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The Evolving Role of the Electric Bass in Jazz: History and Pedagogy

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE ELECTRIC BASS
IN JAZZ: HISTORY AND PEDAGOGY

By

Dave Schroeder

A DOCTORAL ESSAY

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Coral Gables, Florida

June 2011

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The Evolving Role of the
Electric Bass in Jazz:
History and Pedagogy

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The advent and development of the electric bass as an instrument was examined in relation to its application to the genre of jazz and related styles. The evolving role of the bass in the early stages of the development of the jazz genre was considered. The work of pioneering acoustic bassists such as Jimmy Blanton emancipated the bass from its traditional, subordinate and supportive function. Bassists began to explore harmonically elaborate solos in a similar fashion to horn players. Electric bassists are able to expand on the harmonic aspects of the instrument partly due to the playability afforded by the electric bass as opposed to the acoustic bass. Leo Fender's 1951 Precision bass was a significant development, though it was preceded by earlier attempts to create various electric amplified basses. Jaco Pastorius and Stanley Clarke were key figures in the history of the electric bass, and were influenced by traditional jazz music. In turn, they influenced the development of jazz and related styles such as fusion. Modern electric bass virtuosos such as Steve Bailey and Victor Wooten have effectively incorporated traditional jazz influences into their compositions and performances. Jazz and related styles of music continue to evolve, influenced by pedagogical practices and electric bass instruction in academic settings.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF EXAMPLES.....	vi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Key Figures in Electric Bass History	2
Documentation of the Electric Bass in Jazz	4
2. REVIEW OF RELATED SOURCES.....	6
Interviews.....	7
The Jazz Bass Book	7
The Jaco Book.....	8
S.M.V.	9
Acoustic Bass.....	11
Electric Bass-Specific Resources.....	13
Additional Jazz-Related Resources.....	16
3. METHODOLOGY.....	18
4. THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE BASS IN JAZZ.....	22
Duke Ellington Bassists	23
Jimmy Blanton	24
Influence on the Electric Bass	25

5. THE ADVENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ELECTRIC BASS.....	27
Lloyd Loar and Gibson.....	29
Rickenbacker.....	30
Paul Tutmarc.....	31
Leo Fender and the Precision Bass.....	32
6. THE PLAYERS.....	36
Monk Montgomery.....	36
Steve Swallow.....	37
Bob Cranshaw.....	39
Figures Peripheral to Jazz.....	40
Jaco Pastorius.....	42
Stanley Clarke.....	46
Marcus Miller.....	47
Victor Wooten.....	50
Steve Bailey.....	55
Richard Bona.....	57
Avishai Cohen.....	60
Christian McBride.....	62
John Patitucci.....	62
Other Important Figures.....	63
7. JAZZ AND ELECTRIC BASS PEDAGOGY.....	65
Modern Technology.....	66
Pedagogical Resources for Bass.....	67

Classical Acoustic Bass Method Books.....	67
Jazz Bass Method Books.....	67
Electric Bass Material.....	70
Adapting Jazz Material to the Electric Bass.....	72
Paul Chambers Transcriptions.....	76
Teaching Students About Jaco Pastorius.....	79
Teaching Slap Bass.....	83
Physical Aspects of Slap Bass.....	83
Advanced Right Hand Techniques.....	85
Pedagogical Issues.....	89
Student Motivation.....	89
Instructor Idiosyncrasies.....	91
Music Instruction in Popular Genres.....	91
Teaching Electric Bass in Universities and Colleges.....	92
8. SUMMARY.....	94
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	98

LIST OF EXAMPLES

Examples	Page
7.1 Carol Kaye, <i>Days of Wine and Roses</i> , bass solo mm. 11-16.....	71
7.2 Paul Chambers, <i>The Theme</i> , bass solo mm. 1-8.....	78
7.3 Charlie Parker, <i>Au Privave</i> , saxophone solo mm. 20-23	78
7.4 Jaco Pastorius, <i>Teen Town</i> , melody mm. 1-23.....	81
7.5 Jaco Pastorius, <i>Teen Town</i> , mm. 45-51.....	82
7.6 Jaco Pastorius, <i>River People</i> , first thematic statement mm. 1-2	83
7.7 Basic Slap Exercise	85
7.8 Victor Wooten, <i>Classical Thump</i> , mm. 1-27	86
7.9 Victor Wooten, <i>Sometimes I Laugh</i> , melody mm. 1-5.....	88

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In the process of examining the role of the electric bass in jazz, certain other aesthetic and artistic aspects of that genre must be considered. Jazz is the first important art form to develop within the United States. The genre of jazz is still relatively young; the first documented jazz recording was released in 1917.¹ The electric bass was ultimately developed in 1951 by Leo Fender, primarily for the purposes of better amplification, portability and ease of performance, but also to provide an improvement over the intonation issues of the acoustic bass. The musical environment of the 1950's facilitated the creation and application of the instrument. The electric bass as an instrument is in its infancy, and the body of work addressing the historically significant aspects of the instrument is still relatively small. A great deal of potential for original research exists in electric bass studies within the context of contemporary music.

Present day technology facilitates the instantaneous transmission of knowledge in every aspect of daily life including the arts. The term “telescoping” has been applied in recent years in reference to the faster rate of development in virtually every field. Instantaneous information sharing informs and influences the arts in a profound way, leading to a rate of change that did not exist in previous time periods. Therefore although

¹ Mervyn Cooke, *Jazz*. (London, Thames and Hudson, 1998), 31.

the jazz genre is relatively young, and the electric bass is a recent development, there is already a wealth of music to explore. There are many stylistic and artistic developments related to the role of the electric bass in jazz that have not been investigated.

The potential benefits of an academic paper on this subject are significant. It can lead to a deeper understanding of the art form of jazz and the ways in which it is observed and appreciated, while at the same time focusing on the role of the electric bass. Many jazz purists are adamantly opposed to the inclusion of the electric bass in any music that could be categorized as true or “real” jazz. The examination of the instrument’s relationship to the genre could help to offer insight and clarification regarding the defining parameters of that genre. Since jazz is a true original American art form, there is value in investigating the issues as to what constitutes legitimate jazz. The essence of jazz is extremely subjective, but it is worth considering the general consensus of the jazz community. Dissent from mainstream thought will always be present, and should not be ignored if we are to develop a deeper appreciation and understanding of the art form.

Key Figures in Electric Bass History

Bassist Monk Montgomery used the electric bass in Lionel Hampton’s touring band shortly after its invention. Montgomery replaced Roy Johnson, and became one of the first notable figures to popularize the instrument. The use of the electric bass attracted some degree of attention partly owing to the novelty of the instrument. *Downbeat* magazine published an article regarding Johnson’s use of the bass in July 1952. The article featured a picture of Hampton posing with the new bass.²

Many important figures in the history of the electric bass emerged in various musical genres. Larry Graham, Jim Fielder and Carol Kaye contributed to the field of

² Leonard Feather, “Lionel Hampton.” *Downbeat*, July, 1952.

electric bass playing in popular styles outside of the jazz idiom, while reflecting some of the inflections of the jazz style. Graham played electric bass with Sly and the Family Stone, and is known for developing the thumb technique used in right hand slapping. Fielder's work with Blood Sweat and Tears fused jazz elements with rock music. Carol Kaye was a ubiquitous musical figure in Los Angeles, working extensively in the studio. Kaye also authored several pedagogical electric bass books that advanced the technical aspects of the instrument. More recent electric bassists such as Steve Bailey and Will Lee have studied jazz music extensively and worked with jazz luminaries such as Dizzy Gillespie, while contributing significantly to the development of electric bass performance in many musical styles.

Although the impact of the electric bass was significant, its ultimate success was more the result of individual efforts. An important figure in changing the way the electric bass was perceived was Jaco Pastorius. Jazz aficionados and bassists worldwide generally acknowledge Pastorius as the most significant figure in the history of the electric bass.³ He was an innovator in terms of the sound of the instrument as well as performance practices. His unique tone on the fender fretless bass as well as his use of harmonics significantly altered the course of the instrument's musical development and continues to influence the role of the electric bass in a wide variety of contexts.

Another important individual in fusion and mainstream jazz is upright and electric bassist Stanley Clarke. Clarke was a contemporary of Pastorius and one of the first prominent bassist band leaders. There has not been extensive writing about Clarke, as is the case with Pastorius, and further investigation of his work would be merited. Clarke is

³ Bill Milkowski, *Jaco: The Extraordinary and Tragic Life of Jaco Pastorius*. (San Francisco, Backstreet Books, 1995), 10.

still active, and among his most recent projects is an electric bass trio with fellow bass legends and innovators Victor Wooten and Marcus Miller. This group released a recording in 2008 and toured extensively in 2008 and 2009.⁴

Other significant electric bass figures in the contemporary jazz field include Steve Swallow, Bob Cranshaw, Christian McBride, Avishai Cohen, Richard Bona, John Patitucci, Gary Willis, Jeff Andrews, Jeff Berlin, and Mark Egan. Many prominent modern bassists play acoustic and electric bass with great fluency. These musicians have adapted the traditional stylistic inflections of the jazz idiom to the electric bass.

Documentation of the Electric Bass in Jazz

Contemporary writings relating to the subject of electric bass and jazz are abundant in magazines but are often lacking with regards to in depth study. Jazz-related publications such as *Downbeat*, *Jazziz* and *Jazz Times* provide a significant amount of information pertaining to the subject. *Bass Player* magazine has evolved into an industry standard for professional bassists in almost every style. A synthesis of the articles and segments of books on the subject would prove useful in supporting academic research in this area. While questions regarding the instrument and the genre have certainly been raised, available research and academic writings have been limited. Consideration of the historical development of jazz and related genres will provide a foundation from which to explore the subject matter as it relates to the arts, music and specifically jazz.

The rate of development in recent years in the jazz idiom and jazz bass has provided an abundance of research material, but in depth examination of this topic has been limited. With the array of contemporary and accessible electric bassists currently

⁴ Philip Booth, "Thunder: CD review." *Downbeat*, November, 2008.

active, the subject can be explored and examined more thoroughly in order to reveal many various aspects of the genre and the instrument.

The purpose of this study is to examine the evolving roles of the electric bass in jazz. The history of the instrument and its effect on the jazz idiom will also be considered. Research questions related to the purpose include: how the role of electric bass has developed, how the instrument has influenced the genre of jazz, and how the instrument functions in the contemporary setting. The influence of modern pedagogical practices in jazz and the electric bass will also be considered

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RELATED SOURCES

Books focusing on jazz topics have become more numerous in recent years, with many biographies and general historical publications now available. Many jazz history books use a survey approach in documenting the development of the genre, and general information can be synthesized from these sources. More specific information can be extracted from biographical accounts of historically significant figures. A considerable but not exhaustive amount of information is available pertaining to the major figures in the history of the acoustic bass in jazz. Significant academic sources that specifically address the electric bass in relation to jazz are less common.

Popular publications provide numerous articles that can be accessed for the purposes of this paper. *Downbeat* magazine remains the foremost authoritative source in jazz for contemporary writing and criticism, and has been in publication for over 75 years. *Bass Player* magazine has been in publication since 1989 and has emerged as the most prominent and respected source for working professionals in the industry. More coverage is designated to the electric bass than the acoustic bass in this publication, perhaps in part because of the magazine's appeal to younger readers. Jazz music is not the focus of *Bass Player* magazine, but many of the musicians profiled in the publication

are jazz musicians or at least have had experience and training in the field. These two magazines provide valuable contemporary information regarding the most influential and prominent electric bassists working in the jazz genre today. Historical accounts are also featured in many articles.

Interviews

Prominent contemporary jazz bassists do not generally experience the type of adulation that a successful pop-rock artist may receive from the general public; even many of the most significant jazz artists are easily accessible and accommodating to anyone who wishes to speak with them. Personal interviews have been a valuable primary source of information for jazz researchers. Discussions with some of the most historically significant electric bassists have provided insights that will be reflected in this paper. Steve Bailey, Victor Wooten and Bob Cranshaw among others have provided useful information.^{5 6 7}

The Jazz Bass Book

John Goldsby has long been established as a writer for *Bass Player* magazine, the most credible and authoritative publication for professional electric bassists as well as for acoustic bassists working outside the classical genre. In his “The Jazz Bass Book: Technique and Tradition,” he attempts to address the historical development of the bass and its role in a comprehensive manner.⁸ Goldsby displays a readily apparent bias towards the acoustic bass over the electric instrument in his coverage, although this may be partially due to the space limitations of a single book. Perhaps the references to jazz

⁵ Steve Bailey, interview by author, Miami, FL, September 26, 2008.

⁶ Victor Wooten, interview by author, Ottawa, ON, Canada, June 30, 2005.

⁷ Bob Cranshaw, interview by author, Ottawa, ON, Canada, June 28, 2005.

⁸ John Goldsby, *The Jazz Bass Book: Technique and Tradition*. (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2002).

and to tradition in the title of the book suggest Goldsby's opinion of the acoustic bass as being the more authentic instrument for the jazz genre. The inception of jazz occurred many years before Leo Fender conceived of the electric bass in 1951, so the upright bass and tuba were the sole vehicles for expression of the bassist role at that time.

While matters of inclusion are greatly subjective, Goldsby carefully chooses key figures in bass history to write about, providing concise biographical information as well as information regarding musically significant contributions. A major portion of the book is devoted to "the players," and features photographs to buttress images conjured up by the readings. Goldsby is an accomplished professional bassist, and is therefore qualified to speak to the technical and aesthetic aspects of bass performance with insight and authority. There are transcribed solos for bassists to reference as well, though the book is much more of a historical documentation than an instructional method book. Goldsby's experience working for *Bass Player* magazine affords him access to and contact with the elite figures in the field. His extensive knowledge and experience as a musician and a writer allow him to reflect intelligently on various aspects of the bass and its evolution in jazz.

The Jaco Book

Bill Mikowski's biography of Jaco Pastorius was originally published in 1995, and later revised and released as an anniversary edition in 2005 with additional material and interviews.⁹ Although its credibility has been questioned by Jaco Pastorius's first wife, as well as long time friend and musical collaborator Pat Metheny, it does contain many interviews with detailed firsthand accounts of various personal and professional

⁹ Bill Mikowski, *Jaco: The Extraordinary and Tragic Life of Jaco Pastorius* (San Francisco, Backstreet Books, 1995).

experiences with the bassist. Pastorius is universally acknowledged as having been one of the most influential figures in the history of the electric bass, and Milkowski's biography is the most prominent investigation of his life and work. An enigmatic figure, Pastorius suffered from bipolar disorder as well as substance abuse issues.

With such a rich source of musical contributions from which to draw, and with such an intriguing personal legacy to examine, Milkowski seized the opportunity to create a compelling read for those interested in jazz and especially with the electric bass. While some of the details may be questionable in terms of accuracy, discussions of Pastorius, his life and work, are presented in a variety of contexts. The section devoted to interviews and quotes from contemporaries of Pastorius is the most valuable and robust source of information provided by this provocative publication.

S.M.V.

The release of the "Thunder" recording by SMV in 2008 stands as a representative work that reflects the state of the art of bass playing.¹⁰ SMV is made up of three of the most significant iconic figures in the history of the electric bass. The eldest of the three bassists is the legendary Stanley Clarke, a contemporary of Jaco Pastorius in the 1970's and one of the first prominent electric bassists to emerge as a band leader. His technical proficiency continues to astound audiences today just as it did over thirty years ago. Marcus Miller is known for his work with Miles Davis later in the trumpeter's career. The slap funk technique he utilizes, with his 1977 Fender Jazz bass, is very familiar to other bassists in the field. Miller is also an accomplished producer with numerous credits, and is proficient on several instruments. Victor Wooten first came to prominence in the early 1990's as the bassist for fusion pioneers Bela Fleck and the

¹⁰ SMV, *Thunder*, Heads Up, CD B001BP4U50, 2008.

Flecktones. His most notable technical advances involve the right hand attack; he modifies the traditional slapping approach to execute what he calls the “double thump” technique. Wooten also applies the fingers of the right hand on the neck, using a “hammer-on” technique to play contrapuntal parts that often sound like more than one bass playing simultaneously. Right hand fretting while hammering on notes with the left hand has become one of Wooten’s trademark techniques, and his innovations have advanced the art of electric bass playing and influenced countless bassists.

Phillip Booth reviewed “Thunder” in the November 2008 issue of *Downbeat*.¹¹ He addresses the idea that this release will automatically draw skeptical reactions from those who expect that these virtuosos may use the recording as a vehicle for gratuitous technical displays, or self-indulgent excursions that are void of any true musical meaning. He succinctly describes the music on the recording (with one exception per issue, *Downbeat* CD reviews are generally brief) and acknowledges the compositional contributions as well as the production aspects of the work. Booth critically evaluates the recording and recognizes the virtuosity of each of the bassists, while also appreciating the restraint displayed by the musicians.

SMV toured extensively in 2008 and 2009, and are representative of the state of electric bass in the jazz field today. Three generations are represented by the respective members of this group, and the contributions from each are historically significant. The “Thunder” release is a reflection of the culmination of the formidable body of work from each of these iconic figures. The recent date of release, as well as the continued activity of the group in live settings including major festivals around the world, make this

¹¹ Philip Booth, “Thunder: CD review.” *Downbeat*, November, 2008.

recording and this review essential for consideration when discussing the current state of the bass in jazz music and other related genres.

Acoustic Bass

The lineage of the upright bass in jazz will also be considered in this essay. The adjustment from arco playing to pizzicato was a significant development. Leonard Feather's *Book of Jazz* provides some insight into the evolution of the instrument; the pizzicato or plucked or plucked approach in bass playing "came up with the boys from San Francisco" according to piano legend and eastern ragtime musician Eubie Blake.¹² Other sources credit it to a story of an incident that occurred sometime around the year 1911, when Bill Johnson was playing with his Original Creole band one night and forgot to bring his bow. He was subsequently forced to play the engagement plucking the strings with his fingers.¹³ Although it is not clearly known when this technique proliferated, it is evidenced on early recordings that this approach was common among bassists by the time recording began. Some early exponents of this technique include Ed Garland with Kid Ory, Bob Escudero with Fletcher Henderson, George "Pops" Foster with Bunk Johnson, Luis Russell with Louis Armstrong, Wellman Braud with Duke Ellington, and Walter Page with Benny Moten and Count Basie.¹⁴ This development was significant because it gave bassists the option to utilize a different type of technique from classical bass pizzicato in the right hand attack. This approach was predominant in the way that the electric bass was played, although some electric bassists use a pick. Advances such as these looked forward to the evolved state of the electric bass today.

¹² Leonard Feather, *The Book of Jazz: From Then Till Now* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1957), 87.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Bass players in the early stages in the development of jazz generally played in a style designed to support the harmonic structure and provide rhythmic propulsion to the music. If the bass players were afforded any type of solo, it was usually restricted to a walking bass line similar to what they had previously played in support of other instruments. The bass would basically be exposed, to enable listeners to hear the notes more clearly and focus on what the bass was doing in terms of its normal function. Besides featuring the bass player, this practice added an aspect of contrasting dynamics and varied intensity to a performance.

Many musicians established their reputation playing in the Duke Ellington Band. Ellington acknowledged the idiosyncrasies of each player by becoming the first band leader to write specific parts for the individual player's style, rather than for the instrument. One of the most historically significant musicians Ellington wrote for was bassist Jimmy Blanton. None of the bass players prior to Blanton had taken the approach of playing melodic lines in their solos in a similar fashion to horn players. Blanton is historically known for initiating the emancipation of the bass from the confines of its traditional role. While bassists Slam Stewart, Bob Haggart and Milt Hinton were playing bass solos in the 1930's and 1940's, Blanton was the first bass soloist to rival the great horn players.¹⁵ His approach foreshadowed the later style of soloing on the bass, and in particular the electric bass.

While it is important to consider the contributions of the above prominent figures in the history of the acoustic bass, the work of other iconic upright bass figures such as

¹⁵ John Goldsby, *The Jazz Bass Book: Technique and Tradition*. (San Francisco: Backstreet Books, 2002), 49.

Oscar Pettiford, Paul Chambers, Ray Brown, Rufus Reid, and Scott LaFaro will also be acknowledged. Ray Brown and Rufus Reid both wrote acoustic bass method books for jazz. Brown's book focuses on scales and patterns for the upright bass.¹⁶ Rufus Reid's book contains exercises as well as transcriptions of Reid's solos.¹⁷ Both books are useful for electric bass students as well, and have influenced the learning process in the field.

Two classical acoustic bass method books have been in common use for many years. The Simandl method has been utilized in classical bass study extensively for years.¹⁸ A second book widely used is Francois Rabbath's method book.¹⁹ The pedagogical material available influences the development of aspiring bassists and can subsequently have an effect on future compositions and stylistic directions.

Electric Bass-Specific Resources

Several key historical figures have emerged since the inception of the electric bass. The most significant of these figures is Jaco Pastorius. His influence on the development of the electric bass is considerable, and there are sources relating to Pastorius that are worthy of consideration in addition to the biographical material. His work had a resonating effect on many aspects of the electric bass, including tone, function and right hand attack. Besides the monumental self-titled debut solo album, Pastorius played on many historically significant releases. One of his most prominent releases came from his tenure with the innovative band Weather Report. Along with Wayne Shorter, Joe Zawinal, Alex Acuna and Manolo Badrena, Pastorius recorded

¹⁶ Ray Brown, *Ray Brown's Bass Method: Essential Scales, Patterns and Exercises*. (Milwaukee, Hal Leonard, 1963).

¹⁷ Rufus Reid, *The Evolving Bassist*. (New Jersey: Myriad, 1974).

¹⁸ Lucas Drew, *F. Simandl, NewMethod for the Double Bass, Book 1*. (New York: Carl Fischer, 1984).

¹⁹ Francois Rabbath, *Nouvelle Technique de les Contrebasse*. (New York: Slava Publishing, 1968).

Heavy Weather and the group released the album in 1977.²⁰ The record featured two more pieces that would become electric bass anthems. “Birdland” and the Pastorius original “Teen Town” are standards in the electric bass repertoire. Another album of significance to feature Pastorius is Pat Metheny’s debut solo release in 1976; *Bright Size Life* was recorded with the trio of Metheny, Pastorius and drummer Bob Moses and released on the ECM label.²¹ Metheny reflected on the legacy of Jaco in the liner notes of the 2000 reissue of the first Jaco Pastorius solo album: “...the only one of his kind, without predecessor; the only post 1970 jazz musician known on a first name basis with all music fans of all varieties everywhere in the world. From the depths of Africa where he is revered in almost god-like status to the halls of most every music university on the planet.”²²

Among other significant figures in the history of the electric bass in jazz, the most prominent are Stanley Clarke, Bob Cranshaw, Steve Swallow, Harvey Brooks and Miroslav Vitous. In more recent years, musicians such as Richard Bona, Gary Willis, John Patitucci, Christian McBride, Victor Wooten, Steve Bailey, Will Lee, Avishai Cohen and Mark Egan have emerged as significant electric bassists working in the jazz field. Many of these players are accomplished upright bassists as well. Their work will be acknowledged in this paper.

Figures such as these are addressed in books that specifically deal with the electric bass. Jim Roberts was the first editor of *Bass Player* magazine, which was essentially an extension of *Guitar Player* magazine. Roberts published “How the Fender Bass Changed the World” in 2001; he was initially inspired to write the book when Nicky

²⁰ Weather Report, *Heavy Weather*, Columbia, CK 34418, 1977.

²¹ Pat Metheny, *Bright Size Life*, Munchen, ECM CD 1073 827 133-2, 1976.

²² Pat Metheny, “Jaco.” In liner notes of CD *Jaco Pastorius* (Epic, 2000).

Orta and Matt Bonelli invited him to lecture at a 1993 Jazz Bass Conference in 1993.²³ Roberts also authored the book “American Basses” in 2003; this publication documents the evolution of the bass from the acoustic through to early electric models and contemporary designs.²⁴ In 2001 Hal Leonard published a somewhat similar book entitled “The Fender Bass: An Illustrated History.”²⁵ This is more of a collection of impressive photographs with minimal commentary than a detailed written history of the bass, but it is an engaging and informative source of information. A book by the same name, without the subtitle, was written by Klaus Blasquiz.²⁶ “The Fender Bass” documents the evolution of Fender basses, and includes some insightful interviews with Leo Fender regarding the invention of the Fender Precision bass.

Chris Jisi authored an insightful book in 2003 comprised of interviews and biographical information on many significant electric bassists active in the field.²⁷ Jisi has a wealth of experience writing about music and bass players. A 2008 book by Jisi, “The Fretless Bass,” features profiles, interviews, gear reviews and lessons from some of the most significant fretless bassists in the industry.²⁸

Before the advent of *Bass Player* magazine, there were frequently articles relating to the electric bass appearing in *Guitar Player* magazine. In 1993, GPI Books published a collection of articles in a book edited by Tom Mulhern entitled “Bass Heroes.”²⁹ This work is divided into four sections according to genre, with an article devoted to each of the bassists featured. Jazz, rock, studio/pop and funk/blues players are covered, with

²³ Jim Roberts, *How the Fender Bass Changed the World* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2001).

²⁴ Jim Roberts, *American Basses* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003).

²⁵ J. W. Black and Albert Moinaro, *The Fender Bass* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2001).

²⁶ Klaus Blasquiz, *The Fender Bass* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 1990).

²⁷ Chris Jisi, *Brave New Bass* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003).

²⁸ Chris Jisi, *The Fretless Bass* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2008).

²⁹ Tom Mulhern, *Bass Heroes* (San Francisco: Miller Freeman, 1993).

interviews included in each article. The articles provide biographical information, insights into stylistic development and interviews with the artists and other credible sources. While the inclusion of certain figures over others is a matter of subjectivity, many of the most influential bassists are considered.

Much of the same material is addressed in “The Bass Book” by Tony Bacon and Barry Moorhouse.³⁰ The distinguishing aspect of this work is the focus on the actual basses themselves; the history of bass playing is addressed through the lineage of the bass guitar’s development. Many detailed illustrations are provided to demonstrate the construction and evolution of the physical instrument.

Additional Jazz-Related Resources

Biographical books dedicated to bassists are somewhat rare. Tom Stoddard published his book on the life of George “Pops” Foster in 1971.³¹ Sources such as this may offer insight into the development of the bass and its function in the jazz genre in the early years of the idiom. Biographies of major non-bass jazz figures such as Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Duke Ellington and Thelonius Monk are more easily accessible and can provide additional information regarding the influences of some of these iconic musicians.

Books on the subject of jazz that use a survey approach to explore the general history of the genre can also provide useful and relevant information. Mervyn Cooke’s “Jazz” is an example of a well written general jazz history book.³² German music journalist Joachim Berendt wrote “The New Jazz Book” using the same survey

³⁰ Tony Bacon and Barry Moorhouse, *The Bass Book* (New York: Backbeat Books, 1995).

³¹ Tom Stoddard, *The Autobiography of Pops Foster* (London: University of California Press, 1971).

³² Mervyn Cooke, *Jazz* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998).

approach.³³ Although it was published in 1962, it does address the future direction of jazz at the time and also acknowledges European influences on the style.

In 2005 Penguin published “Richard Cook’s Jazz Encyclopedia.”³⁴ Cook offers short biographical information on countless jazz musicians, including contemporary musicians and electric bassists. The recent date of publication allows for the coverage of many younger artists who are also relevant to jazz in this century. Cook offers basic information on jazz musicians but also expresses his own viewpoints and personal evaluations. While those opinions could arouse much debate and discussion among jazz aficionados, the expressed sentiments are usually worthy of consideration and are reasonably insightful.

This essay will extract the relevant major findings from the reviewed literature and synthesize the results to provide insightful answers to the present research questions. The impact of the electric bass and its function in the contemporary jazz setting will be revealed through interviews with prominent figures and contemporary writings. The contrast as to how the acoustic bass functioned in the traditional jazz setting will be considered through the examination of general jazz history publications. Books and articles dedicated specifically to the bass in jazz or to specific bassists will also provide insight into the evolution of the electric bass and its role within the jazz genre.

³³ Joachim E. Berrendt, *The New Jazz Book* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962).

³⁴ Richard Cook, *Richard Cook’s Jazz Encyclopedia* (London: Penguin Books, 2005).

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

To answer questions pertaining to the influence, impact and role of the electric bass in jazz, the role of the acoustic bass within the genre will be considered. Assessing the development of the electric instrument in jazz must begin with the consideration of the role that the upright bass has fulfilled throughout the development of the genre. The scholarly documentation of jazz history has become a serious academic interest only in recent years. Much of the earlier writings on jazz history were colloquial in nature, but still offer insights into subject areas such as the convergence of cultural influences that facilitated the inception of jazz. These resources will be examined for consistencies and inconsistencies to attempt to determine the validity of the information. Reported factual historical events gain credibility when a consensus from multiple writings exists. This study will consider the available information pertaining to the development of jazz bass, which will lead to the role and influences of the electric bass.

Sources for this study include general surveys of jazz history in the form of jazz history texts, electric bass related articles from contemporary publications, and interviews with some of the most significant figures in the field today. Biographical sources will also be reviewed for relevant data. Information gathered from these sources will be considered and synthesized to provide insight into what impact the electric bass has had

on the genre of jazz. Comparisons and contrasts will be made between the acoustic bass roles, as described by jazz history sources, and the roles that the electric bass has played in the jazz genre.

The addition of the instrument to jazz ensembles in the early 1950's was received with skepticism by many, but not all, jazz musicians and aficionados. As is the case with innovations in other fields, the appeal of such innovations can be considerable for some and limited for others. One of the primary objectives of this paper is to examine the role of the electric bass in the jazz genre. It is equally important to consider how the instrument has influenced the evolution of jazz itself.

Many jazz purists believe, with considerable justification, that the timbre and tonal qualities of the upright bass contribute greatly to the efficacy of the bass in jazz music. The characteristic sounds of the instruments on which jazz was originally performed contribute to the historical aesthetic of the music. However, while the creation of jazz music was a synthesis of various cultural and stylistic elements, many in the jazz community now resist certain stylistic or instrumental innovations. This common but misguided viewpoint will be addressed.

The differences between the acoustic and the electric bass in terms of the attack envelope will be acknowledged and examined. Acoustic properties will be examined to explore differences in the way the sound from each instrument is perceived.

This study will present the traditional role of the bass in jazz as described by the existing documented writings relating to the subject. Interviews and statements from prominent figures in the field will be examined. The acceptance or exclusion of the electric bass in specific circumstances will also be considered. Information from written

sources and verbal statements will provide insight into what is generally considered legitimate jazz and why. A narrow definition of legitimate jazz can automatically exclude the electric bass.

After investigating and evaluating sources of historical information, the circumstances under which the electric bass was invented will be examined. Leo Fender conceived of the idea in part to compensate for the lack of volume emanating from the stage when bassists performed on the upright instrument. The acoustic environment of the time facilitated the implementation of electric instruments, but not without some considerable resistance from many musicians. The reactions to the electric bass have evolved over the years, and various styles have facilitated its inclusion to varying degrees. The electric bass influenced the development of musical styles as well. The birth of jazz-rock fusion is important to the history of the electric bass, and will be an important focus for this essay. Key recordings and transcriptions will be examined to expose characteristics of the music that are conducive to performance on the electric bass.

Relevant musical works can provide compelling insights regarding the development of jazz. Transcriptions can facilitate the realization of original observations and harmonic analysis. Transcriptions from various historical contexts will be contrasted to analyze and assess the progression of the role of the bass over time.

The analysis of data extracted from relevant sources will involve discussion and reflection on various issues relating to the research questions. In terms of data collection procedures, initially a large number of sources were consulted. The most valuable and pertinent sources will ultimately be utilized to support the essential ideas in this paper. An historical documentation of the development of the bass and the electric bass in jazz

will be presented and discussed. Transcriptions will be utilized for musical analysis, assessment and evaluation. Consideration of issues from the perspective of prominent figures in the field of jazz bass will provide material for discussion. This synthesis of information will allow for original writing relating to the relatively young field of electric bass-related jazz music. Pedagogical practices in jazz and the electric bass, within academic institutions and otherwise, will be evaluated and discussed in terms of the impact they may have on the future of the genre. Historical information, interviews with key figures, articles from contemporary publications and transcriptions will contribute to the realization of new insights pertaining to the evolving role of the electric bass in jazz.

Chapter 4

THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE BASS IN JAZZ

Before addressing issues relating to the evolving role of the electric bass in jazz, early developments in the role of the upright bass in jazz must first be considered. The first known jazz musician of historical significance was trumpeter Buddy Bolden, who led his own group and established the instrumentation for most early jazz ensembles. There were three melody instruments: a trumpet or cornet, a clarinet and a trombone. The rhythm section consisted of guitar, drums and double bass.³⁵ The bass had become an integral component of the jazz ensemble.

In the early stages in the development of jazz in New Orleans, the tuba played a role in providing the bass part. Many string bassists played the tuba as well in order to maximize employment opportunities. The instrumentation in jazz music was influenced in its early development by military brass bands, and the tuba was sometimes referred to as the “brass bass,” supplying the musical foundation.³⁶ An example can be found in the playing of Pete Briggs with Louis Armstrong. The 1927 recording of “Potato Head Blues” by Armstrong and his Hot Seven features Briggs on the tuba. Marching bands

³⁵ Mervyn Cooke, *Jazz* (London:Thames and Hudson, 1998), 26.

³⁶ John Goldsby, *The Jazz Bass Book: Technique and Tradition*. (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2002), 29.

made use of the tuba for its mobility and sound projection. The tuba was more clearly audible than the acoustic bass in this setting.

Tuba players would usually play in the two feel of the marching bands, playing roots and fifths on beats one and three and breathing on beats three and four.³⁷ In some cases this role would be filled by the baritone saxophone. Early string bassists such as John Lindsay, George “Pops” Foster, Steve Brown, Bill Johnson and Wellman Braud began to play some bass lines in four, which was difficult to emulate on the tuba. Legato solos and chromatic lines were easier to execute on the string bass, without the necessity of stopping to breathe, and bassists would also use various techniques including plucking, slapping and bowing.³⁸ One particularly significant figure was Count Basie’s earliest and longest standing bassist, Walter Page. He was widely influential with his longer quarter notes and steady rhythmic drive. He was also an early bassist band leader. Walter Page’s Blue Devils was a prominent southwest jazz band around the Kansas City region.

Duke Ellington Bassists

In later years, many musicians became known through their role as sidemen with the Duke Ellington Orchestra. Ellington acknowledged the idiosyncrasies of each player by becoming the first band leader to write specific parts for individual players, rather than just for instruments. Bassist Wellman Braud worked with Ellington from 1926 until 1935. His formidable skills in plucking, slapping and bowing provided strong rhythmic support for the band, and he was able to demonstrate that the upright bass could record better than the tuba.³⁹ Ellington employed several other bassists during his long career,

³⁷ Goldsby John, *The Jazz Bass Book: Technique and Tradition*. (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2002), 29.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 25.

including Billy Taylor, Hayes Alvis, Junior Raglin and the innovative and much imitated bebop legend Oscar Pettiford. A classically trained musician, Pettiford adapted to the harmonic language of the bebop idiom with great fluency. He developed lyrical solo passages that remain influential in jazz pedagogy today.

Ellington sometimes employed two bassists simultaneously, partly owing to the fact that he was reluctant to fire anyone.⁴⁰ Billy Taylor was playing in the band when one of the most significant figures in jazz bass history joined the group; Jimmy Blanton began to play with Duke Ellington in 1939.

Jimmy Blanton

The acoustic bass would continue in its fundamental and supportive role for four decades, until the advent of Jimmy Blanton. Other bass players had played improvised but subordinate solo features that were a variation on the bass part; these solos had a novelty aspect but were not melodic expositions. None of the bass players prior to Blanton had taken the approach of playing melodic lines in their solos in a similar fashion to horn players. Blanton is historically known for initiating the emancipation of the bass from the confines of its traditional role. His approach utilized melodic linear contour as well as advanced soloing devices such as rhythmic displacement, while always maintaining a rhythmic pulse. His technical facility on the instrument allowed him to execute intricate and idiomatic solo passages without sacrificing rhythmic integrity.

Saxophonist Ben Webster was working with Ellington when Blanton joined the band. The Ellington group from that era is often historically referenced as the

⁴⁰ John Goldsby, *The Jazz Bass Book: Technique and Tradition*. (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2002), 49.

“Blanton/Webster band.” Blanton’s features with Duke Ellington facilitated the development of his innovative approach to bass playing.

Influence on the Electric Bass

In many ways the musical approach utilized and pioneered by Jimmy Blanton looked forward to the role the electric bass would play in future jazz-related music. Ergonomically, the electric bass would facilitate the execution of faster and more lyrical passages that would be difficult for the acoustic bassist. It has gradually become more commonplace for bassists to play the melodies, often doubling other instrumentalists. In the contemporary setting, in many instances only the bass will play the melody. The electric bass has played a significant role in advancing the potential of the instrument in this regard. Bassists became more exposed in their sound with the electric instrument.

Along with this added exposure came additional responsibilities and a higher degree of accountability. University of Miami Jazz Studies Chair Whit Sidener reflects on this development: “Before the electric bass, a bassist with good time could get by not knowing the changes of a tune well because the acoustic bass did not have the clarity of the electric.”⁴¹ To be felt rather than distinctly heard was often the fundamental role of the acoustic bass in jazz. With the advent of the electric bass the harmonic aspects of the role of the instrument became more significant.

Bassists like Pettiford, Ray Brown and Paul Chambers followed in the style that Blanton had begun to develop, and became influential and recognized musical figures as jazz bassists. These musicians established a benchmark for future jazz bassists to aspire to, on acoustic bass as well as the electric bass. Many of the idiomatic passages that were performed by these bass icons were rooted in the work of bebop pioneers such as Charlie

⁴¹ Whit Sidener, interview by author, Miami, FL, November 15, 2010.

Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. The language of bebop transferred from wind instruments to the acoustic bass, and in later years, this language would be adapted to passages played on the electric bass.

CHAPTER 5

THE ADVENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ELECTRIC BASS

Acoustic bassists in the early days of jazz would perform without amplification. This would often limit the degree of audible clarity in the bass part. Sometimes the pitch of each note was less significant than the rhythmic pulse of the bass. One of the fundamental aspects of the role of the bass is to function as a percussive rhythmic instrument; the harmonic implications in bass parts were often of secondary importance to the rhythmic function. This was a common occurrence since the notes of the bass could not be clearly distinguished. In terms of the evolution of the role of the bass in jazz, the advent of the electric bass allowed for greater aural clarity. This development enabled the bass to contribute more significantly to the harmonic function. The bass in the early 20th century was not only a barely audible support instrument but was also often relegated to a subordinate role at the back of the bandstand, while in the 1960's the role of the bass was expanded in popular music and liberated from its traditional function by the development of the electric bass.⁴²

Electric bass virtuoso and innovator Victor Wooten began playing electric bass at the age of three. After being exposed to jazz-rock fusion in later years he eventually began to appreciate older traditional jazz as played on the acoustic bass. He reflected on

⁴² Jim Roberts, *American Basses* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 7.

how this influenced his concept as an electric bassist: “it influenced how I think of the role of the bass. Sometimes on old recordings you can’t even hear the pitch of the bass, it’s the rhythm that’s more important.”⁴³

Early electric bass proponent Monk Montgomery shared a similar sentiment regarding band leader Lionel Hampton’s preference for the electric bass because of how well he could hear it: “When there’s an upright bass in the band, you don’t really hear it as much as feel it.”⁴⁴ It is important for aspiring bassists to understand this concept in order to serve the rhythmic function of the bass part in an ensemble, though it can be a difficult to transmit the significance of this idea pedagogically. Bass students are often focused primarily on note production and harmonic aspects of the bass part rather than fundamental rhythmic concepts.

In order to appreciate the impact of the electric bass on the jazz genre, it is important to examine how and why the electric bass was originally conceived and developed. It is worth clarifying that the bass guitar was not an entirely novel concept in 1951, as acoustic versions of the bass existed in various locations, such as the *baja* in South America, the *bouzouki* in Greece and the *balalaika* in the East.⁴⁵ The electric bass was, however, a significant departure from the sound of these acoustic instruments. The attack envelope of a note played on the electric bass is considerably shorter than that of an acoustic bass; the same note played on an acoustic bass produces a much less succinct attack. This concept would later influence the development of jazz-related stylistic departures such as jazz-rock fusion. Amplification and in later years effects and other electronic enhancements would allow for a vast range of tonal manipulations that would

⁴³ Victor Wooten, interview by author, Miami, FL, March 1, 2011.

⁴⁴ Tony Bacon and Barry Moorhouse, *The Bass Book* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2008), 17.

⁴⁵ Klaus Blasquiz, *The Fender Bass* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 1990), 4.

also affect the underlying pulse and rhythmic propulsion of various musical styles. While innovations may have been realized in response to environmental needs and circumstances, these innovations then influenced how some music would be performed as well as how it would sound.

Lloyd Loar and Gibson

The concept of bass amplification preceded the advent of the Fender bass by many years; as music was getting louder musicians wanted to hear the bass more clearly. In the 1920's, Lloyd Loar worked as an engineer for the Gibson Mandolin-Guitar Company in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where he experimented with an electric double bass that was slimmer than its acoustic counterpart.⁴⁶ This was far removed from what would eventually become Fender's industry standard Precision bass, but it is worth noting that it is a common misconception to credit Leo Fender exclusively with the invention. The dedication at the beginning of Jim Roberts' book "American Basses" is insightful: "To Lloyd Loar, who had the right idea, and Leo Fender, who made it work."⁴⁷

While others were experimenting with oversize instruments to achieve a better bass sound, Lloyd Loar worked to create a smaller electric instrument to produce a louder sound.⁴⁸ His prototype "stick" bass was similar to modern electric upright basses, with an electrostatic transducer pickup mounted in a Bakelite box under the bridge.⁴⁹ The Gibson company rejected Lloar's idea, and he went on to form his own company, Vivi-Tone, though there is no documentation of Vivi-Tone electric basses ever being

⁴⁶ Tony Bacon and Barry Moorhouse, *The Bass Book* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2008), 7.

⁴⁷ Jim Roberts, *American Basses* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003).

⁴⁸ Jim Roberts, *How The Fender Bass Changed the World* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2001), 24.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

produced.⁵⁰ It is worth noting that although there were earlier developments in electrified basses before the advent of the Fender Precision, none of the ideas were commercially successful, perhaps partly owing to the lack of proper amplification at the time.⁵¹

Along with Vega, Gibson did produce “mando-basses” in the early 1900’s; these instruments were essentially extremely large mandolin shaped fretted basses that were used in mandolin orchestras and played in the upright position.⁵² Similarly, the Regal Basso guitar of the 1930’s was a hybrid of an oversized acoustic guitar and an upright bass, with a ten inch end pin for vertical playing.⁵³ In the late 1930’s, Gibson modified this concept by adding an electronic pickup to this type of design, calling them electric bass guitars. Only two of these basses were ever built, and one was used by Wally Kamin in the Les Paul Trio.⁵⁴

Gibson did produce an electric bass more consistent with the modern concept of the instrument, but not until 1953, shortly after Leo Fender’s revolutionary Precision bass was produced. The bass was eventually named the EB-1 and resembled a violin in design, with a short scale and a telescopic end pin so it could be played in the upright position.⁵⁵ Lloyd Loar was not involved with the design or production of the Gibson electric bass at that time.

Rickenbacker

Rickenbacker basses are among the most recognizable basses on the market. The 4001 model is particularly prominent due to its association with iconic bass figures such

⁵⁰ Jim Roberts, *How The Fender Bass Changed the World* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2001), 24.

⁵¹ Tony Bacon and Barry Moorhouse, *The Bass Book* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2008), 7.

⁵² Jim Roberts, *How The Fender Bass Changed the World* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2001), 22.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁵ Tony Bacon and Barry Moorhouse, *The Bass Book* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2008), 23.

as Geddy Lee of Rush, Chris Squire of Yes and Paul McCartney of the Beatles. Adolph Rickenbacker was a Swiss immigrant who eventually settled in Los Angeles in 1918.⁵⁶ Adolph became a stockholder in the National Stringed Instrument Company, who were producing “ampliphonic” guitars with an aluminum resonating cone inside a steel body.⁵⁷ National manager George Beauchamp developed the first magnetic pickup, and along with builder Harry Watson created the first commercially available electric guitar in 1931.⁵⁸ It was named the “frying pan” due to its round body and long neck.⁵⁹

In 1936, the Rickenbacker company made a significant contribution to the development of the amplified bass. The Rickenbacker Electro Bass-Viol was introduced and featured a metal body and horseshoe-magnet pickup. Interestingly, the bass could attach to the top of its amplifier, with the endpin acting as an output jack.⁶⁰ A similar electric upright bass design was produced by the Regal company in the same year, though it did not attach to the amp.⁶¹

Paul Tutmarc

In examining the course of the development of the electric bass, the work of Paul Tutmarc must be acknowledged. Tutmarc was a Hawaiian guitarist and teacher based in Seattle Washington, where he started the Audiovox company to manufacture electric instruments, including an electric bass.⁶² Leo Fender was usually given credit for the invention of the electric bass until it was discovered that Tutmarc released his Audiovox

⁵⁶ Jim Roberts, *American Basses* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 156.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Jim Roberts, *How The Fender Bass Changed the World* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2001), 25.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Tony Bacon and Barry Moorhouse, *The Bass Book* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2008), 8.

Model 736 Electronic Bass in 1936.⁶³ This was the first solid-body electric bass guitar designed to be played in the horizontal position, but it did not achieve commercial acceptance, with only about 100 models made.⁶⁴ In 1947, Paul Tutmarc's son Bud revived his father's idea and developed the Serenader Electric String Bass, which did not achieve any greater success on the market; the original Tutmarc bass did achieve a historically significant position, and a model is on display at the Experience Music Project Museum in Seattle.⁶⁵

Leo Fender and the Precision Bass

Without question, despite all the early efforts and accomplishments in bass guitar development, the advent of the Fender Precision electric bass was the pivotal event in relation to how the electric bass is perceived in the contemporary setting. The Precision bass remains an industry standard for professional musicians working in various styles of music, both in the studio and in live settings. Various versions of the Precision model have been manufactured in different countries, with varying degrees of quality in the materials used. This has made different models of the Precision bass accessible to amateur bassists and students of the instrument. Precision copies that are often much more affordable are also in abundant supply in retail music stores; any bass resembling the basic shape of the Precision model has been influenced by the original. It remains the most ubiquitous design among all electric basses.

Clarence Leo Fender was born in 1909 in California. He became an inventor, and partnered with George Fullerton in the late 1940's.⁶⁶ In 1948, Leo Fender manufactured

⁶³ Jim Roberts, *American Basses* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 52.

⁶⁴ Jim Roberts, *How The Fender Bass Changed the World* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2001), 29.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁶ J. W. Black and Albert Moinaro, *The Fender Bass* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2001), 5.

the first mass-produced and commercially available solid body electric guitar, which was a precursor to the eventual development of the Precision bass.⁶⁷ Although not a musician himself, Fender would listen thoughtfully to the concerns and demands of guitarists and bassists. The demand for an accessible instrument for guitarists to adapt to, along with the need for bass amplification and portability, led him to follow the model of his “Broadcaster” guitar (later named the “Telecaster”) and increase the size to create an electric bass.⁶⁸ As Fender commented, for musicians of the time, “...in order to work, had to play bass, but most of them couldn’t. They sometimes had to play bass AND guitar.”⁶⁹

The bass was named the Precision due to the accuracy in pitch that could be achieved with the fretted neck. To allow the working guitarist to be able to double on bass and therefore become more employable, Leo Fender created the bass so that guitarists “didn’t have to worry about the pitch...the tuning is actually the same as the bottom four strings of a guitar.”⁷⁰ The portability of the electric bass was a benefit over the acoustic bass, and it allowed for greater mobility on stage during performances as well. The original Precision bass featured an ash body, a 20-fret maple neck, a four pole single-coil pickup and a telecaster style headstock with four big-key Kluson tuners.⁷¹ Leo Fender’s co-worker George Fullerton claims that through trial and error they decided on a 34 inch scale length for the neck, a compromise between the 25 1/2 inch scale length of the Telecaster guitar and the 40-42 inch scale of most acoustic basses.⁷²

⁶⁷ Klaus Blasquitz, *The Fender Bass* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 1990), 4.

⁶⁸ Jim Roberts, *How The Fender Bass Changed the World* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2001), 31.

⁶⁹ Klaus Blasquitz, *The Fender Bass* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 1990), 4.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Tony Bacon and Barry Moorhouse, *The Bass Book* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2008), 10.

⁷² Jim Roberts, *How The Fender Bass Changed the World* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2001), 32.

The Fender Precision bass was released in 1951, though it was not officially shown in the industry until the NAMM (National Association of Music Merchants) show in New York City in July 1952.⁷³ Leo Fender has stated that they had made the bass by the end of 1950.⁷⁴

Bassist Roy Johnson of the Lionel Hampton Band was one of the first musicians to use the Precision bass in a popular setting, and a July 1952 issue of *Downbeat* magazine featured a picture of Hampton holding the new instrument.⁷⁵ Monk Montgomery succeeded Johnson in the band and used the electric bass as well, claiming that he enjoyed playing it and that Hampton like the sound and volume of the instrument.⁷⁶

For a working professional bassist, a Precision bass or something very similar is an essential tool. The sound of the bass is ubiquitous in the recording industry. Many Precision models have been modified to accommodate the addition of a bridge pickup for better clarity in the higher frequencies. This configuration is similar to the design of the Fender Jazz bass, which was released in 1960. The Jazz bass has become another industry standard. Jaco Pastorius used a fretted as well as a fretless Jazz bass and revolutionized the tone of the electric bass, influencing the sound of the instrument immeasurably. Fender Jazz basses have also been used by many other prominent figures such as Geddy Lee and Marcus Miller, who both have mass produced Japanese built signature Fender Jazz bass models.

⁷³ Tony Bacon and Barry Moorhouse, *The Bass Book* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2008), 10.

⁷⁴ Klaus Blasquiz, *The Fender Bass* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 1990), 4.

⁷⁵ Tony Bacon and Barry Moorhouse, *The Bass Book* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2008), 15.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Leo Fender went on to develop Music Man basses, and in later years founded the G & L musical instrument company along with George Fullerton and Dale Hyatt. He died in 1991 from complications due to Parkinson's disease. His innovations continue to have a profound influence in the music industry.

Chapter 6

THE PLAYERS

In the early 20th century, historically significant figures such as Jimmy Blanton, Oscar Pettiford, Paul Chambers and Ray Brown among others established the jazz bass tradition on the acoustic instrument. After 1951, jazz bassists began to emerge as influential artists on the electric bass as well as the acoustic bass. This chapter will deal with the historical aspects of many important electric bassists. Chapter seven will address the pedagogical implications of their work, and include significant musical examples.

Monk Montgomery

After replacing Roy Johnson in Lionel Hampton's band, Monk Montgomery was skeptical about the electric bass but eventually extolled the virtues of the new instrument in 1953, saying "it's the greatest thing that happened. I joined Hamp with an ordinary bass, but he liked the electric kind. I didn't like the idea at all."⁷⁷ After engaging in a relearning process, Montgomery appreciated the instrument even more: "there's nothing like it...you get a better tone...since our piano player left, it seems to fill in a lot for the missing piano."⁷⁸ Unlike the vast majority of bassists during this time, Montgomery

⁷⁷ Tony Bacon and Barry Moorhouse, *The Bass Book* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2008), 16.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

continued to use his Fender bass in jazz settings, saying “I don’t get tired playing it. It’s so much less work; it’s more accurate and you can have more speed.”⁷⁹

Historically, Monk Montgomery stands as one of the most significant early proponents of the electric bass in jazz music, along with Steve Swallow and Bob Cranshaw.

Steve Swallow

Perhaps the most significant figure linking traditional jazz to the electric bass is Steve Swallow, as evidenced in the fact that his compositions are included in jazz Real Books. Swallow was born in 1940, and early in his career played acoustic bass with Thelonius Monk, which lends a high degree of credibility to any of his subsequent work in relation to the jazz and bebop traditions. He went on to work with major jazz artists such as Gary Burton, Pat Metheny, John Scofield and Carla Bley (to whom he is now married).

Switching from acoustic to the electric bass was a controversial move for Swallow early in his career. He reflected on the decision in later years: “It was considered downright rude at the time. I lost some good friends, but I made some others.”⁸⁰ In terms of exploring the possibilities of the electric bass, he began “searching out electric bassists...through an interest in players like James Jamerson and Duck Dunn, I also found an interest in the music they were playing. As a teenager I had been an adamant bebopper. And if I hadn’t discovered the electric bass, I probably would have lagged behind even longer before discovering singers like Marvin Gaye and Otis

⁷⁹ Tony Bacon and Barry Moorhouse, *The Bass Book* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2008), 16.

⁸⁰ Tom Mulhern, *Bass Heroes* (San Francisco, GPI Books, 1993), 61.

Redding.”⁸¹ In 1987 Swallow commented on his perspective of the musical impact he could have on the public: “I’m not as grateful as I was to be a ‘musician’s musician.’ It’s flattering to be well regarded by your peers, but I’m more interested now in reaching people who are not at all concerned with the technical or craft aspects of what I do.”⁸²

Regarding electric bass versus acoustic bass, Pat Metheny has worked with the elite players on both instruments, and feels that the essence of music lies in the personal attributes of the individual musician rather than the instrument. Metheny views Pastorius and Steve Swallow as the two electric bassists that are best able to emulate the wider attack envelope and dynamic diversity of the upright bass: “Jaco and Steve are the best at expanding the narrow dynamic range of the electric bass, which can lead to a better sense of swing.”⁸³ Swallow himself once commented that “the trick with fretted instruments is to make them sound as flexible and expressive as fretless instruments.”⁸⁴

In recent years, Swallow has played an acoustic guitar styled electric bass. One of the most unusual attributes of Swallow’s electric bass playing style is his use of a steel plectrum, and his extensive use of upstrokes. However, his tone is not metallic or abrasive. He achieves a full and unique sound, and plays in a sophisticated and tasteful manner reflective of the jazz idiom. Swallow’s sound and lyrical soloing style have made him one of the most admired bassists in jazz, and he consistently places among the best electric bassists in *Downbeat* magazine’s readers and critics polls.

Vibraphonist Gary Burton reflected on Swallow’s soloing style: “you’re not going to get a lot of fast playing and elaborate harmonic explorations from him; he plays in a

⁸¹ Tom Mulhern, *Bass Heroes* (San Francisco, GPI Books, 1993), 61.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 60.

⁸³ Metheny, Pat, interview by author, Miami, FL, March 22, 2011.

⁸⁴ Tom Mulhern, *Bass Heroes* (San Francisco, GPI Books, 1993), 63.

more melodic way.”⁸⁵ This approach has proven to be extremely successful, and stands in contrast to many of the other electric bass luminaries active today who are known more for technical ability. Swallow shared some insight into his approach to soloing: “Almost everybody, when he or she is young, tends to practice for velocity. I received strong hints early on that I ought to slow down.”⁸⁶

Swallow is one of the most revered and respected bassists in the history of jazz and on the history of the electric bass. His recent work with John Scofield’s trio, along with drummer Bill Stewart, as well as his work with Gary Burton’s reunion group with Pat Metheny and Antonio Sanchez, has further solidified his position as a jazz legend. Touring in recent years with these acts has also served to introduce his artistry to a younger generation of jazz enthusiasts.

Bob Cranshaw

Like his contemporary Steve Swallow, Bob Cranshaw is a key figure in the history of jazz and the electric bass. Best known for his extensive touring and recording with Sonny Rollins, Cranshaw is an accomplished acoustic and electric bassist. In 1964, he recorded on Lee Morgan’s seminal hard bop record on the Blue Note label, *The Sidewinder*. Cranshaw also worked extensively as a session musician for film and television soundtracks, including work on the children’s television shows *Sesame Street* and *The Electric Company*.

Unlike Monk Montgomery and Steve Swallow, Cranshaw’s switch to the electric bass from the acoustic may have been motivated by factors outside of the realm of aesthetic preference, as he was severely injured in a car accident early in his career; this

⁸⁵ Gary Burton, interview by author, Miami, FL, October 14, 2009.

⁸⁶ Tom Mulhern, *Bass Heroes* (San Francisco, GPI Books, 1993), 65.

may have limited his ability to perform on the upright bass. However, he continued to use the electric bass long after he recovered from the accident.

After a 2005 concert with Sonny Rollins, Cranshaw commented on why he continued to use the electric bass rather than the upright, stating that “Sonny likes the electric.”⁸⁷

Like Steve Swallow, Cranshaw utilizes a sparse soloing style that focuses on lyricism rather than dense note production or display of instrumental virtuosity. In recent years, he has remained as the bassist for Sonny Rollins and continues to perform live with the saxophone legend.

Figures Peripheral to Jazz

Many influential electric bassists worked in genres other than jazz. Carol Kaye has countless studio recording credits, and has established herself as an important educator in the industry as well. Kaye has produced her own instructional materials and remains active in bass pedagogy. Jerry Jemmott worked with acts such as B.B. King, Aretha Franklin and a number of rhythm and blues acts. Jermont is also known for his relationship with Jaco Pastorius, who he interviewed for an instructional video. Pastorius cited Jermont as an influence on his development as a bassist. Jim Fielder has numerous session credits to his name, including work with folk-rock legends Buffalo Springfield, but is best known for his historical work with the band Blood, Sweat and Tears. This group achieved a great deal of commercial success in the late 1960's and 1970's, and many of the group's songs became standard repertoire for funk and dance oriented bands.

Francis “Rocco” Prestia is best known for his work with the funk group Tower of Power. Prestia has an unwavering rhythmic connection with the band's drummer David

⁸⁷ Bob Cranshaw, interview by author, Ottawa, ON, Canada, June 28, 2005.

Garibaldi. Although he is not known as a soloist, his feel for sixteenth note rhythms is widely influential in the field of electric bass. Many bassists study his music and aspire to emulate the rhythmic strength of his bass lines. The 1973 Tower of Power hit song “What is Hip” had a major impact on electric bass playing, and “changed the course of history” according to electric bass icon Will Lee.⁸⁸

James Jamerson grew up in Detroit and Studied music at Wayne State University, where Motown president Barry Gordy heard him play and hired him as the house bassist.⁸⁹ Jamerson made the transition from upright bass to electric, and was heavily influenced by jazz bassists. He played with prominent jazz artists such as Barry Harris and Yusef Lateef, and he cites Percy Heath, Ray Brown and Paul Chambers as three of his most significant musical influences.⁹⁰ Jamerson was known for his right hand approach to playing the electric bass; he would use only his index finger to achieve a consistent tone and attack. Although he went on to record with countless artists, he is most remembered for his anonymous contributions to the Motown sound.

Larry Graham is the first known electric bassist to use the slap bass technique, and is widely recognized for his work with the funk group Sly and the Family Stone, as well as his own group Graham Central Station. Graham apparently invented what he called his “thumping and plucking” technique to compensate for the absence of a drummer during some of his performances.⁹¹ This technique became known as “slapping and popping,” and has had a tremendous impact on electric bass playing in many genres. Along with Graham, Louis Johnson was one of the early innovators of the slap technique,

⁸⁸ Jim Roberts, *How the Fender Bass Changed the World* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2001), 117.

⁸⁹ Tom Mulhern, *Bass Heroes* (San Francisco, GPI Books, 1993), 154.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁹¹ Jim Roberts, *How the Fender Bass Changed the World* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2001), 115.

apparently developing the technique before hearing Larry Graham.⁹² Johnson was among the first to use one of the Music Man StingRay basses and capitalized on the battery powered active pickup of the instrument, which allowed for the bass and treble tones to be accentuated.⁹³ Johnson is known for his work with The Brothers Johnson, George Benson and Michael Jackson among others.

Jaco Pastorius

Jaco Pastorius is undoubtedly the most significant figure in the history of the electric bass. He left behind a legacy that may not have come to its full fruition; Pastorius died on September 21st, 1987 at the age of thirty-five. Although his life was brief, his impact on the music world, the jazz genre and the way the electric bass is approached and perceived is immeasurable. The brazen attitude he emulated was met with apprehension by many musicians. He quickly gained a reputation as the self-proclaimed “world’s greatest bass player.” After hearing his playing, most people accepted his audacious claims of greatness as valid. He was born John Francis Pastorius III, in Norristown Pennsylvania on December 1st, 1951. He is typically associated with the Fort Lauderdale, Florida area, as his family moved there shortly after he was born. He is also associated with the University of Miami in Coral Gables Florida, as he was employed there as an instructor for a semester in 1973.

In 1995, author Bill Milkowski released the most comprehensive biographical publication ever written about the bassist: *Jaco: The Extraordinary and Tragic Life of Jaco Pastorius*.⁹⁴ Although the book contains many first-hand accounts of the bassist’s

⁹² Jim Roberts, *How the Fender Bass Changed the World* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2001), 116.

⁹³ Tony Bacon and Barry Moorhouse, *The Bass Book* (New York: Backbeat Books, 1995), 92.

⁹⁴ Bill Milkowski, *Jaco: The Extraordinary and Tragic Life of Jaco Pastorius* (San Francisco, Backstreet Books, 1995).

personal and musical experiences throughout his development as a musician, including detailed descriptions of the mental deterioration he experienced in the latter part of his life, it is widely known that the accuracy of much of the content in the book is questionable. Many of those close to Pastorius at various stages of his life have openly questioned the book's validity, including long-time friend and musical associate Pat Metheny, who refers to the book as "a horribly inaccurate, botched biography."⁹⁵

One of the most innovative advances Pastorius contributed to the electric bass art form was his use of harmonics, as evidenced in his performance of "Portrait of Tracy." The techniques used in the piece have influenced electric bassists immeasurably. One of the most striking features of the piece is the concurrent performance of a melody line along with underlying bass notes. The piece was written as a tribute to the bassist's first wife, Tracy Lee.

One of the most salient aspects of the music and legacy of Jaco Pastorius is his tone. He is principally known for using two Fender jazz basses. One was a 1960 model, the other a 1962 bass which he is known to have modified into a fretless bass by ripping the frets out himself. He had played drums prior to becoming a bassist, which may in part account for his rhythmic strength. He had been playing upright bass, but claimed that the weather in Florida was not conducive to regulating the condition of the large wooden instrument. He tended to use the bridge pickup a great deal, and his right hand attack often involved plucking the strings very close to the bridge. This bright sound became associated with Pastorius and has had a pervasive influence on the music industry. The tone and attack utilized by Pastorius is the most imitated sound in the

⁹⁵ Pat Metheny, "Jaco." In liner notes of CD *Jaco Pastorius* (Epic, 2000).

history of the electric bass. The influence of the sound can be heard in the playing of countless bassists, in an extremely wide range of styles and musical settings.

Pastorius has also accomplished a rare feat among electric bassists; his music has gained almost universal acceptance among the jazz community. It is a common tendency among jazz purists to impose elitist and exclusive parameters around what is said to constitute legitimate jazz music. However, when a musician as rare and as gifted as Pastorius rises to prominence, these purists are eager to claim his genius, acknowledging him as one of their own. Pastorius was not exclusively a jazz musician; his music reflected a fusion of various styles. He worked extensively with Canadian singer and composer Joni Mitchell extensively, and he played in various other capacities outside the confines of traditional jazz. His work with Weather Report is considered exemplary of the jazz-rock fusion genre, though narrow and conclusive categorization can prove elusive. The music of Weather Report stands as a reflection of the jazz influence on the electric bass work of Pastorius, while also demonstrating how the electric bass could impact jazz-related music. All of the musicians in the group were previously accomplished jazz musicians.

On his monumental 1976 debut solo album, he does acknowledge a strong pedigree in jazz and the bebop language by beginning the record with a classic bebop piece. “Donna Lee” is a Charlie Parker composition, based on the traditional song “Indiana.” This inclusion of a classic jazz bebop piece on a stylistically diverse record seems to have influenced many bassists in subsequent years, as many bass players and other instrumentalists seem to have followed the example set by Pastorius. This may be coincidental, but the influence of Pastorius is ubiquitous in the music industry in many

different ways. The version of “Donna Lee” that begins his solo debut has become one of the most imitated works in the entire electric bass repertoire. Pastorius uses only percussion to accompany his bass part, and his concise articulation and tone are memorable and impressive. The impact of this performance still resonates today.

Besides the monumental self-titled debut solo album, Pastorius played on many historically significant releases. One of his most prominent releases came from his time with the innovative band Weather Report. Along with Wayne Shorter, Joe Zawinal, Alex Acuna and Manolo Badrena, Pastorius recorded *Heavy Weather* and the group released the album in 1977. The record featured two more pieces that would become electric bass anthems. “Birdland” and the Pastorius original “Teen Town” are standards in the electric bass repertoire. His work with Weather Report is considered exemplary of the jazz-rock fusion genre, though narrow and conclusive categorization can prove elusive. The music of Weather Report stands as a reflection of the jazz influence on the electric bass work of Pastorius, while also demonstrating how the electric bass could impact jazz-related music. All of the musicians in the group were previously accomplished jazz musicians.

Another album of historical significance to feature Pastorius is Pat Metheny’s debut solo release in 1976; *Bright Size Life* was recorded with the trio of Metheny, Pastorius and drummer Bob Moses and released on the ECM label.⁹⁶ Metheny reflected on the legacy of the bassist in the liner notes of the 2000 reissue of the first Jaco Pastorius solo album: “...the only one of his kind, without predecessor; the only post 1970 jazz musician known on a first name basis with all music fans of all varieties everywhere in

⁹⁶ Pat Metheny, *Bright Size Life*, Munchen, ECM CD 1073 827 133-2, 1976.

the world. From the depths of Africa where he is revered in almost god-like status to the halls to the halls of most every music university on the planet.”⁹⁷

Other musicians share a similar perspective regarding the importance of the musician over the instrument. World-renowned drummer Matt Wilson reflected on the idea of playing jazz music with an electric bassist: “I love playing with electric bass; swing is swing.”⁹⁸ Pastorius is universally acknowledged as having achieved a swing feel on the electric bass that is influenced by the tradition of the jazz genre. While being able to execute virtuosic technical displays, the integrity of the meter and time feel was never compromised. Pastorius and his contemporary Stanley Clarke were able to successfully integrate the electric bass into jazz influenced music in an unprecedented way.

Stanley Clarke

Stanley Clarke and Jaco Pastorius are often compared stylistically. Clarke was one of the first electric bassists to emerge as a band leader. His astounding technique on the instrument earned him a reputation as a world-class virtuoso and innovator. One of his most successful solo albums was entitled *School Days* and was released in 1976. The title track contains a signature bass line that has become a historically significant reference for electric bassists. Earlier that same year, along with pianist Chick Corea, drummer Lenny White and guitarist Al DiMeola, Clarke released the *Romantic Warrior* album under the Return to Forever name. This group is one of the most revered jazz-rock fusion groups in history. A 2008 reunion tour afforded the band the chance to revive some of their classic repertoire, and to demonstrate that their individual instrumental virtuosity is still as impressive as it was over thirty years ago. In live performance,

⁹⁷ Pat Metheny, “Jaco.” In liner notes of CD *Jaco Pastorius* (Epic, 2000).

⁹⁸ Wilson, Matt, interview by author, Miami, FL, October 20, 2010.

Stanley Clarke's bass solos elicit intense reactions from audiences. Clarke is one of the true dual instrumentalists in terms of possessing an exceptional level of virtuosity on the electric and acoustic basses. Clarke's musicianship, charisma and dominant stage presence hold an immediate appeal to audience members, and he remains one of the most admired bassists in the history of the instrument. His recent work with SMV features fellow bass icons Marcus Miller and Victor Wooten, and has perhaps served to introduced Clarke to a younger generation of bass enthusiasts and potential jazz fans.

Marcus Miller

Marcus Miller came to prominence in the jazz community playing with Miles Davis in the latter part of the trumpeter's career. Miller is a gifted multi-instrumentalist (he plays bass clarinet, synthesizer and electric bass on the SMV *Thunder* release). As a bassist, Miller is known for his presence and tone, as well as his funk oriented slapping skills. His influence on electric bassists has been significant. Fender mass produced a Japanese made Marcus Miller signature bass modeled after his 1977 Fender jazz bass. The original design of the bass incorporates a three-bolt neck attachment with a "micro-tilt" feature that allows for easy neck adjustments. The design was short-lived as the stability was insufficient as compared to the traditional four-bolt model. The older Fender basses are usually the most sought after by instrumentalists and collectors, and are subsequently more expensive in general. The original model was constructed in the United States using ash wood, which gives it a deep resonating sound. The signature model is constructed in Japan, and while many inferior models come from Japan and use a less expensive wood such as alder, the Marcus Miller signature bass is built with an ash

body. Miller continues to use his 1977 model as his main instrument, and the signature model continues to sell in high numbers.

Along with fellow bass icons Stanley Clarke and Victor Wooten, Miller released the recording *Thunder* on August 12th, 2008 under the group name SMV. Miller and Wooten have both cited Pastorius and Clarke as two of their most prominent influences, as is the case with countless other bassists. Regarding Stanley Clarke, Miller shared some insight into the specific sound of the electric bass: "...on some instruments that have a particular tuning, like guitars and basses, there are some sounds- like open E on the bass- that are just magical sounds. It's the lowest note on the bass, and Stanley realized that."⁹⁹

Miller Spoke of hearing the Jaco Pastorius rendition of "Donna Lee" for the first time at age of fifteen: "I wasn't familiar with bebop, and it just sounded like somebody playing random notes, but then I took a jazz workshop and learned 'Donna Lee.'"¹⁰⁰

This motivated Miller to further explore the jazz tradition: "Jaco's playing and writing were like a wake-up call; it led me to study bebop, which really got my harmony together."¹⁰¹ Miller was already familiar with other musical styles at the time, and has performed and produced in a range of genres with a diverse list of artists including Luther Vandross, Frank Sinatra, Chaka Khan, David Sanborn and LL Cool J.

The predictable criticisms came to fruition quickly with the SMV project; that the purpose of the disc was to provide a platform from which these three virtuosos can launch self-indulgent solo excursions designed to demonstrate performance skills without regard for musicality. Among bassists the disc was certain to peak some interest at the

⁹⁹ Don Heckman, "Opening Chorus; Before and After," *Jazz Times*, April, 2011, 22.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁰¹ Chris Jisi, *Brave New Bass* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 3.

very least, and the disc is clearly more than just a skills demonstration. The parts tend to be divided into low, middle and high frequencies relative to the bass. There are original compositions from all three bassists on the disc, as well as an interesting remake of the song “Tutu” from the 1986 Miles Davis album of the same name, which Miller produced and played bass on. Miller has long established himself as a top producer in the industry, with numerous production credits.

While *Thunder* was given respectable three-star rating in *Downbeat* magazine, a resonating criticism from writer Philip Booth relevant to any collaborative bass project remained: “...for all the jaw-dropping bass playing, [the album] is a bit too same sounding, even for a listener who plays the instrument.”¹⁰² While the record does have a contemporary jazz and funk aesthetic throughout, there is a wide range of material presented. Booth’s observation may pertain in part to the restricted tessitura of the bass. A standard four string twenty-one fret Fender Precision or Fender Jazz bass has a wide range of just under three octaves, but the highest note is an Eb on the bottom line of the treble clef (in concert pitch, as bass is a transposed instrument with the music written one octave higher than it is sounded). In Western music, the focus is usually on the higher notes that may be carrying the melodic lines. North American listeners are typically drawn to these higher ranges, so it can be difficult to sustain the attention of the average listener when most of the melodic activity is performed on the bass. Some basses have longer necks, and five and six string basses can be tuned in such a way that the highest string is a C, so the range is extended. The tonality of the bass generally remains, however. Bass oriented projects face this limitation in terms of achieving a mass appeal, and the music can often be restricted to an esoteric marketing demographic. *Thunder*

¹⁰² Philip Booth, “Thunder: CD Review,” *Downbeat*, November, 2008, 76.

probably achieved most of its sales within the bass playing community. The album has likely seen few sales among those who are not musicians, but it is an artistic success that extends beyond showmanship and technical prowess.

Victor Wooten

Perhaps the most significant figure in the development of electric bass technique since the advent of Jaco Pastorius is Victor Lamonte Wooten. As a musician and composer, Wooten's artistry is often overlooked. This is due to a large extent to the overwhelming accolades he receives for his more exhibitionist practices on the instrument, especially from younger musicians and fans who may typically be most impressed by heroic technical prowess on an instrument. This has created an image of Wooten as something of a sideshow attraction who may be lacking a true musical vision. The same label is often placed on his long-time musical associate and banjo genius Bela Fleck. Intensity and density of note production has at times been a hallmark of his sound. In an article for *Downbeat* magazine regarding his 2006 book *The Music Lesson: A Spiritual Search for Growth Through Music*, Wooten addresses the importance of acknowledging musical elements unrelated to the actual notes: "Most of my musical study has been dedicated to notes, which was why I usually had a hard time playing well. Everything I knew about groove, I'd learned on my own"¹⁰³ The article goes on to emphasize the importance of intangible musical aspects such as groove and time, and in fact the title of the article is "Note Are Overrated!"¹⁰⁴

Victor Wooten came to prominence in the early 1990's with Bela Fleck and the Flecktones. Fleck is a musical pioneer and banjo virtuoso who respects the traditions of

¹⁰³ Victor Wooten, "Notes are Overrated." *Downbeat*, July 2008, 67.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

the bluegrass and jazz idioms while concurrently endeavoring to explore new fusions of various musical styles. The Flecktones group includes Victor's brother Roy, who is known by the moniker "Future Man" on electronic and acoustic percussion. Saxophonist Jeff Coffin was added to the band in later years. Victor Wooten revolutionized the technical aspects of electric bass playing with his right hand fretting technique as well as the "double thump" approach, which utilizes the right hand thumb in up and down strokes in a similar fashion to the way a guitarist alternates pick strokes with a plectrum. This allows for a rapid percussive right hand attack that would not be possible using conventional techniques.

In live performances with Bela Fleck and the Flecktones, composition may sometimes seem subordinate to virtuosic displays of instrumental prowess. This may be partially owing to the younger public demographic the group has attracted, especially since the recent tours in support of pop-rock icon Dave Mathews. The Flecktones typically join the main act on stage during the latter part of the shows as well, which maximizes their exposure to the Mathews fan base. These younger fans are often enamored with performance displays that may seem gratuitously geared to impress on the basis of flash over substance. The emphatic crowd responses to such displays are significant, and thus seem to positively reinforce the notion that these types of solos are appropriate. The inclusion of these displays is conducive to garnering a strong reaction from the audience. Subsequently this aspect is emphasized in live performance.

Nonetheless, beyond the surface of virtuosic technical demonstration, the compositional and performance aspects of the group are impressive. While Wooten is known superficially for performance virtuosity, the time and groove in his playing are

never sacrificed for speed. The integrity of the pulse and the rhythm is maintained even during his harmonic flourishes. Wooten's bass lines in much of the Flecktones material are supportive and simple as well, with an emphasis on the more traditional role of the bass.

Wooten revolutionized that art of electric bass playing by popularizing and advancing two particular techniques. Right hand fretting was common prior to Wooten's rise to prominence, but its applications were usually limited. Rock guitarists Eddie Van Halen and Randy Rhoads advanced the way the right hand was used on the fret board, but it generally functioned in a capacity that allowed for faster linear single note lines to be executed. Wooten's approach emulates more of a harmonic and contrapuntal approach, utilizing more than one finger of the right hand concurrently or in response to notes generated by the left hand. The fingers of the left hand independently produce notes by firmly hammering against the fret board.

This style of playing completely emancipates the bass from the traditional accompaniment role, as the bassist can utilize this technique to play melodies concurrently with a bass line. Stanley Jordan is the key figure historically for developing this style of performance on the guitar. Jordan has been performing solo concerts since his rise to fame in the 1980's, which was spurred on by an appearance performing in the comedy movie "Blind Date." Jordan can sustain an independence in performance by playing multiple parts concurrently. During his solo concerts he will typically perform one piece in which he alternates playing piano with one hand and guitar with the other. The ambidexterity he employs for this and for his two-handed fret board technique is visually impressive, much like the visual aspect of Wooten's performances in this

technical style. The visual appeal lends itself to the idea that these types of performances, because of the novel technical approaches employed, should be designated as frivolous displays designed to elicit immediate audience response. The complaint of many critics is that a truly artistic and meaningful work is not being created in these circumstances.

However, because of the innate and evolved musicality of players such as Wooten and Jordan, they are able to utilize an unusual technique as a vehicle for true expression, rather than as an end in itself. The true test comes when a listener is deprived of the visual aspect and left only to focus on the aural perception of a piece. In the case of the two-handed fret board technique, there is undoubtedly an aspect of the overall entertainment value lost if the visual component is absent. However, there is often an added element of mystique. The listener may perceive that two instruments are being played, and be amazed at the fact that a solo performance could be so involved. Ultimately, the aesthetic result should justify the method of performance, and Wooten has achieved a high level of artistry on numerous recordings and in many performances.

In 1997, Wooten released a solo album entitled *What Did He Say?* His interpretation of Ray Noble's "Cherokee" features the bassist playing virtuosic lines at an extremely fast tempo. The inclusion of this piece and the language he employs in his improvisation demonstrates a jazz pedigree and influence. Conversely, he extensively utilizes vocal loops in the title track which seem to emulate an affinity for modern processed sounds. The ballad "Sometimes I Laugh" is comprised of multiple bass tracks, but all of the parts remain simplistic. The result is a true showcase for the musicianship of Wooten and specifically for his depth as a composer. Wooten employs an actual

recording of his children's laughter in the piece, which surprisingly does not detract from the overall feeling of the music. His 1999 *Yin Yang* release is a two disc set. One of the discs in this two-disc set is instrumental, the other vocal. One of Wooten's greatest strengths is certainly stylistic diversity, and he explores this avenue with an extensive list of guest musicians.

The second major technical device popularized by Wooten is the "double thump" technique. The right thumb moves down across the bass string and then back up as a guitarist's plectrum would move. This is often followed by a "pop" executed by the right index finger in the traditional slapping and popping style. This results in a rapid attack that can produce triplets and other rhythmic figures at an extremely fast pace.

The most well-known piece that extensively exploits this technique is Wooten's original composition "Classical Thump." He employs traditional slapping, hammer-on slapping, hammer-on slapping followed by popping, conventional playing and of course the double thump technique. The piece begins by arpeggiating through the one, four and five chords in the key of G major. The arpeggiation continues and gradually becomes more and more intricate. Like many virtuoso guitarists and bassists, Wooten utilizes the open strings extensively, especially with hammer-ons and pull-offs. This facilitates a fluency in many of the lines that would not be possible were every note to be fretted and plucked. This is a commonality between Wooten's playing and the playing of Scott LaFaro on the upright bass decades earlier. Interestingly, Wooten uses open string notes such as A and E over the underlying harmony of G major. These notes are the ninth and thirteenth relative to the root note G, and would probably not be the first notes of choice to play in Wooten's composition. Because the open string notes occur so briefly and

function mainly as accented or unaccented passing tones, they do not detract from the harmony. The percussive effects and the fluency provided by the use of these notes compensates for the fact that the open strings may not always be the perfect note choices with regards to pitch. “Classical Thump” has proven to be a seminal work in electric bass playing, and countless young aspiring bassists are so taken with the technique that they strive to imitate Wooten. Unfortunately, like many bassists who have tried to imitate the virtuosic aspects of LaFaro’s work, many developing players execute complex passages at the expense of time and groove elements, unlike LaFaro and Wooten.

Wooten’s latest solo recording effort is *Palmystery*, released on April 1st, 2008. His eclecticism continues on this disc but seems much more focused and effective than that of *Yin and Yang*. Richard Bona and Mike Stern both appear on this disc. Once again he pays homage to his jazz background, this time by including a somewhat funky version of Horace Silver’s “Song For My Father.” Wooten plays a great deal of slap style bass lines quite effectively on this disc, continuing to employ his advanced right hand techniques.

Before his work with SMV, Victor Wooten negotiated the challenges of multiple bass performances previously with fellow bass virtuoso Steve Bailey, under the Bass Extremes name. The two have collaborated on two studio albums and a live performance/instructional DVD, and remain active in educational and performance settings.

Steve Bailey

An alumni of the University of Miami, Steve Bailey began to perform with premier jazz acts such as Dizzy Gillespie and Paquito D’Rivera while still in school, and

has since established himself as an eminent bass performer, innovator and educator internationally. One of his most significant contributions comes from his work on the six-string fretless bass, where he has advanced the art of bass playing by incorporating natural and artificial harmonics and executing multiple parts simultaneously. Bailey typically uses his right hand index finger against a string while he plucks with the second or third finger to produce various harmonics. This is similar to the method that classical guitarists use extensively, except that the thumb is usually used to produce the harmonic on the guitar; many bassists use the thumb in this fashion as well, while plucking the string with the right hand index finger.

Bailey utilizes the first three fingers of his right hand extensively to pluck the strings, reminiscent of the approach used by Nils Henning Orsted Pederson on the acoustic bass (Bailey is an accomplished upright bassist as well). His fluency with this technique is extremely advanced, as is his agility with his left hand. He is able to execute intricate lines with an elite level of dexterity and accuracy.

Bailey produced his 2008 release *Solo....So Low*, and recorded it at Tree House Studios, his home studio in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. The album baffles the uninitiated listener, as many of the solo tracks sound as if more than one musician is performing or multiple tracks were used. All the tracks are original compositions except for two. Homage is paid to two jazz legends from different eras; Bailey performs solo versions of Charlie Parker's "Scrapple From the Apple" and Pat Metheny's "Last Train Home." Like many of the bass oriented releases, this album may have a particular appeal to jazz musicians and bassists. For bassists not versed in jazz, an album such as this can serve as an introduction to jazz-related styles of music. Many younger musicians become

familiar with jazz after exposure to jazz-rock fusion related works or music that features a virtuoso on a particular instrument, and this may lead to further exploration of the jazz repertoire.

Steve Bailey and Victor Wooten are respected and admired ambassadors of the art of bass playing. Both of these icons have always maintained an admirable level of humility, and both have remained easily approachable to followers and admirers. Bailey and Wooten have both achieved the distinction of having made original contributions to their art form, developing creative innovations and experimenting with new ways to play the bass. Both musicians have studied the jazz idiom and incorporated it into their electric bass performances and compositions effectively.

Richard Bona

Among the most elite electric bassists active in the world today, Richard Bona garners the respect and admiration of those in the field perhaps as much or more than any of his contemporaries. Early in his career, he gained a reputation as a stunning virtuoso with an integral sense of spirituality in his music. He quickly earned tremendous respect in the United States, widely recognized as “the African Jaco.” In 2007, he held an honored position similar to that of a house bassist for the second half of the Montreal Jazz Festival. The festival is the biggest of its kind in the world. Bona has performed with numerous artists as a guest in various capacities. He has played and recorded extensively with guitarist Mike Stern, and performed with him at the festival as well. Stern had held the same featured guest artist position for the first half of the festival, and there were two days near the mid-point of the festival where both artists were featured. Bona should be regarded primarily as a musician as opposed to a bassist specifically; he has recorded and

toured extensively in recent years with Pat Metheny's group, where he is employed as a multi-instrumentalist and vocalist rather than for his bass prowess. Bona learned to play on home-made instruments in his native Minta village in Cameroon, and in fact much of his natural and organic aesthetic appeal may be related to the fact that he seems to approach music with a holistic perspective, rather than from the vantage point of a musician focused on a specific instrument.

On Bona's 2003 release *Munia* (the title comes from his native Douala dialect and can be translated as *The Tale*), the listener might expect his proficiency on the electric bass to be featured forthright and aggressively due to his reputation as one of the finest bassists in the history of the instrument. Instead, Bona begins the disc with the piece "Bonatology (incantation)," an original composition performed entirely a cappella, with Bona performing each of the layered vocal parts in his native language. The intensity of the musicality transcends any language barrier, and the dialect seems so naturally musical in its inflections that it may carry more meaning than if the lyrical sentiments were explicitly pronounced in English. Bona employs a number of elite musicians on the record, including drummer Vinnie Colaiuta, saxophonist Kenny Garret and vocalist Salif Keita. Bona restrains his bass prowess until the final track, entitled "Playground." He performs an electric bass solo which simultaneously demonstrates taste and virtuosity, as well as a solid grounding in the jazz language. The fluency with which he executes the lines is exceptional, and he can achieve an impressive result without the use of any of the more esoteric right hand techniques employed by many of his contemporaries, such as right hand fretting, slapping and popping or double-thumping.

A strong connection is usually realized between Bona and his live audiences, as his stage persona is as endearing as his music. He is able to smile and engage the crowd with his strong but comfortable presence, evoking laughter and applause seemingly at will. His spirituality seems to be immediately communicated. Bona does, however, have a reputation for being at times short-tempered and difficult to work with. The “African Jaco” sobriquet was earned for reasons other than an erratic disposition, but perhaps there is a connection in existence here between great artist and artistic temperament. The phenomenon connecting musical genius to various unusual personality traits has never been more evident than in the case of Jaco Pastorius.

Richard Bona continues to gain momentum and recognition in the international jazz community and increasingly outside of that setting. He recently placed seventh among electric bassists in *Downbeat* magazine’s annual reader’s pole, after Steve Swallow, Stanley Clarke, Christian McBride (who placed first among acoustic bassists), Marcus Miller, Victor Wooten and John Patitucci respectively. Bona’s most recent release is entitled *Bona Makes You Sweat*. The music was recorded live at the A38 club in Budapest in 2001. Writer and critic Ken Micallef wrote that the album “captures, practically note for note, the songs of such past Bona albums as *Tiki and Munia: The Tale*. The music pops, the rhythms sparkling and sizzling, with nary a note given up to the concert experience.”¹⁰⁵ The reviewer goes on to emphatically praise keyboardist Etienne Stadwijk, drummer Ernesto Simpson and percussionist Samuel Torres. Bona is acknowledged as “a magical genie of global pop proportions, gliding between styles with ease,” but a caveat concludes the review: “At times the music is so slick and

¹⁰⁵ Ken Micallef, “Bona Makes You Sweat: CD review.” *Downbeat*, December, 2008, 71.

immaculately performed that it lacks a grit that seems essential to the folk music Bona so heavily references.”¹⁰⁶ This notion conjures images of possible overproduction in the studio, as recent advances in technology give an entirely new credibility to the old idea that there really is no such thing as a live album. In Bona’s case, however, he is readily capable of reproducing a studio performance in a live setting with as much precision and attention to detail as he chooses to employ.

Anyone who witnesses Richard Bona in the context of a live performance will likely be impacted by the experience of seeing such a great artist. Interestingly, Bona claims that his initial exposure to the music of Jaco Pastorius had little impact on him. Repeated listening then fostered a deeper appreciation. The influence of Pastorius is certainly evident in Bona’s bass work. It is interesting to note that combining his native African artistic heritage with the influence of the great American bassist (who had in turn absorbed much of the African influences of jazz music) has resulted in Bona’s original aesthetic contribution to the art form. As evidenced by the birth and growth of jazz, cultural and stylistic fusion can yield artistically rich results.

Avishai Cohen

Among the most influential and prominent bassists in jazz today, Avishai Cohen has emerged as a musician and composer with a unique and innovative voice on both the acoustic and the electric bass. His compositions reflect the spirit of jazz with respect to the way he utilizes a wide range of cultural and aesthetic influences. His innovative work reflects his Israeli background as well as influences from the classical, rock, funk and jazz genres.

¹⁰⁶ Ken Micallef, “Bona Makes You Sweat: CD review.” *Downbeat*, December, 2008, 71.

Early in his career, Cohen became the bassist for the Chick Corea New Trio, along with drummer Jeff Ballard. This gave him a tremendous degree of exposure and garnered attention for his solo work. Cohen uses both basses in the studio and live, sometimes playing both acoustic and electric bass on the same pieces. He is also an accomplished pianist and plays piano extensively on his recordings.

The music of Avishai Cohen tends to appeal greatly to younger audiences, which serves as a positive force for the jazz community as many listeners may come to appreciate and explore the jazz genre on a deeper level after being exposed to his music.

Writer Micheal Jackson's article about bassist Avishai Cohen appeared in *Downbeat* magazine in 2007.¹⁰⁷ Jackson discusses the work and style of Avishai Cohen in a variety of ways. He cites Cohen's acknowledgement of the influences of upright bass icons such as Ray Brown, Paul Chambers and Ron Carter. Cohen is also quoted as having been significantly influenced by Rachmaninov, Stevie Wonder, Bach and rapper Dr. Dre. This surprising range of interests suggests a particularly intriguing potential for Cohen to uniquely develop the genre of jazz through his composition and performance; acknowledgement of such a broad base of musical inspirations implies a willingness to expand beyond the parameters of one given genre. Cohen has indeed worked toward establishing an individual compositional voice in music, and Jackson addresses performance aspects of his style in terms of his percussive attack and his tendency towards ostinato-driven passages within his arrangements. Jackson also recognizes and discusses the impact that living in Jerusalem and losing friends to senseless war-related atrocities has had on the life and music of this contemporary genius.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Micheal Jackson, "Low End Octane," *Downbeat*, October, 2007, 75.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

Christian McBride

One of the premiere jazz bassists active today, Christian McBride is ubiquitous in the industry. He was mentored by Ray Brown and went on to work extensively with Brown and bassist John Clayton as a bass trio. McBride has worked with countless major artists, including John McLachlan, Chick Corea, Bruce Hornsby, Jack DeJohnette, Sting, Queen Latifah, Diana Krall, Joshua Redman, Roy Hargrove, Benny Green, McCoy Tyner, Joe Henderson and Freddie Hubbard among many others. McBride is known for a high level of virtuosity in performance, and is equally recognized for his musicality.

Although he is known primarily for his work as an acoustic bassist, McBride is a virtuoso on both the acoustic and the electric bass. He is able to execute astounding passages with tremendous velocity on both instruments while maintaining an unwavering time feel. McBride placed first in the 2010 *Downbeat* magazine readers poll in both the acoustic bass and the electric bass categories.

John Patitucci

Like Christian McBride, John Patitucci is a renowned virtuoso on both the acoustic and the electric bass. Regarding playing both basses, Patitucci shared a surprising insight: “I always say it’s just stupidity on my part! ...playing both instruments has caused me some physical problems. It can be tough. But I see musical reasons for playing both instruments. For one thing, I get to play with a more diverse cross-section of people.”¹⁰⁹ Like many of his contemporaries, Patitucci is experienced in a diverse range of musical styles, with numerous recording and performing credits.

Patitucci makes a clear distinction in his approach to each type of bass: “You’re talking about two separate instruments. The technique and touch are completely

¹⁰⁹ Chris Jisi, *Brave New Bass* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 34.

different. Upright players who double on electric usually have to work on lightening their touch because the upright is more physically demanding to play...it's a long way from arco to slap"¹¹⁰ Regarding the left hand fingering, Patitucci acknowledges that unlike the acoustic, on the electric bass "you want independence of all four fingers."¹¹¹

One of his first opportunities to achieve recognition in the jazz genre came when he had the opportunity to work with Chick Corea in his "Akoustic Band" as well as his "Elektric Band." In his electric bass solos, Patitucci is inspired by traditional jazz but strives for a unique voice: "I try as hard as I can to be different. I try to get a flexibility like John Coltrane, Mike Brecker or Joe Henderson. They have that flowing way they play through changes....I don't know if I'm succeeding, but I want that kind of musicality."¹¹²

John Patitucci demonstrates his musicality in great depth in his work with Wayne Shorter, along with drummer Brian Blade and pianist Danilo Perez. Their live performances expand the boundaries of conventional improvisation. Patitucci plays acoustic bass in this setting, but maintains his virtuosity on both instruments. Writer Chris Jisi speculates that "no one has spanned the gap between traditional upright and modern electric with more facility and renown."¹¹³

Other Important Figures

There are countless electric bassists in the contemporary setting who are incorporating jazz elements into their performances. Players such as Anthony Jackson, Victor Bailey, Hadrien Feraud, Jeff Andrews, Will Lee and Mathew Garrison (son of the

¹¹⁰ Chris Jisi, *Brave New Bass* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 33.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹¹² Tom Mulhern, *Bass Heroes* (San Francisco, GPI Books, 1993), 54.

¹¹³ Chris Jisi, *Brave New Bass* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 32.

late John Coltrane bassist Jimmy Garrison) continue to draw inspiration from the jazz tradition to inform their performances. Other players especially known for their work on the fretless electric bass include Gary Willis, Mark Egan, Percy Jones, Jimmy Haslip, Michael Manring and Alain Carron. All of these influential electric bassists have studied and absorbed the jazz tradition and applied it to their musicianship, and in turn have explored new possibilities in musical stylistic fusions influenced by the electric bass.

Chapter 7

JAZZ AND ELECTRIC BASS PEDAGOGY

Jazz pedagogy has proliferated in numerous institutions of higher learning and in many other countries. The institutionalization of jazz as an academic endeavor has occurred as the genre was developing during the twentieth century. Electric bass pedagogy has been slower to develop in terms of any kind of formal or standardized approach; the instrument is relatively young and its acceptance in academic settings is still limited. The methods employed to teach jazz, and the electric bass, will affect the evolution of the genre and the function of the electric bass within jazz-related music.

Jazz education has become an integral part of the genre and its evolution. The stylistic development of jazz and jazz-related music is now being influenced by the way aspiring musicians are taught. Jazz as an evolving genre and jazz education have become inseparable entities. Because jazz and related styles are an organized source of material for harmony, theory and other aspects of music education, passionate students are often drawn to them. Performance instructors are able to utilize jazz as a vehicle for teaching various rhythmic and harmonic aspects of general music performance. Aspiring instrumentalists may look to virtuoso musicians with a background in jazz for inspiration, and maybe attracted to the genre through the advanced level of performance displayed by

various musicians who have studied the jazz tradition. Bassists like Steve Bailey and Victor Wooten have ostensibly (perhaps somewhat unintentionally) served as ambassadors of the jazz genre, in that their virtuosity attracts young musicians, who then realize that Bailey and Wooten have an extensive background in jazz. These aspiring musicians may then decide to further investigate other music in the jazz tradition.

Modern Technology

The instantaneous transmission of knowledge through modern technology facilitates the growth of the art form in a way that has not been realized in past centuries. The accelerated rate of development in jazz music is partly due to the educational and technological resources available in the modern age. Advances in technology over the course of the 20th century have facilitated an unprecedented rate of growth in virtually all fields. The arts have experienced a type of globalization; regional styles and developments that may have taken months or even many years to spread to various geographical locations are now proliferated through the internet instantaneously.

The internet as a pedagogical tool is invaluable. Jazz students, aficionados and teachers, until very recently, would sometimes have to go to great lengths in order to obtain recordings for the purposes of historical or musical study. People would often be forced to travel to various cities in order to visit retail outlets for recordings. Specific rare recordings could prove especially difficult to acquire. Today, anyone with access to a computer and the internet has an immediate and expansive jazz music library at their disposal. Even with an inexpensive pair of speakers, a music student can gain considerable knowledge pertaining to the work of countless artists. The ubiquitous presence of visual video material to accompany audio recordings offers an additional

pneumonic asset to those engaged in the learning process. Electric bass performance examples and pedagogical video material is abundant and readily accessible on the internet.

Pedagogical Resources For Bass

One of the primary goals of this chapter is to examine common approaches in the field of electric bass pedagogy. Traditional instruments often have universally accepted instructional method books; these are often established publications that have gained credibility over time

Classical Acoustic Bass Method Books

The “New Method for the Double Bass” by Franz Simandl has long been a core reference for study in the field of acoustic bass pedagogy.¹¹⁴ Also widely used in upright bass instruction is the three-volume “Nouvelle Technique de la Contrebasse” by French double bassist Francois Rabbath.¹¹⁵ These two method books are ubiquitous in the classical as well as jazz genres for teaching the acoustic bass. The two methods differ perhaps most significantly in the prescribed use of the left hand. Rabbath uses only six positions for the left hand on the neck of the instrument, while Simandl refers to eight positions (ranging from half position to VII position) with 4 additional intermediate positions. Rabbath’s method is perhaps more easily related to the electric bass. Despite the differences in these two methods, they each remain common in the field.

Jazz Bass Method Books

In the field of jazz bass instruction, two instructional books in common use were written by two of the leading figures in the history of the instrument: Ray Brown and

¹¹⁴ Lucas Drew, *F. Simandl, NewMethod for the Double Bass, Book I*. (New York: Carl Fischer, 1984).

¹¹⁵ Francois Rabbath, *Nouvelle Technique de les Contrebasse*. (New York: Slava Publishing, 1968).

Rufus Reid. Brown played with Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and many other bebop luminaries, and contributed significantly to the development of the bebop language as played on the bass. His lines are predominantly diatonic with notes from the bebop scales added in, such as the passing tone between the fifth and sixth degrees of the major scale and the natural seventh scale degree as a passing tone in the Mixolydian mode. His lines often resolve to the third degree of a given chord, which is a common practice in the bebop idiom. Brown utilizes open strings to add to the fluidity of many of his fills, and preserves the time feel and underlying pulse of the music even when executing intricate lines. These characteristics often distinguish the elite players from the masses, and are indeed common traits among many of the prominent figures in the historical lineage of acoustic and electric jazz bassists.

Some of Ray Brown's most memorable work was with Canadian virtuoso pianist Oscar Peterson's trio, with either Herb Ellis or Barney Kessel on guitar. With the absence of a drummer, Brown was left to function as the dominant timekeeper of the group. This afforded him the chance to demonstrate and further develop his unusual strength in this area.

"Ray Brown's Bass Method: Essential Scales, Patterns and Exercises" was originally published in 1963.¹¹⁶ Brown presents exercises relating to scales, various intervals and triads. Later in the book he addresses the use of diminished and augmented chords as well as whole tone scales, blues patterns and extension scales. He concludes the book with solo exercises and arpeggios for endings.

¹¹⁶ Ray Brown, *Ray Brown's Bass Method: Essential Scales, Patterns and Exercises*. (Milwaukee, Hal Leonard, 1963).

The material presented is useful, especially to aid in the development of physical facility on the instrument. There are no transcriptions of Brown's own recorded solos for the student to explore for more insight into the legendary bassist's approach. The book may be seen as somewhat limited because of the clinical nature of material. However, as the title suggests, many of these patterns are essential and integral to the art of jazz bass playing. This book has useful implications for the electric bass student as well, especially those aspiring to study the jazz genre. Some of the musical language in Ray Brown's bass playing is revealed through the material. It can serve as a useful tool for developing reading skills and a basic familiarity with the sounds of some of these scales, patterns and arpeggios. Much can be learned pertaining to relevant music fundamentals in the study of Ray Brown's method book, especially for the acoustic bassist but also for the electric bassist.

Rufus Reid first published the method book "The Evolving Bassist" in 1974.¹¹⁷ A revised version was published as a Millennium Edition in 2000. The book contains many fundamental exercises involving basic scale material and fingerboard knowledge. Reid is very thoughtful in the way he addresses the physical aspects of bass playing, and he refers to the importance of obtaining a level of physical comfort on both the acoustic bass and the electric bass. The main focus of the book is dedicated to acoustic bass jazz playing, with detailed material and illustrations regarding body position and bowing. The fundamentals of musicianship addressed in this book are very relevant to the electric bass, however. The open string exercises are extensive, and are to be played at fifty beats per minute. This approach instills the concept of time keeping while encouraging patience and the use of space. The book concludes with several transcriptions of Reid's

¹¹⁷ Rufus Reid, *The Evolving Bassist*. (New Jersey, Myriad, 1974).

playing. These transcriptions are useful for harmonic analysis and the development of standard notation reading skills, and they can be effectively utilized in instruction for the advanced electric bass student.

It is important for the aspiring electric bassist studying jazz to carefully consider educational resources relating to other instruments, particularly the upright bass. The study of pedagogical jazz materials can lead to a more thorough understanding of the fundamentals of the jazz tradition. For an electric bassist to adapt to the genre of jazz successfully, it is imperative to absorb the essence of the jazz bass tradition.

Electric Bass Material

A standardized method book in the jazz idiom such as the method books of Rufus Reid or Ray Brown does not exist for the electric bass. With the proliferation of publishing and easily accessible instruction materials, a much wider range of approaches is currently available to students. Many segments of instructional videos can be accessed on line for free on websites such as YouTube. Many aspiring musicians who are not interested in classical music are self-taught to varying degrees. The casual student may learn in a variety of ways outside of formal instruction. Many musically inclined students are capable of learning their favorite songs aurally, simply by listening to the music and engaging in a trial and error method of replication.

An effective teacher may choose to incorporate a number of different instructional books into a multi-modal type of instructional approach. Many books might address issues relating to beginner level study on the electric bass, but may not relate specifically to the study of jazz music.

Legendary session bassist Carol Kaye has published a series of pedagogical books for the electric bass. Her books feature basic theory, advanced jazz concepts and transcriptions of her work. Example 7.1 shows an excerpt from her solo on the jazz standard “Days of Wine and Roses.” This active bass part demonstrates her skill and creativity as a soloist. This type of electric bass solo represents a significant departure from the traditional role of the acoustic bass in jazz, especially before the work of Jimmy Blanton. The ease of playability of the electric bass facilitates an expanded function for the jazz bassist.

Example 7.1. Carol Kaye, *Days of Wine and Roses*, bass solo mm. 11-16.

The image displays three staves of musical notation for an electric bass solo. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a common time signature (C). The music is written in a key with one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The notation is highly rhythmic and melodic, featuring many slurs and ties. The second staff starts with a measure number '3' and continues the melodic line. The third staff starts with a measure number '5' and concludes the excerpt. The notation includes various accidentals, such as sharps and flats, and rests.

Berklee College of Music bass professor Anthony Vitti has published a number of books designed for the serious electric bass student. The material is designed to introduce students to concepts such as slap bass and reading funk music for bass. Vitti’s books are useful for aspiring bass players, especially to introduce them to the reading that may be required of them should they pursue careers as professional bassists. One of his most recent publications is entitled “Odd Time Sight Reading for Bass.”¹¹⁸ The book

¹¹⁸ Anthony Vitti, *Odd Time Sightreading for Bass*. (Haverhill: DaaDoo Music, 2008), 4.

provides the reader with fifteen etudes in unusual time signatures. Vitti conceived of the book because “there just are not a lot materials out there for bass players to read in odd meters. A problem I think most players face, is that you don’t see certain meters very often. But, then you find yourself playing a show or recording a song and you are expected to be proficient at reading and playing in 7/8, 9/8, 5/4 or any number of odd meters.”¹¹⁹

There are countless books for electric bass instruction available on line and at music stores. The onus is on the instructor to thoughtfully consider what publications can best be utilized in each situation. The teacher must consider the level, potential, attitude and preferences of the student. If teaching electric bass in an academic institution, a teacher must also consider what is expected of the student within a given program of study.

Adapting Jazz Material to the Electric Bass

In jazz pedagogy, there are some core materials to consider using in electric bass instruction. Much of the harmonic language of jazz is consistent across various instruments. There are numerous books containing melodies and chord charts for jazz pieces and standards. “Fake books,” or the properly copyrighted “real books,” are essential for the jazz bass student to study. It is especially beneficial to incorporate these materials into lessons when the student is relatively young, in the formative years of cognitive development and in the early stages of developing a musical identity. A major part of jazz study involves the memorization of pieces in the jazz repertoire. A competent jazz student must be able to recall, perform and improvise on jazz pieces and

¹¹⁹ Anthony Vitti, *Odd Time Sightreading for Bass*. (Haverhill: DaaDoo Music, 2008), 4.

standard tunes that have been adapted for the jazz genre. In live jazz settings, a jazz musician is often called upon to perform a piece that may be considered common knowledge for many jazz musicians. The ability to remember pieces will often be viewed as a reflection of the experience and competency level of a jazz musician. Beginning to learn this repertoire at a young age enables students to memorize a larger quantity of music as they develop. Learning pieces at a young age also reinforces the music in the formative years of the student; this can serve as a great advantage in later years when the student may be asked to recall pieces and reflect the nuances of the music.

In terms of acquiring the skills needed to perform music from the bebop jazz idiom with a degree of competence and authenticity, a student must constantly be aurally exposed to this music. Extensive, exhaustive and analytical listening is essential to the education of the jazz musician. To reflect the nuances and idiosyncrasies of the jazz genre and specifically the bebop idiom, a student must internalize the music. It is essential for a student to have a considerable amount of audio jazz material for the purposes of listening and studying. With current technical advances, any student with access to the internet and a pair of speakers of reasonable quality has access to a vast jazz library. Videos on websites such as Youtube are easily accessible, free and are often accompanied by visual stimuli that may help considerably in terms of learning through association and remembering various aspects of an artist's work.

Whatever the medium, recorded music itself is an essential learning material. Transcriptions and lead sheets are not comprehensive enough to convey the true essence of a piece of music. The student must be able to listen to the music being studied extensively and regularly. Attentive and thoughtful listening are key elements in a

student's training. The act of transcribing can be viewed as the ultimate expression of attentive listening, as the student must carefully review each note in order to properly transcribe it harmonically and rhythmically. Again, the modern student has tremendous advantages, as technology has produced readily available software that can aid greatly in transcription.

One book of transcriptions is utilized extensively, on various instruments, throughout jazz education to instill the concepts involved in performing music from the bebop idiom. The "Charlie Parker Omnibook" contains detailed and accurate transcriptions of many of the alto saxophonist icon's melodies and solos.¹²⁰ The chord changes are also included. The book is available in treble clef and bass clef, as well as for Bb and for Eb instruments. An electric bass student can benefit greatly studying the harmonic language of Charlie Parker. One of the originators of the bebop style of jazz, Parker's melodies and solos exemplify the language of the music.

Although solo passages can be played at extremely fast tempos on the alto saxophone, playing these passages at the same tempo on the acoustic bass is considerably more difficult and often impossible. Playing these passages at very fast tempos on the electric bass is much more feasible, but still very difficult. The electric bass student will typically have to play through the transcriptions at a much slower tempo than that of the original recordings. Playing along with recordings is extremely beneficial. However, if the tempo must be slowed down in order to execute certain passages, a student can still learn a great deal by playing through the music in the Charlie Parker Omnibook. Extensive listening to the recorded work of Parker will allow a student to internalize the

¹²⁰ Jamey Aebersold, *Charlie Parker Omnibook*. (Hollywood: Atlantic Music Corporation, 1978).

time feel and the subtle inflections of the music, even if the tempo will be slowed down considerably when the bass student plays the transcriptions.

There are many potential benefits for the electric bass student studying music from the Charlie Parker Omnibook. If a student uses a metronome while working from the book, progress can concurrently be realized in the areas of time keeping, standard notation reading and the development of the harmonic language of bebop. Students can begin to incorporate passages from the book into their own improvisations. There are many recurring passages throughout the transcriptions of Parker's solos. It is important to adapt these idiomatic patterns into one's own playing for the development of a bebop vocabulary. To emulate the style in one's own original way is important later in the student's development.

It is much more difficult to play extremely fast passages on the trumpet than on the saxophone. For this reason, studying the music of great jazz trumpeters can be very helpful for the electric bassist, as playing along with the recordings at the original tempi is much more feasible. Transcriptions of Clifford Brown's solos are very useful and often reasonably playable on the electric bass at the original tempi. Brown uses some of the same approach and bebop vocabulary as Charlie Parker. The extensive catalogue of Miles Davis offers countless jazz solos that can be transcribed for other instruments; many of these are playable at the original tempo on the electric bass because of the focus on lyricism rather than technical proficiency. It is important to realize that studying transcriptions from other instruments is greatly beneficial; it can encourage the student to play outside the ergonomically convenient patterns that are easily accessible and often habitual on the electric bass. Learning the vocabulary of the jazz tradition as expressed

on other instruments can serve to liberate the student harmonically from the confines of positional playing on the electric bass.

Paul Chambers Transcriptions

Paul Chambers was the most dominant bassist in jazz music during his active years. He worked with virtually all of the jazz legends of his time. He recorded for the Prestige, Riverside, Blue Note and Verve record labels. He appeared on the 1956 Sonny Rollins album *Tenor Madness*, and contributed several exceptional bass solos to the record. In 1959 he played on two of the most significant and popular albums in the history of jazz; *Giant Steps* by John Coltrane and *Kind of Blue* by Miles Davis. Chambers played with exceptional tone, time and taste, and was a master of improvisation in the jazz style.

Chambers was also an accomplished arco player, and recorded a considerable number of bowed solos. He continued to develop the jazz and bebop language as played on the bass, in much the same style as Ray Brown. Chambers and Brown are two of the key defining figures in the traditional jazz bass and bebop styles; their music is studied extensively by aspiring musicians.

Chambers died in 1969 at the age of thirty-three. Even in his short life span, he left behind a formidable legacy and remains one of the most imitated and emulated bassists in the history of the genre. His influence can be heard in the playing of virtually all acoustic jazz bassists, and many electric bassists study his work at great length to assimilate his language and inflections into their playing style.

Jim Stinnett is professor of jazz bass at Berklee College of Music in Boston Massachusetts. Stinnett has researched the music of Paul Chambers extensively, and

produced four books dedicated to the study of his music. In 1983 he published a book entitled “The Music of Paul Chambers,” which he describes as “a collection of twenty solos which I feel epitomizes bebop as played on the bass.”¹²¹ The book is divided into three sections; the first is devoted to blues, the second to rhythm changes and the third to various pieces. The book includes bass solos from recordings with Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Red Garland, Jackie McLean, Lee Morgan, Kenny Drew, Kenny Dorham and Sonny Rollins.

Paul Chambers uses much of the same language as Charlie Parker, and in fact Chambers is sometimes referred to as “the Bird of the bass.” Although these transcriptions were originally performed on the upright bass, they are very playable on the electric bass as well. An advanced student will be able to perform much of this music at the original tempi along with the recordings, although this may take a considerable amount of effort and dedication. This book is very useful for the electric bass student studying jazz, as it introduces the student to the intricacies of the bebop language as played by one of the iconic figures in jazz bass history. It is important for the electric bassist studying jazz to learn to emulate the feeling of the upright bass when it is appropriate to do so. Learning the tradition of jazz bass adds to the musicianship of the modern electric bassist.

Example 7.2 shows a passage from a Paul Chambers solo that utilizes a similar harmonic approach to that of Charlie Parker. This passage is taken from a bass solo on a Miles Davis recording of the song “The Theme.” In the third measure, over the parent key of Bb Major, the notes ascend from the major sixth (g) to the major seventh (a) with a chromatic passing tone (the flattened seventh) in between. Then the fifth degree of the

¹²¹ Jim Stinnett, *The Music of Paul Chambers*. (Boston: Stinnett Music, 1983).

scale (f) is played followed by the sharpened fifth (a characteristic bebop note) and then sixth degrees.

Example 7.2. Paul Chambers, *The Theme*, bass solo mm. 1-8.

Example 7.3 shows a segment of a Charlie Parker alto saxophone solo taken from a recording of his original blues piece “Au Privave.” In the second measure of this excerpt, over the parent key of F major, Parker plays the same six note sequence that Chambers would later use, although rhythmically it is displaced in comparison.

Beginning on the sixth degree (d) he ascends to the major seventh degree with a chromatic passing tone, then plays the fifth, sharp fifth and six degrees of the parent key.

Example 7.3. Charlie Parker, *Au Privave*, saxophone solo mm. 20-23.

These excerpts demonstrate that the bebop language can be adapted to the upright bass. The same adaptation from the upright bass to the electric bass is much easier in the performance aspect. It is essential for electric bassists in jazz to immerse themselves into

the harmonic language of bebop, as played on other instruments, in order to convey the nuances of the genre with a degree of conviction and authority when performing on the electric bass.

Any credible instructional book relating to jazz harmony is worthy of consideration for use in the study of the jazz genre by electric bassists. The harmonic and rhythmic nuances of jazz music are consistent across instruments, at least to some degree. A broader understanding of the general concepts inherent to jazz music can only serve to enhance the overall sense of musicianship in electric bass performance.

Teaching Students About Jaco Pastorius

For jazz students studying the electric bass, Jaco Pastorius material could generally be considered mandatory. For bass students in general, exposure to this music could serve to nurture an interest in jazz-rock fusion that could in turn lead to an interest in jazz. The mystique of Jaco's legacy is intriguing, and he remains an enigmatic and provocative figure in music history. Hearing his music can enlighten the uninitiated as to how the tone and attack commonly heard on the modern electric bass was influenced by Pastorius.

Pastorius tended to use the bridge pickup a great deal, and his right hand attack often involved plucking the strings very close to the bridge. This bright sound became associated with Pastorius and has had a pervasive influence on the music industry. The tone and attack utilized by Pastorius is the most imitated sound in the history of the electric bass. The influence of the sound can be heard in the playing of countless bassists, in an extremely wide range of styles and musical settings. Serious students should be made aware of this aspect of his legacy.

Jazz bass students and electric bass students in general should have a fundamental knowledge of the music of Pastorius. When teaching students to play the music of Pastorius, it is imperative to emphasize that the accurate execution of the notes in a given transcription is not the ultimate goal. Playing all the notes is important, but the rhythmic feel and the subtle inflections of the attack carry the most significance. Pieces such as the Weather Report classics “Teen Town” and “River People” can serve to demonstrate to students the importance of the right hand attack in the music of Pastorius. Example 7.4 shows the melody from “Teen Town,” as originally played on the electric bass.

Example 7.4. Jaco Pastorius, *Teen Town*, melody mm. 1-23.

The musical score for Example 7.4 is written in bass clef, 7/8 time, and consists of eight staves of music. The melody is characterized by eighth-note patterns and rests. Chord symbols are placed above the staff lines. The score is as follows:

- Staff 1: C 13, A 13
- Staff 2: 3, F 13, D 13, C 13
- Staff 3: 6, A 13, F 13, D 13
- Staff 4: 9, C 13, 1. A 13, F 13
- Staff 5: 12, D 13, 8^{va}, C 13, A 13
- Staff 6: 15, F 13, D 13, 8^{va}
- Staff 7: 17, 2. A 13, F 13, D 13, C 13
- Staff 8: 21, A 13, F 13, D 13

Example 7.5 shows an excerpt from a later section in “Teen Town.” This passage is not especially conducive to playability on the electric bass. This is indicative of the

style of Pastorius in that he did not necessarily play or write in ways that were ergonomically accessible. Musicality in his playing and writing was the paramount consideration. In the same way that students can benefit from the study of other instruments, studying Pastorius transcriptions can serve to demonstrate harmonic applications that are not necessarily familiar to the habitual physical patterns on the electric bass. This passage is widely imitated, but achieving the authentic sound of the original artist can prove elusive.

Example 7.5. Jaco Pastorius, *Teen Town*, mm. 45-51.

The image shows two staves of musical notation for the electric bass. The key signature is E major (one sharp). The first staff begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. Above the staff, the chords E13, C#13, and A13 are indicated. The second staff starts with a four-measure rest, then continues with a similar rhythmic pattern. Above the second staff, the chords F#13, E13, C#13, and A13 are indicated. The notation is dense with many beamed notes, characteristic of Pastorius's style.

The first thematic statement in “River People” is played in octaves on the electric bass, with each note played twice (Example 7.6). In order to capture the tone of the original work, a student is forced to utilize a right hand attack similar to that of Pastorius. The attack must take place close to the bridge in order to execute the rapid passage with clarity and to obtain the proper tone. The octaves are ergonomically easier to access on the electric bass as opposed to the acoustic bass. The notation is limited in terms of what can be transmitted; the student must hear the recording in order to understand the essence of the sound and the time feel that Pastorius captured. This is exemplary of the tone that Pastorius captured on his Fender Jazz Basses.

Example 7.6. Jaco Pastorius, *River People*, first thematic statement mm. 1-2.



Teaching Slap Bass

Students of the electric bass are almost invariably attracted to the slap and pop style of bass playing. It is apparent at many performances that the rudimentary execution of a basic slap bass passage can elicit more of a reaction from an audience than a considerably more sophisticated passage played in the traditional way. It is of the utmost importance that students be constantly reminded that the time and feel of a performance should never be sacrificed for the purpose of gratuitous technical display. In all aspects of bass pedagogy, the emphasis on the importance of time cannot be overstated. The application of this technique in jazz-related music must be carefully considered. Because the jazz tradition was established before the invention of the electric bass, the slapping sound is not a part of the aesthetic of the style. In jazz-rock fusion and funk-oriented music, the sound of slap bass is often integral to the music. However, the techniques should still be applied judiciously, with a view towards strengthening the rhythmic aspects of the music and not towards gratuitous displays of technical ability.

Physical Aspects of Slap Bass

Different approaches to the slap technique are utilized by many bassists and teachers. A common and very effective way to attack the strings with the right hand is to strike the highest fret with the left side of the thumb at the knuckle joint. While many

bassists strike the string off the fingerboard, striking against the highest fret produces a bright and percussive tone in the attack.

Whether teaching beginner level musicians to play electric bass or teaching more advanced upright bassists to become adept at doubling on electric, is important to teach students that the right wrist should not bend to the left or right or up or down when executing the slap. Each student has a somewhat unique shape to his or her hand, so the appearance of this approach may seem different to the instructor when viewing various students. However, there can still be a significant measure of consistency across students in teaching this technique.

After a student is given basic instruction regarding the slap technique, the teacher can begin to address the “pop” aspect of slap bass. It is common to begin accompanying the slapped notes with a popped note an octave higher. The tip of the index finger of the right hand should move under the string to be popped as the thumb executes the slap. The slapping position of the thumb should not be compromised. Students should know that on a standard tuned bass, the popped octave note will always physically appear two strings down and two frets over from the lower slapped note.

An effective exercise in teaching this technique is to have the students play an E natural minor scale in octaves beginning on the open E string and ending with the highest note on the seventh fret of the G string (Example 7.4). By including the open strings and having notes rooted on the E and A strings, the student gains experience slapping and popping octaves between the E and D strings and between the A and G strings. It is also

Example 7.8. Victor Wooten, *Classical Thump*, mm. 1-27.

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Classical Thump" by Victor Wooten, measures 1 through 14. The score is written in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The music consists of a single melodic line with various rhythmic patterns and articulations.

Measures 1-4: The first line shows a steady eighth-note pattern. Measure 1 starts with a half note G2, followed by eighth notes A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F#3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F#6, G6, A6, B6, C7, D7, E7, F#7, G7, A7, B7, C8, D8, E8, F#8, G8, A8, B8, C9, D9, E9, F#9, G9, A9, B9, C10, D10, E10, F#10, G10, A10, B10, C11, D11, E11, F#11, G11, A11, B11, C12, D12, E12, F#12, G12, A12, B12, C13, D13, E13, F#13, G13, A13, B13, C14, D14, E14, F#14, G14, A14, B14, C15, D15, E15, F#15, G15, A15, B15, C16, D16, E16, F#16, G16, A16, B16, C17, D17, E17, F#17, G17, A17, B17, C18, D18, E18, F#18, G18, A18, B18, C19, D19, E19, F#19, G19, A19, B19, C20, D20, E20, F#20, G20, A20, B20, C21, D21, E21, F#21, G21, A21, B21, C22, D22, E22, F#22, G22, A22, B22, C23, D23, E23, F#23, G23, A23, B23, C24, D24, E24, F#24, G24, A24, B24, C25, D25, E25, F#25, G25, A25, B25, C26, D26, E26, F#26, G26, A26, B26, C27, D27, E27, F#27, G27, A27, B27, C28, D28, E28, F#28, G28, A28, B28, C29, D29, E29, F#29, G29, A29, B29, C30, D30, E30, F#30, G30, A30, B30, C31, D31, E31, F#31, G31, A31, B31, C32, D32, E32, F#32, G32, A32, B32, C33, D33, E33, F#33, G33, A33, B33, C34, D34, E34, F#34, G34, A34, B34, C35, D35, E35, F#35, G35, A35, B35, C36, D36, E36, F#36, G36, A36, B36, C37, D37, E37, F#37, G37, A37, B37, C38, D38, E38, F#38, G38, A38, B38, C39, D39, E39, F#39, G39, A39, B39, C40, D40, E40, F#40, G40, A40, B40, C41, D41, E41, F#41, G41, A41, B41, C42, D42, E42, F#42, G42, A42, B42, C43, D43, E43, F#43, G43, A43, B43, C44, D44, E44, F#44, G44, A44, B44, C45, D45, E45, F#45, G45, A45, B45, C46, D46, E46, F#46, G46, A46, B46, C47, D47, E47, F#47, G47, A47, B47, C48, D48, E48, F#48, G48, A48, B48, C49, D49, E49, F#49, G49, A49, B49, C50, D50, E50, F#50, G50, A50, B50, C51, D51, E51, F#51, G51, A51, B51, C52, D52, E52, F#52, G52, A52, B52, C53, D53, E53, F#53, G53, A53, B53, C54, D54, E54, F#54, G54, A54, B54, C55, D55, E55, F#55, G55, A55, B55, C56, D56, E56, F#56, G56, A56, B56, C57, D57, E57, F#57, G57, A57, B57, C58, D58, E58, F#58, G58, A58, B58, C59, D59, E59, F#59, G59, A59, B59, C60, D60, E60, F#60, G60, A60, B60, C61, D61, E61, F#61, G61, A61, B61, C62, D62, E62, F#62, G62, A62, B62, C63, D63, E63, F#63, G63, A63, B63, C64, D64, E64, F#64, G64, A64, B64, C65, D65, E65, F#65, G65, A65, B65, C66, D66, E66, F#66, G66, A66, B66, C67, D67, E67, F#67, G67, A67, B67, C68, D68, E68, F#68, G68, A68, B68, C69, D69, E69, F#69, G69, A69, B69, C70, D70, E70, F#70, G70, A70, B70, C71, D71, E71, F#71, G71, A71, B71, C72, D72, E72, F#72, G72, A72, B72, C73, D73, E73, F#73, G73, A73, B73, C74, D74, E74, F#74, G74, A74, B74, C75, D75, E75, F#75, G75, A75, B75, C76, D76, E76, F#76, G76, A76, B76, C77, D77, E77, F#77, G77, A77, B77, C78, D78, E78, F#78, G78, A78, B78, C79, D79, E79, F#79, G79, A79, B79, C80, D80, E80, F#80, G80, A80, B80, C81, D81, E81, F#81, G81, A81, B81, C82, D82, E82, F#82, G82, A82, B82, C83, D83, E83, F#83, G83, A83, B83, C84, D84, E84, F#84, G84, A84, B84, C85, D85, E85, F#85, G85, A85, B85, C86, D86, E86, F#86, G86, A86, B86, C87, D87, E87, F#87, G87, A87, B87, C88, D88, E88, F#88, G88, A88, B88, C89, D89, E89, F#89, G89, A89, B89, C90, D90, E90, F#90, G90, A90, B90, C91, D91, E91, F#91, G91, A91, B91, C92, D92, E92, F#92, G92, A92, B92, C93, D93, E93, F#93, G93, A93, B93, C94, D94, E94, F#94, G94, A94, B94, C95, D95, E95, F#95, G95, A95, B95, C96, D96, E96, F#96, G96, A96, B96, C97, D97, E97, F#97, G97, A97, B97, C98, D98, E98, F#98, G98, A98, B98, C99, D99, E99, F#99, G99, A99, B99, C100, D100, E100, F#100, G100, A100, B100, C101, D101, E101, F#101, G101, A101, B101, C102, D102, E102, F#102, G102, A102, B102, C103, D103, E103, F#103, G103, A103, B103, C104, D104, E104, F#104, G104, A104, B104, C105, D105, E105, F#105, G105, A105, B105, C106, D106, E106, F#106, G106, A106, B106, C107, D107, E107, F#107, G107, A107, B107, C108, D108, E108, F#108, G108, A108, B108, C109, D109, E109, F#109, G109, A109, B109, C110, D110, E110, F#110, G110, A110, B110, C111, D111, E111, F#111, G111, A111, B111, C112, D112, E112, F#112, G112, A112, B112, C113, D113, E113, F#113, G113, A113, B113, C114, D114, E114, F#114, G114, A114, B114, C115, D115, E115, F#115, G115, A115, B115, C116, D116, E116, F#116, G116, A116, B116, C117, D117, E117, F#117, G117, A117, B117, C118, D118, E118, F#118, G118, A118, B118, C119, D119, E119, F#119, G119, A119, B119, C120, D120, E120, F#120, G120, A120, B120, C121, D121, E121, F#121, G121, A121, B121, C122, D122, E122, F#122, G122, A122, B122, C123, D123, E123, F#123, G123, A123, B123, C124, D124, E124, F#124, G124, A124, B124, C125, D125, E125, F#125, G125, A125, B125, C126, D126, E126, F#126, G126, A126, B126, C127, D127, E127, F#127, G127, A127, B127, C128, D128, E128, F#128, G128, A128, B128, C129, D129, E129, F#129, G129, A129, B129, C130, D130, E130, F#130, G130, A130, B130, C131, D131, E131, F#131, G131, A131, B131, C132, D132, E132, F#132, G132, A132, B132, C133, D133, E133, F#133, G133, A133, B133, C134, D134, E134, F#134, G134, A134, B134, C135, D135, E135, F#135, G135, A135, B135, C136, D136, E136, F#136, G136, A136, B136, C137, D137, E137, F#137, G137, A137, B137, C138, D138, E138, F#138, G138, A138, B138, C139, D139, E139, F#139, G139, A139, B139, C140, D140, E140, F#140, G140, A140, B140, C141, D141, E141, F#141, G141, A141, B141, C142, D142, E142, F#142, G142, A142, B142, C143, D143, E143, F#143, G143, A143, B143, C144, D144, E144, F#144, G144, A144, B144, C145, D145, E145, F#145, G145, A145, B145, C146, D146, E146, F#146, G146, A146, B146, C147, D147, E147, F#147, G147, A147, B147, C148, D148, E148, F#148, G148, A148, B148, C149, D149, E149, F#149, G149, A149, B149, C150, D150, E150, F#150, G150, A150, B150, C151, D151, E151, F#151, G151, A151, B151, C152, D152, E152, F#152, G152, A152, B152, C153, D153, E153, F#153, G153, A153, B153, C154, D154, E154, F#154, G154, A154, B154, C155, D155, E155, F#155, G155, A155, B155, C156, D156, E156, F#156, G156, A156, B156, C157, D157, E157, F#157, 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G250, A250, B250, C251, D251, E251, F#251, G251, A251, B251, C252, D252, E252, F#252, G252, A252, B252, C253, D253, E253, F#253, G253, A253, B253, C254, D254, E254, F#254, G254, A254, B254, C255, D255, E255, F#255, G255, A255, B255, C256, D256, E256, F#256, G256, A256, B256, C257, D257, E257, F#257, G257, A257, B257, C258, D258, E258, F#258, G258, A258, B258, C259, D259, E259, F#259, G259, A259, B259, C260, D260, E260, F#260, G260, A260, B260, C261, D261, E261, F#261, G261, A261, B261, C262, D262, E262, F#262, G262, A262, B262, C263, D263, E263, F#263, G263, A263, B263, C264, D264, E264, F#264, G264, A264, B264, C265, D265, E265, F#265, G265, A265, B265, C266, D266, E266, F#266, G266, A266, B266, C267, D267, E267, F#267, G267, A267, B267, C268, D268, E268, F#268, G268, A268, B268, C269, D269, E269, F#269, G269, A269, B269, C270, D270, E270, F#270, G270, A270, B270, C271, D271, E271, F#271, G271, A271, B271, C272, D272, E272, F#272, G272, A272, B272, C273, D273, E273, F#273, G273, A273, 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Musical score for bass clef, measures 15-25. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The score consists of eight staves of music. Measures 15-16: Rapid sixteenth-note runs with sixths (6) and triplets (3). Measure 17: Quarter notes with sixths (6). Measure 18: Quarter notes with sixths (6). Measure 19: Quarter notes with sixths (6). Measure 20: Quarter notes with sixths (6). Measure 21: Quarter notes with sixths (6). Measure 22: Quarter notes with sixths (6) and triplets (3). Measure 23: Quarter notes with sixths (6). Measure 24: Quarter notes with sixths (6). Measure 25: Quarter notes with sixths (6).

Two staves of musical notation in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff, starting at measure 26, contains four measures of music. Each measure features a sixteenth-note triplet on the lower strings, indicated by a '6' below the notes. The notes are slurred together. The second staff, starting at measure 27, contains four measures. The first three measures continue the triplet pattern with a '6' below. The fourth measure features an eighth-note triplet on the lower strings, indicated by a '3' below, and is marked with an *8^{va}* dynamic marking above the notes.

Although Wooten displays an impressive level of technical virtuosity in pieces such as “Classical Thump,” he sustains a high level of musicianship with regards to maintaining the integrity of the time, even in the metric subdivisions of the intricate passages. Another aspect of Wooten’s musicality is evident in contrasting original pieces such as “Sometimes I Laugh” (example 7.9). The melody begins with a simple phrase at a slow tempo. Wooten does not employ any of his innovative right hand techniques on this piece; the focus remains on simplicity and melodic expression.

Example 7.9. Victor Wooten, *Sometimes I Laugh*, melody mm. 1-5.

A single staff of musical notation in bass clef with a common time signature (C). The melody consists of five measures. The first measure begins with a quarter note on G2, followed by a dotted quarter note on A2. The second measure contains a quarter note on B2, a quarter note on C3, and a quarter note on D3. The third measure contains a quarter note on E3, a quarter note on F3, and a quarter note on G3. The fourth measure contains a quarter note on A3, a quarter note on B3, and a quarter note on C4. The fifth measure contains a quarter note on D4, a quarter note on E4, and a quarter note on F4. The notes are slurred together across the measures.

Pedagogical Issues

Music teachers in various settings are faced with many challenges. Unique circumstances exist for instructors teaching in different environments. A performance instructor working within the parameters of an institutional setting may be required to adhere to certain requirements as dictated by a given program of study. Conversely, tremendous variety exists in the pedagogical approaches utilized by teachers employed by private companies, such as local music schools, who have no specific academic agenda. Some teachers may overemphasize the fundamentally valuable principles of technique and theory. This type of approach has a desirable goal but may lead to a less enjoyable experience for the student. Focusing on more casual and immediately gratifying aspects of playing an instrument may encourage the average student to continue playing and studying music. At some point in the student's development, an interest in the more serious aspects of becoming a musician may develop.

Student Motivation

Classical music students are often given standard repertoire and specific exercises to enable them to pass a standardized exam. In jazz pedagogy, there are a number of pieces that are considered essential to the genre, but a great deal of flexibility exists in the choice of repertoire to be performed. Original pieces are often encouraged in recital performances in jazz programs. Once a student has reached a certain level of proficiency in the basic performance aspects of jazz music, an individual style can begin to materialize. Even in the early stages of studying jazz, a student should be exposed to the joy of improvisation. While this aspect of the jazz style can be intimidating, for some it encourages a sense of individual expression during the early developmental stages of

jazz study. If a student is engaged in this form of personal expression and finds it appealing, it can provide a great deal of motivation for the student to practice and develop the necessary skills for improvisation.

Using one particular method book may not be the best mode for instruction. To use one method book almost exclusively, as might happen in classical music instruction, would most often be counterproductive when teaching in other genres. Countless instructional method books have emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century, and many can prove beneficial if used in conjunction with other materials and instructional methods. A book for basic music reading may be beneficial for the student's development, but may often be best utilized as a supplemental source of material, until the student endeavors to study at a more serious level. A typical beginning student on the electric bass might become discouraged if left to study standard music notation exclusively. Within the formalized academic setting, a student must be capable of reading music at a level appropriate to his or her program and academic standing.

It is worth noting that most guitar and bass students are capable of playing at a much higher level than their ability to read standard notation would indicate. Many players are able to perform passages that they would not be able to read with any fluency; this is especially true with non-classical students. The enjoyment level of a student in performance is often greater when music reading is not involved (there are exceptions, e.g. a classical student may be uncomfortable performing without the familiarity and security provided by the presence of sheet music). The measure of a student's enjoyment in performance is often influenced by the subsequent level of motivation.

Instructor Idiosyncrasies

It is important that a teacher recognize his or her own personal frustrations with a student. An effective teacher should be capable of speaking to a student with a level of detached objectivity, without displaying anger or resentment towards a student, despite the potential for many different teaching scenarios to become personally frustrating. It is appropriate in many situations, however, for an instructor to speak with passion when truly motivated to do so, as this can convey a deeply convicted belief in the significance of the art form.

Ultimately, a productive teacher must consider the best motivational tactics to utilize in each setting and with each individual student. A teacher must acknowledge his or her own tendencies and idiosyncrasies. Genuine and impassioned sentiments should be expressed when appropriate. Personal anger and frustrations must be acknowledged and controlled. Each instructor brings a unique skill set and depth of experience to a teaching situation. It is incumbent upon the teacher to capitalize on these skills and experiences and mobilize them in teaching and motivating students, carefully considering each individual situation and each individual student.

Music Instruction in Popular Genres

The study of classical music tends to be more uniform in its instruction than other genres. The electric bass is prominent in genres that lie outside of the classical music idiom. Learning music in genres such as pop, rock, blues, punk rock, rhythm and blues, hip hop, disco, reggae or other styles does not necessarily involve a standardized approach. An electric bassist studying music in these styles may learn from a friend or relative, or a private teacher. There are no standardized or recognized qualifications for

these instructors. Even if a particular instructor is highly educated and experienced but unable to engage a student on a personal level, the relationship can often produce limited results.

Teaching Electric Bass in Universities and Colleges

While jazz pedagogy has evolved considerably and taken some shape in terms of consistent teachings in recent years, there is still a wide range of approaches utilized by various private instructors at the university level. Those teaching private lessons in jazz in institutions of higher learning are often afforded a great deal of flexibility in terms of the material to be studied and the pedagogical approach to be used. As previously discussed, the pedagogical approaches in jazz education are often not as clearly developed and defined as the pedagogical approaches in classical music education. For example, a conservatory will traditionally train students to pass standardized conservatory exams, each with a designated grade level involving certain requirements. Jazz instruction involves much more subjective interpretation on the part of the instructor. Some teachers might focus on the technical aspects of playing a specific instrument, while others may take a more conceptual approach, addressing aspects of overall musicianship.

In summary, music teachers in certain genres and in institutions may be restricted in terms of what is expected from them in their pedagogical approach. As the electric bass is a relatively young instrument that is generally used outside of the classical music tradition, each teacher must ultimately decide which avenues to pursue in electric bass instruction, in order to produce a well-rounded performer. These decisions will be

influenced by various factors including the musical genre involved, the setting in which the lessons are being taught, and the requirements and desires of the individual student.

Chapter 8

SUMMARY

Jazz music has realized tremendous growth over the course of the 20th century. The historical evolution of the art form intersected with the inception of the electric bass in 1951, when Leo Fender produced his Precision model electric bass. Early electric bass proponents in jazz include historically significant figures such as Monk Montgomery, Steve Swallow and Bob Cranshaw. The use of the electric bass was greeted with skepticism and resistance by many critics.

In the formative years of jazz, before the invention of the electric bass, the bass parts were played sometimes on the tuba but primarily on the acoustic bass. The acoustic bass has a much wider attack envelope than the electric bass, and this timbre has become an integral part of the jazz tradition. The electric bass has a much more pointed attack, as well as having more defined overtones, and has secured its place in certain genres within the jazz tradition.

Harmonics on the electric bass are easier to articulate, and many bassists exploited this concept to explore new sounds on the instrument. Jaco Pastorius was among the first to gain notoriety for his innovative work with harmonics. There are some electric bassists who emulate the sound of the acoustic bass to some degree, and preserve

some of the essence of the jazz tradition. Many electric bassists are well versed in the jazz tradition, and elements of the style in their compositions and improvisations. A broader perspective would be to view the music as a stylistic expression in itself, regardless of the medium through which it is expressed; the human qualities of a performer will, at least to some degree, transcend the instrument in performance.

Jaco Pastorius had an immeasurable impact on the evolution of the function of the electric bass in jazz. His influence is heard throughout the music industry; his innovations regarding the tone of the electric bass were significant. The sound of the instrument in general is permanently affected by his work. Pastorius was one of the first and most important electric bassists to effectively fuse elements of the jazz tradition with stylistic inflections from other genres. His work with Weather Report was exemplary of early jazz-rock fusion, and the group influenced countless musicians in years to follow, attracting many aspiring musicians to their jazz-influenced music. This led many musicians involved with other genres to explore jazz further. Pastorius and Stanley Clarke have become icons among electric bassists in jazz as well as other genres.

In examining the evolution of the bass as an instrument, it is clear that Lloyd Loar, Paul Tutmarc and the Rickenbacker company had produced primitive electric basses years before Leo Fender's idea came to fruition. The instrument as it is now perceived is related to the 1951 Fender Precision electric bass. The Precision model remains an industry standard in the contemporary professional setting, used extensively in studio and live performances in a wide range of musical styles. Many electric basses are modeled after this type of design. These instruments range from very inexpensive

imitations made with inferior materials and craftsmanship to exclusive and extremely expensive models crafted with the finest materials.

In 1960, a new electric bass was introduced. The Fender Jazz Bass, like the Precision, also went on to become an industry standard, widely copied in design at a range of prices. The Fender Jazz model was used by bass legends such as Marcus Miller and Jaco Pastorius, who removed the frets from one of his Fender Jazz basses and became an innovator on the electric fretless bass. Later bassists who effectively mobilized the study of jazz music in their work on the electric fretless bass include Steve Bailey, Michael Manring, Alain Caron, Jimmy Haslip and Mark Egan.

Future research into the electric bass and its place in the evolving field of jazz should explore a variety of topics. Comparing existing versions of the same pieces as performed on the acoustic bass and also as performed on the electric bass could provide interesting distinctions with regards to the acoustical characteristics of each instrument. Objective measures pertaining to the differences in the attack envelope could be analyzed, and subjective aesthetic differences could also be considered. Analysis of the differences could lead to a better understanding of what contributes to the perception of a given stylistic definition, though categorization is often a matter of great subjectivity.

As jazz and related styles evolve, there can often seem to be a dissolution of standardized practices that adhered to the confines of a specific musical style. Just as jazz was originally conceived as a conflux of cultural influences, music in the future can continue to capitalize on the benefits of incorporating diverse stylistic elements. This concept can be liberating for the composers and performers active today; once the barriers and restrictions of a given musical style or practice are removed, composers and

performers are free to explore their creativity and artistry outside the parameters dictated by tradition. This can facilitate the growth and expansion of existing musical styles as well as the birth of new and innovative stylistic fusions.

This is not to dismiss the educational value of studying the tradition of past styles. As so many of the most prominent electric bass players discussed have shown, a strong background in the study of the jazz tradition can contribute immeasurably to one's potential as an original and expressive artist. Jazz has proven to be an abundant source of harmonic and rhythmic information and inspiration for countless electric bassists working in a wide range of musical styles. The study of the jazz idiom has allowed many of the world's elite electric bass players the opportunity to gain a more thorough understanding of harmony, composition, improvisation and rhythmic concepts. Many of these artists have internalized the nuances of the jazz tradition, and incorporated these qualities into their own personal musical statements. Modern electric bass virtuosos such as Victor Wooten and Steve Bailey have incorporated elements of jazz music into their own personal artistic statements.

Just as the electric bass was a technological innovation that helped to inspire the birth of the jazz-rock fusion idiom, future advances in instrument and sound technology may influence the development of stylistic innovations. Research in the future could assess the impact that those developments may have on new styles. Technology allowed for the creation of the electric bass during a time when its applications were practical, and the electric bass in turn influenced the development of jazz-related music and genres in the popular music setting.

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