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TIME TO PLAY

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10 Common Bass Lines

Let's talk about how to create some common bass lines. First of all, in many musical situations the one note the bass player plays the most is the root of whatever chord is being played at the time. The root, or tonic, of a chord is the note on which the chord is built, and is where the chord gets its name. (The root of a C chord is C.)

Occasionally, the bass player wants to play some other notes to add some color to their bass lines, so they turn to other chord tones besides the root, or arpeggios, to find which notes to use. An arpeggio is made up from the notes of a chord played one at a time. Let's start with the arpeggio of a very common chord type: the major chord.

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11 The Major Chord

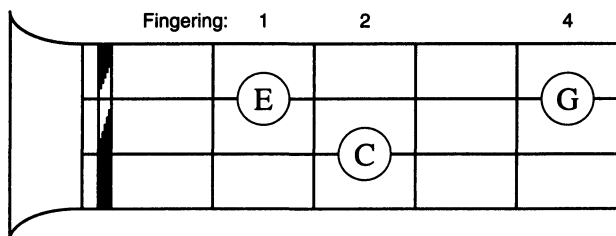
The notes of a major arpeggio are the root, the third and the fifth. The third of a C major chord is three notes up the C major scale (C - D - E) and the fifth is five notes up the C major scale (C - D - E - F - G).

C Major Scale: C D E F G A B C
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

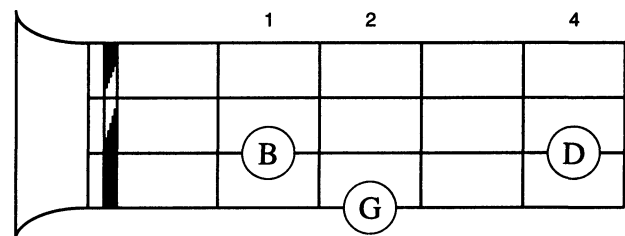
C Major Chord: C E G
1 3 5

An easy way to play the major arpeggio is to play the root with the 2nd finger of the fretting hand. That makes the third easily reachable using the 1st finger, and the 4th finger can easily grab the fifth. This is great because you can move this arpeggio around just by knowing the root of the chord you're playing against. Practice this arpeggio pattern over C and then transpose it to G and D.

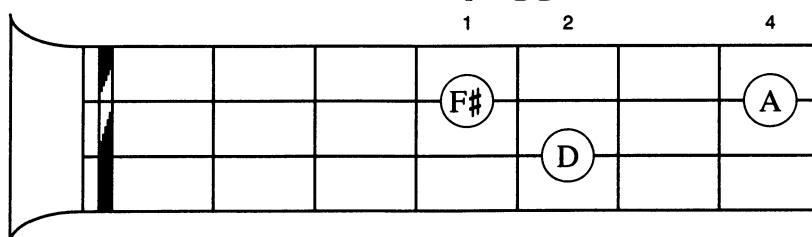
C Major Arpeggio



G Major Arpeggio



D Major Arpeggio



CD

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Example 7: Country Pattern

One style that uses the fifth below the root is Country. This exercise uses the root with the bass drum (Ex. 7A), then adds the fifth below, this time also with the bass drum (Ex. 7B), and finally combines the two previous examples (Ex. 7C).

Example 7A — Root with Bass Drum (♩ = $\overset{3}{\text{♩}}$)*

*Indicates uneven eighth notes; listen to recorded example.

Example 7B — Adding 5th Below

CD

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Example 7C — Combination