

Maurizio Rolli & A.M.P. Big Band — *Moodswings* (A Tribute to Jaco)

The aim of *Moodswings* is to keep alive the memory of what in my view are Jaco's most interesting — and for this very reason underrated — works. Driven by the dreams of my students, I organized a jam session focusing on a specific theme: Jaco Pastorius.

This special birthday present (that was the occasion) was accompanied by a video screening and concert, a birthday cake offered by the management of the Kabala in Pescara, and performances by a series of electric bassists who rendered homage to their maestro.

The response of the public, but above all, the emotional involvement of the musicians, set me thinking about the impact that the figure and music of Jaco has had and — why not? — will continue to have on musicians.

Forming an orchestra was my other big dream. And so, combining my aspirations in order to keep awake the almost suppressed child-like spirit in me seemed almost inevitable. I immediately involved Michael Manning, Fabrizio Bosso and Diana Torro in my plan, and their complicity in the face of my unrestrained and childish enthusiasm helped me find the energy to start writing, arranging — and sometimes even composing — material for a large group of musicians with big problems of survival. I set two contrasting criteria as necessary conditions for the successful outcome of this project — the original scores, and the preservation of my own musical personality.

The message I want to convey above all to my students in this tribute: If you want to imitate Jaco, don't imitate his musical phrases or sound, but discover your own equally personal style, even at the risk of it not being liked. In my view, this spirit is the one thing [Jaco had in common with Louis Armstrong, John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Miles, Hendrix, Django Reinhardt] — don't imitate the phrases, but the philosophy of those who have left their mark on our music. Only in this way can we keep alive their spirit and truly acknowledge the work of those who have come before us and who have often paid with their lives for having disassociated themselves from standardization and from the musical market that nourishes it.

—Maurizio Rolli



I studied briefly with Jaco in New York in the early '80s. He was my musical idol when I was a teenager, so when I moved to New York I would go to his shows and try to learn whatever I could.

One night I got up the courage to ask him for lessons at one of his many gigs at the 55 Grand Club, and as it turned out, he was trying to teach more at that time to earn some extra money, so he was quite obliging.

He certainly wasn't a methodical teacher at all, and I got the impression that the way he played came so naturally to him that he had a little trouble explaining it. He wanted students to ask a lot of questions and I think those who didn't ended up with some pretty negative experiences. Fortunately for me, I had thousands of questions and he was always quite open to answering them and showing me whatever I wanted to know. It was odd, because he was intelligent and knew a lot about music, but it was almost as if he was embarrassed about that. He often preferred to just play together and he was surprisingly supportive.

We played jazz tunes and sometimes, after I'd take a meager solo, he'd stop and say, "Man, you're the baddest #\$%^&!" It was difficult to be around him though, because he was so extraordinarily self-destructive and his illness caused him so much pain and confusion. I'm not sure how much of it was substance abuse, but it wasn't unusual for him to be completely incoherent. At that point in his life he seemed tired and lost and it was pretty crushing for me as an aspiring and impressionable young musician to have such a troubled role model. I did a lot of soul searching about it and ended up feeling very lucky to have had the opportunity to get to know him a little as a human being and not just a symbol of musical brilliance. Sadly, I always got the impression that beneath all that swaggering, chaos and madness, there was a kind, passionate and very gifted person.

#### On Maurizio Rolli

I met Maurizio when I was on tour in Italy in February 2000 and he invited me to give a clinic at the music school where he teaches in

Pescara.

We became good friends and I'm a great admirer of his music.

When he started working on his Jaco tribute CD he asked if I'd be up for playing on a track and I told him I'd absolutely love to. We had a few e-mail discussions about it and he thought it would be fun to have a crack at "Donna Lee." Living on different continents didn't give us a chance to try anything out or rehearse of course, but we figured we'd just book a little studio time to give it a try next time I was on tour there. My next Italian tour was pretty busy, so Maurizio picked me up early in the morning after my show in Pescara (too early - thank God for Italian coffee!) and we spent a few hours in the studio before I had to get on to the next town.

Since we didn't have much time, we had to do a little instant arranging. Our goal was to refer to Jaco's arrangement of the tune while adding a few ideas of our own. We decided to play the head in both keys Jaco played it in (Ab and E) and use his very cool ending, but to break things up a little and start by just goofing around in Ab. I figured out some tuning options that would allow me to use an altered tuning for the intro and then change back to standard tuning using the Hipshot Extender Keys on my Zon Sonus for the body of the tune. Maurizio, being a monster on both electric and upright, plays the first head in Ab on the big bass and then we trade solos, modulating to E at the end of Maurizio's solo before I play the out head. At the end of the tune I use the Extender Keys again to make the last chord a bit more interesting.

Thanks to our drummer Nicola Angelucci for helping us keep the groove and to Maurizio for his vision and artistry.

—Michael Manning



COMPANION CD  
TRACK 1

