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# INTRODUCTION

Since 1940, when Jimmy Blanton was the featured bassist with the Duke Ellington Orchestra, the role of the bassist in jazz music has expanded and gone through several stylistic changes just as the music itself has changed. With the advent of improved technique, better instrumental instruction, and amplification and equipment innovations, the bassist is now exercising ever-increasing musical range. No longer relegated to merely accompanying others, the bassist can now be a featured soloist on an equal level with other soloists.

On the surface, these developments would seem to have nothing but positive effects. However, this may not be the case. Despite the changes in the music and the level of playing, the role of the bassist in jazz or any other kind of music is still primarily one of accompaniment, or, in other words, the foundation. There are indeed many virtuosic bassists in jazz today, but it seems there is also a growing perception that when a bassist is needed to "lay it down" or provide strong support, the field of qualified individuals is limited.

Therefore, it may be more important than ever to understand the intricacies and subtleties of accompaniment for today's jazz bassist (or composer, arranger, and keyboardist/synthesist for that matter). In most situations, the common point of departure for bassists is the spontaneous creation of the so-called "walking" bass line. It provides a simultaneous harmonic and rhythmic continuum which the rest of the group interacts with.

It is the purpose of this book to provide the first comprehensive and exhaustive study of bass line construction. Included in the study will be basic harmonic principles, chord/scale relationships, rhythmic embellishment, meters and tempos, musical styles (i.e. swing, latin, ballads, etc.), special situations (modal tunes, polyharmony, etc.), and so on. Each application shall be discussed from the beginning level to the advanced professional level.

The author sincerely hopes that by providing this information, he will not only enable the level of accompaniment to improve, but also effect a positive contribution to all jazz musicians who perform at every level. Remember, the purpose of mastering the art of accompaniment is not only to improve individually as bassists, but to be able to play whatever is required by the music of the moment. With this in mind, the whole shall always be greater than the sum of its parts.

## CHAPTER 1: BASIC NOMENCLATURE

Before one begins any jazz-related studies, it must be a certainty that he is thoroughly operative when it comes to nomenclature as well as knowing what jazz music sounds like. This chapter shall deal briefly with basic chord/scale relationships that are necessary for understanding how to spontaneously construct bass lines. Since this is not a jazz theory book, only a summary overview is provided. If you feel especially deficient in this area (don't worry, we were all beginners at one time!!!), may I recommend first consulting any of the following excellent books: [The Jazz Language](#) by Dan Haerle; [A Complete Method for Jazz Improvisation](#) by Jerry Coker; and [Scale Syllabus](#) available free from Jamey Aebersold. If you are already fluent in jazz nomenclature, you may want to use the following as review material or simply go on to the next chapter.

Notice in Figure 1 that there is more than one chord symbol listed for each individual chord. This is simply due to the fact that chord symbols have never been standardized and their use is according to personal preferences. Just be aware that there is more than one way to denote a single chord.

For our purposes, we shall outline basic chord categories initially. Various types of altered chords shall be covered in subsequent chapters.

# CHAPTER 4: HOW TO PRACTICE

A better name for this chapter might have been "What To Practice," since "How To Practice" implies that there is only one way to practice. Of course, there are several ways to practice but it is fascinating how many music students never develop a practice regimen or routine. Many students spend much more time contemplating practice than actually getting something substantive accomplished. Others practice in such a disorganized and haphazard way that they never really gain firm comprehension and thus become very illogical, careless players. Insofar as the study of bass line construction is concerned, the following chapters of this book should at least provide you with enough individual topics worthy of attention. If this is true, one need only organize his time and work deliberately, with steady concentration. The quality of the practice session is much more important than the quantity of time spent.

The review questions at the end of this chapter will take the form of a sample diagram of a practice session. The following conditions will be assumed:

1. The practice shall occur at your most effective time of day, each day, if possible. For many people, the first thing in the morning is good for many reasons.
2. Do not allow yourself to be distracted in any way (i.e. telephone, family members, television, other daily menial tasks, etc.). You deserve at least two hours a day for yourself!
3. Have everything in the room that you will need for your practice session. This might include your instrument (!!!), a music stand, metronome, pencils and manuscript paper, record player, music books, etc.

## CHAPTER 4: REVIEW EXERCISES

The following practice session model will make use of this book, but any other topics could also be substituted. Now, imagine you have just closed the door to your practice room and are ready to begin your two-hour session.

1. First 30 minutes: Use this as a time to warm-up and get the concentration and creative juices flowing. Work primarily on scales, arpeggios, and intonation. Rereading Chapter 1 and doing the review exercises at the end of the chapter are ideal for this 30-minute segment. Listen to what you are playing!
2. Second 30 minutes: Reread Chapter 2 and perform the review exercises at the end of the chapter. Stay only on this subject for this 30-minute segment. You are striving to perfect these principles.
3. Third 30 minutes: Same as #2 but substitute Chapter 3.
4. Final 30 minutes: Apply the principles you have covered above to a tune or tunes that you want to add to your repertoire.
5. Follow this same routine for a few days or a week until you have made a noticeable improvement in your level of proficiency. Once you are satisfied, revise your routine by substituting other chapters (in book order) into your 30-minute slots.

You should find that you make steady progress when you are so focused and you practice and concentrate on just one topic at a time. This type of practice requires patience and long-range vision. Remember the tortoise and the hare? Slow and steady wins the race!

## CHAPTER 8: REVIEW EXERCISES

For the following exercises, please refer to the chart in Figure 19.

1. Take any major, dominant, or minor seventh chord and slowly play through all 24 inversions. You may either play vertically down each of the columns or horizontally across each line from left to right (see Figure 19). **IMPORTANT!!:** Make sure you are using the right thirds and sevenths for the chord type you are playing. Remember to *listen carefully* to the sound of each chord you play. If you hear a note that doesn't seem to fit the sound, it probably doesn't! When you play a "bad" note, you want your ear to be so sharp that it retaliates and doesn't accept what it knows is "wrong."
2. Now try applying different cycles to the chart in Figure 19 so you can practice changing chord types. Some possibilities are diagrammed below:

### VERTICALLY

D-7)	1	b3	5	b7
G7)	1	3	b7	5
G-7)	1	5	b3	b7
C7)	1	5	b7	3
C-7)	1	b7	b3	5
F7)	1	b7	5	3
F-7)	b3	1	5	b7
Bb7)	3	1	b7	5 etc.

OR

### HORIZONTALLY

D-7)	1	b3	5	b7
G7)	3	1	5	b7
G-7)	5	1	b3	b7
C7)	b7	1	3	5
C-7)	1	b3	b7	5
F7)	3	1	b7	5
F-7)	5	1	b7	b3
Bb7)	b7	1	5	3 etc.

3. Also try applying some other common cycles to the chart, such as: || D-7 | G7 | C-7 | F7 | Bb-7 | Eb7 | Ab-7 | Db7 || etc. (key circle). OR: | D-7 | G7 | CΔ | CΔ | C-7 | F7 | BbΔ | BbΔ | Bb-7 | Eb7 | AbΔ | AbΔ | Ab-7 | Db7 | GbΔ | GbΔ || etc. This will cover II-V-I's in six keys; you will also have to start this sequence on Db-7 in order to cover the six remaining keys!

**A FINAL NOTE:** Please remember to be patient and work slowly on these exercises. Chances are good that they will take your ears and fingers to places that they have never been before. Be assured that the effort will be rewarded by your being able to construct much more interesting and melodic bass lines that will be uniquely your own! After all, that's what playing jazz is all about!!!

## CHAPTER 9: PLAYING THE "SOUND"

Playing the "sound" of the chords in a tune is a subject that was touched upon briefly in Chapter 8 and is worthy of some elaboration. All chords that one will encounter in jazz possess a singular sound not to be confused with any other sound. As we learned in Chapter 7, playing the proper thirds and sevenths have a great deal to do with accurate transmission of chord sounds. However, being able to identify chord types by their sound and construct a bass line that precisely represents that sound is an art which requires a highly developed ear. Therefore, ear training should be considered part of anyone's desire to create better bass lines.

FIGURE 34

Three musical staves, labeled 1, 2, and 3, each showing a bass line exercise in 4/4 time. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb).  
 Staff 1: Labeled with chords Dø, G7b9, and C-. The bass line starts on D2, moves to Eb3, then G3, Ab3, Bb3, C4, D4, Eb4, F4, G4, Ab4, Bb4, C5. It ends with "ETC."  
 Staff 2: Labeled with chords Dø, G7b9, and C-. The bass line starts on D2, moves to Eb3, then G3, Ab3, Bb3, C4, D4, Eb4, F4, G4, Ab4, Bb4, C5. It ends with "ETC."  
 Staff 3: Labeled with chords Dø, G7b9, and C-. The bass line starts on D2, moves to Eb3, then G3, Ab3, Bb3, C4, D4, Eb4, F4, G4, Ab4, Bb4, C5. It ends with "ETC."

In each case the b5 is sounded and therefore identifies this as a ø sound.

The diminished chord is another special needs chord. It would be represented in C by the chord symbol C°. The common usage chord/scale for this sound is the diminished scale which begins with a whole step. Figure 35 illustrates the C° scale.

FIGURE 35

A single musical staff in bass clef, 4/4 time, showing the C° diminished scale. The notes are: C4, D4, Eb4, E4, F4, G4, Ab4, Bb4, C5. The staff is labeled with C° at the beginning.

The diminished scale is unlike most scales in that it contains eight pitches instead of seven. Figure 36 illustrates some of the possibilities for using the diminished scale in a bass line.

FIGURE 36

Five musical staves, labeled 1 through 5, showing different applications of the diminished scale in a bass line. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb).  
 Staff 1: Labeled with chords CΔ, C#°, and D-. The bass line starts on C4, moves to D4, Eb4, E4, F4, G4, Ab4, Bb4, C5. It ends with "ETC."  
 Staff 2: Labeled with chords CΔ, C#°, and D-. The bass line starts on C4, moves to D4, Eb4, E4, F4, G4, Ab4, Bb4, C5. It ends with "ETC."  
 Staff 3: Labeled with chords CΔ, C#°, and D-. The bass line starts on C4, moves to D4, Eb4, E4, F4, G4, Ab4, Bb4, C5. It ends with "ETC."  
 Staff 4: Labeled with chords CΔ, C#°, and D-. The bass line starts on C4, moves to D4, Eb4, E4, F4, G4, Ab4, Bb4, C5. It ends with "ETC."  
 Staff 5: Labeled with chords CΔ, C#°, and D-. The bass line starts on C4, moves to D4, Eb4, E4, F4, G4, Ab4, Bb4, C5. It ends with "ETC."

# CHAPTER 16: REVIEW EXERCISES

1. Walk the following scalar type pattern through all of the cycles listed in this chapter: 1-2-3- 1/2 step leading tone; 1-2-3- 1/2 step leading tone, etc. (see Figure 41).

**FIGURE 41**

Figure 41 shows two staves of music in 4/4 time. The first staff contains a scalar pattern for four chords: D-, G7, E-, and A7. The notes are: D- (D, F#, A), G7 (G, B, D, F), E- (E, G, B), and A7 (A, C#, E, G). The second staff contains a scalar pattern for four chords: F#-, B7, Ab-, and ETC. The notes are: F#- (F#, A, C), B7 (B, D, F, A), Ab- (Ab, Cb, Eb, Gb), and ETC. (E, G, B, D).

Note! Be especially careful to always use the appropriate thirds and sevenths. These are crucial to creating the unique sound of each chord.

2. Same as #1 but in the opposite direction (ie. 1-7-6- 1/2 step leading tone). (See Figure 42).

**FIGURE 42**

Figure 42 shows a single staff of music in 4/4 time with a descending scalar pattern for five chords: D-, G7, E-, A7, and F#-. The notes are: D- (D, F#, A), G7 (G, B, D, F), E- (E, G, B), A7 (A, C#, E, G), and F#- (F#, A, C).

3. Next, walk a chordal pattern that arpeggiates the chord from the root and upward (1-3-5-7). (See Figure 43).

**FIGURE 43**

Figure 43 shows a single staff of music in 4/4 time with an upward arpeggiated chordal pattern for four chords: D-, G7, E-, and A7. The notes are: D- (D, F#, A), G7 (G, B, D, F), E- (E, G, B), and A7 (A, C#, E, G).

4. Same as #3, but from the root and downward (1-7-5-3). (See Figure 44).

**FIGURE 44**

Figure 44 shows a single staff of music in 4/4 time with a downward arpeggiated chordal pattern for four chords: D-, G7, E-, and A7. The notes are: D- (D, F#, A), G7 (G, B, D, F), E- (E, G, B), and A7 (A, C#, E, G).