What Does *Donna Lee* Mean?

An Analysis of the Construction of Meaning in Music

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Abstract

This essay examines the construction of the meaning of bassist Jaco Pastorius' solo on Charlie Parker's composition *Donna Lee* (Pastorius 1976) according to musicologist Jean-Jacques Nattiez' semiological tripartition theory. After the application of Nattiez' approach, the following conclusions can be established:

1. At the time of its conception, 1976, *Donna Lee* represented both a big step forward in the developments of the instrumental possibilities of the electric bass. In its refusal to submit to exclusively rhythmic tasks it gradually became an increasingly soloistic voice. This arrived to the point where it actually was conceivable for a bass player to take upon a three chorus long solo on a classic jazz standard.
2. Despite this innovative spirit which drives Pastorius artistic output, his *Donna Lee* pays hommage to the jazz tradition and to the group of stylistic constraints that today characterize what is known as *bebop*.
3. The final meaning of *Donna Lee* and of any other musical text goes beyond its historical vicissitudes and its immanent structures. Meaning is not imposed by the exterior but is constructed by the individual mind in a perception that is creative and over-productive in a circular dialog with the environment.

The essay will also make reference to the theories of musical semioticians and cognitive psychologists such as James Gibson, Robert Hatten, Ruben Lopez Cano, José Antonio Marina, among others.

Table of contents

Introduction

There is hardly any doubt that Jaco Pastorius, the self-titled debut album by a young 25 year-old bassist from Florida published in 1976, is a masterpiece. One might like the album or not: while some might appreciate the fact that it explores a wide variety of genres, some might prefer to see it as an exercise in stylistic dilettantism lacking uniformity. The same goes for Jaco's playing: one can hear it as unbearable melodic incontinence while another might judge it as the most unsurpassed beauty in terms of bass playing.

But qualifying Jaco Pastorius of masterpiece doesn't leave much room for argument. It is not based on a personal value judgement but on actual facts. I am not referring here to the usual denotation of "any outstanding, superlative piece of work by a creative artist" but to its original meaning: in the old European guild system, the aspyring journeyman was expected to create a piece of handicraft of the highest quality in order to reach the status of "master". One was then oficially allowed to join the guild and to take pupils under tutelage.
After the publication of his debut album, Jaco jumped from anonimity to jazz stardom, earning admiration both from the average musically uneducated concert-goer to the hippest jazz cat, becoming the undisputed master of the electric bass, followed by an ever growing number of adept students that, still today, study his solos, licks, compositions and arrangements and try to mimic his playing style, sound and, some, subdued by his aura of untamed charisma, even ideology and lifestyle. Ever since then, Jaco burned like a shooting star in a meteoric career that was truncated by his untimely and tragic death in 1987.

The first track of Jaco Pastorius, a rendition of Charlie Parker's classic tune Donna Lee with the conga player Don Alias as the only accompanist, is today considered as the quintessential bass players' manifesto. As Alias himself puts it, " every bass player I know now can cut 'Donna Lee' thanks to Jaco" (Milkowski 1984:62). Even a musical figure of unquestionable stature as the ex-enfant terrible of jazz guitar Pat Metheny professes his admiration: "(Jaco's) solo on 'Donna Lee', beyond being astounding for just the fact that it was played with a horn-like phrasing that was previously unknown to the bass guitar, is even more notable for being one of the freshest looks at how to play on a well traveled set of chord changes in recent jazz history – not to mention that it's just about the the hippest start to a debut album in the history of recorded music. That solo […] reveal(s) a melodic ingenuity (that rarest and hardest to quantify of musical qualities amongst improvisors) that comes along only a few times in each generation and then there is just his basic relationship to sound and touch; refined to a degree that some would have thought impossible on an electric instrument" (Metheny 2000).

Despite Metheny's known penchant for affective hiperbolae, this view of the greatness of Jaco and his Donna Lee is unanimously shared by many people. But just not

everybody. As with all those who, at some point or other of their lives, have been worthy of the qualification of genius, people seem to take very extreme positions when considering his creative output. Especially with Donna Lee, there are no diplomatic opinions nor does sheer indifference ever seem like a plausible option. A lot of it has to do with the personal taste of the listener and his expectations on what he is about to hear. Appreciating Jaco's Donna Lee presumes certain conditions from the listener, among which there is certain level of stylistic competency. To put it shortly, people are more or less akin to Donna Lee depending on the content of their personal symbolic background. But what is the point of trying to analyze a piece of music and determining its meaning if that meaning is as variable as there are different people and different tastes? Can one analyze a piece of music without committing the sin of reductionism?

Objective and method

This aim of this essay is to examine how the semiological tripartition suggested by the musicologist Jean-Jacques Nattiez applies to Jaco Pastorius' rendition of Donna Lee. It will end with a final discussion about how the meaning of the musical text is constructed, which can be applied to any work of music. This approach will in its turn introduce a sort of tri-furcation in our essay. Each of the resulting parts will have their own particular concern: Although they will be treated more in depth in the following pages, they could be summarized as:

1) What is the historical context that serves as a preface to Pastorius' *Donna Lee* from a historical point of view? What developments of the instrumental possibilities of the electric bass are brought forward during the last part of the 20th and who are their protagonists?
2) What kind of solo is Pastorius' *Donna* Lee from an immanent/structural point of view? What stylistic stereotypes do we find in it? Is it a classical solo or a modern one?
3) Where does the final meaning of a piece of music lie? Does it originate from knowledge of the historical vicissitudes of the work? Or does it come from an understanding of its technical features? What happens when a listener ignores both? To put it bluntly: where does the final meaning of a piece of music originate?

An introductive explanation of the theories of Nattiez, exposed in his book *Music and Discourse. Toward a Semiology of Music* (1990) will precede the aforementioned three parts.

Theoretical background

This entire chapter builds upon the semiological tripartition theory in its application to musical analysis as exposed by Jean-Jacques Nattiez in his book *Music and Discourse* (1990).

Analytic discourse as a metalanguage

As Jean-Jacques Nattiez claims, at least until recent times it has been unusual for musicologists to undertake a meta-reflection of the methods employed in their own discipline (Nattiez 1990: 150). Musicology, both in its historic and systematic approaches, is a symbolic construct whose function is to explain another symbolic system. Thus, in its desire to explain the musical fact, musicology cannot escape being biased by language.

Nattiez believes that it is common for some people to not feel comfortable with the idea that music can or needs to be explained (1990: 151). Those in favour of this view might tend to see a musicological analysis as an act of ”betrayal” to what the essence of music is: to communicate without words. For them, as soon as music is explained with words, it becomes fixed, literal and deprived of what constitues its basic characteristic: its ”openness”, its reference to a non-verbal signifier, its capacity to express the ”ineffable”.

What is musical meaning?

Nattiez proposes a general definition of meaning that suits our purposes: ”An object of any kind takes on meaning for an individual apprehending that object, as soon as that individual places the object in relation to areas of his lived experience – that is, in relation to a collection of other objects that belong to his or her experience of the world” (1990: 9). The definition includes all kinds of possible objects: from physical phenomenons concerning earthly matter to personal or social facts, abstract concepts, words, ideologies, etc. It stresses the fact that any study of how an object functions symbollically must happen, first and foremost, at an individual level. It is this level of functioning which makes possible the further study at other levels and allows us to determine how meaning can also be constructed collectively or in interpersonal interactions. The definition understands meaning as something that is apprehended; in a way, constructed, as opposed to perceived. The meaning of an object is a transaction between the receiver and the producer.

The semiological tripartition

Nattiez states that when a symbolic object, a text, a work, etc., enters the biographic horizon of an individual, the result is the creation of a new constellation of symbols in endless interactive web of symbols ”playing” with one another. The meaning of a text is not the product of the transmission of a message that a receiver translates thanks to his knowledge of

a fixed code he shares with the producer. It is a myth to see the symbolic object as an intermediary in a process of communication that transmits the meaning intended by the author to the audience (1990: 16). The act of meaning is manyfold: it can refer to a complex process of creation (poietic) that has to do with the form as well as the content of the work, and also the point of departure of a complex process of reception that reconstructs a message. These two moments aren't necessarily equivalent.

Nattiez doesn't try to negate the possibility of any communication. In an act of symbolic functioning, communication is a particular type of exchange.The problem is that, as Nattiez believes, "for musicologists, music theorists, analysts, critics, and musicians often have a different view of the matter: for them, there *must* be communication between the composer and the listener" (1990: 17-18). Nattiez sees communication is a particular case of exchange. The need of communication as the driving force of any composer does not correspond with the reality of the constructed and dynamic aspect of the meaning of human activities.

Meaning is rather constructed: it constitues the assignment of a whole new web of symbols to a particular text (or symbolic form): meaning emerges from the construction of that assignment. The symbolic background of each receiver is, to one or another degree, different. Thus, the construction of meaning can never be guaranteed to be the same for each personal case.

When considering how the signification of a text works, three levels are to be taken into consideration (1990: 13-15):

- The poietic dimension: the text whose meaning one intends to analyze usually results from a process of creation, whose conditions (social, material, historical) may be described, reconstituted and, in its turn, also analyzed critically.
- The esthesic dimension: it considers the moment when the receiver constructs the meaning of a text during the perceptual process.
- The trace: it referes to the physical, material embodiment of the object of study. It is the immanent and recurrent characteristics that are perceivable by our senses after the neutralisation of esthesic or poietic considerations. "The trace remains merely an amorphous physical reality, until it is entrapped by analysis" (ibid.: 16).

I consider enough theoretical context has been given to be able take upon the first part of the analysis. In it, I will examine the musical socio-historical context leading up to the creation of *Donna Lee*. This part will in its turn be divided in two: after a brief history of the electric bass which puts the emphasis on the evolution of the roles and constraints allowed to bassists throughout the last part of the 20th century, a brief outline of Pastorius' musical relationship to jazz and Charlie Parker in particular will follow.

Poietic analysis

According to Gilson (1963), any consideration of the creation of a work can be divided in three elements:

1) Deliberations on what must be done to produce the object
2) Operations upon external materials
3) The production of the work

This is similar to what Jean Molino (1984), from whom Nattiez explicitly borrows the use of the semiological tripartition, considers to be the different moments of the poietic phase:

1) The study of the techniques and rules which, at a given moment, for a given form, define the state of resources and procedures used by the artist.
2) Analysis of the particular strategies of production which help furnish a model for the production of the work.
3) Study of the intentions of the author, who often wants to communicate or express something about the work.
4) Reconstruction of the expressive meaning, conscious or unconscious, which might be found within the work.

It is obvious that Donna Lee takes a whole new meaning when considered from a historical perspective. In this line, I will now expose the musical socio-historical conditions previous to the creation of Donna Lee during the decades of the 50es, 60es and 70es in the United States. In order to better appreciate the originality and freshness of Donna Lee, in the moment of its inception, I consider necessary a summary of the stylistic evolution of electric bass. As for the intentions of the author and the possible expressive meaning of Donna Lee, it will be necessary to look into Jaco's life prior to his first solo album, as well as his own explanations about why he chose to play Donna Lee in it.

A brief history of the electric bass (Bass before Jaco)

The constant attempts to amplify acoustic basses during the first decades of the 20th century saw its first fruits when Leo Fender came up with the first solid body electric bass guitar with enough volume and portability to attain worldwide acceptance: the 1951 Precision bass. According to Fender Ltd. (2003), the decision to name it Precision responds to 3 main issues:

1. Unlike the members of the violin family, the Fender Bass had frets. This eliminated the need of spending endless hours working on intonation that the double bass required.

2. The instrument was built thanks to the latest state-of-the-art machinery, without which it would have been impossible to come up with such a technologically advanced product.
3. The sound of this new instrument was much more clear and precise than its acoustic version. Thanks to amplification, they were able to cut across the horn section in a big band and really be heard.

Monk Montgomery

One of the first upright bassists to make the switch to electric bass (which at that time, meant exclusively the Fender Precision bass and later the Jazz Bass, manufactured in 1960) and to popularize it all over thanks to his concerts with Lionel Hampton was bass player Monk Montgomery, the brother of the mythical guitar player Wes and a true musical figure in its own right. He used a very unorthodox technique, considering his past experience as an upright player, which consisted of playing all downstrokes with his thumb. After listening to the classical record *Fingerpicking* (Pacific, 1957), that features his brother guitarist Wes Montgomery as the leader, it is fairly obvious that his bass lines still were in the tradition of the walking bass, consisting of the constant stream of quarter notes.

James Jamerson

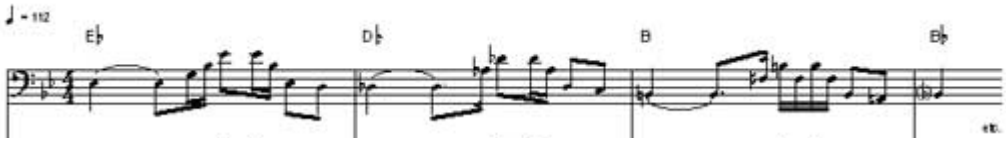
James Jamerson is considered one of the first true innovators with the electric bass. Jaco cites him almost without exception as a main source for inspiration, as do many other great bass players. *Standing in the shadows of motown* (Dr. Licks, 1989) is an excellent book on the life and works of Jamerson as well as a detailed analysis of his style done by today's famous bassists.

Jamerson was from the beginning very well versed in the classical school of the double bass, influenced by the such house names as Paul Chambers and Ray Brown. He began playing electric bass in 1561, two years after he began recording with Motown Records, partially forced by the constant requests of the studio technicians and the company's artistic directors. The timbre of the electric bass provided with a new sound that was beginning to be appreciated. Jamerson played his Fender jazz bass in more number 1 hits than The Beach Boys, The Rolling Stones and the Beatles together, thus becoming a major contributor to the so called "Motown sound", one of whose trademarks was the ever more popular sound of the electric bass.

With him, this instrument grew in legitimacy and popularity and began to free himself from the influence of the upright bass, still observable in Monk's playing. The electric bass went from the double bass' "bastard" brother to an instrument capable of playing

rhythmical, percussive yet melodical lines, enhancing the musical experience and attaining a rawer, more physical sound, away from the subtle undertones of the contrabass.

There are a few elements that characterize James Jamerson's playing style. Speaking in broad terms, he usually played off a root-5th-octave pattern; most of his grooves had a hidden baion type of feel. James built many of his lines from the root-5th-octave shape, and then he'd add other scale tones, as well as non-scale chromatic passing tones, to create motion and melodic lines. A classic example is the kind of stuff he played on songs like "Bernadette" by the Four Tops:



Later on, the choice of notes grew further to start including the 3rd, the 7th, and other chord and non-chord tones, which enabled him to play through the changes and not be so constrained by the need of constantly stating the fundamental of the chord, a personal feature of him that gained him notoriety among musicians everywhere. He'd use the 5th in the root-5th-octave shape as a pivot but he would elaborate it, constantly varying the notes and rhythms. From there, it seemed like Jamerson's style expanded every year until his parts began to sound like bass solos, but totally in the pocket and supportive of the song.

The bassist Anthony Jackson suggests in Standing in the shadows of motown (Dr. Licks 1989: 93) the following classification of the innovations brought forward by Jamerson's playing:

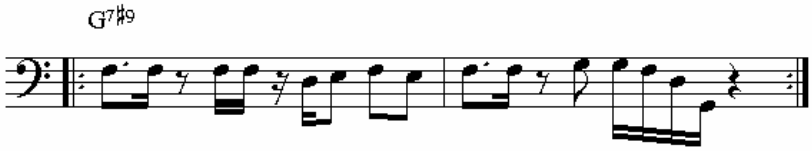
- Harmonic and rhythmic ambiguity: use of anticipations to avoid downbeats, alteration of the rhythmic feel, use of passing tones to redefine harmonic structure.
- Use of contrast in phrasing for motivic development: abrupt transitions from busy to inactive passages, between horizontal to vertical motion and unexpected changes of melodic direction in a short space.
- Use of dissonance as an effect: use of "wrong notes", use of "lazy" open strings to approach notes a semitone lower and general chromatic approach of chordal roots.

Further musical developments: Rock and Funk

In March 1965, James Brown signed a new contract with Smash Records. Among other things, he managed to gain complete artistic control over his output. He promptly went into the studio and recorded "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag." Funk was born and a new musical revolution started. It is hard to stress enough the importance of the concept of funk, since its influence can be traced even in today's last single radio hit. Funk as a musical quality has never been out of style, and many artists today, from hip hop to r'n'b, fusion and rock-pop

backgrounds, they all strive to have some kind of ”funky” element in their music. Coming to terms with the ”funk” is something any aspiring electric bass player can hardly seem to avoid. Most of the times, it is his hability to play in a funky, groovy manner and not his technical hability what is going to determine his success as a musician.

So what is Funk? When it comes to beign funky, the most important thing, what is going to keep the performance together, is the central necessity of playing and improvisig within tthe groove. Funk is a style that brings to the foreground a primary element such as rhythm. To ensure that nothing gets in the way of it being felt, funk turns the rhythm section into an art form in itself. The groove allows for some improvisation, as long as it remains recognisable. It is everyone’s duty to strictly adhere to this basic principle so that the groove is not disturbed. In this way, all instrumentalists play very rhythmical, short phrases. It could almost be said that all members of the funk band are considered to be rhythm section players in their own right. Nevertheless, most of the responsibility for ensuring that everything grooves belongs principally to the electric bass and the drums. Everything else is built on top of the rhythmic foundation they provide, as with the icing on top of a cake. In the most classic funk tunes, the bass player supplies a repetitive two to four measure bass line (known as an "ostinato"). Such is the case with Fred Thomas' bass line on *Everybody wanna get funky one more time,* featured on the JB’s record *Hustle With Speed* (People, 1975). Fred plays endless small variations of the same bass ostinato as it serves as the perfect support, establishing and maintaining the groove, along with the guitars and drums. Fred’s purpose is to establish the groove and to maintain it fresh but recognizable by applying variations that propel the music forward. He follows this process, repeating the same groove:



(except for the bridge sections) for a total of 9 minutes and 34 seconds. He's economical in his note choices and phrases, the important idea being that, to be funky, one must only say what needs to be said, and nothing more.

The music of James Brown provides aspiring bassists with endless examples of what constitutes nowadays the essentials of bass playing. As cats say, it doesn’t matter how fast you can play, how flashy your lines are, if you don’t have any pocket, that is, if you can’t groove over a short, simple bass line. Though all the bass lines were improvised initially, they are near perfect examples of how to do a lot with a little. Like jazz, blues or any other of their ancestors in black music tradition, funk is heavily based on one’s capacity to improvise and create lines on the fly. It is probably this freshness of concept that has allowed funk never to fall out of favor since it's inception in 1965. Thanks to the musical contributions of the

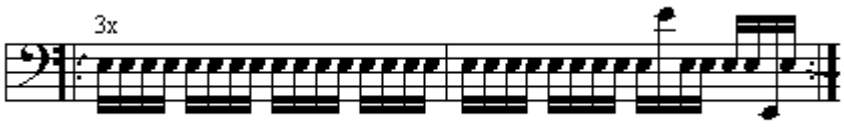
bassists of James Brown (Bernard Odum, "Sweet" Charles Sherrell, Tim Drummond, Bootsy Collins, Fred Thomas—to name a few) it wouldn't be long before everyone started considering funk as the new thing to be doing. Especially if one wanted to sell records, since funk proved itself an incredible commercial success.

Rocco Prestia

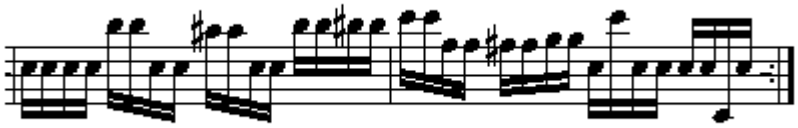
Francis Rocco Prestia is considered by bass connoisseurs a stylist of refined taste and a funk institution. Among bassists worldwide, he is known for his innovative use of fast, 16th-note-based grooves behind the five-horn front line of the mythical soul-funk group *Tower Of Power*. The band began playing cover versions of tunes by rock groups such as the Beatles and the Stones, and after a while, the band got hip to soul music and enlisted other horn players. They started covering the r&b tunes of James Brown, among others. Rocco was personally inspired by the sounds and feels of James Brown, along with the Motown and Memphis sounds. Bassists that influenced Rocco included: James Jamerson, Chuck Rainey, Jerry Jemmott, and Duck Dunn. Through the use of these influences, Rocco invented and developed his own style of bass playing which would come to be called fingerstyle funk.

The first of many classic Tower Of Power recordings came in the form of East Bay Grease which was released in 1971 on an independent label. Shortly thereafter, the band was signed by Warner Bros. Records in 1972 and years of top 40 hits and gold records followed. The release in 1973 of the album Tower of power helped bassists and musicians worldwide recognize the talent behind Rocco's innovative 16th-note based lines.

Finger funk style of playing is an essential element of Rocco's technique and has become a prominent component in the performance of many of today's top bassists. Even though Rocco seems to be constantly playing a steady stream of 16th-notes, his busy lines always come from deep inside the groove and never get in anyone's way. It deeply influenced Jaco when coming up with his own version of fingerstyle funk, which is a step ahead from Prestia’s one. Let’s analyze this style in more detail: First of all, 16th-note rhythms are the backbone of fingerstyle funk grooves. It is the constant and continuous stream of 16th-notes that is the underlying foundation of this style of music. By incorporating ghost notes into this style, one creates the impression of continuous flow, and because what would be rests of silent space are filled with the percussive sound of the gost notes, groove is propelled and so is the overall feel of the music. The following is the main groove on Tower of Power major hit ”What is hip”



This groove belongs to section A, that opens with the 16th-note based droning or ostinato technique that the entire tune is built on. This figure constantly reappears throughout the tune. The first verse commences at section B. These four measures contain what are probably Rocco's most recognizable and trademark groove:



This non-stopping flow of constant 16th notes is one of the elements that people tend to associate with Jaco. Despite this fact, the due credit must be given to Rocco Prestia, since he was playing in this fashion a few years before him.

The status of the electric bass

By the mid 1970's, the electric bass was the predominant choice of popular music bassists. Most professional upright players were forced to "double" on the electric bass if they wanted to keep working. Despite this fact, when it came time for the "respectable" bass players to create their "artistic statement," most of the top players of the early 70's would revert back to the upright bass, an instrument that had long "proven itself" artistically. It was a very common attitude to qualify the electric bass of ”inferior instrument”, despite its’ popularity in Top 40 music. In fact, there was a belief among the Jazz elitists that the electric bass was "half the instrument" the upright was, in terms of the amount and degree of artistic expression that could be yielded from the instrument. The electric bass was great for supplying the underlying support for Rock, R&B and Funk records. But if one wanted to play in a subtler, more vulnerable, artistic way, one reverted back to his acoustic forefather. The electric bass wasn’t considered capable of emoting like a singer or to express beautiful melodies with the drive and energy of a bebop player. But someone was about to revolutionize the way people thought about the electric bass forever.

The motivations behind *Donna Lee*

Jaco was from the very beginning a very energetic, flamboyant kid with animal-like stamina. He excelled at sports, which he practiced with furious intensity that never seemed to decay, which more than made up for his lack in strength and size.

The legend is that Jaco playing style is influenced by the fact that, during his childhood, he heard music with a cheap radio he had won in a cereal contest. The bad quality of the sound made him almost impossible for him to listen to the bass, so instead he imitated the rest of the melodic instruments and played the guitar or the brass parts. That’s how, for him, the electric bass was freed from the subsidiary rhythmic role traditionally assigned to

him. Jaco used to recommend all bassists “to learn tunes. Learn melodies. Most bass players make the mistake of just learning bass lines and nothing else. But you have to concentrate on learning a piece of music, thoroughly, which includes melody and harmony and theory as well [...]. All bass players should become more melody conscious” (Guitar Player: 1986). During the summer, Jaco practiced endless hours this way. His family and friends claim that it was hard for him to take his hand out of the bass.

Just as any jazz musician with the tiniest bit of historic notion about their profession does, conciously or not, Jaco felt he needed to pay his dues to the “inventor” of modern jazz improvisation: Charlie Parker. As he aknowledges in an interview “(Charlie Parker) is definitely a big influence on me; he definitely can play some great lines. I really like the way Charlie Parker plays” (Rosen, 1978). Jaco can single-handedly be considered the leader of the modern way of playing the bass, which takes advantage of the innovations that horn players had been doing for years. As Jaco tells BBC interviewer Ray Recchi when talking about how he came across the innovations he’d be famous for, "I didn't know there was a barrier […]. What I did, when I was a little kid, was I listened to records on a record player I won from a Rice Krispies contest. It was just a kid's record player so I couldn't hear the bass, only the melody. So I played what I could hear, if it was a sax or a piano or whatever”.

As Jaco himself puts it when discussing his technique with Neil Tesser, "I felt that I had never heard anyone clearly outline a tune on the bass. Maybe someone has done it before, I don't know because I don't listen to that many records, but I had never heard it before. I had never heard someone take a tune like 'Donna Lee,' and play it on the bass without a piano player so that you always could hear the changes as well as the melody. It's a question of learning to reflect the original chord in just the line. Players like Wayne Shorter, Sonny Rollins, Herbie Hancock, Ira Sullivan can do that. I wanted to be able to do it, too." Choosing to display this on his record with a dazzlingly fresh version was no accident. Bebop was his self-imposed theory class. "The first jazz record I heard was a Max Roach quarter date," he says "with Kenny Dorham and Hank Mobley. I don't even know who the bassist was. The record was old, and shot, and I couldn't hear the bass player at all. The only thing I could hear was these lines. So I just worked them all out on the bass, without thinking anything of it. And at 15, I already knew how to play most of Bird's[1] tunes, I couldn't play them very fast, because of my arm, but I studied them, and I knew how they worked. Just the heads. I didn't mess with the solos, man; I figured that was personal" (Tesser 1977).

It is obvious that Jaco was aiming at having some kind of impact in the world, as if he thought of playing such a classic for dead-head / serious jazzers as Donna Lee would at once give him the credit everyone that knew him, and above all himself, thought he deserved. As

[1] Charlie Parker’s nickname.

he tells journalist Clive Williamson in a BBC interview, who isn't yet acquainted with his first album, "you gotta check it out! You got to! Listen to the first tune, the first cut on the album, and you're dead, he shouts. You will not believe it! This is my claim to fame, I play 'Donna Lee' , y'know? Charlie Parker's 'Donna Lee' , just bass and conga drums and look out! You never heard nothin' like this, just be-ware! (smiles)" (Williamson 1978). It couldn't be clearer that he thought of Donna Lee as a tune that served as his card of presentation to the world. And it definitely did the job.

Conclusion

In its short but intense history, the figure of the bassist takes upon an act of refusal to submit to exclusively rhythmic tasks and a search for an increasingly soloistic voice. Once an instrument confined to play quarter notes buried under the lead instruments' flashy melodies, bass lines become increasingly elaborated, sincopated, chromatic and noticeable. The sound of newborn electric bass becomes punchier and more aggressive, as if trying to call for attention. Despite all this, the bass player is still relagated to a principally supportive role. It would take a true innovator to change the collective attitude of serious musicians toward the electric bass. Before Jaco, no one had ever tried to do a 3 chorus long solo on a traditional bebop tune just like a sax would. It wasn't until Pastorius' *Donna Lee* came about that the electric bass finally gained the right to become a lead instrument just like any other.

Neutral analysis

Neutrality doesn't mean objectivity.

Nattiez believes that the increased difficulty of the contemporary analytical discourse is a reaction to the impreciseness of the impressionist / historicist style of analysis of the 60's (1990: 155). The contact with highly formalized disciplines such as mathematics, logic, information theory, linguistic or computer programming has prompted musical analysis to take upon a reconsideration of its own methods. The musicologist must nowadays clearly state the parameters used in his analysis if he is to claim any scientificity for his task.

The paradox is that no analysis can claim to be perfectly objective. There is already a choice – and thus a tendency to promote certain elements above others – when one chooses a determinate study object and poses specific questions as to how this object works. The classical refutation of objectivity by physicist Heisenberg claimed that "natural science does not simply describe and explain nature […]; it explains nature as exposed to our method of questioning" (Heisenberg 1958).

When doing a neutral analysis, by no means does the word neutral mean objective or non-biased. There are many choices left to the analyst that come from a personal standpoint. As Nattiez says, an analysis "cannot be prevented from evolving in terms of its own problematic" (1990: 155). An analysis is not a mere reproduction, like the reflection on the mirror, but a simulation that tries to explain how a work functions.

It is not our intention here to realize a purely immanent analysis of Donna Lee as in a pitch set analysis inspired in the theories of Allen Forte. Even if one is to determine some structural characteristics of Jaco's solo, it is good to place these characteristics inside of a stylistic context so that conclusions can be drawn about the meaning of the solo played by Jaco. My thesis here is that Jaco's solo builds a bridge between two worlds: that of modernity and that of tradition. Jaco intends to increase the credibility of the electric bass as a soloistic instrument. It is saying, "listen to all these things the electric bass can do and always could". It is a breath of fresh air and a homage to the past. In order to prove this, I will do a classificatory analysis of the melodic devices found in Jaco's which are considered characteristic of the so-called bebop style.

Bebop style

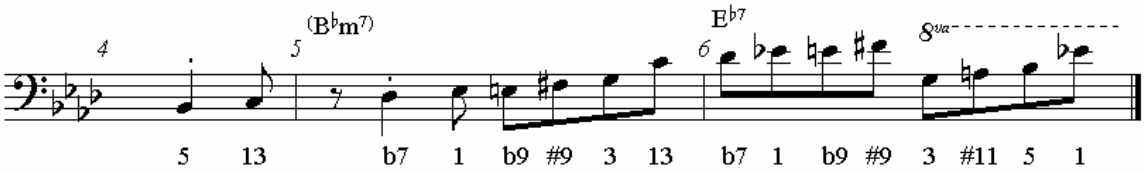
There is one name that runs parallel with the developments experienced by jazz improvisation during the 30s and 40s: Charlie Parker. His harmonic and melodic devices are today considered as the quintessential elements characterizing bebop. He was the inventor and main developer – together with Dizzie Gillespie and Bud Powell - of this style, whose influence

extends way beyond his era and even shows up in the playing of most modern improvisers. Juha Henriksson concerned his doctoral dissertation *Chasing the bird* (Henriksson 1998) on analyzing Charlie Parker's melodic and harmonic devices. *Charlie Parker. His music and his life*, by Carl Woideck (1996) is one of the many biographies available on this extraordinary musical figure. Close consideration of these two sources allows us to establish a by no means exhaustive taxonomy of the elements that are considered as belonging to Parker's style, that is, bebop: extension of the duration of chords, use of whole tone scales and other altered scales, indirect resolutions, upper structure chordal playing, musical quotations and instrumental virtuosity, among others.

I will now try to show how Pastorius' Donna Lee contains a wide array of bebop elements by examining closely a few chosen spots of his solo. The examples come from a transcription of the solo made by myself (included in its entirety in the appendix 1). Since most of the tunes from the bebop era were actually never written down on paper, the chords have been inferred after listening to actual performances of the tune by Charlie Parker and others. The analytical methodology used is the melodic-harmonic analysis popularized by Berklee College of Music. It consists of, first, determining the modal scale that results from, at any given moment, taking the root of the sounding chord as the root of the scale and considering whether the tones that sound within the duration of that chord are chord tones, tensions or secondary tones. After that, one considers whether the scale is diatonic to the key or chromatically altered and derives the appropriate esthetic judgements from that. Let's now start looking for Pastorius' bebop licks.

(a) Extension of the duration of chords

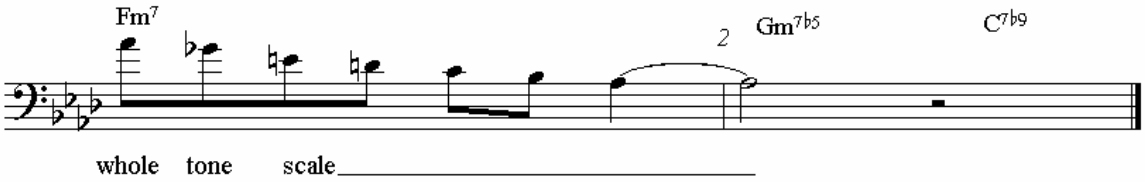
A fairly easy concept to grasp: one plays a scale that, in theory, corresponds to a certain chord and keeps playing it after the chord has changed. Another option is to play the scale that corresponds to a chord before this chord actually comes in. This device introduces a certain peculiarity in the harmonic rhythm, which is anticipated or prolongated.



Bars 4-6. A long scalar run of diminished sonority consistent almost exclusively of stepwise motion, spanning more than 2 octaves. The tones Jaco plays suggest the extension of the dominant chord to the previous bar, its related II-7. Since the scale contains both altered 9ths, we have to choices when trying to determine its name: it could be a mixolydian b9, the

common substitution for the dominant of the major mode, or a symmetrical diminished (also called half tone / whole tone) if the natural A is considered as a scale tone and not as an approach to Bb.

(b) Use of whole-tone scales



Bar 22: A little more “out” substitution. Here, only Ab, Bb and C belong to the F natural minor scale that should, in theory, be used in this modulation to the parallel minor mode. It can be interpreted the following way: Jaco delays the resolution of the previous C7b9 and extends it by two bars by using the C whole tone scale, beginning on Ab down an octave to the lower Ab.

(c) Altered notes

Parker's lines include pitches outside the given harmony: from passing notes, to suspensions and other devices such as free use of chord extensions, particularly the flattened 9th and raised 11th, the interchange of major and minor mode, arpeggiation of diminished chords, etc.

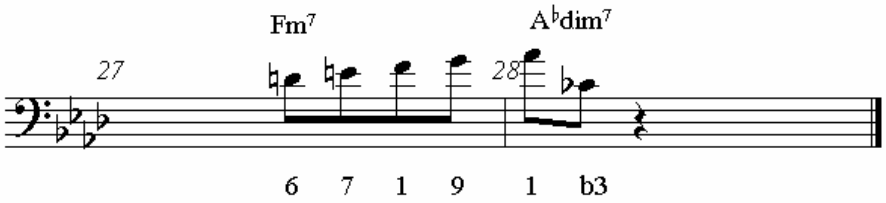
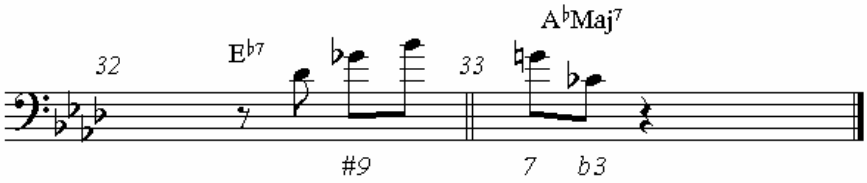
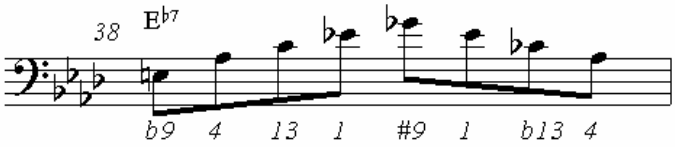


Fig. 12: Bar 27-28: Use of the melodic minor scale, with raised 6th and 7th degrees, instead of the usual natural minor scale. The four notes in bar 27 could also be interpreted as an anticipation of the diminished scale played over the Abdim7 chord on the next bar.

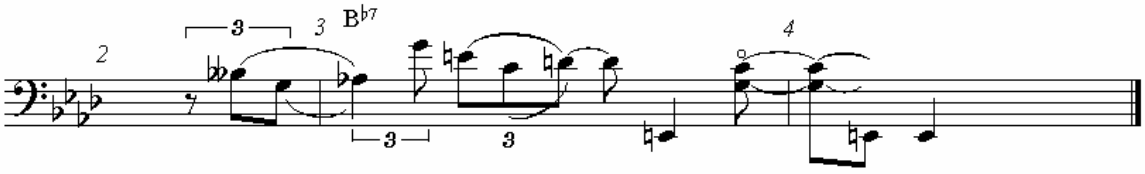


Bar 32: The #9 of Eb, Gb, implies a mixolydian #9 scale. Another possibility is the half-whole tone diminished scale. Jaco goes on to play the b3 over a major 7th chord, a typical "Jacoesque" feature, that makes the I chord sound "bluesy" and, in a way, answers the use of the #9 (enharmonically the b3) of the previous chord.

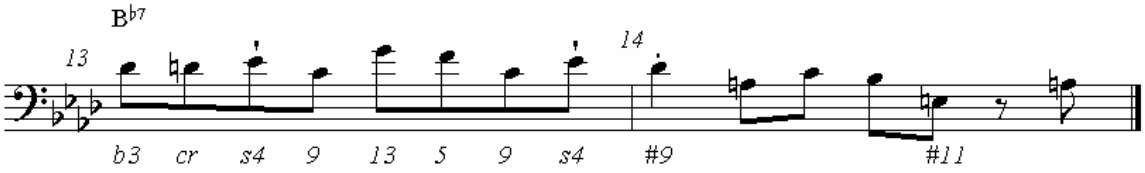


Bar 38: The use of the chord tensions b9, 4 and 13 (later b13) imply the transformation of the mixolydian Eb7 chord into a 7sus4b9 (later b13) chord, a not so common substitution during the bebop era. This lick is also a development of the upper-structure playing style of Charlie Parker brought forward, which will be expanded on later.

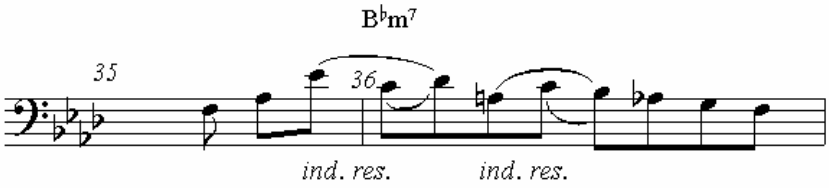
(d) Indirect resolutions (often implying chromaticism)



Bars 2-4: 2 indirect resolutions to the b7 and 3 of Bb7. The use of a natural E implies the lydian b7 scale, a very common substitution for the usual mixolydian scale a V7/V would get. Note the first use of the harmonics (in this case, natural).

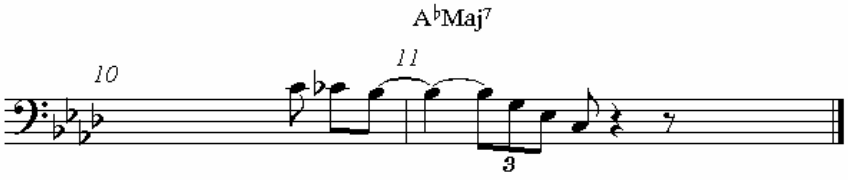


Bars 13-14: Jaco leaps both Eb, the natural 4th of the chord and thus a dissonance, only to resolve it down to the #9 a bar later. Bar 13 can be seen as an extended indirect resolution to Db in bar 14. The fifth tone of this bar is E natural, the #11 of Bb. The use of the #9, #11 and 13 tensions imply then a half-whole tone dimished scale.

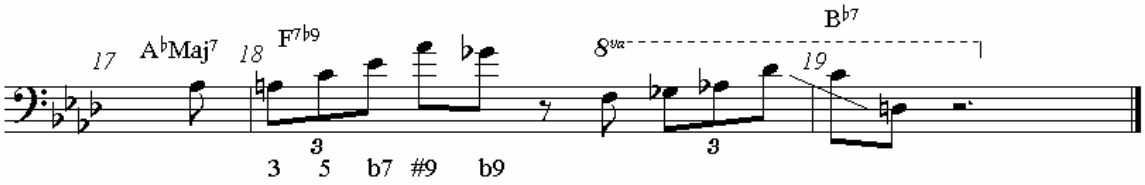


Bars 35-36: Bebop players used to extend the resolution of dissonances by interpolation of other dissonances. Here, Jaco uses both the upper and the lower auxiliary tones before resolving, first to Db, then to Bb.

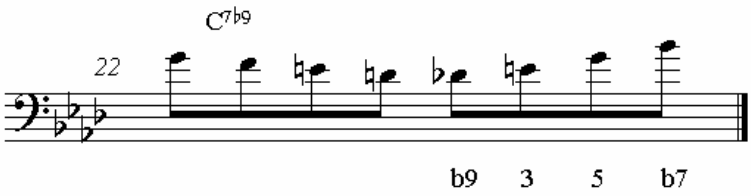
(e) Arpeggiated upper-structure chords



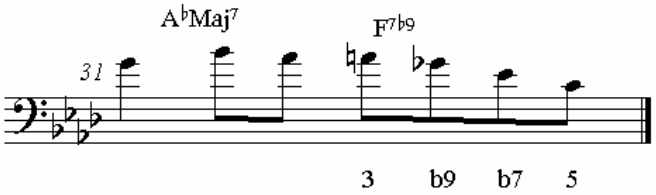
Bars 10-11: One of the trademarks of Charlie Parker: to play the seventh chord beginning on the third of the actual notated chord, so we get the 9th as upper extension. Here, Jaco plays C-7 over AbMaj7. Bb, the seventh of the upper structure seventh chord, is Ab's ninth.



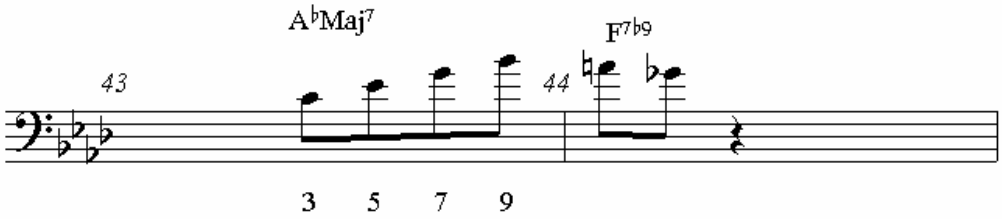
Bars 17-19: Again, use of the upper structure of a chord playing the seventh chord from its 3rd. In a 7b9 chord, the chord usually played for the substitution is a diminished chord, here with Ab, the #9, included between the b7 and the b9, both members of that diminished chord. It is also worth mentioning the Db-D natural a major seven apart, between bars 18 and 19. Jaco leaps out of C, the 9th of Bb7, a minor seventh down to D, the third Bb, creating a very nice effect. In the following chord, he'll use both C and D in a triple stop that hints a Bb7,9 chord.



Bar 22: Use of the diminished seventh chord, beginning from the b9th, on C7b9.

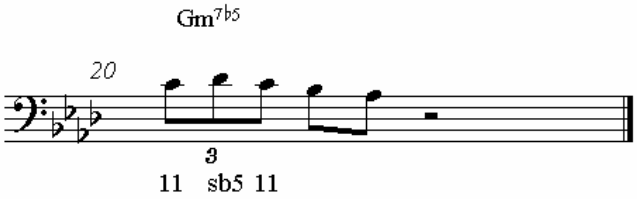


Bar 31: Use of the downwards diminished seventh chord, beginning on A natural, over F7b9 chord.

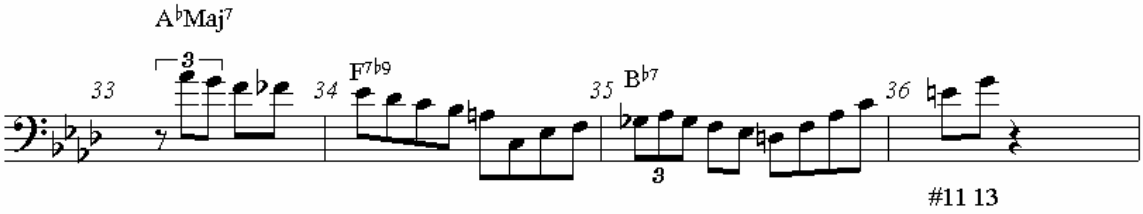


Bar 43: Yet again, upper structure playing. A C-7 chord over a AbMaj7 allows the appearance of Bb, Ab's 9th.

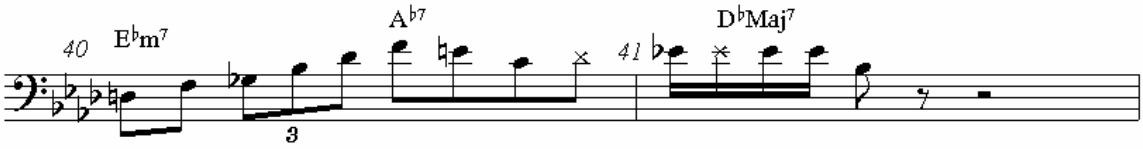
(f) Musical quotations and thematic paraphrasis



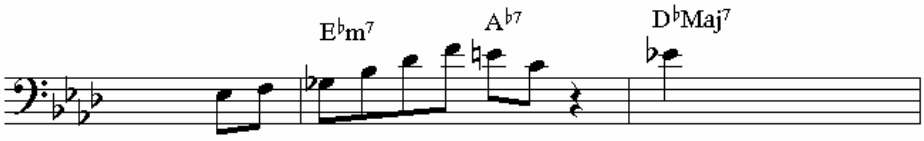
Bar 20: Recurrent rhythmic figure in Charlie Parker's playing: the tone-upper auxiliary-back to the same tone lick which is actually the beginning of Donna Lee. This is an example of the use of paraphrase in a solo, and also of musical citation, since Charlie Parker did not use this lick only in Donna Lee but also when he improvised in many of his tunes. A lot of people associate this triplet figure with "bebop", and its use today can reminisce of an "outdated" style.



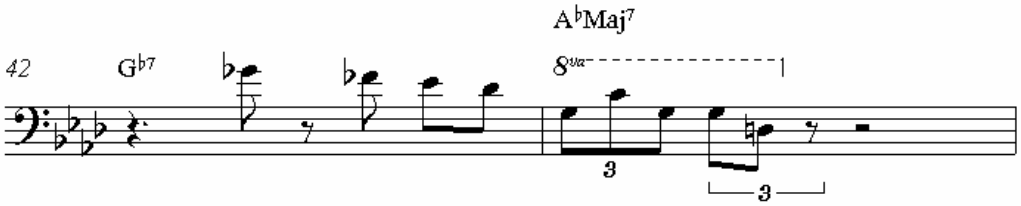
Bar 33: Jaco begins the second chorus of his improvisation by paraphrasing almost exactly the head. He only changes the two last tones (bar 36): instead of the usual G-F, he continues stacking thirds on top of one another, developing forward the concept of the super-structure Charlie Parker is known for. Beginning on the natural D of bar 35, the third of the chord, he plays 5 intervals of a third, implying all chord tones and available tensions that a lydian b7 (implied by the E natural) scale based on Bb would allow (except, of course, the fundamental tone).



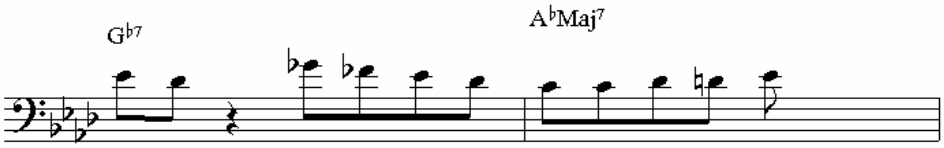
Bar 40: Compare this passage with the notes of the head over the same harmony:



Jaco is clearly paraphrasing the head. Like all great improvisers, Jaco always has the original melody in mind so that he can refer to it whenever he feels like it. The same goes for the following bars:

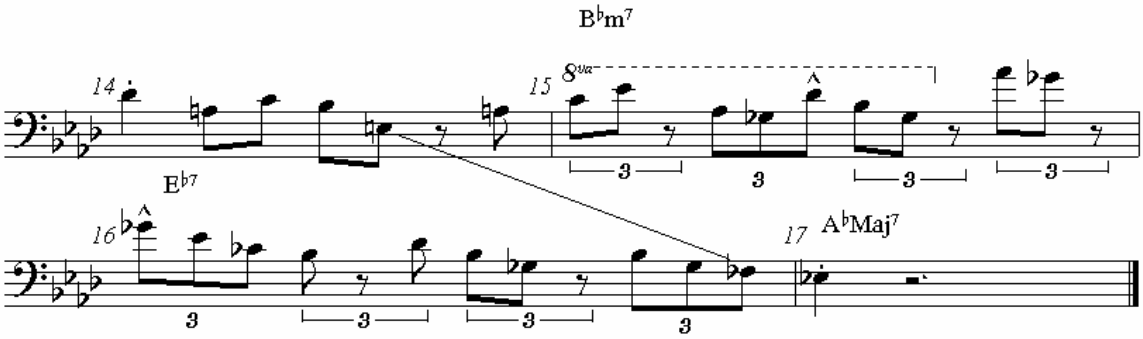


Bar 42: This passage is undoubtedly referring to the original melody:

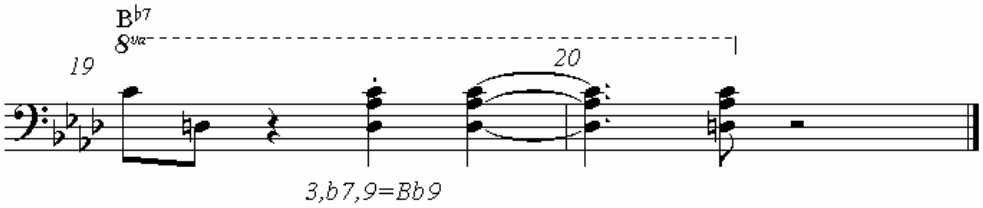


But now, in bar 40, instead of resolving Db down to C, the 3rd of Ab, he plays the tones G, C and D natural, outlining a D7sus4 (omit 5) chord which begins on the #11. This quartal sound constitutes a typical jacoesque lick, which he uses on other improvisations.

(g) Command of the instrument and virtuosity



Bars 14-17. Note the chromatic relationship between E natural in bar 14 and Eb in bar 17. Jaco manages to instate this middleground relationship almost three bars apart despite a very intricate passage in triplets full of syncopation, ghost notes and intervallic angularity in near-sequential patterns that spans more than an octave.



Bars 19-20: First use of a triple stop. The consistent use of double and triple stops can be considered one of the many techniques that Jaco helped introduce and popularize to a point where they have become idiomatic to electric bass playing. It is very common to hear the critique “he’s trying to sound like Jaco” when a bass player makes extensive use of these devices in his playing. Here, he outlines a D7b5 chord over Bb7, which results in the 3rd, 7th and 9th of Bb7.

Conclusion

After consideration of a relatively large number of passages, it is fairly obvious how Pastorius' solo is, in a way, a classic jazz solo. This doesn't contradict the usual consideration of Pastorius as an innovator, though. Here lies what constitutes a very interesting paradox around Pastorius' Donna Lee: he innovates by playing a classical solo. It is not that he plays any new scale, or any new combination of tones. What is revolutionary is that he plays in the same way others had been playing for almost three decades but with an instrument that many had judged sturdy and incapable of such virtuosity. It is the perfect example of building a bridge between the past and the future, from tradition to innovation in one single step.

Esthesic analysis

Meaning is created

This way, even though I have taken upon a classification of characteristic stylistic traits in Jaco's solo, I don't mean to say that that is how an individual mind proceeds when perceiving Jaco's solo or any other tune. The listener doesn't detect certain aspects of the tune, and place the tune in a certain category of elements, all of which share those aspects. On the contrary. As Spanish philosopher José Antonio Marina affirms in his *Teoría de la inteligencia creadora* (*Theory of the creative intelligence*, 1993), "the stimulus, doesn't determine the perception[2]" (page. 31). And a little later on the same page: "we complete what we see with what we know, […] we interpret data giving them meaning. We don't see things and interpret them; intelligence seems to work backwards: we see from meaning".

When a hypothetical listener perceives *Donna Lee*, he doesn't think "OK, let's see, we have substitute scales, arpeggiated upper-structure, long eight-note lines, altered dominants… this must be a bebop tune!". Or at least not in such a uni-directional cartesian way. As López Cano says, "to belong to a musical genre is not something inherent to the musical piece. The attribution to a genre is done from the moment we start doing things with music[3]" (2002b: 7).

Our classification of melodic and harmonic devices belonging to bebop is then a functional choice, whose purpose is to insert Jaco's *Donna Lee* into a theoretical frame in order to be analysed. We are, then, *doing* something with the piece. We are doing theory out of it. We could categorize *Donna Lee* in many other ways depending on the type of musical situation or listening act. But then again, all of them would imply a certain *affordance* of the piece: this term, suggested by cognitive psychologist Gibson (1979), refers to those things an object invites us to do. And it is thanks to the recognition of these affordances that we establish a determinate category for the perceived object. In this way, *Donna Lee* is different for someone who wants to make a melodic analysis and another one who wants to light up a party. In these two cases the same object collides with a whole different constellation of interpretants in the listener's mind and creates different meaning. A middle-aged person who heard that Jaco was a great jazz player might be dissapointed by a torrent of notes in a register too low to be intelligible and a piece that "doesn't swing because you can't snap your fingers to it". Or a young person who hoped to hear "groovy" bass lines might not comprehend why

[2] Author's translation.

[3] Author's translation.

this guy is considered the ”best bass player in the world” when he plays ”outdated licks like the guys in the 40s”.

The ”open” work of art

During the last decades of the 20th century, the positivistic aspirations of structuralist approaches to meaning in music have been highly criticized. Semiotics in general and musical semiotics in particular have rediscovered the importance of the listener’s part in constructing the meaning of a particular work. Long gone is the figure of the authoritarian musicologist who determines canonical interpretations of classical masterpieces. Musical semiotics has been much influenced by the latest developments in cognitive sciences. The traditional historical – systematical methodologies of musical investigation have witnessed the emergence of new areas of investigation, in what some have seen as a case of interdisciplinar dilettantism and an exageration of the importance placed on those areas traditionally considered as auxiliar to musicology. In any case, music has been seen through the prisms of sociology, psychology in its many different approaches, cybernetics, neurology, system theory, anthropology, linguistics, etc.

A large number of current psychologysts, especially those in the filed of cognitive psychology, seem to have consensuated that to consider the meaning of a work of art is an individual process of creation. When one considers a sonata, a painting or a sculpture, one generates an interconnected chain of interpretations, reactions and meanings that are not necessarily inferred by another person. Thus, there is always an element of impredictability which brings us to the epistemic problem of how to study a phenomenon that is unpredictable, dynamic, overproductive and individual.

Musical competency

Long gone are the times when Deryck Cooke tried to elaborate a musical dictionary in his famous *The language of music* (1959), where he intended to attribute rigid and univocal meanings to chords and tone combinations. The structuralist dream was to find stable correlations between musical structures and specific expressive meanings which allowed to state a canonical ”musical code” which would allow to interpret just about any piece of music. Musical analysis saw the need of going beyond the intrinsecal characteristics of the musical object and start considering the role of the musical competency of the interpreting subject or receiver which is the final responsible fo the construction of meaning.

One of the first and foremost attempts to present this subject and build a theory around it was *La competenza musicale* of Gino Stefani. This author defines musical competency as ”the overall hability to make sense out of music” (1982:9). It is obvious that, even if one is very knowledged in a specific type of music, one cannot be proficient in all

existing musical styles. Musical competency is not an absolute concept, and can be considered in relation to five different levels of codification:

- General codes of the Homo musicus: anthropological level which considers the fact that we are capable of emotion, physical, sensorial experiences, that man applies perceptual and cognitive schemas that are common to all human beings.
- Social practices: musical habits that are acquired through belonging to a specific culture.
- Musical technique: special hability one develops through learning theories and methods that are specific to the musical fact.
- Musical styles: one's capacity of recognizing specific approaches to musical technique that are considered typical of a style, era, school or movement.
- Work: the level of the individual artistic object, where one is able to determine a particular piece of music.

The theories of Stefani are strongly based on Umberto Eco's concept of code. A code is a conventional system of instituted relationships between two planes: the plane of expression and the plane of content. The common criticism to this theory is that musical cognition is richer than the application of a code to a piece of music. As Lopez Cano claims, "when we understand music, competency allows us to produce daring inferences that allow (sic) us to produce meaning sucessfully in hipocodified expressions, that is, where there is no strongly established code. At the same time, it takes estrategic advantage of the rhetorical and stylistical advantages to go beyond and produce meaning both locally and globally" (Lopez Cano 2002a).

For Robert Hatten, one of the most influential recent musical semioticians, competence cannot be reduced to sharing a code. It is much more than "knowing the rules". According to him, competency is the "internalized (possibly tacit) cognitive hability of a listener to understand and apply stylistic principles, constraints, types, correlations, and strategies of interpretation to the understanding of musical works in that style. More than a lexicon of types or a set of rules" (1994: 228). Hatten understands competency in a way which is similar to Stefani's. It is essentially the same concept but more general and dynamic. It includes more elements than just codes, such as stylistic principles, constriction, cognitive types and interpretation strategies.

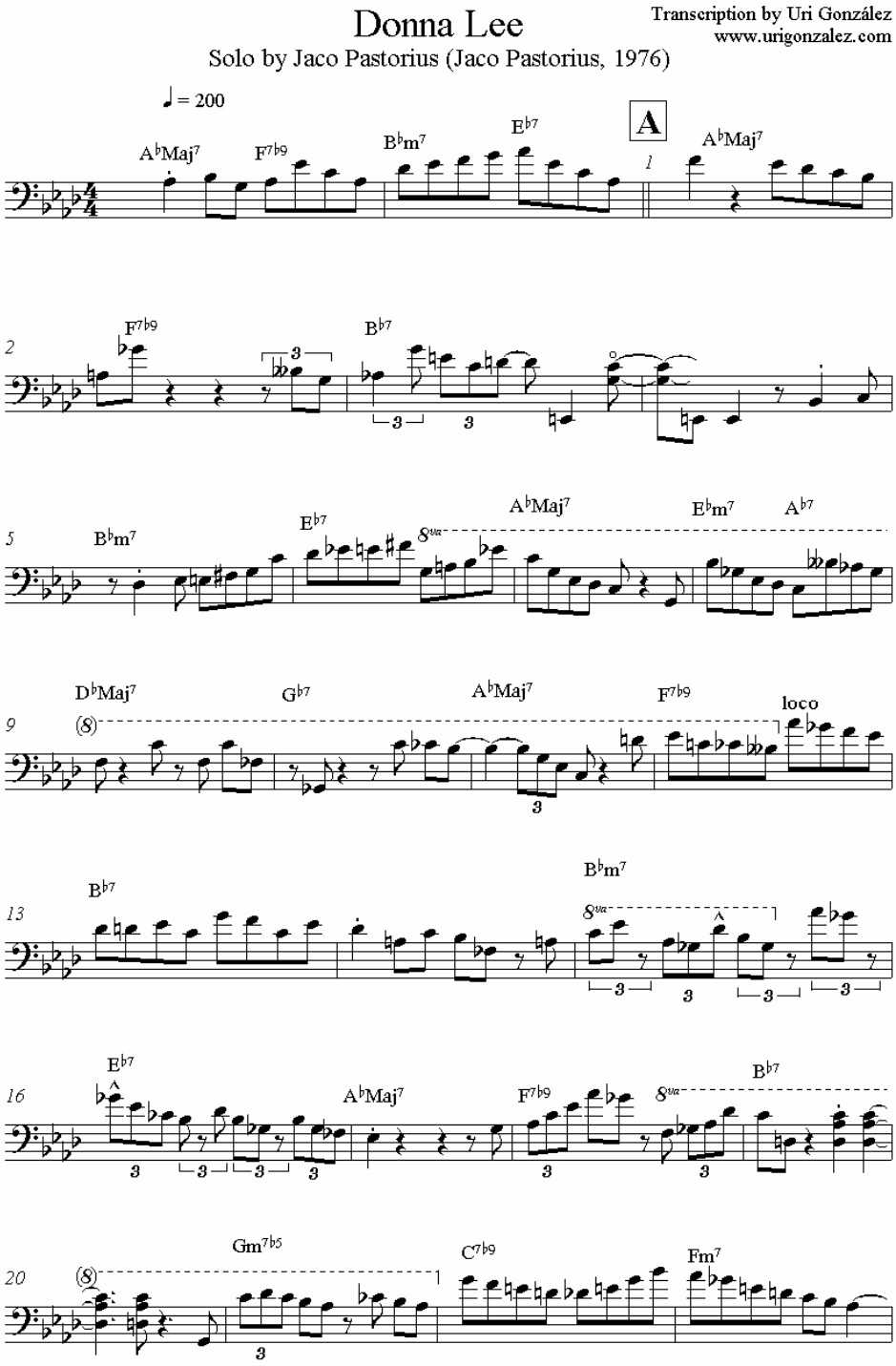
Hatten's concept of competency is closely related to the study of style. For him, style is a requirement that competency needs to understand a work. He defines it as "that competency in semiosis presupposed by a work, and necessary for its understanding as a work of music" (ibid.: 293-4). Competency and style are two theoretical elements of equal importance. Their interdependancy is crucial in considering the meaning of a work. They function in a sort of dialectic circle with one another. Style determines what specific sections

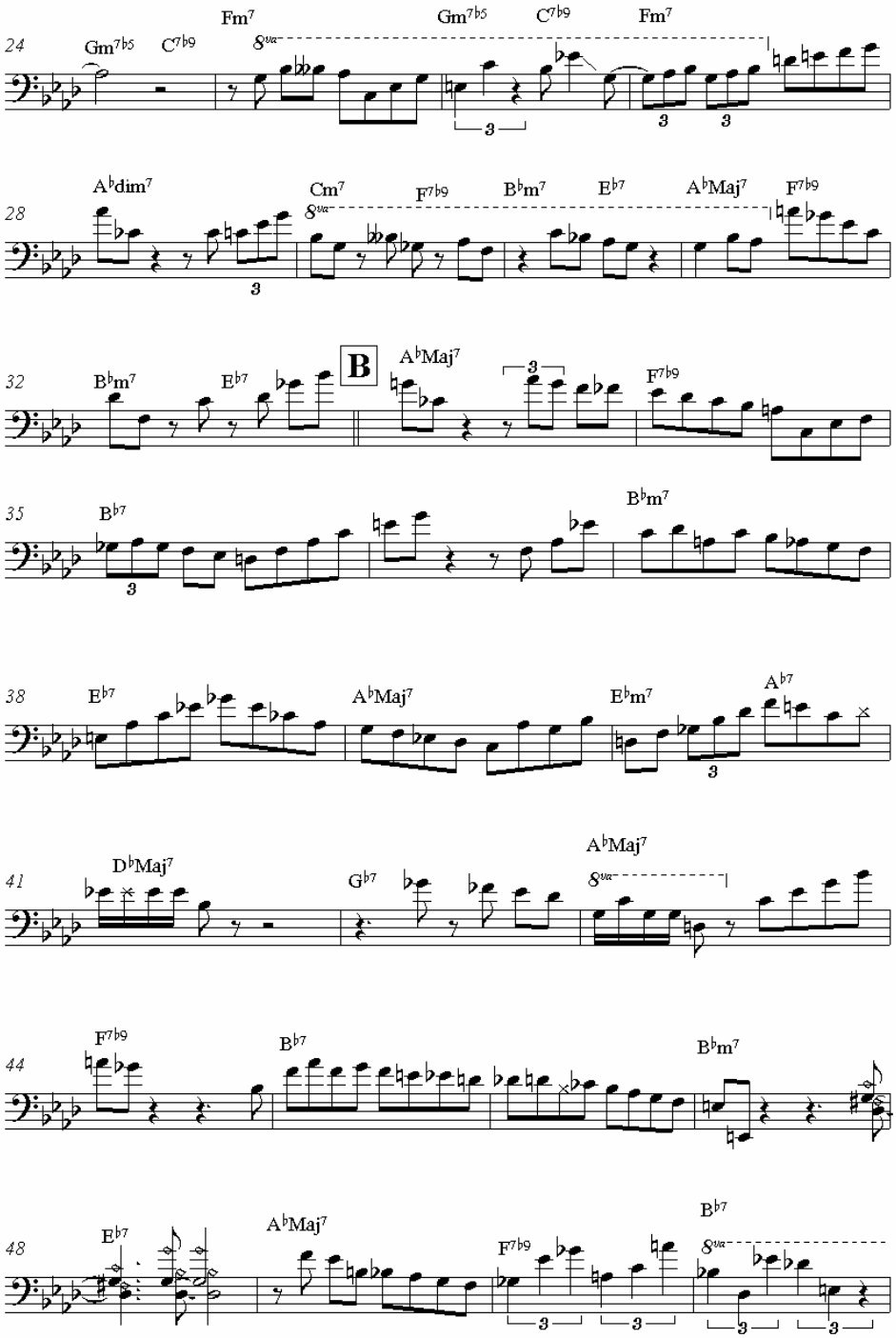
of musical competency one is going to use. But one cannot place a musical object within a set of stylistic constraints if one lacks the necessary competency. One pressuposes the other.

Conclusion

What can be concluded after the application of the tripartition theory to *Donna Lee*? The poietic analysis has helped us see how the electric bass was an instrument whose technical evolution happened at a very fast pace. In its first twenty years of life, it went from the upright bass illegitimate brother to a lyrical instrument able to share protagonism with the more traditional soloistic *prima donnas* such as the brass and woodwind instruments. After the neutral analysis, we've seen how Pastorius' *Donna Lee* is a modern yet classical solo. It innovates by paying a tribute to the tradition of bebop, thus building a bond between the past and the future. Despite of all this, this aforementioned elements contribute (or might contribute) to the construction of the meaning of *Donna Lee* in the measure that one is aware of them. But one might not, and need not, be aware of them. It is not the role of musicology to determine canonical meanings of works of arts just because it has acces to more information about the study object and concerns itself with structural analyses. The musicological meaning is just one kind of meaning. Even if the theoretician concerns himself with the historical events leading up to the creation of a work of art, and also to the detection of musical structures the come to the surface after the selection (and thus rejection) of analytical criteria, the final meaning of *Donna Lee* and any piece of music escapes the judgement of the critic. What the individual listener will make out of *Donna Lee* goes way beyond its history and its immanent structure in a circular dialog with the personal configuration of each and everyone of our individual minds.

Appendix 1: Transcription of Jaco's solo on Donna Lee




2
24
Gm7♭5
C7♭9
Fm7
8va
Gm7♭5
C7♭9
Fm7
28
A♭dim7
Cm7
8va
F7♭9
B♭m7
E♭7
A♭Maj7
F7♭9
32
B♭m7
E♭7
B
A♭Maj7
F7♭9
35
B♭7
B♭m7
38
E♭7
A♭Maj7
E♭m7
A♭7
41
D♭Maj7
G♭7
A♭Maj7
8va
44
F7♭9
B♭7
B♭m7
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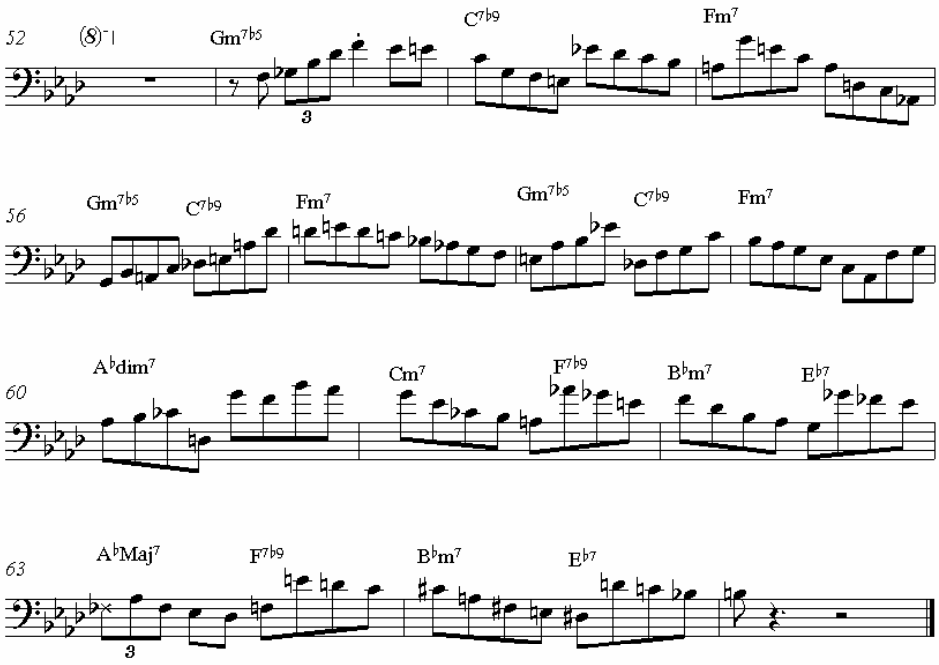
E♭7
A♭Maj7
F7♭9
B♭7
8va


52
(8)
Gm7♭5
C7♭9
Fm7
56
Gm7♭5
C7♭9
Fm7
Gm7♭5
C7♭9
Fm7
60
A♭dim7
Cm7
F7♭9
B♭m7
E♭7
63
A♭Maj7
F7♭9
B♭m7
E♭7

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