

# **Synæsthesiattack**

**Bobby Osborne 2014**

Synæsthesiattack would have been a lonely and daunting experience were it not for Mr Michael Glass, who - abundantly endowed with patience and technical skill - fully enabled my fruitless and pointless quest for a “perfect” recording.

Effortlessly satisfying the whims of a stressed, pedantic client, Michael would spend hours splicing together individual notes from disparate takes then tinker at the quantum level with plug-ins whilst providing that calm, clerk-like voice of reason that all artists on their 128th take of a two bar phrase require. On top of this, he drove my equipment and I to the studio everyday. Thank you, Michael.

Free from worrying about marking I can admit my disappointment with the final product. There is an issue of excess. Too much overdubbing, splicing, dropping-in and MIDI. There are awkward ensemble moments where the groove slips away. There are tuning issues in the strings.

The recording is somewhat redeemed by some choice moments: Ben Eames' brief, cameo; De Banzie and McLachlan's synergy and deep pocket on “Key of Maltese Glass” and “Lay off The Risotto”, that abrasive clarinet cluster in “With A Windsor Knot”.

In the years since, these tunes here have been re-written and re-written yet, I must immodestly confess, their initial germs of existence here showed passable elements of potential and inspiration. I have many wonderful memories from these sessions, especially of the people involved so generously donated their time and effort to the realising of the product. I can only hope that they found something worthwhile from the experience.

Lastly, the dry formality with which I address the clarinettist Ashton McConnell has become a source of joyous amusement given that, in 2019, this wonderful woman will become my wife.

Bobby Osborne  
January 2018

*This document originally closed with a press release and a section called “The Gameplan” that outlined strategy for the marketing and promotion for the released EP. I have omitted these as they were date-specific and tailored to the marking criteria of the module, hence lacking in interest to the general, non-marker, reader.*

This document outlines the creative process behind the creation of *Synæsthesiattack*. The aim of this project was to record an E.P. in the “jazz-fusion” genre. Jazz rock (synonymous with fusion or jazz-fusion) is a genre that developed as an amalgamation of the contemporary rock (most tellingly funk and R&B) rhythms and sounds (such as loud amplification and electronic effects and studio manipulation) with the modern harmonic content of jazz. The genre originated around the late 1960s with landmark Miles Davis albums such as *In A Silent Way* (1969) and *Bitches Brew* (1970) before finding mainstream success with the likes of Jeff Beck's *Blow By Blow* (1975) and Mahavishnu Orchestra's *Birds of Fire* (1973). (AMG, 2013)

There lies an intrinsic issue in defining “jazz-rock”: the genre has never successfully coalesced into a single, definable genre in the way blues or swing jazz has. While there are features which are common, such as distorted electric guitars playing jazz harmonies with funk rhythms, this is in no way the accepted “standard model” for fusion. See the guitar-less Weather Report, for example. Instead, fusion occupies a “broken middle” between genres (Fellezs, 2011, pg220.) The beauty of this, however, is that every “fusion” artist presents their own personal blend of influences. What follows is my dissection of my own particular recipe and how I arrived at it.

*Unless otherwise notated, all transcriptions are by the author.*

# Influences

I have always strived to never simply copy my influences but - through careful study, listening and transcribing - attempt to integrate their particular concepts – be they musical, intellectual or emotional – into my own playing in my own personal way, rather than through the outlet of outright imitation.

## Jeff Beck

My first experience of the “jazz-rock” idiom was through the music of guitarist Jeff Beck, in particular the albums *Blow by Blow* (1974) *Wired* (1976) and *There And Back* (1980). These three albums are often dubbed his “fusion trilogy” (Obrecht, 2008), featuring funk rhythms and bluesy guitar peppered with forays into jazz harmonies, complex odd-timed unison runs and even rock interpretations of jazz standards.

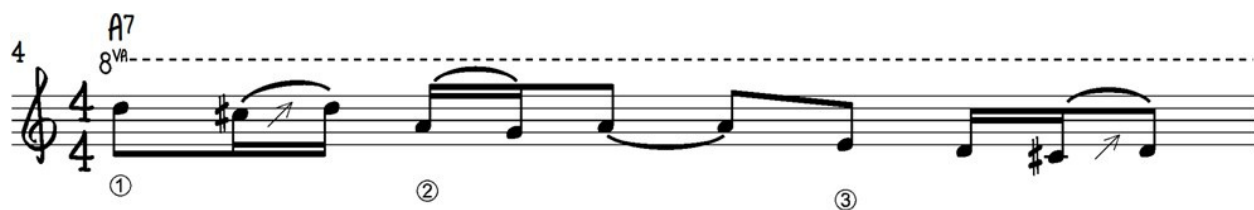
Amongst his broadly blues-inspired vocabulary, Beck has number of idiosyncratic pet lick”, two of which have become ingrained in my own playing through years of listening to his recordings.

The first is a double note idea taking advantage of the string bending possibilities of the guitar, akin to the false fingering of saxophonists. A single note is played then quickly followed by a bend from a note below on the same string to same pitch:



This idea is also used frequently by Jan Hammer as one of a plethora of pitch-wheel “tricks” he uses to emulate a guitar. (Hammer, 1987) It is unclear as to who influenced whom with this idea, however Beck has stated that “[Hammer's] phrases influenced me greatly.” (Obrecht, 2008) It is possible that Beck originally devised this as a reversed version of the Charlie Christian/Les Paul/T-Bone Walker “false fingerings” lick when a note is played on one string, and then the same pitch is slid into on a lower string. Beck, and countless other blues based guitar players, would generally replace this slide with a tone bend, a la Chuck Berry. Pruning this idea from two strings to one results in the above technique.

Generally Beck uses this technique to emphasize the 11<sup>th</sup> of a dominant chord while surrounding this tone with regularly fretted notes from the “Hindu” Pentatonic scale. An example this would sound like:



This concept was used as the basis for most of the melodic content in “Mjölfnir” (discussed later).

This technique applied to different harmonic situations can be heard throughout the E.P., predominately in the solo in “Mink Line Prison” in bars [02:37]:

Bar 3:  $F_m7$   
 Bar 4:  $Bb7(SUS4)$   
 Bar 5:  $F_m7$   
 Bar 6:  $Bb7(SUS4)$   
 Bar 7:  $F_m7$   
 Bar 8:  $Bb7(SUS4)$   
 Bar 9:  $G_m7(b5)$   
 Bar 10:  $C7_{ALT.}$

and at [03:35]:

Bar 30:  $F_m7$  (8<sup>va</sup>)  
 Bar 31:  $Bb7(SUS4)$

A second pet lick of Beck's is to play a short phrase and then chromatically descend until reaching a resolution point. An excellent showcase of this is on the Stevie Wonder track “Lookin' For Another Pure Love” from *Talking Book* (1972) at [02:07] (See Reference CD Track 2)

A lick with a similar concept turns up in the Mjölfnir guitar solo at [03:26]:

Bar 13: Trills (3 notes)  
 Bar 14: Trills (3 notes)  
 Bar 15: Trills (3 notes)

Interestingly, Beck entered the fusion world of playing as an unschooled musician with extremely limited theoretical knowledge. He recounts how he did not know the correct names of the chords he was playing, with keyboard player Max Middleton spending hours playing through chords on a note-by-note basis for Beck to learn. (Obrecht, 2008) This “unschooled” approach results in Beck's playing being much more rock-jazz than, say, McLaughlin's jazz-rock hybrid. Generally, Beck will improvise around minor pentatonic and blues scale ideas – played beautifully and displaying incredible control over a wide variety of expressive technical and rhythmic devices – while adding the occasional “sophisticated” flourish. An excellent example of this approach is this lick from Beck's outro solo in “Come Dancing” from *Wired* (1976) which uses the D Blues scale over the D minor chords. More interesting is the material employed over the  $Bb7$  chord, which the  $b7$ , root and

9<sup>th</sup> being sustained in the first instance [bar 2], with a superimposition of B $\flat$  Melodic Minor occurring in the second [bar 4]:

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The first staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. It features a melodic line with a Dm7 chord above the first measure and a B $\flat$ 7 chord above the fourth measure. The melody includes a sixteenth-note run, a triplet of eighth notes, and another triplet of eighth notes. The second staff is also in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. It features a bass line with a Dm7 chord above the first measure, a B $\flat$ 7 chord above the fourth measure, and a Dm7 chord above the seventh measure. The bass line consists of a steady eighth-note pattern, a melodic phrase, and ends with a sustained note.

For the improvised solo in “Mjölfnir” I attempted to channel this particular aspect of Beck's playing.

### Tommy Bolin

While Beck was highly vocal of his appreciation of John McLaughlin in interviews, he was quieter in discussing the influence of Tommy Bolin on his playing. It does seem, however, that Tommy's played served as an intermediary between his own blues-rock background and McLaughlin's complex fusion that he so admired. (Obrecht, 2008)

Tommy Bolin was only 22 years old when he featured on ex-Mahavishnu drummer Billy Cobham's solo album *Stratus*. (1973) Listening to this album – which Beck was reported to be listening to non-stop while on the road (Obrecht, 2008) - it is startling to note the many similarities to Beck's fusion albums, especially *Wired*.

With an abundance of modal funk grooves peppered with complex rhythmic twists and extended, sometimes dark, harmonies, Cobham seems to have taken the drum and bass break from The Mahavishnu piece "One Word" and extracted an entire album from it. The record is propelled by Cobham's masterful drumming and the bluesey, excited guitar playing of Tommy Bolin.

No doubt Jeff saw this album as a Rosetta Stone towards understanding McLaughlin's unapproachable material, as despite his ravings about McLaughlin in interviews for many years (citing him in interviews since the first Mahavishnu album released), he did not attempt this style himself until after Cobham released *Stratus*. (Obrecht, 2008)

Bolin and Beck had many things in common: neither could read music or even knew the names of the notes on the fret-board or in the chords, resulting in both having to be lead through chords changes one by one. (Cauffield, 1977) Both also possessed a vocabulary drawn primarily from the blues, Bolin having toured as Albert King's second guitarist. In fact, his improvising on *Stratus* is almost exclusively blues and pentatonic scale based with little of the “jazzy sophistication” that Beck would sparingly drop into his solos.

One key difference was that Bolin played much longer solos than Beck – the latter being quite vocal regarding his disdain for extended soloing (Obrecht, 2008). In practical terms, this means that Bolin tends to have much more room to develop ideas in his solos – a hallmark of jazz soloing which is beautifully illustrated in his solo on the title track of *Stratus*, where a small motif is extrapolated, reaching a fiery conclusion.

Beck, conversely, tends to play in a “lick” based style where a line is played perhaps once or twice

and then left alone. While I did not pick up on the concept from Bolin, I do lean more towards the exploration of brief motifs in my solos than licks, although they do also feature. The simplicity of Bolin's note choices mean that it is easy to hear the manner in which he develops ideas and, although I discovered his playing long after I did Beck's, I have found much to learn from his approach.

There are some sonic homages to Bolin in the final EP. Bolin would at times run his guitars through Jan Hammer's synthesisers, resulting in the flamboyant sound heard on “Quadrant 4”. I attempted to create a similar, if more subtle, sound in my solo in “Key of Maltese Glass.” [2:40]. For the final half of his solo in “Stratus”, Tommy employs a Leslie style effect which sound more like a chorus pedal with a very fast rate. I created a similar sound to this in the rhythm guitar tracks in “Mjölñir.”

## John McLaughlin

John McLaughlin was the primary composer and leader of The Mahavishnu Orchestra, his work in this outfit inspiring both Bolin and Beck.

A key feature of McLaughlin's style is his highly developed and impressive facility with rhythm. While this is realised in his effortless ability to play through the irregular meters of The Mahavishnu Orchestra, a more subtle – yet more technically demanding – application of this skill is his use of irregular groupings within other time feels.

For example, observe the rhythm pattern that McLaughlin plays under the bass/violin ostinato in “Birds Of Fire”. Here he phrases the bar of 18/8 as 5 + 5 + 5 + 3, creating a complex cross-rhythm:



*Transcription: McLaughlin (1976, pg58)*

A further example is this excerpt from the piece “Guardian Angel” in which this solo guitar part is grouped in such a way that the listener is tricked into thinking the piece is changing time signature:



*Transcription: Hal Leonard Artist Series: Friday Night In San Francisco, pg86*

McLaughlin asserts that his mastery of such rhythmic devices is due to his study of the Indian

system of *Konnakol* - where rhythmic sub-divisions are learnt through vocalising - and to employing a specialised metronome in his practise regime that allows for the simultaneous output of up to 3 combination of subdivisions. For example, output A plays quaver triplets, B plays quaver quintuplets and C plays semi-quavers. (Resnicoff,1996.)

I find this particular aspect of McLaughlin's playing the most fascinating and inspiring, but toughest to emulate. The use of time signature changes throughout the E.P, as well the more convoluted rhythmic interplay in pieces such as “Lay Off The Risotto” and “Key Of Maltese Glass” were introduced partly as exercises to improve this aspect of my musicianship, directly inspired by McLaughlin.

Another McLaughlin hallmark is use of sequenced scales when soloing, for example playing through the scale in ascending thirds or in fixed rhythmic patterns, such as descending by three notes at a time. [McLaughlin, 2004] Through listening and study of his music, lines employing such concepts have entered my own improvisations and can be heard in various variations throughout this EP. For example this line from the guitar solo in “Key Of Maltese Glass” [02:21] which, essentially, descends the scale in groups of four:



Another example is the closing lick in the “Mink Line Prison” solo [03:39] this time ascending:



Neither of these lines purely employs a fixed pattern for obvious musical reasons, but their basis is in practising the types of scale exercises that McLaughlin teaches on his instructional DVD *This Is Way I Do It*. (2004).

McLaughlin has a beautiful touch on the guitar which truly comes to the fore when he plays acoustic guitar. John's acoustic playing, along with the chord work of Bill Evans, inspired the unused E.P. track “Song For Bill”. Performing this tracks required much practise as I wished to emulate McLaughlin's highly developed picking technique by picking every note in the melody. To practise this I began practising by playing along with the Shakti recording “Joy”, which is truly a alternate picking workout. While “Song For Bill” was never recorded to the standard desired, this practice did improve my facility, resulting in my surprising myself with some improvised passages which were completely picked, such as the closing lick in “Mink Line Prison” above and the climaxing run in “Mjöltnir” [03:44] which also mixes subdivisions in a McLaughlin manner:





A fundamental textural influence on this entire E.P. stems from McLaughlin, although I did first encounter this on a Jeff Beck album: heads played in unison between a guitar and synthesiser. Beck was inspired to do this by the Mahavishnu Orchestra, openly acknowledging John McLaughlin as a “dazzling” influence. (Obrecht, 2008).

McLaughlin's Mahavishnu Orchestra often furthered this by having the head played in unison by guitar and synthesiser (almost exclusively a Moog) with the addition of violin. Unison heads like this are a natural extension of the jazz tradition from which this music draws influence: bebop combos famously rejecting the dense horn arrangements of the swing/big band era in favour of complex heads played in unison by the frontline. (Gioia, 2011 pg187) Jazz artists have been exploring the various textural results of combining instruments in unison ever since, some examples being Bill Evans and Paul Chambers double-bass/piano intro to “So What” from *Kind of Blue* (1958) and George Benson's daring guitar/saxophone lines on “The Cooker” from *The George Benson Cookbook* (1966). Given this exploratory history, it was only natural that fusion carry over this arranging technique. Fusion artists simply “updated” the sound pallet.

The resultant sound of guitar, synthesizer and violin playing in unison fascinated me and this arrangement was utilised, in various ways, throughout the E.P.: the guitar/violin unison “B” section in “Mjölnir” which climaxes with a guitar/violin/synthesizer unison run; the guitar/synthesizer/violin unison melodies in “Lay Off The Risotto” and the guitar/synthesizer combo heads in “Mink Line Prison” and “Key Of Maltese Glass”.

For these unison parts, the “classic” Moog sound was used but a variety of synthesiser layers were added to this in the interests of modernising the sound. An overdriven guitar/clarinet unison was initially tracked for “With A Windsor Knot” but I was unhappy with the final result and instead left the clarinet to play the melody solo, as described below.

## Bill Evans

I vividly recall my first encounter with the music of Bill Evans. Finding *Kind of Blue* in a supermarket bargain bin, I was fascinated by the claims on the back cover that this album was “a trip to heaven”. [Palmer, 1997].

The particular moment I can remember was the end of the tune “Blue In Green” when the horns drop out, leaving Evans toying with the cyclic tune, accompanied only by a languid arco bassline and the faintest rustle of brushes on the snare. Due to the questionable quality of my stereo, the sound of the drums and bass were all but completely lost, transforming Evans' closing chorus into a floating cadenza.

I recall thinking at the time that the band must have planned to play along, but were taken aback by how beautiful Evans played and had to stop playing to listen with their full attention. Listening so intently and being so captivated, the track ended without my realising. I had never heard anything quite like this, it was both alien and comforting.

Writer Richard Williams, when describing another Evans' recording (of Scott LaFaro's “Jade Visions”), perfectly describes the feeling I encountered:

*“...a piece so subtly conceived that it exists seemingly without melody, metre or harmonic scheme, simply unfolding according to its own logic. It would be wrong to call it a ballad, since that suggests a set of familiar conventions...[it creates] it's own little self contained universe...so unfamiliar was the mood that it evoked that the...performance ends without anyone in the room realising. This pungent yet weightless music has simply evaporated.”*

(Williams, 2009, pg158)

Evans' influence on my own playing is subtle yet distinctive. His beautiful touch on the piano has always pushed me to strive for a better tone on guitar. His trademark use of close intervals in his chord voicings has been a source of much exploration over the years, this often comes to the fore when comping as can be heard in the guitar part under the bass solo in “Key Of Maltese Glass”, which makes use of close intervals to highlight the tense nature of the Superlocrian tonality. [1:07 onwards] A further example is the 'comping under the guitar solo in “Mink Link Prison”, which makes extensive use of a combination of Jim Hall inspired quartal harmony and close-voiced chords.

The unused track “Song For Bill” was written as an exercise in close voicings on guitar, inspired by Evans:

The image shows a musical score for a guitar piece. Above the staff, the following chords are written: Cmaj7, A7, Dmaj7(#11), F#7, F7, Bbmaj7(#11), Am7, A7ALT, and E7. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 'GTR PICKUP' label. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, while the bass line features close-voiced chords and intervals.

Transposing the part to piano, I asked Ben Eames to flesh out the harmonies to make them more pianistic. He, however, only added one or two notes to select chords, letting the “thinness” of the harmonies speak through his controlled pedalling. Despite Eames' beautiful performance on the track, it was deemed unacceptable for release, as described below.

## Andy Summers

It practically impossible for me to gauge Andy Summers' influence on my playing as it is all encompassing. Being a self taught musician before attending university, I forged the foundations of my playing style by listening to and studying Summers' playing in The Police.

Summers' playing was the first time I had consciously heard extended harmony, and his three-string, easy-to-finger voicings and use of superimposed triads to suggest complex harmony was a revelation. You can the influence of his chordal concepts, blended in with the Bill Evans and Jim Hall influences, throughout the entire E.P. The beauty of pairing down chord voices to only three or four strings is the “room” that is left for the other players, particularly the bass player. I feel this sense of harmonic space is apparent even in the busiest sections of the E.P.

On a gear related note, I employ two distinctive pedals that Summers famously used: an Electro.-Harmonix Electric Mistress Deluxe (an analogue flanger) and a MXR Dyno Comp. These are used to achieve my own take of the compressed, modulated guitar sound “that was all the rage during the early '80s”.(Buskin, 2004) This sound was used exclusively in the rhythm guitar tracks, such as the intro to “Lay Off The Risotto” and the prominent rhythm guitar heard throughout “Key Of Maltese Glass”.

## John Coltrane

Four of the five guitar solos in this project are over modal vamps. (“Mink Line Prison” being the exception.) I have always felt comfortable playing in such harmonic environments as, when learning to play, I would often jam with friends for several hours on a single chord or short chord progression. There was two reasons for this: firstly, we only knew brief sections of songs and, secondly, I had come across a copy of *Kind of Blue* in a supermarket bargain bin roughly a year after I started playing the guitar, the impact of the album subconsciously influencing me before I could even consciously understand what I was listening to.

This album was my first exposure to the modal concept. I recall always being alarmed when Miles Davis' solo on the opening “So What” would end and a much louder, more abrasive solo began. This was played by the great John Coltrane, who - as my ears began to grow and could finally hear the developing motifs, the subtle dynamic inflections and the great balancing act of logic and melody - began to be a premier influence. In regards to this project, Coltrane's biggest influence is his ability to extract every potential possibility from a chord, finding unique substitutions and angular lines whilst always remaining melodic and “bluesy.”

Coltrane is widely reported as practising diligently from Nicolas Slonimsky's *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns*, hence in my preparation for recording my solos I too practised lines from this volume. However, I made sure to not treat the patterns in this book as “licks”, instead using them as ear training exercises to open new doors in my improvisations. Thus, I found great pleasure throughout this project in trying to fully embrace my ear when improvising and not be afraid of the results that come out as long as what came out conveyed the appropriate *feeling*.

When aspects of this project proved difficult – such as rehearsing “Key Of Maltese Glass”, described below, or struggling with a technically demanding passage in a tune – stories of Coltrane's own dedication to his craft are energised me to carry on. Whether it be the image of him standing at the door of his university building waiting for the practise rooms to open at six am or leaving the stage to go practise in the bathroom during the extended piano solo (Porter, 1999, pg254), Coltrane's example has fuelled me to better my playing and to practise as much as possible. Due to this, I believe that there is a noticeable improvement in my playing between the first solo recorded (“Mjornir” in December) and the last. (“Mink Line Prison” in March.)

## Compositions

The pieces were composed over a two week period and carried out mostly on manuscript paper. This was eventually transferred to MIDI demos which I sent to Michael Glass, Fraser De Banzie and Alasdair McLachlan. I also sent the MIDI demos to Dr. Haftor Medbøe – Jazz Musician In Residence at Edinburgh Napier – and Cam Nesbit – television composer - [*See Appendix A*]. Taking feedback from all concerned, I refined the pieces on the page before preparing the material for rehearsal with the rhythm section.

### Mink Line Prison

The title is taken from a line in the novel *Dr No* by Ian Fleming when Bond, the protagonist, finds himself entrapped in a luxurious prison suite. (Fleming, 2002, pg324) While not particularly relevant to the musical content of the track, I found the phrase to be interesting enough to be employed as a quirky title.

When rehearsing this track, I asked De Banzie to interpret the groove from the Tony William's track "Snake Oil" which, like this track, is based on a propulsive yet "heavy" funk groove with a only small number of melodies and harmonic movement.

The chord voicings in the B sections are based on Jim Hall's comping style which regularly utilises modern sounding quartal harmony. In addition to this, Hall was inspired by Bill Evans (Myers, 2010), an inspiration no doubt reinforced by their duet recordings, and would employ minor and major second intervals within his chord voicings in the style of Evans, as has been done here:

1 F(SUS2) Bb11 C(SUS4) Ebmaj13 F(SUS4) C7ALT. Ebmaj13(SUS2)

John McLaughlin also makes use of close intervals in his chord voicings, however his approach to this is more guitarist with the close voicings mostly being the product of mixing fretted notes and open strings, creating a distinctive "jangly", ringing timbre in contrast to Hall's piano inspired approach. Hall's method exclusively uses fretted notes and requires dexterous fretting hand stretches to achieve, the result being a more pianist timbre. Both of these approaches are combined in the improvised comping under the guitar solo.

## Lay Off The Risotto

The nucleus for this composition was a creative challenge that I issued myself. This challenge had roots in *Guitar Techniques #178* where writer John Wheathcroft - examining the Dorian framework of the Miles Davis' tune "So What" - examined the utilised mode in detail. The conclusion of this examination was that, with the absence of any "avoid notes" (traditionally, in a minor setting, the flatted 13<sup>th</sup> (Nettles, 1987, pg34), any note in this mode would sing consonantly over any harmonic situation derived from this mode.

I found the logic of this analysis and its resultant sonic applications completely convincing, swiftly all but abandoning the natural minor in favour of the Dorian mode. The Dorian mode has since become a natural and well explored tool in my melodic arsenal, as can be heard throughout this project in both the soloing (such as opening phrase in "Mjölnir") or in the heads ("Key Of Maltese Glass" and "Mink Line Prison" being predominately Dorian.)

Due to my subsequent neglect of the natural minor scale, I decided it would be rewarding to challenge myself to compose a piece using it. Facing the problem head on, I resolved to base the piece on the characteristic Im to bVI chord sequence, a cliché movement found throughout rock's canon from Bob Dylan's "All Along The Watchtower" (1967); Led Zeppelin's "Stairway To Heaven" (1971); Black Sabbath's "Neon Knights" (1980); a host of Iron Maiden numbers including their début hit "Run To The Hills" (1982) and Ron Wasserman's theme tune to the popular Mighty Morphin' Power Ranger's television show (1993) amongst a plethora of others.

To colour this chord movement, I composed a guitar/piano unison part that plays with the rhythm *à la* John McLaughlin. The part is a constant cycle of three quavers superimposed over a 4/4 groove. To "force" the pattern to restart on beat one I added a bar of 9/8 every fourth bar. This perverts the time and creates an unusual "floating" groove, which nonetheless flows smoothly due to the energy of the rhythm section.

In Jim Hall fashion, the A section melody is essentially a small rhythmic motif transposed through several permutations. This is played in unison by guitar, synthesiser and violin. I did, however, wish to reinforce the “floating” vibe of the groove of this section, instructing the players involved to be marginally free with their timing, allowing “breath” to exist in their phrasing. Thus, these unison lines are not rhythmically perfect but more expressive as a result.

The B section provides contrast to the modal derivations of the A section with chord based material. This section featured the following chord sequence, utilising these voicings:

Am<sup>11</sup> G<sup>11</sup> Dbmaj7(#11) Ab7(#11) Gm<sup>11</sup> C7<sup>ALT.</sup> Fm<sup>7</sup> F7<sup>ALT.</sup>

Inspiration for a melody proved elusive until, while researching John Coltrane, I came across the following quote from pianist Tommy Flanagan discussing the infamous changes to “Giant Steps”:

*“He came round and played it for me [a week or two before]. There was no need for any music...I don't think there was any melody, just the chord sequence, which spells out the melody anyway, practically.”* (Flanagan in Porter, 1999, pg155)

This statement sparked the idea that the melody was “hiding” in the chord sequence. Thus through removing the lower harmonies from these voicings a melody was “discovered.”:

Am<sup>11</sup> G<sup>11</sup> Dbmaj7(#11) Ab7(#11) Gm<sup>11</sup> C7<sup>ALT.</sup> Fm<sup>7</sup> F7<sup>ALT.</sup>

Over the succeeding C section a quarter note walking bassline was originally composed. This was ambiguously notated in the chart, causing McLachlan to interpret this as double time passage. The resultant quirky, disco-esque groove brings to mind “Bruce Lee” by Federation of The Disco Pimp.

The title is derived around De Banzie's sudden, and completely unexplained, rant concerning dieting fads that was committed to tape at the start of this track's recording session.

### **With A Windsor Knot**

This piece was originally a solo guitar number that was written a number of years ago that I had always wanted to adapt for a full band due to the strength of the melody. Thus, in comparison to the other tracks, this is a simple affair, the emphasis entirely placed on the melodic content with minimal improvisation or derivation in the reading of said melodies.

The title here was again derived from an Ian Fleming novel. In *From Russia Love* the protagonist, secret agent James Bond, is said to have “mistrusted anyone who tied his tie with a Windsor Knot. It showed too much vanity.” (Fleming, 2002, pg178). Given that this piece is centred around a “pretty” melody, I found this title appropriate.

As can be heard on the demo, there was initially an entirely different pallet of sounds desired for this track. For example, the acoustic piano was originally for electric “Fender Rhodes” style piano; the clarinet melodies were to be performed by overdriven electric guitar and the piano comping in the A sections was to be provided by organ. While these were all recorded, I found the resulting track too bombastic and ill-fitting of the melody, hence the piece was re-arranged as can be heard on the final version.

The C section melodies were entirely provided by guitars in the demo. For the final version, these were instead arranged for two violins, viola and clarinet. In a Bill Evans inspired mood, I was keen to avoid making this section too “sweet”, (Pettinger, 1998, pg251) therefore dissonances are gradually introduced over the 8 bars of this section, eventually climaxing with an elongated cluster creating by the strings and six overdubbed clarinets.

Although not intentional, the strings take a noticeable moment to “settle-in” tuning wise on their first note. On reflection, I feel this provides a nice emotional tension to the section, using tuning in an accidental way the way Ornette Coleman would deliberately utilise it to evoke an emotional response. [Berendt, 1975, pg151]

## Mjölñir

Most of the melodic material for “Mjölñir” was derived from the “Jeff Beck bend lick” described earlier. This approach to composition was inspired by John Coltrane's tune “Like Sonny”, which is based entirely on a popular Sonny Rollins lick (Porter, 1999, pg157).

In the A sections this melody is supported by Drop-D riff inspired by Beck's tune “Hammerhead” from *Emotion and Commotion* (2010), itself a tribute to Jan Hammer's riffing style (Beck, 2010):



“Hammerhead” riff by Jeff Beck.

The mixture of this riff and melody create an ambiguous tonality due to the melody featuring the major third, on paper clashing with the riff's minor third. This adds a bluesy bent to the track and creates an interesting environment to solo over that provides ample space to employ Beck's “blues lick with sophisticated tangents” approach. A similar approach can be heard in Shakti tune “Joy” where John McLaughlin plays with bluesy over a dominant drone.

Inspiration for the B section melody was found in the bridge of “Birds Of Fire” by The Mahavishnu Orchestra. Despite the minimal number of notes, I feel this brief section is the most via an elusive combination of the rhythm, harmony, melody and mood is the most “Mahavashinu-esque” of the entire project.

For the following C section, the A section melody and riff are extrapolated to a 6/4 time signature, in the process creating an almost Celtic ambience, although I cannot claim this was intentional.

For the actual recording, my choice of guitar tone was inspired by modern rock band Muse, who employ a similar “brittle” sounds on the track “Exo-Politics” (*See Reference CD Track 14*)

Also in the final track, there is a slight tuning discrepancy between the violin and lead guitar parts in the high F note in the B sections. I like the effect this generates as it heightens the tension of the altered chord, making the proceeding resolution more aurally satisfying.

The title is a reference to Thor, the Norse god of thunder. I was at the time of writing this piece reading the new Marvel *Thor: God of Thunder* “Godbomb” story arc [#1-12], by Jason Aaron.

### **Key Of Maltese Glass**

The rhythmic feel of this song was inspired by the Allan Holdsworth tune “City Nights”, the opening track on his seminal *Secrets* (1989) record.

The A section melody was developed by superimposing triads over a static minor chord. The resultant line, as with “Lay Off The Risotto”, exploits a single rhythmic motif. As a counterpoint to the apparent mayhem, the B section melody simply outlines the changes in quavers.

Another point of interest is the changing modal flavour of the vamps under each solo: the bass solo is centred in the Superlocrian mode, while the opening guitar solo chorus features G Harmonic Minor with the final vamp returning to G Dorian.

The fleeting swing sections were added candidly in rehearsals although, in the studio, these proved difficult to track without sounding stiff. It was soon worked that out that this was due to the missing “and” of beat 4 in the bar of 7/8 resulting in two “dead” (not swung) beats following one another.

To improve the feel of this section, the time-signature was re-imagined as being a pushed 4/4. The title of this piece is a simple amalgamation of two of my favourite novels *The Maltese Falcon* (1930) and *The Glass Key* (1931), both by Dashiell Hammett.

### **Song For Bill [Unused]**

The A section melody was a further exploration of transposing a rhythmic motif through a series of modulations while the B Melody is inspired by John McLaughlin's fiery acoustic work, particularly in The Guitar Trio, mixing melodic and natural minor scales.

This track was written and recorded for this project but was dropped from the final E.P. at the mixing stage for two reasons. Firstly, and as described earlier, I was keen to emulate John McLaughlin's picking fluency, in this case by attempting to pick every note in the B section melody. Being able to play such a rhythmically dense line with the relaxed, slight rubato of the piano and bass, whilst fighting to produce an elegant, singing tone was a considerable challenge. My failure to achieve this resulted in dropping the track. Secondly, the violin performance was deemed too poor to save, featuring questionable intonation and tone throughout.

# Title

I have synaesthesia in the form that I perceive colours when I listen to music. The effect is random and bears no relation on any tangible factor in the music such as the key, tempo, timbre etc. However, the colour that I experience upon first hearing a piece is usually the static “assigned” colour. With few exceptions, a single colour is assigned to the music.

When listening to my MIDI demos for this project, however, I began to notice that the “assigned” colour I had originally perceived for a track began to alter during the duration of the track. Following several more listens, I began to experience a very odd kaleidoscopic style perception of the track, which was candidly dubbed a “Synaesthesia attack” at rehearsals when I explained this reaction to the band. This phrase hung in the air until I eventually decided that this would make an excellent title for the E.P. I eventually decided on the stylised “Synæsthesiattack”, making use of an alternative spelling of synæsthesia.

# Artwork

After deciding on this title, I found myself remembering that, in primary school, I used to enjoy creating whimsical abstract pictures by drawing a random series of lines then colouring in the resultant spaces. Usually in the process of colouring in I would cross over lines, resulting in the size and shape of the spaces changing, the original lines blurred and lost. I recalled the visual effect of this approach to be somewhat representative of the perception reaction I was experiencing while listening to the MIDI demos.

This concept vaguely reminded me reminded me of the Japanese art form of *suibokuga* (Kahn, 2000, pg153) that Bill Evans compares jazz improvisation to in his liner notes for *Kind Of Blue*:

*“There is a Japanese visual art in which the artist is forced to be spontaneous. He must paint...in such a way that an unnatural or interrupted stroke will destroy the line or break through the parchment. Erasures or changes are impossible...the resulting pictures lack the complex composition and textures of ordinary painting, but it is said that those that see will find something that captured that escapes explanation.”*

(Bill Evans, 1959)

I believe my less refined inspiration for such drawings was the artist Neil Buchanan who had a popular art-based television show called 'Art Attack' in the 90s that I would watch on a well-worn VHS when off sick from primary school.

Inspired by my recollection, I decided to attempt such a drawing to use as my album artwork. Rather than use pencils or coloured pens, I decided to use pastels: the effect of the colours “smudging” together, creating new, unintended colours in the process, reminding me of the improvisational process. I created three pictures at various intervals over three months, choosing my favourite as the cover.

While I cannot claim that this is a great piece of art, I do believe it illustrates the perceptions of colour I experience when listening to the audio from the final project. The improvised nature of process that birthed this artwork reflects the spontaneous, improvised aspects of the final tracks themselves.



# Rehearsals

Rehearsals with the rhythm section began in November. In an effort to capture a fresh, spontaneous feel in the rhythm tracks the band had minimal rehearsal time before entering the studio, usually amounting to little over an hour per track. Such extremities were justified as – having played with De Banzie for many years – I have found that he quickly decides on his parts for a track over a number of rehearsals then rarely strays from them and fails to react to improvised alterations in other bandmember's parts. Given the limited rehearsal time De Banzie was forced to listen and extemporise in the studio, resulting in spontaneous interplay with McLachlan.

Such rehearsals methods are common throughout the jazz idiom with leaders striving to liberate their musicians from personal clichés. Miles Davis perhaps took this to the extreme, offering his musicians no rehearsals in favour of perpetually running tape. (Davis, 1989 pg289) Bill Evans was another endorser of minimal rehearsal, remarking in the '70s that his trio of over a decade had had only a handful of rehearsals, most of them verbal. (Pettinger, 1998, pg232) Outside of the jazz world, Bruce Springsteen has developed a number of unique rehearsal tactics – including teaching his band a song with the sections out of sequence – to ensure freshness and group improvisation in his recordings. (Buskin, 2010).

While this method worked for the majority of the tunes, the closing track “Key Of Maltese Glass” required multiple rehearsals due to its complex time signature and awkward five bar phrases. This still, however, only resulted in around four hours of rehearsal time. Initial attempts at the piece were deemed catastrophic. A breakdown in communication resulted in De Banzie playing in 7/4 rather than 7/8, this issue only being realised and corrected following McLachlan and I repeatedly “losing the one”. A subsequent discussion on how we were all counting the bar revealed De Banzie's error. Following this correction much time was spent fitting the drum part around the pre-composed bassline, the correct groove proving elusive. When this was at last arranged, a short recording of this section looped was made, which De Banzie then took home to learn.

An overriding issue with these rehearsals was the absence of the keyboard, violin, clarinet and guitar overdubs that were present on the demos and subsequent final tracks. The rehearsal run-throughs thus sounded “empty” causing brief moments of antagonism as, not being as familiar with the tracks as I was, the musicians were forced to imagine the missing parts and tailor their parts to suit without having a truly firm idea of what was going to be added later.

I failed to fully articulate my ideas in these situations, and found myself failing to fully inspire the rhythm section. That they – come the studio session – performed with consummate feel professionalism is a testament to their high quality of musicianship and not a reflection of my bandleading abilities

There was no rehearsal with David Burke (strings), Ashton McConnell (clarinet) or Ben Eames (piano) before recording. These players – all being classically trained – were all able to sight-read their respective parts.

# Recording

## Drums & Bass

All drum and bass tracks were recorded live simultaneously in the studio with guide guitar. As described above, I wished the rhythm tracks to be “lively” and spontaneous. Therefore, every track was recorded in a single, complete take with the exception of “Key Of Maltese Glass.”

Due to De Banzie and McLachlan's required level of concentration to perform this track, initial takes felt too cautious and tame or, if they were energetic, rhythmically “sloppy.” Eventually the decision was made to record this song in four sections, which would then be spliced together for the final track. Each of these section does, however, feature live drum and bass recording simultaneously. To hide the edits in the compiled track, kick drum and cymbals were overdubbed. The bass solo was overdubbed separately, with McLachlan utilising a multi-octave pedal to create an unusual organ-like timbre.

Lastly, McLachlan performed double bass on the unused track “Song For Bill”. A number of drop-ins were required to piece together the final performance as McLachlan, using an unfamiliar instrument, encountered numerous tuning and tonal issues. This was recorded before the free-time piano track, thus the bass notes were later synced up, with intentional minute imperfections, to create the impression that they had been tracked simultaneously.

The bass had been recorded direct. At the mixing stage this direct signal was split into two channels: one EQ'd to remove all but the bass frequencies then heavily compressed to have minimal dynamic range, the other brighter with more top end, ran through a guitar amplifier emulator to add an element of dirt whilst improving the articulation of the part.

De Banzie was sent the raw drum tracks from the sessions, these were then mixed at his home studio, then sent them back as a bounced stereo file. While not ideal as this minimized Glass's ability to manipulate the drum tracks in the mix, this did allow De Banzie to have his drums sounding precisely how he wished. For most part, both parties were satisfied with this arrangement, however, De Banzie's mix of the drums in “With A Windsor Knot” were deemed to sound too dry and “weedy” sounding for the style of this track. As the raw drum tracks were still saved in the session, Glass was able to achieve a compromise mix by creating a blend of De Banzie's drum bounce and his own, more stylistically appropriate mix.

## Violin

The strings parts were performed by David Burke, head of music at Graeme High School. These were the sole tracks not recorded at Edinburgh Napier, instead being recorded in two sessions in Burke's classroom on a Zoom Digital 16 track.

These sessions were plagued with issues. Arriving for our initial session, I discovered that Burke had forgotten we had arranged a recording and was without his violin. Not wishing to cancel, he was forced to use the school's low-quality electric violin, the resulting track populated with a plethora of artefacts such as squeals and hisses which had to be removed at the mixing stage. As a result of using this unfamiliar instrument tuning issues also ensued.

To add to these issues, Burke, being primarily a viola player, found some of the higher runs too difficult to perform. These were either abandoned altogether (such as the climatic run in “Lay Off The Risotto” - which was instead performed on guitar - first appearing at [01:17].) or transposed

down an octave. These ad-hoc transpositions were notated on small ledger line “tablets” found in the classroom.

A interesting moment occurred when, having attempted to drop-in a difficult run in the violin solo in “Lay Off The Risotto”, I suggested that he instead improvise a line here instead. A tension apparent, Burke suggested instead that these bars simply be left empty or I dictate him a new phrase. I did not want this. Therefore, instead of improvising, Burke doubled the bass lick played by McLachlan in these bars third higher in these bars. [03:07] This was my first “real-life” encounter of what Derek Bailey describes as a musician “who not only cannot improvise but to whom the whole activity is incomprehensible.” (Bailey, 1980, pg66)

Our second session was far more fluid, Burke being in possession of his own instrument. With the recording running smoothly and ahead of time, I had Burke record his parts on “With A Windsor Knot” and “Key Of Maltese Glass” several times to create the sound of a larger string ensemble.

### **Clarinet**

The clarinet parts were performed by Ashton McConnell, who sight-read her parts over two sessions. This being McConnell's debut recording, she was apprehensive at hearing her own playing in real time though headphones yet nonetheless completed all her parts in a single take.

A number of issues did arise due to my lack of proper organisation for these sessions. When recording “Lay Down The Risotto”, McConnell played to a rough mix of the drums and bass. When mixing and first hearing the clarinet in the context of the complete track, however, it became clear that the clarinet chart had not been transposed for the session. With no time available to re-record the part, the track was pitch-shifted up a tone. Due to the small intervallic shift and the liberal reverb “bedding” the part, the resultant shift in timbre was negligible.

The same issue occurred during the session for “With A Windsor Knot” when – having prepared two charts, one transposed and one at concert – the wrong one was printed and presented to McConnell. Realising that the part was wrong after an initial run through and with no access to the transposed chart, I was forced to write the part by hand on manuscript paper, finding myself handing McConnell the transposed parts as she tracked. This was sight-read perfectly.

### **Piano**

The grand piano, performed by Ben “Thumbs” Eames, on “With A Windsor Knot” and “Song For Bill” was tracked in the recital room on a portable set-up over two short sessions. Eames is that rare combination of classical and jazz musician, bringing – much like Bill Evans - the pedigree of classical technique and tone production to the jazz medium (Pettinger, 1999, pg95). Hence, Eames was able to perfectly sight-read my written score but also respond to my verbal, abstract cues to improvise particular lines or harmonies over sections of the song. Being an Evans fan himself, Eames realised what I was attempting to accomplish with the written parts and suitably embellished them: filling in the chords, performing cascading arpeggios and indulging in single line extemporisations. I was so inspired by his eventual performance on “With A Windsor Knot” that I had to re-record my guitar parts on this track, feeling them inadequate next to his playing.

At the mixing stage, these piano tracks were not treated to any plug-ins, simply being left with the natural reverb that had been picked up in the recital room.

## Keyboards

Keyboards were the only element of the project not recorded under my direct supervision. Originally, all keyboard parts were to be provided by Eames, however he was unable to commit the required amount of time to rehearsal and recording. The parts were provided by Fraser De Banzie, who as well as being the drummer on these recordings works as professional keyboard player in a number of function bands.

De Banzie wished to track his keyboards at his home studio, where he had access to a number of high-quality synthesisers. He was provided with the MIDI demos, complete charts and isolated general MIDI tracks to ensure that he played the correct parts. Some level of artistic license was taken which was not always fitting of the project, such as his choice of sounds. For example, highly rhythmic parts were at times tracked with soft, “paddy” sounds. These were heavily adjusted in Pro-Tools at the mixing stage, usually by means of amplifier simulators, EQ and compression.

Another issue was that parts began/ended in the wrong place, repeats were missed or sections were ignored altogether. Most of these were corrected by means of painstaking copy and pasting, but there were issues which required more complex solutions. For example, De Banzie's oversight in failing to perform the closing unison line in Mjölfnir [04:42] resulted in Michael Glass having to create a sample of a single synthesizer note, line copies of this to create the desired rhythm, then pitch-shift each individual note to create the correct line.

Time limitations resulted in De Banzie being unable to provide the keyboard tracks for the final track “Key Of Maltese Glass”. Unable to physically perform these parts myself and with time short, I took the programmed parts from my MIDI demo, exported these to Pro Tools and then had Glass sonically manipulate these to ensure the keyboard sounds were uniform throughout the E.P.

## Guitars

Guitar tracking dominated the majority of the recording sessions. A recurrent problem was that, as I had written most of the music in my head, I found myself faced with some highly challenging guitar parts to perform and minimal time to practise them. The heads in “Lay Down The Risotto” and “Key Of Maltese Glass” caused considerable trouble and were only achieved with an immoderate amount of drop ins. The difficulty of the parts was rarely due to technical weaknesses but more a case that I wanted to play the part with the correct “feel”. I was often changing my fingerings between takes to achieve this or to alter the timbre of a line.

With the exception of the solo in “Mjölfnir”, all guitar solos were left unrecorded until the end of the sessions. The procedure for recording the solos was simple: I would improvise over the section x number of times, if I could not say what I wanted to say in a complete take then we would splice highlights from several takes. Splicing was utilised in “Mjölfnir” - which is composite of two passes - and “Mink Line Prison” which was a compilation of several takes. The four solo “sections” in “Key of Maltese Glass” were all recorded individually. The solos in “Lay Off The Risotto”, however, were one complete takes with no edits.

As most of the guitar tracks had effects printed on them at source, the bulk of guitar mixing involved experimentation with delays, reverbs and panning effects. Effects that were added at the mix stage include the Bolin-esque “Analogue Filter” patch in the solo of “Key Of Maltese Glass [2:40] and the Leslie style chorus added to the rhythm guitar in Mjornir. [*first heard panned hard left at* [0:15])

## **Glockenspiel**

Glockenspiel was added playing a diminution of the linking electric piano lick in “Mink Line Prison” [*first heard at* [0.08]) Due to the wide register jumps this proved to be more difficult than at first imagined and took multiple drops in to achieve a good take.

## **Mastering**

Mastering was carried out by Alex Fenton & Will MacConnachie of Fentec Audio LLP at Swanfield Studios at a cost of £30 per track. “Song For Bill” was left unmastered due to the poor quality of the final track.

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