

September 1972, you leave Lee's Summit to study at the Miami University, the thing that attracted you most was the new musical world in which you would have entered. What air (musical I mean) breathed in those years in Miami compared to Kansas City? What were young jazz musicians attracted to? That is where you first met Jaco Pastorius, how did your meeting come about?

I was very lucky to start working as a musician in Kansas City at very young age. I was 14 when I first started getting gigs and played with all the best musicians around town for almost 4 years before I got out of high school. I was lucky in that I really learned how to play on the bandstand. But the other result of all that was that I never took a book home or studied at all from 8th grade on. My grades were terrible and it wasn't really clear what would happen with me after graduation, assuming that I actually would graduate which was seriously in doubt.

One night at the gig I was playing, I noticed a sophisticated looking gentleman sitting alone at table listening carefully, kind of focused on me. During the intermission, he came up and introduced himself to me as Dr. Bill Lee, dean of the school of music at the University of Miami. He said he had been hearing about me, was in the area (I believe to meet with Matt Benton over in Manhattan KS as the IAJE was just beginning), and made a trip over to Kansas City to check me out.

He explained that the U of M was going to open up their program that fall to include electric guitar as a major for the first time - only the 3rd official university in America to do that (North Texas and the U of Nevada-Las Vegas were the other two - Berklee didn't count since it was not then accredited as a real school - more like a trade school).

It was clear that I was sort of being scouted the way I guess a high school quarterback might get scouted by a school with a football program or something.

On the spot, he offered me a full scholarship to attend the U of M that fall. I told him about horrible grades - he said it didn't matter, that he was in the position to bring in a small number of kids who were players to bolster the program no matter what their academic level.

The next morning at breakfast I told mom and dad about this and after school that day, Dr. Lee came out to our house, and very quickly, it was a done deal - within 24 hours. I can honestly say that that was the happiest I had seen my parents in a couple of years. And me too, I was pretty excited about it all. I really didn't know what I was going to do. I had already done just about everything I could do in KC by that time, but also (correctly) didn't feel like I was anywhere near ready to move to New York or something. Miami was perfect.

I had basically never been anywhere outside of the Kansas City area except for a few family trips. I had never seen another kid around my age with an archtop/hollowbody guitar, and suddenly there were 80 of them right there on that first day in Miami. The 2nd night I was there, I went to an Ira Sullivan concert, and Jaco Pastorius played one tune with him. My impression then was, "There must be people like this everywhere!". Jaco and I met that night, we became great friends, I realized that there was no way I could ever make it as a college student, Dr. Lee then hired me to teach instead, and for the next 18 months, I did every gig (often with Jaco) that I could around South Florida. I would say that during that period, the thing that sort of might be identified as my thing emerged in ways it hadn't yet while still in KC. I don't know how much of that had to do with being in Miami or whether it was just general growth, but that was an important period for me for sure.

2. Can the meeting with Gary Burton and the subsequent collaboration with the "Gary Burton Band" (1974) be defined as two of the key moments of your artistic career?

A pivotal thing happened that following April (1973), while I was teaching in Miami; I got an invitation to go back to Wichita for the Wichita Jazz Festival because everybody knew that my favorite band throughout this entire period was the Gary Burton Quartet. That was the band that for me, and you kind of have to put this almost in a historical/cultural context--I could identify with them as a person from the Midwest playing electric guitar in a way that was incredibly resonant to me; their band was revolutionary in a lot of ways, and as much as people give all the credit to Miles Davis' Bitches Brew and so forth, Gary and those guys were three, four years ahead in that whole movement of trying to find a way of reconciling that moment in culture with an improvised presence.

The Gary Burton Quartet Live in Concert is just an incredibly important record for me. In a way, it answered so many questions for me about what might be possible as an improvising musician. Gary is a huge influence for me, melodically, harmonically, and particularly in terms of what that band just *sounded* like.

The folks in Wichita (where I had played many times) called me and said, "Look, we're going to have Gary Burton here, you should come up". So I took a long bus trip to Wichita, played my set, and kind of was hanging around, and was invited to play a tune with Gary, which was how we met. We ended up teaching together in an unrelated program a few weeks after that.

During that teaching period, I got to play four concerts with Gary, and two of them were quartet concerts. And that's when I really felt like we got to know each other, he got to really hear me under more reasonable conditions. Gary basically said to me, "You've got to get out of Miami. There's no reason for you to be down there. You should move to New York immediately if you're serious about this because everyone has to do that." But then he added, "Or you could move to Boston. Why don't you move to Boston as an intermediate stop and you can teach at Berklee, since you're already teaching at Miami,"

So I moved to Boston in January of '74 to start teaching at Berklee, and very shortly after that, I was asked to join Gary's Quartet, making it a Quintet. Additionally, Gary indicated that he had just started with a new label, ECM—he and Chick had just done Crystal Silence around then--and he thought that I should do a record for ECM and that he should produce it.

I responded to the idea by saying I have this friend in Miami (Jaco) who's an incredible bass player, and we have this way of playing together that's really cool, and subsequently Bob Moses and Jaco and I started playing trio gigs.

At a very young age you found yourself playing alongside Mick Goodrick, Bob Moses, Steve Swallow and of course Gary, would you like to tell me about this fantastic experience of yours, both humanly and artistically?

I can never say enough about all of them. I spoke about GB above, but Swallow is at least as influential musically for me. He was one of my 3 favorite bass players before I met him, but being on the bandstand with him every night was (and still is occasionally) unlike anything else. He is such a unique musician with such a distinctive voice. But it may be that his biggest impact on me was his advice on writing music. He really encouraged me to get away from

writing with a guitar in my hands, and that proved to be hugely important going forward. And his composition "Falling Grace" literally changed the vocabulary of modern music in my opinion. Plus, he is one of the greatest people I have ever known off the bandstand as well.

And Bob Moses was the first "New York" drummer I played with a lot. He was (and is) very serious about not just the playing but the whole meaning of music in the largest sense. He had grown up around Charles Mingus and had seen Trane live throughout his youth. His connection to Roy Haynes was direct - he followed Roy in Gary's band, and Roy had always been my favorite.

And Mick and I had a strong and immediate rapport. In fact, it was that rapport that Gary noted when he heard us play a duet concert right after I arrived in Boston that led him to the idea of having two guitars. Mick had been doing GB's gig for a few years by that time and was ready to step away, and it all made a lot of sense. Mick was (along with Joe Diorio, who I had known in Miami) the best guitar player I had ever seen up close like that. And when he and I played together (and this is still true when we get together now) it almost sounds like one instrument. I have never had that with any other guitar player along the way.

3. What was it like being a teacher at Berklee when you were just 20 years old considering that as students you had Mike Stern, Al di Meola and Emily Remler (to name a few)?

Was it difficult for you to find a good teaching method given your young age?

Both of the teaching situations I found myself in at that time (U of M and Berklee) happened because I had quite a bit of real-world professional experience by that time. My main focus was getting students to rise to the level of professional playing and improvising that I aspired to myself and that I had experienced on the bandstand by being around a lot of really great players. My only method was the thing of trying to talk about what it was that were the essential things required to bring to the music as I understood it.

But, any chance that I ever get to teach, then and now, I always get more out of it than anyone. It seems like most people who get to teach feel that way too. I enjoy it and wish I had more time to pursue it.

I would be pleased if you told me a little about your experience at Berklee, about the musicians you met and how they enriched both on a human and an artistic level.

Honestly, during that time teaching at Berklee, I was also touring with Gary, doing gigs with what became the BSL trio, doing gigs with folks like Hubert Laws or Paul Bley for a week here and there, so I wasn't that involved in the local scene as it stood at that time, although there were many incredible players around at that time (Alan Dawson, Herb Pomeroy, and many others). I think it was the GB bandmates that were the most important for me then.

4. You have defined your experience with Paul Bley's group as one of your most important in terms of learning, how much of this experience do you still carry with you in your way of playing?

Paul was an interesting guy and certainly one of my real heroes musically. The experience with him back then could only be described as strange however. Neither Jaco or I really

understood exactly what was going on. We would rehearse for hours with him, but only playing the written material in the mostly Carla (Bley) book of tunes he had. We rehearsed with one drummer a lot (Bruce Ditmas), but then on the gig, he would have other drummers show up (once it was inexplicably Jan Hammer on drums).

The record that came out (first under Paul's name, then later under Jaco's name, and then later after that with a big sticker of *my* name on it was not exactly a record as much as it was (we thought) a rehearsal. He had just seen the Mahvishnu Orchestra and had rented a giant Marshall stack and a wah wah pedal (a Morely, which is/was a strange one) for me to play through, and I had never done that before nor did I have any interest in that kind of thing. Then for ten years, neither of us ever got paid for it. One day, years later, we both got checks in the mail from him for 180 dollars. That kind of summed his off-the-bandstand thing up pretty well.

That said, he was, and still is, one of the biggest influences on me and the music in general even if it isn't that recognized sometimes. *Footloose* and his playing on *Sonny Meets Hawk* changed everything.

Did it also affect your way of living and writing your music?

Living, only in the "don't be like that" category. Music, absolutely yes.

5. In the late 60s and 70s, jazz experienced new forms, changing clothes and merging with other musical genres. Starting from Ornette Coleman, passing through Miles' Bitches Brew, the fusion / funk music of the Headhunters up to the Weather Report, just to name a few.

How did Pat Metheny experienced these musical evolutions, how did they affect you?

Have you somehow felt part of these new jazz forms?

Then, like now, I certainly was aware of what was going around me, particularly in the general community of musicians in this area.

But even with that awareness, I really just try to honestly represent in sound the things I love about music.

I am not a huge fan of the whole idea of "genre" or styles of music kind of to start with. To me, music is one big universal thing. The musicians who I have admired the most are the ones who have a deep reservoir of knowledge and insight not just about music, but about life in general and are able to illuminate the things that they love in sound. When it is a musician who can do that on the spot, as an improviser, that is usually my favorite kind of player.

I feel like I am a musician in this broad sense first. And all the subsets of the way music often gets talked about in terms of the words people use to describe music is basically just a cultural/political discussion that I have found that I am really not that interested in in the same way I am interested in the spirit and sound of music itself.

As far as sound goes, I always try to let the music at hand decide what direction I go in in terms of orchestration. I am pretty happy to play in a really dense way, or a really sparse way, or really loud or really soft or all over the dynamic range, really inside the chords or outside

the chords - it kind of doesn't matter too much for me - it is whatever seems to sound best for what is happening at that particular moment.

All the folks you mentioned, I really liked. But I mostly liked how they were dedicated to creativity and how open they were to their own instincts. In a way, the results were less of an inspiration for me than their impulse to try new things.

6. Bright size life. Your first solo album, in trio, line up not easy for a guitarist to manage. How was this album born?

Trio playing was (and remains) really interesting for me. It seemed like the natural thing for me to do as a first record since I had done that kind of playing quite a lot by then and also had this particular band with Jaco and Moses as an ongoing thing.

7. Manfred Eicher, owner of the ECM, how did your meeting come about?

Gary introduced us. GB had mentioned to Manfred that he was going to hire me, and that he thought I might be a good candidate for the label. Shortly after that, I recorded the record *Ring* with Gary for Manfred in Germany. I didn't really do much on there, but I guess it was enough that Manfred approached me himself about doing something.

Was it stimulating for your sound and the sound of the band to record your first album as leader for this important label?

It was fantastic. ECM was just emerging then, and the musicians on the label were among my favorites. To be a part of that was incredible.

8. How important were your life experiences in making the tracks on the album? What was your relationship with the composition, how did the creative process take place?

The session itself was tacked on at the end of a GB session where we recorded the record *Dreams, So Real*, a record of all Carla Bley music. We had 6 hours on one day and 3 hours to record the next day and 5 to mix the whole thing. Jaco had never been to Europe before and was really excited about it and had stayed up all night the night before when he arrived, walking around the streets of Stuttgart where we were recording (Ludwigsburg is a suburb of Stuttgart).

Moses really disliked Manfred's conception of drum sounds, so he was unhappy most of the time (you can see his expression on the *Dreams So Real* album cover - that says it all). And I thought we could have played about 10 times better than we did, especially me, because we had in the past. So, it wasn't exactly a memory that it was an amazing experience or anything.

9. In an interview (Luigi Viva - Pat Metheny A guitar Beyond the Sky) you said that the BrightSize Life record does not fully express the potential that the group could express; BobMoses claimed that the album is much less than the potential that the group could express in the concerts (from Bill Milkowski's Jaco Pastorius).

Could you tell me about one of the most beautiful concerts you remember having done with this trio and, if you remember, the setlist? What songs from your repertoire would you have liked to include in the album that you later found yourself having to / want to discard also because of the label's "directives"?

(Honestly, you should disregard anything and everything from the Viva book - he managed to misrepresent pretty much every very easily checkable fact in there.)

(That said...) Whatever I or anyone else thought about the recording process and what we did or didn't capture, after about 10 or 15 years, that record began to be regarded as something more than I might have imagined and it even took me about that amount of time to understand what it offered that eventually became pretty influential.

And yes, I can remember some gigs, one in particular in Hartford CN, with that band that in my memory were what I thought we could do at our best. But how close or far away my memory is to what is actually represented on the record is a matter of subjectivity that probably cannot be overestimated. I am probably the last person to notice what made that record what it has ended up being. They entered it into the Smithsonian a few years back as a notable recording of the 20th century - and here you are writing a paper about it. I wouldn't have guessed that that would be happening at the time, that's for sure.

10. Which of the songs on the album do you think is the best in the recording phase, both in terms of interplay with the band and in guitar terms. Do you have a song you are particularly fond of?

To me, from my perspective now and looking back on all the music I have made I mostly see all of it as one continuous thing that is very personal.

I don't make a distinction between this period or that period, this band or that band. And I don't see the end of anything, only beginnings and expansions. Each of the playing environments I have set up over the years are all different versions of my sense of what music can be, what a band can be and that started back then. When I have a band and I have hired certain musicians to be in it, it is because I feel like they are the best guys to help me realize a certain sound that I have an almost primal need to get out there. And for the most part I feel like each of those areas of interest are still worthwhile. And this was true back then as well.

I don't feel like anything I have ever started has ever ended, everything is ongoing. I could happily play all the music from Bright Size Life right now - and I still do sometimes. It still seems viable - the arguments there still seem valid and worth thinking about.

I know there are musicians who go through life kind of like a snake shedding its skin, moving on the next thing and then the next. It isn't like that for me - it is more a process of addition onto a preexisting structure, like adding rooms and wings and additions onto a house. Everything is connected to me. The foundation of the house that led to everything that has followed was laid on Bright Size Life.

That said, I do tend to want to go where the fire is, where there is the most intensity and urgency. I have always had very strong instincts about what that is at a particular moment in time that I have followed faithfully. I just try to do my own thing and do my best at whatever I

am working on during a given period. I would say that process began then, during the planning, writing and recording of BSL.