This transcription is from one of my favourite bass players, Anthony Jackson on Chaka Khan’s cover of the 1974 ‘Love Unlimited’ tune, ‘Move Me No Mountain’. From the 1980 album, ‘Naughty’ it’s a great example of Anthony’s developing and innovative approach to pop and R&B bass lines during his prolific studio era during the seventies and eighties.

At its core it is steeped largely in the legacy of James Jamerson who Jackson has sighted as one of his main influences but builds on this tradition in a number of different ways making it just as innovative as any Jamerson line during Motown’s heyday in the sixties.

The first thing that strikes the listener is the tone of the recorded Bass Guitar. Around this time the bass guitar was beginning to be rapidly replaced on recordings by synthesised bass and bass players were being asked or hired exclusively just for slap. Jackson who must have been aware of this as an active participant in the changing musical landscape began experimenting with what he called a ‘Contrabass Guitar’ or simply an extended range instrument to be able to reach the lower ranges of a synthesised bass.

His first forays with this were into a bass with a string lower than the traditional E string, resulting in what it now a standard low B string on five or six string bass. Later he would add a high C string and help create the modern day six string bass. Very innovative at the time, access to these instruments made Jackson particularly popular on records where a producer needed lower pitches that they would often call a synth player for.

The other is the complexity, chops and harmonic content of the many fills he plays. One thing unique about Jackson is his use of fourths as a primary interval in many of his fills across many recordings and genres. The fourth is quite an uncomfortable interval to play on the bass especially consecutive fourths across multiple strings and therefore can be incredibly difficult to execute. A great example of this is the bar long fill in the second last outro over an Eb minor chord that leaps out at the listener.

This use of fourths is hallmark of Jackson’s playing across a number of Chaka Khan’s tunes where he is allowed free reign somewhat and space to provide moments of brilliance and capture the listener to where the bass becomes the primary focus of the harmony for a second while never taking away from the groove or detracting from the message of the song.

All these things combined in addition to Jackson’s superior musicianship and taste make this song and many of his recorded parts some of the highest and most interesting art within the Bass Guitar lineage.