*. Both discs delve deeper into Jaco's history and shed new light on his natural feel for playing authentic R&B.

*Woodchuck* is the earlier of the two, taped in 1969 when Jaco was just 17. 'Although he started out in a group called Las Olas Brass in 1968,' says Bobbing, 'his first group as leader was an organ, bass and drums trio called Woodchuck. Jaco formed this R&B trio and would keep it together for 18 months just

out of his sheer love for the music.' The trio consisted of Billy Burke on Hammond B3 organ and Bob Herzog on drums and vocals (Herzog, who Jaco once referred to as his 'number one music teacher,' would eventually write the classic soul tune 'Come On, Come Over' as featured on Jaco's self-titled debut album). Although the *Woodchuck* recording suffers a bit from rather poor audio quality, Jaco's presence is clear. Although he's not particularly groundbreaking at this stage in his development, and there are no bass solos, it's fascinating to hear Jaco the teenager playing bass, knowing what was to come later.

The material on *Woodchuck* includes tunes such as Wilson Pickett's 'Ninety-Nine And A Half (Won't Do)' and Aretha Franklin's 'Think,' as well as the classic 'Fannie Mae,' a tune that would re-emerge in Jaco's solo repertoire many years later. Musically, the trio is top notch and in an improvisational mood. 'Even though Jaco was just starting out and the band was playing strictly cover tunes, *Woodchuck* would frequently go way beyond the typical confines of the arrangements and into uncharted territories, all the while maintaining the general vibe of the original song,' explains Bobbing. 'So there was also a very daring, almost jazz-like freedom at times.' It's also historically interesting to note that Jaco's axe on this recording is a 1966 CBS Fender Jazz strung with heavy-gauge La Bella flats.

Fast-forward two years and we arrive at the Tommy Strand recording. By now Jaco is growing by leaps and bounds on his instrument - this time a 1960 black Fender Jazz. Fortunately the source tape is greatly aided by mic placement, as Jaco's punchy bass is easily the loudest component of the mix, with each note gloriously jumping out at the listener. The band's repertoire here pays particular homage to the popular jazz-rock horn bands of the day, such as Chicago, Sly & the Family Stone, and Blood, Sweat & Tears, all a constant presence at the top of the pop charts in 1971 when Bobbing made this tape at the Bachelors III club in Fort Lauderdale. Although it may seem odd to hear Jaco play in what was essentially a top 40 band, Bobbing explains his friend's situation at 19 years old. 'Jaco made the decision to join Tommy Strand & The Upper Hand more as a practical matter, as he and his new bride Tracy Lee just had their first child, Mary,' he recalls. 'It was the responsibility of a new family that made Jaco have to buckle down and become more concerned about making a steady pay cheque. In fact, he decided that he really needed to

make it big and was looking for the right opportunity to showcase his rapidly growing talent. To Tommy's credit, he allowed Jaco the space and freedom to stretch out and experiment without any constraints.'

And stretch out he does, as we hear the marvellous Pastorius audacity begin to creep into his performance. Jaco's technique in *The Upper Hand* band is more sure-handed, his right-hand strength noticeably improved, and his creative juices firing on all cylinders. Highlights in this set are Jaco's four-and-a-half minute solo on Sly Stone's 'I Want To Take You Higher' (one of the earliest recorded Jaco solos) and the burning grooves on Muddy Waters' 'I Just Want To Make Love To You,' Otis Redding's 'Hard To Handle' and the Family Stone's 'Thank You.' Other standout tracks on the album include Chicago's 'Beginnings,' and BS&T's 'Go Down Gamblin'." Like *Woodchuck*'s 'Fannie Mae,' the Strand band closes its set with a tune that would also be a staple of Jaco's post-*Weather Report* years, 'The Chicken.'

In interviews throughout his career Jaco often acknowledged his bass influences, and perhaps to the surprise of some of his jazz-leaning fans, nearly all were R&B players - James Jamerson, Jerry Jemmott and Bernard Odum were often mentioned. On these revealing new albums we hear those influences come to the fore, as Jaco absorbs their innovations and begins to find a way to take it to the next level. A deep foundation in R&B rushed through Jaco's blood and permeated his feel and sense of rhythm, separating him from many of his bass-playing peers in jazz.

'For someone like myself it was a rare and precious treat to get to hear this music before it was released to the masses,' says bassist Oteil Burbridge, who was given a sneak preview by Bobbing. 'I always knew that Jaco was into black R&B music but I clearly didn't realise to what extent. Even though he took it in new directions and added other influences, the foundation is obvious. Jaco's playing is amazingly developed at the tender age of 18. He already had his signature tone and touch, and a few of his signature licks too. The best way I could describe this music is: alive and kicking!' According to Bobbing there will be more treasures to come from his personal Jaco collection in the future. 'There will be a comprehensive 2-CD Wayne Cochran and the CC Riders release, then a killer single CD of Jaco playing with Ira Sullivan. Tentatively I plan a Peter Graves Orchestra release, and of course Jaco's Florida demos.'

**Rick Suchow**