

Preface

A hearty welcome to you whether you're new to the bass player's guild or whether you've already got well developed callouses on the tips of your fingers. I'm glad you've decided to play bass. You made the right decision. The bass emerged from the shadows of its "oom-pah, oom-pah-one-and-three" existence long ago and has become a powerful and important instrument. The bass callisthenics of such players as Jack Bruce, Jaco Pastorius, Mark King or Billy Sheehan, which you most certainly have in your ear, impressively verify this fact. Even the "synth-sampler-computer" bass is slowly but surely becoming a thing of the past. Real and live bass playing is back in vogue.

The demands on bass players have increased enormously over the years. Today a good bass player must be able to play in a wide variety of styles. He or she has to be able to solo as well as be able to provide a solid groove and the necessary harmonic foundation of a song. A comprehensive knowledge of music theory is not only helpful, but also gives the bass player the possibility of branching out into composing, arranging and producing. Solid bass playing skills and the ability to read music well help the creative bass player to become a much sought-after sideman and/or an in demand studio musician.

I've tried to incorporate all these aspects of bass playing into this method book. It's designed to help you along the path of becoming a better bass player. It doesn't matter whether you are a beginner and self-taught player who's only played within the comfort of his or her own home or whether you are an instrumentalist with band experience who may be presently taking or had some bass lessons already.

In the first part of this book I'll get you acquainted with the bass, give you a few tips on practicing and a few hints about technique. The second part is the most important section on the way to mastering the bass. Here you'll learn to feel "at home" on the bass. Learning to play in different positions will help you to do just that. The advantage of being able to do this is that, as you gradually move from position to position (from the open strings to the final fret), you'll get to know and have command of each and every note on the bass, from the very lowest to the very highest. You should always play through the position diagrams found at the beginning of each chapter as an additional exercise. "Dead notes" are important when it comes to precise rhythmical playing on the bass. These are normally left unmentioned in conventional bass method books or discussed only in connection with slap bass technique. I will familiarize you with this special method of picking and muting from the very beginning. The "dead notes" will be your constant companion in this volume.

At the same time you'll find out a lot about music theory so that you can become accomplished at reading music. In this course I'll also introduce you to the various playing techniques which are indispensable for the modern bass player. The first exercises also include tablature notation. This will gently introduce you to traditional music notation, but only at the beginning. In addition, you can use the "Fret and Notation Table" that can be found in the Appendix.

There you'll find the respective names of the notes and their corresponding positions on the fingerboard. If it makes you feel more secure, just play an exercise that's on the CD by ear and compare it to the notation. This way you can train your ear as well. A good musician should be able to both read music and play by ear. As an extra treat in Part II, I've included an introduction to fretless bass playing which is another indispensable technique of the accomplished bass player. In fretless playing, the double bass fingerings that I chose to use in this book from the beginning will turn out to be a big help. I consciously chose to use these fingerings (up to XII. Position) as opposed to guitar fingerings because in this range, the bass is tonally and functionally closer to an upright double bass than to a guitar (see p. 14).

In Part III, "Styles", we'll begin to use all the positions and techniques you learned about in Part II. In the single chapters discussing the individual positions in Part II you'll find references to exercises in Part III that you can practice supplementarily. This doesn't mean, however, that the exercises in Part II are purely theoretical in nature. Taken on their own accord, they are just as practically oriented and suitable for live performance as the stylistic examples. Part III serves to do justice to the stylistic variety of contemporary bass playing.

Although dynamics (the theory behind different levels of volume) are an important element of music, I decided not to use them in the musical examples. First, they only play a subordinate role in rock and pop music. Secondly, dynamic markings originate from classical music theory and finally, in consideration of the amount of markings already present (stroke direction, accents, harmonic symbols, position indications and fingerings), additional dynamic markings would be just too confusing. Just practice all (!) the exercises at several different dynamic levels. That way you'll have even more musically expressive possibilities at your disposal. The CD that accompanies this book is more than a helpful point of reference when it comes to this.

Part IV, "Equipment Tips", will offer fundamental suggestions for the selection and care of your equipment and information on five and six string basses. Nonetheless, you should never forget: your bass sound is made first and foremost with your fingers.

In addition to the "Fret and Notation Table" I've already mentioned, you'll also find Scale and Chord Tables as well as a list of the special symbols used in this book in the Appendix.

Before you begin, here's an important message: creativity is a substantial element of our music. In working with this book, your creativity is expressly desired. Use your own musical imagination and alter the exercises as you see fit. Remember, though: it's better to leave out a few notes in the right place than play too many in the wrong spot. Of course you should take your level of technical ability into consideration. It's better to play something simple and with more command of the instrument so that it's convincing and more secure. "Artistic" yet tensely played mega-licks, performed poorly, lead nowhere and therefore are not desired. And in this spirit: let your fingertips catch on fire!

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Even these two articulations have their own specific sound. Even more sounds are possible depending on exactly where you strike the strings on the bass. The same string will always sound different when played at the neck, in the middle (between the neck and the bridge) or at the bridge. Try it out. You can basically use both of these articulation techniques (pizzicato and spectrum) in almost all styles of music. If you find that one that you like more than the other, then of course it's possible that you specialize in this one. You should learn both, though. In later chapters I'll introduce you to other articulation techniques (for example "Slap Bass", see p. 71, "Concert Guitar-Finger Picking", see p. 94, and "Tapping", see p. 101).

The Left Hand – Fingering

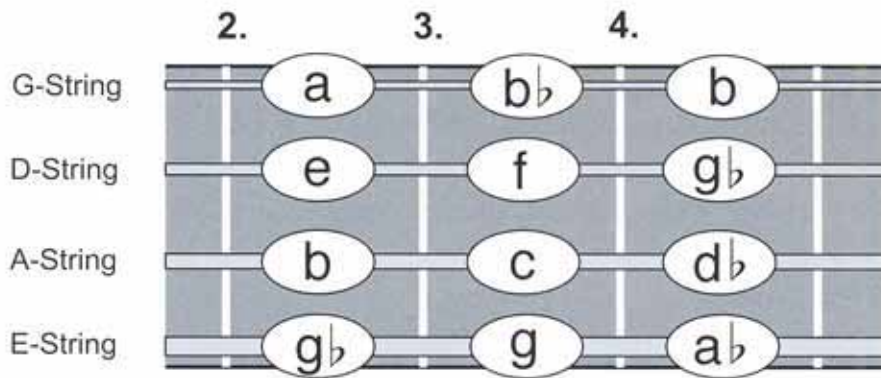
While the right hand (the playing hand) is "only" responsible for the rhythm (except when tapping), the left hand (the fingering hand) has multiple roles. It determines the pitch and the length of the notes, the articulation (the connection or separation of individual notes in music) and the rhythm. Therefore it's important that you develop good left hand posture from the very beginning.

Regarding the question of fingering on the bass, there are several different schools of thought. In general we differentiate between guitar fingering and double bass fingering. Up to the XII. Position we will solely use double bass fingerings. As the name implies, our instrument is a combination of bass and guitar. Despite this fact, it's my opinion that the bass guitar's sound and technical function in music are more closely related to the double bass than to the guitar and should therefore be played as such. Double bass fingering is also better suited for the clean fingering of the thicker bass strings as it's proven to be more versatile and is thus less strenuous. At the latest, this will become very clear to you when you want to play the low B-string (see p. 136) at the 4th fret on a five string bass with just the little finger of your left hand. Playing a fretless bass (that's right, a bass with no frets, see p. 106) will be a lot easier when using double bass fingerings. In addition, bassists with somewhat shorter fingers will be able to deal with the larger scale length of the bass (see p. 6) better when using double bass fingerings.

Double Bass Fingering

Slightly bend the first (index) finger of your left hand and place it right next to the first fret of any string and place your second (middle) finger next to the next fret. The third (ring) finger assists your fourth finger up to XII. Position. Place them together between the third and fourth frets. Your thumb acts as a counterbalance to the other four fingers and rests relaxed (not cramped) approximately underneath the middle finger on the backside of the neck of the bass. You should maintain this thumb position also when the other fingers are not pressing down on any frets at all. It will be of service when you're playing fast bass passages. Don't worry if your thumb should momentarily

II. Position



I. Position

II. Position

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Rock Bass Samples

G-String: \flat a, a, \flat b, a, \flat b, b

D-String: \flat e, e, f, e, f, g \flat

A-String: \flat b, b, c, b, c, d \flat

E-String: f, g \flat , g, g \flat , g, a \flat

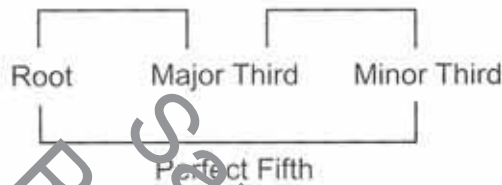
Five Tone Row starting from "a"
 Accidentals (\flat)
 Enharmonic Equivalents
 Chromatic Scale
 Staccato (also with Dead Notes)
 Legato

Playing in II. Position
 Changing Positions

Chords

When three or more notes of differing pitches sound at the same time, this is called a chord. The simplest chord is the triad which, as a rule, is made up of two thirds stacked on top of each other (one exception: the suspended chord). There are different types of triads:

The Major Triad



C Major Triad

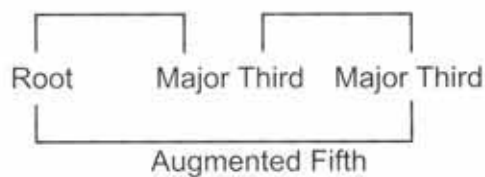
In the following exercises you'll be playing broken chords (arpeggios) as they appear in many bass lines. This means that you'll play the individual chord tones, one after the other. Practice these arpeggios in other keys as well. Later I'll explain how you can play more than one note at one time (see p. 77).

42



6.3 00:48

The Augmented Triad



C⁵⁺

97



15.4 01:01

Tapping

Each playing technique, whether it be plucking with your fingers, playing with a pick, slapping or concert guitar-finger picking, has its own appeal and particular musical application. Each technique demands (see also: "The Right Hand", p. 12) its own practice regimen and each virtually deserves its own method book.

This is especially true of the tapping technique as this special form of bass playing is very complicated. What follows will serve to merely introduce you to tapping and then you can decide whether its worth it for you to delve deeper into this very special technique. To have a real command of it will take you a long time.

Tapping is especially suitable for solos and also for fast bass runs with large interval jumps. In the true sense of the word, tapping is a "striking" technique in which, similar to the hammer-on technique, you tap the strings onto the frets with both your left and right hands so that the desired notes sound. It's basically fingering (left hand) and striking (right hand) the strings rolled into one. The advantage is obvious: with tapping you can play more things simultaneously. With the right hand, for example, you can play a melody while the left hand plays a bass figure or you can play a bass line with the left hand and the accompanying chords with your right.

Basic Groove in the Style of Earth, Wind & Fire

136



20.1 00:00

Dm⁷

Exercise 136 consists of two staves of bass notation in 4/4 time. The first staff begins with a Dm⁷ chord. The notation includes quarter notes, eighth notes, and sixteenth notes, with some notes marked with an 'x' to indicate muting. The second staff continues the groove with similar rhythmic patterns.

Basic Groove in the Style of Tower of Power

137



20.2 00:15

G

Exercise 137 consists of two staves of bass notation in 4/4 time. The first staff begins with a G chord. The notation includes quarter notes, eighth notes, and sixteenth notes, with some notes marked with an 'x' to indicate muting. The second staff continues the groove with similar rhythmic patterns.

The next bass line is a typical "Motown" figure:

Motown Groove in the Style of Diana Ross

138



20.3 00:30

E_bFm⁷Gm⁷

Exercise 138 consists of two staves of bass notation in 4/4 time. The first staff begins with an E_b chord, followed by Fm⁷ and Gm⁷. The notation includes quarter notes, eighth notes, and sixteenth notes, with some notes marked with an 'x' to indicate muting. The second staff continues the groove with similar rhythmic patterns.

Don't be afraid of all the "black spots" on the page in the next exercise. It's not as fast as you think.