

CHORDAL BASS LINES

Playing the primary notes of a chord (root, third, fifth, seventh) is a great way to begin learning how to construct walking bass lines. Even the most “modern” bassists outline triads and seventh chords in their walking lines. Chordal bass lines provide the foundation for harmony, which, besides time feel, is one of the fundamental functions of a bassist.

This is a basic blues progression in F:

F7 B \flat 7 F7 F7
 B \flat 7 B \flat 7 F7 D7
 G-7 C7 F7 D7 G-7 C7

TRIADS

Begin by playing triads in root position:

F7 B \flat 7 F7 F7
 B \flat 7 B \flat 7 F7 D7
 G-7 C7 F7 D7 G-7 C7

MOTION DOWN A FIFTH

When chord roots resolve down a perfect fifth (or up a perfect fourth), the V to I motion in the bass is very strong. Here is an example of a bass line using seventh chords and motion down a fifth on beat 4:

VOICE LEADING

To avoid “choppy” bass lines, and to construct lines with logical motion, it is helpful to view harmony horizontally rather than vertically. For example, instead of thinking of the first two chords this way,

think of them this way:

Notice especially the 7th to 3rd motion (Eb of F7 resolving to D of Bb7). Here is a bass line using 7th to 3rd motion on chords which move down a fifth:

NON-CHORD TONES ON BEAT THREE

With the root established on beat one, a strong melody can override the need for a chord tone on beat three. Notice in this example that there are a few melodic ideas that are repeated in various forms, giving the line cohesion:

The musical notation consists of three staves in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a common time signature (C). The first staff has four measures with chords F7, Bb7, F7, and F7. The second staff has four measures with chords Bb7, Bb7, F7, and D7. The third staff has six measures with chords G-7, C7, F7, D7, G-7, and C7. The melody is composed of quarter notes, with some non-chord tones on beat three.

(This is heard as F7 for a bar, C7 for a bar)

LINES STARTING ON NON-CHORD TONES

Note that whenever beat 1 is not a chord tone, there is a chord tone on beat 3.

The musical notation consists of three staves in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a common time signature (C). The first staff has four measures with chords F7, Bb7, F7, and F7. The second staff has four measures with chords Bb7, Bb7, F7, and D7. The third staff has six measures with chords G-7, C7, F7, D7, G-7, and C7. The melody starts on non-chord tones in the first measure of each bar, but has a chord tone on the third beat.

APPOGIATURAS

All of the melodic devices discussed in the previous chapter will help you in creating logical bass line melodies. Another useful device is the *appoggiatura*, which for the purposes of this book, is a non-chord tone arrived at by a leap, resolving to a chord tone by whole step or half step. It is a general melodic principle that a leap in one direction should be balanced by stepwise motion in the opposite direction. Appoggiaturas can be diatonic or chromatic, as in the following examples:

USING HARMONY IN BASS LINES

The basic blues progression used so far is only a harmonic framework. There are numerous possible chord substitutions that any bassist should know. The following examples show some of the common methods of chord substitution, and some common “changes” used on a blues. It is obviously important that your bass line outlines the new chords.

Note that you can “impose” these changes on the group you are playing in (which may or may not be a good thing), or you may have to react to someone else’s changes.

ALTERNATE CHANGES

Here is a common progression that most musicians refer to as “Bird Blues.” The bass line uses a combination of chordal and scalar ideas, with a few sequences thrown in.

Chord progression for "Bird Blues":

Staff 1: F Δ , E \emptyset , A7 $^{\flat 9}$, D-7, (G7), C-7, F7

Staff 2: B \flat 7, B \flat -7, E \flat 7, A-7, D7, A \flat -7, D \flat 7

Staff 3: G-7, C7, F7, D7, G-7, C7

This is a chord progression that may be used on a slow blues:

Chord progression for slow blues:

Staff 1: F7, B \flat 7, F7, C-7, F7

Staff 2: B \flat 7, B \circ 7, F7, G-7, A-7, A \flat -7

Staff 3: G-7, C7, F7, F7/A, B \flat 7, B \circ 7, C7 $_{sus}$, C7

Rhythm can bring a walking bass line to life! It can also destroy the momentum, so use discretion. Check out Paul Chamber's bass line on *Straight No Chaser* with Miles Davis. Not only is it a great bass line on its own, but it fits beautifully with what Miles is playing.

Chords: F7, Bb7, F7, F7, Bb7, Bb7, F7, A-7, D7, G-7, C7, F7, D7, G-7, C7

DROPS

Drops can happen on any beat, and they create a sense of motion towards the lowest note.

Chords: F7, Bb7, C-7, F7

PULL-OFFS

Play the first note of two slurred notes with both hands, then "pull" the left hand off the string, which sounds the second note.

Chords: F7, Bb7, C-7, F7

SKIP BEATS

The left hand mutes the string while the right hand plays the note. This creates the sound of a "ghost note", or skip beat.

Chords: F7, Bb7, F7, F7

Most minor blues use the same twelve bar form as major blues. The harmonic motion is similar to major blues, but applied to minor keys. It starts in the tonic area for 4 bars, moves to the IV chord (subdominant area) in the fifth bar, back to the tonic in bar seven, and there is a turnaround in the ninth and tenth bars (dominant area), resolving back to the tonic.

TONIC AREA

In minor keys, the tonic can be a minor triad, -6, -7, or a -Δ chord, with extensions above. The basic triad is the same in each, but the bass line needs to change depending on the 7th (6th).

Tonic -6 chord

Placing a G# (#5) passing tone in the scale puts chord tones on the beat.

C-6

c.t. c.t. c.t. c.t.

Tonic -7 chord

Placing a B natural (natural 7) passing tone in the scale puts chord tones on the beat.

C-7

c.t. c.t. c.t. c.t.

Tonic -Δ7 chord

The same scale and passing tone used on a -6 can be used on the -Δ7 because of the interchangeability of the 6th and 7th. Or, simply use a melodic minor scale as below:

C-Δ

c.t. c.t. c.t. c.t.

Rather than using these scales in their entirety, the best idea is to use segments of them in your walking lines. The main principle is that they line up chord tones on beats 1 and 3. If your bass line is chordal, it should, as always, reflect the chord of the moment.

Here is an example of a walking line over the first four bars of a C minor blues. Bars one and two use a scalar line with stepwise connection on beat four. Bars three and four use the "bop" scale for a -6 chord:

C- F-7 C-

II V I PATTERNS - MINOR

up-down-up

A \emptyset *p.t.** D7 \flat 9 G-6

down-up-down

A \emptyset D7 \flat 9 G-6

up-up-down

A \emptyset D7 \flat 9 G-6

down-down-up

A \emptyset D7 \flat 9 G-6

up-up-up

A \emptyset D7 \flat 9 G-6

down-down-down

A \emptyset D7 \flat 9 G-6

** This passing tone could also be B natural, which will give the bass line a more "modern" sound. Note though, that B natural is the major third in the key of G minor. B \flat sets up the sound of the key better than B natural.*

Having more than one chord per bar presents a new challenge in a walking bass line. In rhythm changes, there are only two beats by which to define a chord. Obviously the bass line can't define a seventh chord in two beats, so it is important to play primary chord tones (root, third, or fifth). Since rhythm changes are strongly built around one tonality, though, there is a lot of room for variation in your bass lines.

Here is an example of a chordal approach to rhythm changes. The entire bass line is made up of chord tones:

B \flat G7 C-7 F7 B \flat G7 C-7 F7

B \flat B \flat 7 E \flat Δ E $^{\circ}$ 7 B \flat /F G7 C-7 F7

Here is an example of a bass line using scalar ideas:

B \flat G7 C-7 F7 B \flat G7 C-7 F7
(implies F7 for full bar)

B \flat B \flat 7 E \flat Δ E $^{\circ}$ 7 B \flat /F G7 C-7 F7

Another example using devices discussed earlier:

(sequences)
 B \flat G7 C-7 F7 B \flat G7 C-7 F7

(neighbor tone) *(7-3 voice leading)* *(chromatic approach tones)*
 B \flat B \flat 7 E \flat Δ E $^{\circ}$ 7 B \flat /F G7 C-7 F7

The following examples discuss each of these approaches.

RHYTHM CHANGES TRANSCRIPTIONS

(COMPARISON VIEW)

Check out the different ways that these eight bass players play rhythm changes, and compare them measure by measure. The basic changes are above, but note that in each example there are variations from the basic harmony. You can play through each bass line separately by turning to the “play view” on page 82.

B \flat G7 C-7 F7 B \flat G7 C-7 F7

The image shows eight staves of bass line transcriptions for the Rhythm Changes progression in B \flat major. The basic chord progression is indicated above the staves: B \flat , G7, C-7, F7, B \flat , G7, C-7, F7. Each staff represents a different bass player's interpretation:

- Doug Watkins (1958)**: Starts with a double bar line and the number '1' below the staff.
- Paul Chambers (1956)**: Features a melodic line with eighth notes.
- Israel Crosby (1958)**: Features a melodic line with eighth notes and a triplet of eighth notes in the final measure.
- Ray Brown (1990)**: Features a melodic line with eighth notes and a triplet of eighth notes in the final measure.
- Sam Jones (1958)**: Features a melodic line with eighth notes and a triplet of eighth notes in the final measure.
- Ron Carter (1982)**: Features a melodic line with eighth notes and a triplet of eighth notes in the final measure.
- George Duvivier (1957)**: Features a melodic line with eighth notes and a triplet of eighth notes in the final measure.
- Miroslav Vitous (1981)**: Features a melodic line with eighth notes and a triplet of eighth notes in the final measure.

Example 2

G-7 C7

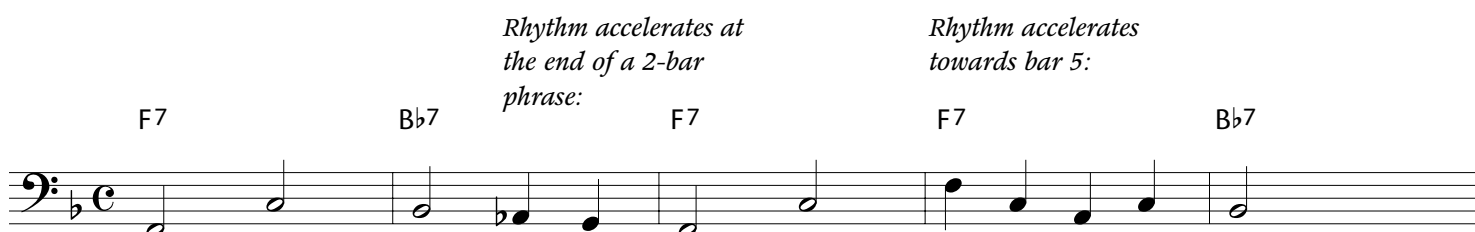


In most standard song forms, we hear phrases in 2- or 4-bar segments or longer. Hearing harmonic rhythm in 3 or 5 bar segments, for eg., is much less common. In much the same way that harmonic rhythm often accelerates at the end of phrases (towards cadence points) in classical music, bass lines can help define phrases by "accelerating" into the next phrase.

To illustrate this, listen to the following examples:

F7 Bb7 F7 F7 Bb7

Rhythm accelerates at the end of a 2-bar phrase: *Rhythm accelerates towards bar 5:*



Now compare the feel of the previous example to this one below. Notice that this second example does not have as much forward momentum as the first.

F7 Bb7 F7 F7 Bb7

Rhythm speeds up at the beginning of a 2-bar phrase: *Here as well:*



Here is a chorus of a blues in "2" using acceleration into the beginning of two and four bar phrases:

F7 Bb7 F7 F7

Bb7 Bb7 F7 D7

G-7 C7 F7 D7 G-7 C7



Example 4

This rhythm can work great in a bass line, but if it is played too much, it sounds like a rhythmic modulation (2/4). It can destroy the feeling of three, because of its symmetrical “two” feeling (although you may want to do that intentionally).

B \flat Δ D7#5 E \flat Δ G7

Example 5

This is similar to the “backwards” feeling of example 2, with the stress coming on the “and” of one.

B \flat Δ D7#5 E \flat Δ G7

THREE NOTES PER BAR

This is “walking” in 3/4. It presents an entirely new challenge from 4/4. The bass notes on beats 1 and/or 2 need to define the chord, with beat three connecting smoothly to the next chord. Walking can be chordal or scalar. The next few examples illustrate different ways of walking in three.

Chordal Lines

This bass line uses triads to define the harmony:

B \flat Δ D7#5 E \flat Δ G7

This bass line uses 7^{ths} as well as triads:

B \flat Δ D7#5 E \flat Δ G7

Example 5 – These Bass Notes Turn Bars Two and Four Into Dominant Chords

C- G7^{b13} C-7 F13

The musical notation shows four bars of music in a 4/4 time signature. The bass line consists of four quarter notes: C, G, C, and F. Above the bass line, the chords are indicated as C-, G7^{b13}, C-7, and F13. The treble clef staff shows the corresponding chord voicings.

PEDALS

Using pedals can create an “open” sound, because there is less movement in the bass. Any major or minor II-V can be altered by using a dominant bass pedal (it is called a dominant pedal because the bass note takes place on the fifth of the key of the moment):

This major II-V:

becomes:

F-7 B^b7 B^b7^{sus} B^b7

The musical notation shows two measures of music. The first measure contains the chords F-7 and B^b7. The second measure contains the chords B^b7^{sus} and B^b7. The bass line has notes F, B^b, B^b, and B^b. The treble clef staff shows the corresponding chord voicings.

This minor II-V:

becomes:

F^o9 B^b7^{b9b13} B^bsus^{b9} B^b7^{b9b13}

The musical notation shows two measures of music. The first measure contains the chords F^o9 and B^b7^{b9b13}. The second measure contains the chords B^bsus^{b9} and B^b7^{b9b13}. The bass line has notes F, B^b, B^b, and B^b. The treble clef staff shows the corresponding chord voicings.

Notice that there is only one note that changes (the ^b7 of the II chord resolving to the 3 of the V chord). It is because the II and V chords are so similar that the pedal works. This pedal will not work if the II chord is a dominant seventh chord.

Using a third/seventh voice leading line with the root is a good way to create logical movement when using chords on bass.

Starting On the Third:

Two staves of musical notation in bass clef, 2/4 time, key of B-flat major. The first staff shows chords: EbΔ, Ab7, G-7, C7, F-7, A∅, D7b9. The second staff shows chords: EbΔ, F-7, G-7, C7, F7. The notes are written as half notes, with the third and seventh of each chord indicated by a vertical line and a dot.

This example starts with the root and seventh and uses the same third/seventh voice leading as the first example.

Starting On the Seventh:

Two staves of musical notation in bass clef, 2/4 time, key of B-flat major. The first staff shows chords: EbΔ, Ab7, G-7, C7, F-7, A∅, D7b9. The second staff shows chords: EbΔ, F-7, G-7, C7, F7sus, F7. The notes are written as half notes, with the seventh of each chord indicated by a vertical line and a dot.

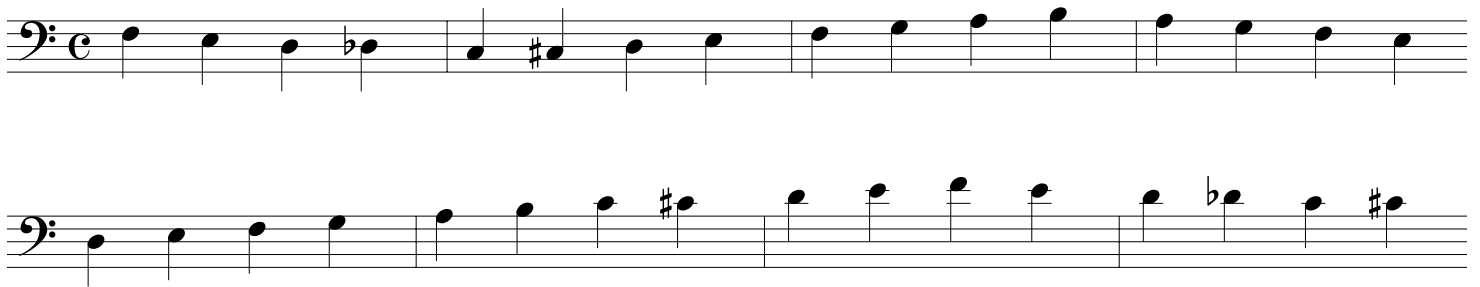
Here are two examples using fifth/ninth voice leading in the upper voice and roots in the bass. It has a different quality than using sevenths and thirds. Combining fifth/ninth and seventh/third ideas will give you the most options.

Starting On the Fifth:

One staff of musical notation in bass clef, 2/4 time, key of B-flat major. The chords are: E∅, A7b9#9, D-7, Db7#5, C-7, B7#5, BbΔ, Eb7, A∅, D7b9#9, G-7. The notes are written as half notes, with the fifth of each chord indicated by a vertical line and a dot.

Using this scale, you can start a bass line on any chord tone and play up or down, always placing chord tones on beats one and three:

D-7



The sound of D-7 will be the strongest if the bass plays the root “D” on beat 1. It is not necessary to play the root on beat 1 of every bar, but playing it every second bar, or at least every fourth bar will maintain the sound of D minor.

Chromatic passing tones can be used between other degrees of the scale, but they won’t line up chord tones on the strong beats in the same way. That doesn’t mean that they don’t sound great!

Paul Chambers plays the passing tone between the sixth and fifth a lot in his bass line:

D-7



These passing tones can work as well:

D-7



Using more than one passing tone opens up even more possibilities:

D-7



INTERVALLIC BASS LINES

SCALES IN VARIOUS INTERVALS

Using scales intervallically, as opposed to stepwise, can open up a world of new possibilities for your bass lines. Practice playing scales in thirds, fourths, fifths, sixths, sevenths, octaves, ninths, etc. Here are four ways you can practice them:

D Dorian in Thirds:

Four staves of music showing the D Dorian scale in thirds. Each staff starts with a double bar line and repeat signs. The notes are: D, F, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D.

D Dorian in Fourths:

Four staves of music showing the D Dorian scale in fourths. Each staff starts with a double bar line and repeat signs. The notes are: D, G, C, F, B, E, A, D, G, C, F, B, E, A, D, G, C, F, B, E, A, D.

Below are some more ideas for handling *Giant Steps*.

A chromatic bass line works over the progression:

BΔ D7 GΔ Bb7 EbΔ

GΔ BbΔ EbΔ F#Δ BΔ

REHARMONIZATION:

By using alternate chords, you can come up with different bass lines which will work over the original changes.

In this first example, all of the dominant chords are replaced with the related II-7 chord. Even if the rest of the group is playing the dominant chords, the bass line will still work:

BΔ A-7 GΔ F-7 EbΔ A-7

GΔ F-7 EbΔ C#-7 BΔ *etc.* F-7

EbΔ A-7 GΔ C#-7

BΔ F-7 EbΔ C#-7

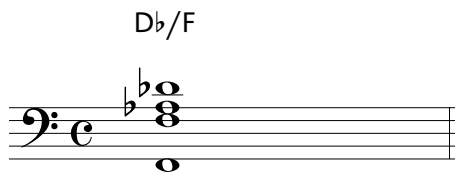
V/I

Depending on context, this could sound like FΔ9, or possibly F-Δ9. If it has been preceded by F minor tonality, it may be perceived as F-Δ9, but in most cases treat it the same way as you would an FΔ9.



♭VI/I

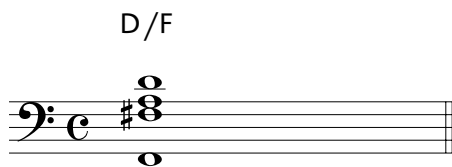
This is again a triad in inversion, although if it resolves down a fifth or half-step, it may be functioning as a F7alt chord. This is because it contains the alterations #5 and #9. If it is functioning that way, the bass line should stress the root, 3, #5 and ♭7, even



though they are not all technically present in the chord.

VI/I

Piano players and guitar players often voice chords with a triad over a “shell” voicing (root, third, seventh). A VI major triad over I is usually used as a dominant chord voicing – in this case F13(♭9). The bass line should therefore sound like it is outlining the



F13(♭9). Typically, an F Half/Whole Diminished scale would be the scale of choice for this chord. A problem arises with placing chord tones on strong beats, however. Look at the example below:



Practice each one of these separately at first. Then use this page as a template along with a recording (*Straight No Chaser*, from Miles Davis' *Milestones* album, for example), playing one or two choruses of each variation. Applying these to a blues is a good place to start. All the three-over-four rhythms repeat every three bars, so that they work out over a twelve bar form. Note that the five-over-four rhythms repeat every five bars.

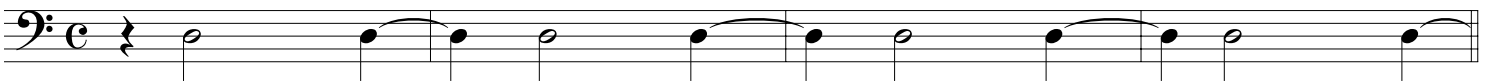
Example 1 – 6 Quarter Notes Over 4



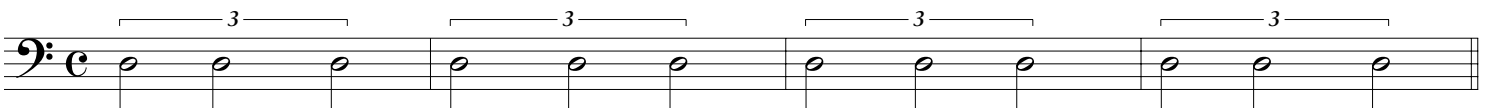
Example 2 – Syncopated Whole Notes



Example 3 – Syncopated Half Notes



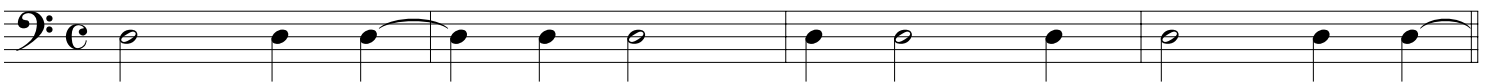
Example 4 – Half Note Triplets Over 4



Example 5 – 3 Quarter Notes Over 4



Example 6 – 3 Quarter Notes Over 4 With Added Note



Example 7 – Example 6 Reversed



BASS LINES IN LATIN MUSIC

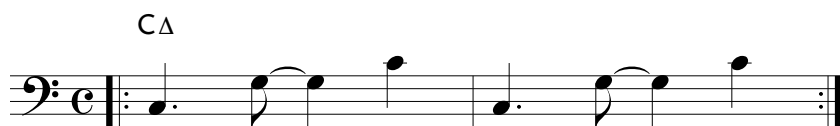
This is a very broad category, and to discuss it in detail would easily take several volumes. The influence of Afro-Cuban, Brazilian, and other Latin American music is wide ranging in jazz. Jazz musicians have been influenced by this great music, and Latin American musicians who play jazz bring elements of their traditions into the music. Tunes from composers such as Antonio Carlos Jobim have become part of the standard jazz repertoire.

The bass line is an integral part of most Latin American styles, such as Cha-cha-cha, Bolero, Mambo, Son Montuno, Salsa, Samba, Bossa Nova, and many others. As a jazz bassist, the study of these styles can greatly enrich your bass lines. Listen to as much Latin American music as possible! For a much more comprehensive look at bass lines in these idioms, the following books are invaluable: *Brazilian Music Workshop*, by Antonio Adolfo (Advance Music), *The Latin Bass Book*, by Oscar Stagnaro & Chuck Sher (Sher Music), and *The True Cuban Bass*, by Carlos Del Puerto and Silvio Vergara (Sher Music).

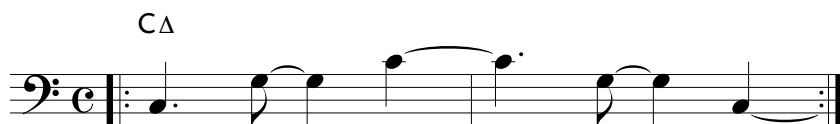
Here are a few ideas to get you started. Remember that the feel is based on straight eighths (even eighth notes), not swung eighths (triplet feel).

THE BASS TUMBAO

For playing afro-cuban styles, this is the essential bass pattern. It gets its name from the tumbadora drums (congas). The simplest tumbao pattern is this:



The syncopated version of this (the most common pattern now used) ties beat four to beat one, so that the bass does not play on beat one:



Here is an example of the bass tumbao applied to a jazz chord progression. Notice that the harmony is always anticipated:

F B \flat 7 E \emptyset A7 \flat 9 D-7 G7 C-7 F7 B \flat 7

One chord per bar, using root and fifth (thirds can be used as well):

F D7 G-7 C7

A single staff of music in bass clef, 2/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The notes are: F (quarter), G (quarter), A (quarter), Bb (quarter), C (half), D (quarter), E (quarter), F (quarter), G (quarter), A (quarter), Bb (quarter), C (half).

Here are some possible variations on the bass tumbao pattern for you to practice. More liberties can be taken when playing latin jazz than playing traditional styles, so make a point of listening to recordings or live performances of both styles.

F D7 G-7 C7 F D7 G-7 C7

A single staff of music in bass clef, 2/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The notes are: F (quarter), G (quarter), A (quarter), Bb (quarter), C (half), D (quarter), E (quarter), F (quarter), G (quarter), A (quarter), Bb (quarter), C (half).

F D7 G-7 C7 F D7 G-7 C7

A single staff of music in bass clef, 2/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The notes are: F (quarter), G (quarter), A (quarter), Bb (quarter), C (half), D (quarter), E (quarter), F (quarter), G (quarter), A (quarter), Bb (quarter), C (half).

F D7 G-7 C7 F D7 G-7 C7

A single staff of music in bass clef, 2/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The notes are: F (quarter), G (quarter), A (quarter), Bb (quarter), C (half), D (quarter), E (quarter), F (quarter), G (quarter), A (quarter), Bb (quarter), C (half).

Brazilian music has been heavily influential on jazz, especially since the 1960s. Familiarity with Bossa Nova and Samba is a requirement for any jazz bassist today. Here are some samba patterns to get you started:

CΔ CΔ

A single staff of music in bass clef, 2/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The notes are: F (quarter), G (quarter), A (quarter), Bb (quarter), C (half), D (quarter), E (quarter), F (quarter), G (quarter), A (quarter), Bb (quarter), C (half).

CΔ CΔ

A single staff of music in bass clef, 2/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The notes are: F (quarter), G (quarter), A (quarter), Bb (quarter), C (half), D (quarter), E (quarter), F (quarter), G (quarter), A (quarter), Bb (quarter), C (half).

CΔ CΔ

A single staff of music in bass clef, 2/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The notes are: F (quarter), G (quarter), A (quarter), Bb (quarter), C (half), D (quarter), E (quarter), F (quarter), G (quarter), A (quarter), Bb (quarter), C (half).

CΔ CΔ

A single staff of music in bass clef, 2/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The notes are: F (quarter), G (quarter), A (quarter), Bb (quarter), C (half), D (quarter), E (quarter), F (quarter), G (quarter), A (quarter), Bb (quarter), C (half).

4) OUTLINE THE TRIADS

Play the triads (in or out of time) in root position and all inversions:

A) Root Position

C Δ F-7 B \flat 7

B) First Inversion

C Δ F-7 B \flat 7

C) Second Inversion

C Δ F-7 B \flat 7

5) OUTLINE THE SEVENTH CHORDS

Play the seventh chords (in or out of time) in root position and all inversions:

A) Root Position

C Δ F-7 B \flat 7

B) First Inversion

C Δ F-7 B \flat 7

B) Appoggiaturas

C Δ F-7 B \flat 7 C Δ A7

C) Neighbor Tones

C Δ F-7 B \flat 7 C Δ A7

9) COMBINE 6), 7) AND 8)

Combine 6), 7) and 8) to create walking lines (try two at a time, etc.):

C Δ F-7 B \flat 7 C Δ A7

chordal *scalar (p.t.)* *appog.* *c.a.t.* *n.t.*

10) CREATE LINES USING SEQUENCES OR MOTIVES

Invent your own phrases using these melodic devices:

A) Sequences

C Δ F-7 B \flat 7 C Δ A7

B) Motive (Half-Step Motive)

C Δ F-7 B \flat 7 C Δ A7

11) MANIPULATE THE HARMONY

A) Tritone Substitution (Dominant Chords)

C Δ F-7 B \flat 7 C Δ E \flat 7

B) Added or Subtracted II-7

C Δ B \flat 7 C Δ E-7 A7

C) Secondary Dominants

C Δ C7 F-7 B \flat 7 C Δ B \flat 7 A7

D) Pedals

C Δ F-7/B \flat B \flat 7 C Δ A7

12) USE DIFFERENT RHYTHMS AND RHYTHMIC DEVICES

A) Various

C Δ F-7 B \flat 7 C Δ A7

pull off *ghost note* *syncopation/anticipation* *skip beat* *drop*