

## PERFORMANCE 1

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# BASS PERFORMANCE 1

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Welcome to the Musicians Institute Bass Performance course. Over the duration of this course we will uncover the technical and conceptual aspects of bass performance, whether in the practice room, on the stage, or in the studio. The curriculum will analyze bass performance in successive gradations, from very simple applications to the more nuanced approach of the professional performing bassist.

The very act of performing infers a direct communication of the player's intent, in this case from the player, through the bass, to the listener. The success of this pursuit demands a marked sense of control over the instrument technically and, as progress is made, musically. The course will cover such basic ideas as: the function of the parts of the instrument and how to control them, how to interface these parts with an amplifier, how to obtain a workable sound out of the bass guitar, and how to then integrate that sound and your newly discovered control with other musicians, primarily the drummer, as the function of a rhythm section is paramount in any situation. Rhythm, melodic and harmonic theory, technique, and approaches to soloing will also be analyzed.

The material will be covered in ten units of evolving complexity, accompanied with visual examples, be they graphics and/or musical examples. There will be no tablature presented, as an administrative decision has been made to adhere to the tradition of clefs, notes and staves—this being a universal language with a very long historical precedent.

Are you ready? Let's begin!

There are five things you must have with you each time you come to class:

1. Your bass.
2. A strap.
3. A cable of at least 10 feet in length (3 meters).
4. A tuner.
5. Your curriculum.

Tune your bass before you get on stage, and adjust the tuning frequently (and silently, with a tuner) while you're on stage. Changes in temperature as well as constant playing WILL affect the tuning. It is very important that you be in tune at all times.

All stage noise should be kept to a minimum. It is discourteous and unprofessional to make unnecessary noise while on stage.

The volume on your bass AND on the amplifier should be off (or on zero) BEFORE you plug in and/or turn on the amplifier. Below is an image of typical knobs on the bass.

Always listen to the other performer(s) and to the instructor. Listening is one of the main skills in becoming a professional bass player. Always be supportive of your fellow bassists and bandmates. Having a positive attitude and good "people skills" will go a long way in facilitating your career as a professional bassist.

Ex. 1.1



## Chapter 2: Getting a Good Sound

Getting a good sound is a somewhat subjective pursuit, but we'll start with the basic description of signal flow from the bass to the amplifier, and an understanding of the various controls that most basses and amplifiers have. A fundamental description of the signal flow is as follows:

**BASS TO AMP (OR TUNER PEDAL) >**  
**AMP > INPUT/GAIN > (FREQUENCIES) > LOW > MID > HIGH > MASTER**  
**VOLUME > SPEAKER > OUT**

The "input/gain" knob (Ex.1.2) controls the amount of signal being sent to the amplifier. If the gain knob is too low and the volume knob is too high, this may result in overdriving or distortion at the output stage. You may also have a "passive/active" switch (Ex. 1.3) on the amp. If you have a bass with an active preamp you'll want to keep the switch in the "active" position. This will insure that the correct amount of signal is being sent from the bass to the amplifier, as active basses have pickups with higher output. Conversely, if you have a "passive" bass, you should keep the switch in the passive mode. You may also notice a "peak" light (Ex. 1.4) on some amplifiers. This will light up when too much signal is being sent into the amp and indicates that the signal is distorting or "clipping." To insure the right amount of input signal, adjust the gain and/or volume knobs on the amp so that the peak/clipping light doesn't illuminate. This usually happens when the gain knob is set higher than the volume knob (presuming your amp has both). When this is set correctly, just use your volume knob to control the volume level.

Ex. 1.2

Ex. 1.3

Ex. 1.4



### EQUALIZATION or EQ

These knobs (Ex. 1.5) help you control the "color" of your sound by discreetly adding or subtracting preset frequencies from the low to high range of the bass guitar's tonal spectrum. Frequencies are the rate at which a vibration occurs to create a sound wave. The term "hertz" refers to the cycles per second of that particular vibration. The contraction for Hertz is hz. Below is a description of the hz in the audible bass spectrum as they relate to the controls on amplifier EQ knobs.

20hz - 80hz = Low Bass

80hz - 320hz = Hi Bass, also referred to as Mid-bass.

320hz - 1280hz = Midrange

1280hz - 5120hz = High Midrange/Low Treble

When your EQ is set to "flat," it means that there is no frequency cut or boost chosen. This is usually when all of the EQ knobs are set to zero. The "low" knob handles frequencies at around 100Hz. The "mid" knob controls frequencies between 200 and 800Hz. Midrange frequencies are very important to the sound of the bass and provide the presence and audibility of the bass inside a recording or live performing environment. It will be beneficial to familiarize yourself as much as possible with the midrange control on your amplifier. The "high" knob controls frequencies from 800-1000Hz and above. This will give your sound more attack but

should be used delicately and with taste, as an abundance of frequencies above 1000Hz can tend to counterbalance the sonic weight and feel of the bass in a track or when playing live.

Ex. 1.5



Note: It's important to remember, when plugging into an amp, to make sure that the volume knobs on both the bass AND on the amplifier are off. It is also helpful to start with all of the EQ knobs in the "flat" position (with all the markings straight up at 12 o'clock on most amps). Once the amp is on you can start adjusting the volume and EQ levels as discussed.

Ex. 1.6



## PICKUPS

Pickups transfer the vibrations of the strings into sound. Most basses have more than one pickup, but some only have one. The pickup closest to the bridge will give you a "brighter" sound and the pickup closer to the neck will give a "warmer" sound. You should experiment with various pickup blends and levels to find sounds that you prefer and also sounds that fit various playing situations. Remember that there is a difference between "single coil" pickups (Ex. 1.6) (like those found on a Fender Jazz-style bass) and "dual coil" or "split coil" pickups (Ex. 1.7) (like those found on a Fender Precision-style bass), which are also referred to as "hum-bucking" pickups. On passive basses, single coil pickups need to be on full volume in order to prevent an electronic hum from coming out of the speaker. If one pickup is dialed in more than the other this hum will occur. Active basses and basses with dual or split coils are automatically hum-bucking and prevent this from happening.

Ex. 1.7



Always refer to this chapter when plugging in and dialing in your sound. In short:

## GETTING YOUR SOUND

1. Tune often.
2. Keep the volume on your bass and on the amp off when plugging in and turning on the amplifier.
3. Set the EQ knobs at 12 o'clock before turning on the amplifier.
4. Be conscious of the pickup configuration of your bass, i.e. single coil or hum-bucking.
5. Be considerate of your band mates and your audience by not making more sound than necessary before and in between songs or exercises.

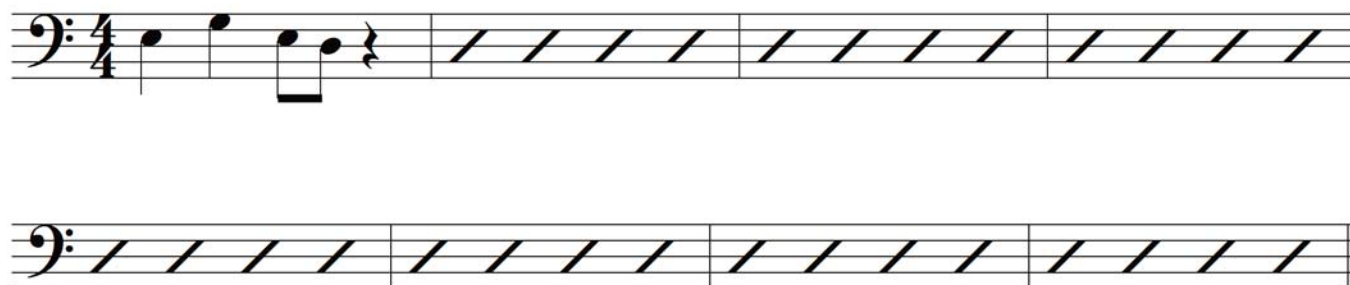
## Chapter 3: Basic Notation, Structure and Concepts

In this chapter we will be discussing the basics of rhythm, with examples of how to refine this most important facet of bass playing. Although the bass can cover the three main aspects of music (harmony, melody and rhythm), it is primarily through the development of rhythmic acuity and the bass's interaction with drums and/or percussion that provides the foundation of a classic rhythm section and a good performance.

### Structure: Eight- Bar Phrase

A common structure, which is used in most rock and pop music is the eight- bar phrase. This passage is eight bars (measures) long, and each bar (after the first bar) is marked with *time slashes*. Furthermore, each phrase can be augmented with *rehearsal letters* and/or *repeat signs* as well.

Ex. 1.8



### Time Slashes

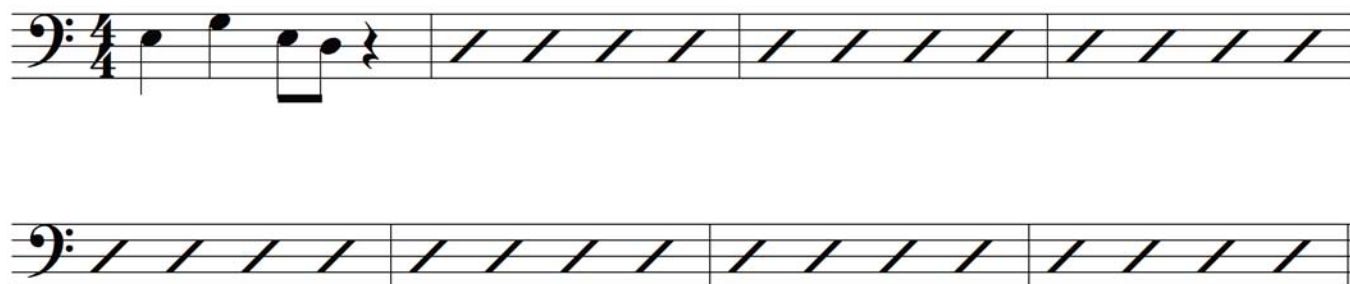
Time slashes not only mark the beats of a measure (i.e. 1, 2, 3 and 4), but they also indicate that the musician plays "time" as well.

Ex. 1.9



Once the groove has been notated, the time slashes are used in place of the notation, marking the time of the groove.

Ex. 1.10



## Rehearsal Letters

Within the eight- bar phrase, each additional section (new eight- bar phrase) is marked with a letter such as A or B. Each rehearsal letter represents a different section of the song. Each letter (section) can also represent a key musical attribute such as a different structure.

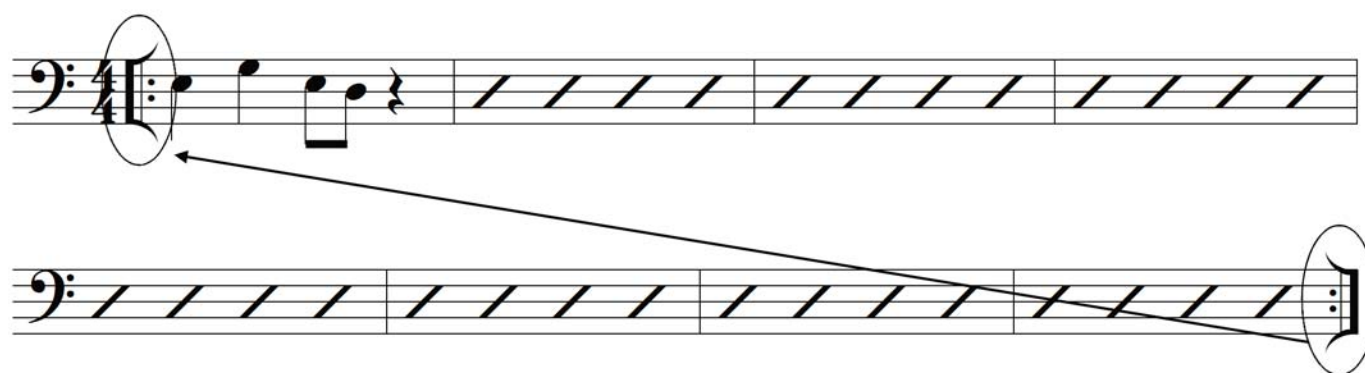
Ex.1.11



## Repeat Signs

Rather than writing two identical eight-bar sections, an additional usage of the same phrase is marked with both a *start* and *end repeat sign*. Therefore (upon reaching bar eight), you will immediately “repeat” (travel back) to bar one of that phrase. For example:

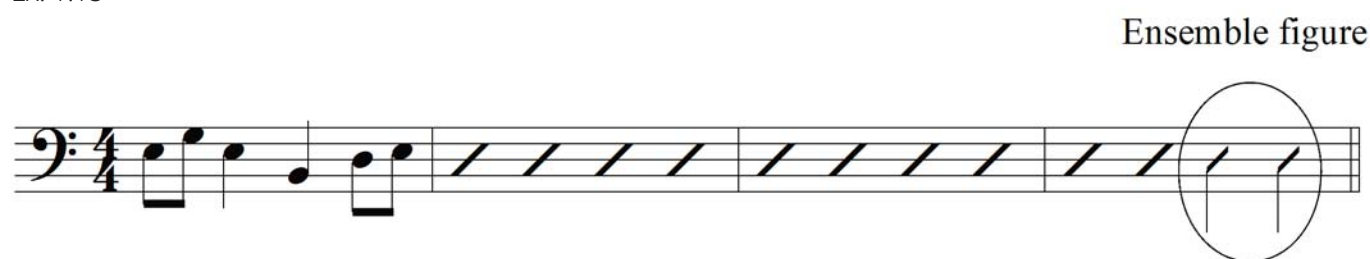
Ex. 1.12



## Ensemble Figures

*Ensemble figures* are rhythms that are played by the entire ensemble (band). These figures are written in the middle of the staff and take precedence over the *time slashes*. In this example, there are ensemble figures on beat four of the eighth measure of Letter A, just prior to entering letter B. You will need to accentuate these rhythms along with the band.

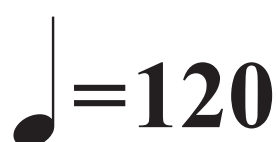
Ex. 1.13



## Tempo Marking

A *tempo marking* indicates the tempo (speed) of the music, expressed in beats per minute (BPM). In addition, this is usually related to a specific note value. The example below indicates that a quarter note equals 120 beats per minute.

Ex. 1.14





## The Count-Off

The *count-off* is extremely important. These four counts (with stick clicks) set up the tempo for the song and next few minutes of your life. With this in mind, it is extremely important that you pay special attention to the count-off, whether it is given by the drummer (as is common), or another band member. You may have to count off songs yourself as well. Make sure that the count-off is discernable to each member of the band—and steady in tempo. To count off a unit's chart, you will begin two bars before the chart. The first bar of the count off is usually set up in *half time* with a beat in between to establish the meter. Use the count: 1- 2- . . . . . 1-2- 3-4:

Ex. 1.15

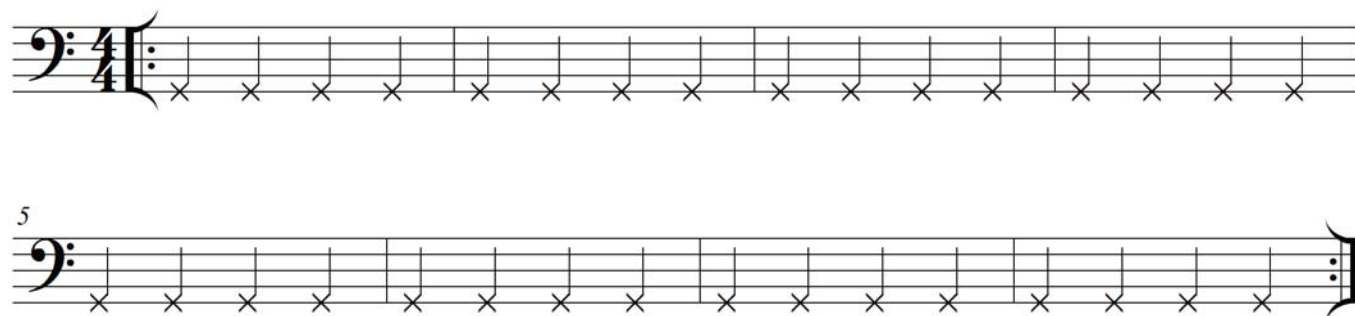
The musical notation shows a bass clef and a 4/4 time signature. The first measure contains four quarter notes, each with an 'x' mark below it. The second measure also contains four quarter notes, each with an 'x' mark below it. The notes are labeled as follows: "One" under the first note of the first measure, "Two" under the second note of the first measure, "One" under the first note of the second measure, "Two" under the second note of the second measure, "Three" under the third note of the second measure, and "Four" under the fourth note of the second measure.

# Chapter 4: Marking Time

Set your metronome at a comfortable speed, around 80 BPM in 4/4 time. 4/4 refers to the *time signature* whereby the top number tells you how many beats are in a measure (or bar) and the lower number tells you what note value gets one beat, in this case the “4” refers to a quarter note. So a time signature of 4/4 means that there are four beats to the measure and that one quarter note receives one beat. Start this exercise without your bass by tapping your foot in time to the quarter notes on the metronome. It is extremely important that you develop a sense of time by knowing where the notes are and by “feeling” the spaces in between them. Here’s a performance example to help you with this. In this exercise the “x” represents a note of indeterminate pitch value and is used to mark the quarter notes.

**Remember**, the brackets at the front and end of the exercise are *repeat signs* that tell the player to repeat all of the music between the two signs.

Ex. 1.16

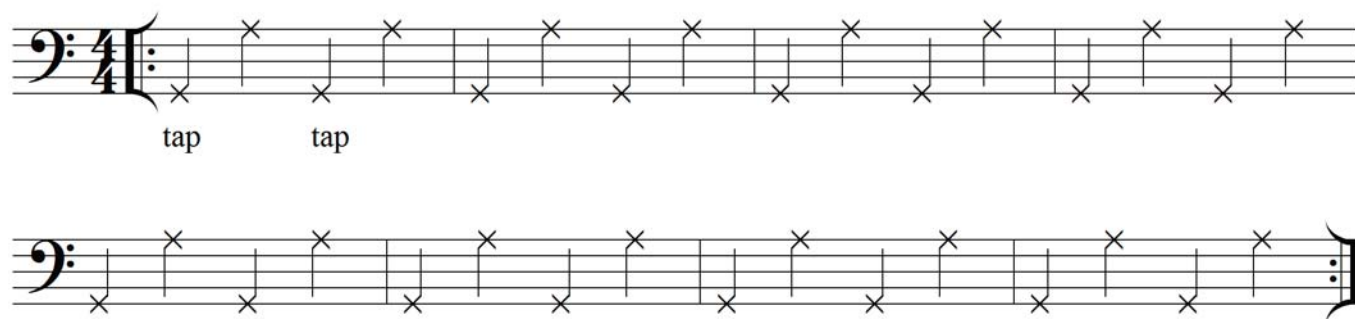


Two staves of musical notation in bass clef, 4/4 time. The first staff begins with a repeat sign and contains 16 quarter notes marked with 'x'. The second staff begins with a '5' above the first measure, contains 16 quarter notes marked with 'x', and ends with a repeat sign.

## The Backbeat

While you’re tapping your foot to four quarter notes per measure, imagine an accent on the second and fourth beats. These are where the backbeats occur. In most situations, a drummer would be playing the snare drum on the two and four of the bar. Now pretend that your hands are the snare drum and clap on beats two and four—the *backbeats*. This is the beginning of a *groove*.

Ex. 1.17



Two staves of musical notation in bass clef, 4/4 time. The first staff begins with a repeat sign and contains 16 quarter notes marked with 'x'. The second and fourth notes of each measure are marked with an 'x' and have the word 'tap' written below them. The second staff begins with a '5' above the first measure, contains 16 quarter notes marked with 'x', and ends with a repeat sign.

The backbeat is an anchor of all styles of modern music and must be instinctively felt by the bassist.