

A close-up, black and white photograph of a man's face, looking slightly to the right with a subtle smile. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting his features against a dark background. The text is overlaid on the top left and bottom left of the image.

# BASS MUSICIAN MAGAZINE

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THE  
FRENCH  
CONNECTIONS...  
INTERVIEWS WITH  
DOMINIQUE DI PIAZZA  
YVES CARBONNE  
& ETIENNE MBAPPE  
CD REVIEW OF HADRIEN FERAUD

THE MUSIC  
LESSON  
BY VICTOR  
WOOTEN

## Bass Musician Magazine

April - May 2008 Issue With Dominique Di Piazza, 4/01/2008  
an Interview With Editor Jake Kot



Dominique DiPiazza has earned the reputation of being one of the most original voices on bass in modern music, and rightfully so. He blew everyone away in the 90's with his solo cut "Marie" on John McLaughlin's album "Que Alegria". His, at that point, totally original right hand flamenco style technique would influence a legion of bassists right up to the present, such as Matt Garrison, Adam Nitti, and Hadrien Feraud to name just a few. More importantly, his commitment to the development and depth of his music, as well as his technique, is undeniable as he continues to redefine the traditional role of the bassist---dangerous territory he admits, but he wouldn't have it any other way.

I more or less see him on a parallel course philosophically, as far as his instrument is concerned, with Victor Wooten who I interviewed last issue---that being that his technique is just a tool to convey a much greater message, which he certainly does in

every aspect of his playing and his writing. It's a pleasure to talk to someone with this kind of insight, and I highly recommend checking him out if you've not experienced his musicality, and very original "voice" on this instrument.

**Jake:** Like many others, I discovered you on John McLaughlin's Que Alegria album. I know we're looking back here, but I'd like to know how your relationship with John impacted your playing at that time?

**Dominique:** Working with a musician such as John did have a great impact on my playing. I was a fan of John's for quite some time before I played with him. I was aware of his music and was very influenced by it. I enjoyed his work with the Mahavishnu Orchestra as well and enjoyed the Indian style of music he was playing. After playing with him for two years I found I was influenced by the way he more or less pictured how the trio would be. He opened the door for me in that trio to play chords to accompany him. He was the first player that actually asked me to do that. At that point, I switched from the four string to a five string with a high C. It was kind of a classical chordal approach on the bass.

**Jake:** As far as composition is concerned, I'm usually referring to composing for a band format. With you being one of a small amount of players that I believe truly encompass' the art of solo bass, I'm curious as to your approach to creating a solo composition for the bass.

**Dominique:** It became natural for me to play solo bass, as I always wanted to hear the melody along with the chords as well when I played. My philosophy has always been to try to play an entire tune, melody, as well as harmony and bass on the instrument. That approach to playing came very naturally to me. Just before you called I was working on a new piece. Sometimes I get an idea for a melody for a tune that could be played in the trio format, or a quartet, but I then see the possibility of it becoming a solo piece. I always try to emphasize the melody, and then back to it with a strong chordal harmony.

**Jake:** Did working on this approach inspire you to develop the right hand technique that you now use, and are so well known for?

**Dominique:** Honestly, I can say that for a few years I played a little bit of guitar. I worked on some jazz, but I was not able to solo on the guitar like I could on the bass. Also I came from a gypsy heritage---my stepfather was a gypsy, and I was very interested in a lot of that music as well. But also, I learned to play a little bit of African guitar from a friend of mine. They used their thumb and index finger to play. So I decided to approach playing the bass in that fashion, with that technique, and added my middle and ring

finger. I didn't play with my nails as a guitarist would, but with my fingers. And then when I discovered Jaco, I decided all I wanted to play was bass. He touched so many different aspects of music -- melody, harmony, groove, everything. I have a huge respect for him, and as time goes on and I mature in my playing, I have yet even more respect for the man and what he accomplished. So at that point I sold the guitar that I had and bought a Fender jazz bass. I wasn't sure about the technique for playing bass, the usual technique everyone used as far as your right hand goals, the two-finger technique, so I started right off using the thumb and the index finger and just tried to reproduce what I was hearing, and that's how my right hand approach came about.

**Jake:** Knowing a little bit of your history brings me to this next question. For me personally, I find that taking a break from the "music and nothing but music" mode is a healthy move. I know you took a lengthy hiatus from your playing a while back, and my question is not so much why, as what were your thoughts about your involvement with music when you decided to return to it?

**Dominique:** I noticed right away that the music world had changed. It was almost a period of ten years that had gone by. I was seeing that a lot of younger musicians were emerging at that point. The music industry was definitely not the same anymore because of the Internet. Also, I saw it was going to be more difficult to play, as a lot of music venues had closed down. Beyond that, Fusion was not as popular as it was when I stopped playing. In general, it looked like it was going to be more difficult being a player again than it had been in the past. But I know at this point there was much more maturity to my overall playing because of the break that I took.

What I did enjoy on my break were my studies in religion and theology. The break I took really helped me personally, and I knew it would help my music as well, as they are most certainly connected. I felt I had more depth in general in my playing, and the music I was playing as well. When you're young, you want to show everybody that you "can" play -- it's kind of a pride thing. When you grow older, you seem to concentrate more on the "music", then yourself. I knew more about what I wanted to do with myself musically, as well as the people that I would enjoy playing with.

**Jake:** In my interview with Victor Wooten last issue, we spoke a great deal about how his playing and his music are basically a reflection of himself, completely connected to who he is as a person. It sounds like your life choices have impacted your musical choices as well.

**Dominique:** Absolutely! What you experience in life, and the road you choose musically for yourself are definitely connected. For example, when I was a kid, I was raised in a gypsy camp, and if you listen closely you can hear that in my playing -- some Spanish, and some Django Reinhardt. These elements are all connected. I have heard people mention that there is a lot of lyricism in my playing, which makes sense to me as music has always been a means to express who I am. I did not have a joyful childhood, but today I'm enjoying my life, and I think that comes across. I feel I'm not really a groove player, but of course I love the groove. I find myself being more about the melody and improvisation in general -- these are the elements of music that I most enjoy.

When I started, I had this kind of idea that if I wanted to make it, I'd have to find my own way, my own voice, and make it personal. I've tried to keep that direction for myself and come up with something new as best that I could. But I've also found that it can be very difficult when you play very differently. It's hard to find people that will more or less let you do what you do. If they have no reference point as far as what you play, they seem to see it as unusual or even weird. So many times, it comes down to finding a good balance of being original and still doing what's required, or what they expect from you. I always find that to be a challenge. Sometimes people will be afraid to hire you if you sound different. To give you an example, I've always played the way I play, even before McLaughlin. But people always told me -- you play like a guitar player, not a bassist. After I started playing with McLaughlin, I've found that people were actually asking for me "because" of the style that I played. But once again, I understand that that is a difficult road to follow.

**Jake:** What music have you spent time listening to that you feel has influenced you as far as your style is concerned?

**Dominique:** I listened to a lot of Bach. I also enjoy listening to Chopin. I was just working on a Chopin piece when you called. And now with the Internet, and My Space, I'm able to hear all kinds of music. I'm

always curious to discover new music, or listen to the younger players and what they have to say. Michael Brecker was also a great influence on me -- it was very sad to lose him. I have also spent a great deal of time listening to John Coltrane, and finally, I enjoy listening to Flamenco guitarists as well, like Paco.

**Jake:** I know that you're a self-taught musician. What do you feel are the advantages as well as the disadvantages of learning in that fashion?

**Dominique:** In certain areas, I feel that it's been helpful to be self taught. I learned to memorize a great deal of what I play, as I'm a rather poor sight-reader. On the other hand, sometimes I feel handicapped because I'm not able to read and understand the music from looking at it. In one way, being self taught has given me more time to work on those things that I choose, as opposed to school, which would probably be focusing on a different agenda. I guess I'll just have to say it's kind of a 50/50 proposition.

**Jake:** What projects have you been involved in lately, and what can we look for from you in the near future?

**Dominique:** There is a CD coming out that I'll be on at the end of March with Dreyffus Records--- the Shrinivas CD featuring a very talented Indian mandolin player who played with John McLaughlin's group Shakti. The players involved with that CD are Zakir Hussian, Megliorblin, Selvaganesh, and Debbashish Battasharya, and others. I've also played on Antonio Farao's CD, an Italian pianist, along with Andre Ceccarelli on drums on Camjazz for Japan. And finally, my debut solo CD "Princess Sita" with Nelson Veras, an incredible electro-acoustic guitar player, and Manhu Roche on drums, will be coming out on Sunnyside Records and Ryko distribution in June 2008.

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