

Celebrating Jaco: The Music of Jaco Pastorius – SNJO at The Queen's Hall



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The name of **Jaco Pastorius** is legendary in the jazz world; one of the few musicians who can be recognised by their first name alone. Pastorius was a musical genius who effectively reinvented the playing of bass guitar, bringing the bass from an anonymous role in the rhythm section to the front of the stage. A multi-instrumentalist, he initially played drums but soon moved to upright acoustic and electric bass as a teenager. In 1976 he produced an eponymous and ground-breaking first album where he redefined the art of electric bass guitar, combining astonishing technical skill with speed, creativity and musical sensitivity.



Weather Report at Shinjuku
Kosei Nenkin Hall, 1981

Pastorius played bass with the seminal jazz-rock band **Weather Report**, before recording his second solo album, *Word of Mouth*, with his own big band. He was one of the few musicians to cross the jazz-popular music divide with success, making two influential recordings playing bass for **Joni Mitchell** on her *Hejira* and *Shadows and Light* albums. Unfortunately, the

incredibly talented Pastorius also suffered from bipolar disorder. His mental health and career disintegrated rapidly in his thirties leading to his tragic and premature death at the early age of 35.

Over the last few years, the **Scottish National Jazz Orchestra (SNJO)** has performed a number of highly successful collaborations, supporting internationally acclaimed jazz musicians in celebrating the works of the jazz masters. The SNJO celebrated its anniversary this year, twenty years after its formation by the internationally recognised Scottish tenor sax player, **Tommy Smith**. This November, the SNJO set out on a short tour celebrating the works of Jaco Pastorius with the virtuoso bass player, **Laurence Cottle**.



Laurence Cottle

Cottle is highly regarded and an ideal musician to celebrate Pastorius, having had a successful career in both jazz and rock worlds, and gaining huge respect for his bass-playing talent and musicianship. Cottle was born in Swansea and quickly grew into jazz through his family, initially playing trombone in his father's traditional jazz band, before moving on to electric bass and his own rock bands.

He played in a number of highly respected bands, including **Bill Bruford's Earthworks**, and even (whisper it) recording as the session bassist throughout **Black Sabbath's Headless Cross** album.

In a highly varied career he also managed to write a number of commercially successful tunes, including the themes from the TV shows **Friends** and **Third Rock From The Sun**. Hearing Jaco Pastorius' first album was a life-changing experience for Cottle. Cottle later joked that he would have stopped playing bass if he'd realised quite how good the album was.

Cottle actually met the famous bass player as a teenage while

studying music at **Berklee College of Music in Boston**, and managed to spend the afternoon and evening with Pastorius, juggling foam balls on Boston Common before Pastorius' concert, and later listening to a pre-release copy of the *Word of Mouth* album with Pastorius and friends. He is a highly talented musician and arranger, and has worked with his own big band on a number of arrangements and performances of Pastorius' work.

All of this sets the stage for Friday's first performance by Cottle and the SNJO at Edinburgh's **Queen's Hall**. Tommy Smith brought in Cottle, with virtuoso English jazz flautist **Gareth Lockrane** and Argentinian maestro percussionist **Marcio Doctor**, to celebrate the works of Jaco Pastorius with the orchestra. They played Cottle's own, new, arrangements of Pastorius' work, including both Pastorius original compositions, and pieces composed by other jazz musicians but which will be forever associated with Pastorius.

Cottle's arrangements provided the perfect balance, allowing the SNJO to show their power while simultaneously focusing on Cottle's (and Pastorius') bass lines. Cottle's five-string bass playing was mesmerizing, delivering stunning bass riffs and solos at speed with utmost precision, while clearly enjoying every minute as much as the audience. Meanwhile, Lockrane provided a number of intricate solos on flute, bass flute and piccolo, and Doctor (unfortunately hidden out of sight at the back of the stage) completed the 1970s jazz-rock theme with a Latin slant to the sound of the jazz orchestra.

Cottle's arrangements allowed the excellent SNJO band line-up to showcase their own musicianship through a number of stunning solos. The performance included featured solos from Tommy Smith on tenor in *Punk Jazz*, and **Tom Walsh** on trumpet in *Scent of a Secret*, and a number of individual solos including **Alyn Cosker** on drums, **Paul Harrison** on piano, **Martin Kershaw** and **Paul Towndrow** on altos, **Tom MacNiven** on trumpet, and **Chris Greive**, **Phil O'Malley** and **Keiran McLeod** on trombones.

The evening was completed with an electric, almost rock and roll solo from tenor **Konrad Wiszniewski** during the encore *Chicken*; a tune made famous by, and synonymous with Pastorius, although written some years earlier by **Pee Wee Ellis**. This iconic Pastorius tune brought to end a fantastic evening and a huge success for the SNJO, Tommy Smith, and Laurence Cottle.

