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Bass Bible
 Samples

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■ Introduction

The main role of the bass guitar is to provide a musical foundation for the rhythm section, and together with the drums in particular, to play an interesting groove which drives the band along. In order to keep the audience involved, the bass line must often be fairly varied.

Consequently, whether you use a walking bass line, riffs, improvisation, or even a simple pattern, the fundamental purpose of the bass guitar is to play more or less repetitive phrases, solidly and with a good sense of time.

Learning an instrument can be like learning a language. The first step is usually to become familiar with short phrases aurally. You then learn to speak these as accurately as possible. As you learn more phrases, your vocabulary becomes increasingly varied and sophisticated. Reading usually comes later. Enthusiasm can be dulled by getting bogged down by too much theory too early. This book is designed like a dictionary of musical phrases, which can be opened at the point that interests you. Therefore, in putting this book together, I have worked on the premise that if you learn a whole series of musical phrases, riffs, rhythms and patterns, it provides the basic language to be able to perform within a group. I have avoided excessively repetitive exercises because they can be boring, and practising being bored is dangerous if you are learning to entertain people. There are more interesting and practical phrases which will keep your attention and be of use in providing a good, solid, fluent technique.

Once you have absorbed a whole series of phrases in a certain style, alternatives will then come to mind. This is where it becomes really fascinating. Only after experiencing many alternatives can you invent your own original ideas. Convincing improvisation follows on from learning sufficient, basic phrases. What I have tried to do with each section is to capture the essence of what the style is about. It is by no means complete or definitive. It is merely the beginning, or a springboard from which to start.

In many cases I have included the ideas which got me interested in the first place. They may be simple or complex, but they all work, and have each formed the basis of a whole new series of my own ideas.

The book can be used in various ways. If you are interested in slap bass playing, open the book at that point. You will find beginners' phrases and more advanced ones. You will also find that many slap ideas are based on old boogie lines, which are to be found in the chapter before. Studying walking bass lines will lead you to examine certain scales and arpeggios which are related. In this way you can explore your own interests and expand your own horizons.

Many bass players play by ear and do not read, so with them in mind, I have recorded the CDs which accompany this book. Even so, I suggest that non-readers do look at the appropriate phrase they are listening to, as eventually they will learn to recognise it. We read by pattern recognition. For instance, we do not read the individual letters of a word, but the group of letters as a whole.

Manuscript is a useful way of storing ideas. When you learn to read, you have access to a whole new world of music, information and experiences which the non-reader does not share. It is all about enthusiasm and effort.

Finally, I must explain that I did not set out to write a book at all. It evolved as a way of helping my pupils, whom I discovered were desperately short of ideas and ways of expressing themselves musically. Each pupil has his own set of problems. Only when I had amassed a pile of musical examples did I realise that I had actually developed a system which could help others too. My aim was therefore to provide each student with a sort of armoury of phrases; an arsenal of musical weapons.

In this fashion, you can be prepared for most eventualities. Your vocabulary will be expanded enough so that you are able to express yourself better in the language of music.

P.S. The publishers have at times used a new and modified version of music notation. I am reliably informed that it is widely used and makes reading easier in certain circumstances.

■ Techniques

Finger Style

The left hand should be able to grip the guitar neck firmly. Place each of the four fingers between consecutive frets, producing a stretch of four semitones. To produce the maximum grip, the thumb is best placed opposite the second finger, on the rounded side of the neck. There are exceptions, but this is a good starting position for getting into good habits early on. Bad habits start, for instance, when you play a scale of G with the thumb under the first finger. You will find it difficult to stretch the little finger (4th).

The right hand position is based on the pizzicato, double-bass style of plucking with the first and second fingers. For a straight 8th note pattern, it is often better to use just the first finger to produce a steady, strong, even-sounding feel. Using two fingers can sometimes sound uneven. It is an advantage to be able to play as evenly as possible with two fingers, because you do not want a great difference between the volume and tone produced by each finger.

The most natural way for the arms to be positioned is for the elbow to be bent at 90°. You will find that tighter angles make your muscles work harder and you become more easily tired. Greater angles can result in loss of control, as the guitar is further away from your body and not gripped to prevent it swinging out of control. The right hand thumb can rest on a pick-up, using it as a pivot. The thumb can also be placed on the fourth string (E), and even moved across to the third string (A) for greater control and precision.

Soft/Hard Playing

To provide a laid back feel, it is not always necessary to underplay. Nor is it always necessary to overplay for a hard driving feel. It is a question of where the note is placed in relation to the beat which determines the feel. If you play slightly late, it will be laid back and lazy. If you play on top of the beat (or even early), the feel will be driving. You can play with heavy or light dynamics, or somewhere between the two. A driving rhythm can be intense when played more quietly, and more aggressive when played louder. Laid-back feels can be firm or gentle. It all depends on the mood of the song, and the intensity of the music around you.

Tone

Part of the art of bass playing is to have the right tone. A bright tone can be useful for a more exposed, harder sound. It can be used for solo or lead lines, for greater clarity or for a driving effect.

A bassier tone can be effective in other ways. In the same way that a double bass often provides a subtle pulse, the bass guitar can have a similar role. The sound comes out "beneath" the band, where it is not in competition with harder, higher sounding instruments. The right tone can make a band swing; the wrong one can destroy the feel.

Common 12 bar Blues sequences:

| C | ♯ | ♯ | C⁷ | F | ♯ | C | ♯ | G⁷ | F | C | G⁷ ||
 | C | F | C | C⁷ | F | ♯ | C | A⁷ | Dm⁷ | G⁷ | C | CG⁷ ||

12/8 Blues and R & B (Shuffle Feel)

slow C⁷ **122**

medium C⁷ **123**
CD 1 Track 1

slow C⁷ **124**
CD 1 Track 1

medium C⁷ **125**

slow C⁷ **126**
CD 1 Track 2

Latin Styles

Cha Cha 1.

medium CG⁷

349

Cha Cha 2.

medium CG⁷

350

Cha Cha 3.

medium CG⁷

351

Cha Cha 4.

medium CG⁷

352

Cha Cha 5.

medium CG⁷

353

Cha Cha 6.

medium CG⁷

354

North Africa & The Middle East ■

The Arabic style of music is not as forceful as the African drum dominated variety. As the acoustic instruments which play the tune and accompaniment are relatively quiet, the percussion is played much more subtly. Bass guitars were, unfortunately, not in vogue during the evolution of Middle Eastern and Turkish music, but I have adapted some lines which are close to authentic drum patterns, and also ones which follow lines played by other instruments having a similar role to the bass.

medium Am

694

medium

695

medium Bb

696

medium Am

697

CD1
Track 85

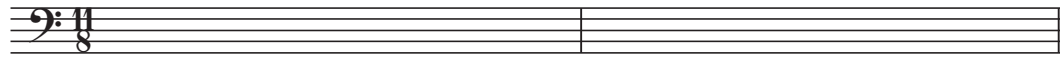
medium Am

698

CD1
Track 85

Fretless Bass Solos

open key Gmaj7
medium ad lib.



922

CD 2
Track 41

8va

Gmaj7 G⁶ A/G D/G

T 11 12-14 16 18-19 14 14-18-19 14

A

B

Dm⁹ F/D Fmaj7 F⁶(9)

T 12 14-16 14 12 14 12 14

A

B

B^b F/B^b A^{sus4} A

T 15 15-14-12 14 15-12 15-13 12 12

A

B

Fine