

PERFORMANCE 2

By Michael Visceglia

Instructional Design: Maurice Verloop, Bass Program Chair, Musicians Institute

Edited by Joe Bergamini

Digital book design and cover by Mike Hoff

Layout by Rick Gratton

Music engraving by Willie Rose

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Creative Director & Executive Editor: Donny Gruendler, Vice President of Instruction and Curricular Development

Managing Editor: Joe Bergamini

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BASS PERFORMANCE 2

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Introduction

Welcome to book two of the Bass Performance course at Musicians Institute. The course work that we will be covering over the next ten units will put you well on your way toward acquiring the knowledge and skills that every professional bass player possesses, while furthering your mastery of the instrument. In order to be a professional bassist, you must attain employment as one, and the diligent practice of the material covered in this book and in books three and four will enhance that career goal.

In book one we covered basic concepts such as getting a good sound, being attentive and prepared for your classes and gigs, introductions to various musical styles (with accompanying performance exercises), basic reading skills from whole notes through 16th notes (and their accompanying rests), basic concepts of grooves from rock to country, from singer-songwriter to funk, and shuffles. We also covered chart navigation with different endings and signifiers, such as *da capo*, *del segno*, *coda*, *fine*, and single-bar and multiple-bar repeats. If you are unsure of any of these topics, please refer to book one for clarification and review.

Chapter 1: Applied Cross-String Rhythms

Up until now, the performance exercises that you have been given have primarily been linear, or moving from string to string. One of the more challenging techniques in playing the bass guitar involves playing *across* the strings, or bass lines that skip over strings, in order to play wider intervals. The successful execution of this movement involves the concerted coordination and strengthening of both hands, and the appropriate exercises will be provided in order to accomplish this.

One of the main things to be aware of when playing music that requires string-crossing is to control the string that's *not* being played. It is very common for beginner players to overlook this important aspect of this technique. This results in unintentional ringing or vibrating of the unwanted string—and that will interfere with a clean performance of the music. The responsibility of controlling the unwanted sound in cross-string playing falls on the left hand. The goal here is to have part the left hand gently mute the string(s) that isn't being played. You'll notice that the left hand has a natural tendency to do this, as the fingers curl around the strings.

Another challenge to playing cross-string bass lines is to make up for the lack of strength in the left-hand pinky finger by using it in conjunction with the ring finger. This harkens back to upright bass left-hand technique, where the left-hand ring finger acts as a support to the fourth finger. Playing with the third and fourth finger of the left hand *together* will make it much easier to play wide intervals and octaves across strings. The performance piece that you will be working on later in this unit will be a steady execution of eighth notes. As with any piece of music that doesn't contain a lot of rests, this can be very demanding. Constant playing of cross strings with precision can stress the left hand. It's advisable to keep your left hand as relaxed as possible, and to apply pressure to the notes when needed. Keeping your left hand very tight and stressed can sometimes lead to overuse syndromes such as tendonitis. If you feel any unwarranted pain, take a break. Keeping both your playing hands relaxed will help to stave off any of the common neuromuscular ailments.

When playing cross-string rhythms, the suggested approach is to anchor your plucking hand by the thumb at any point that feels comfortable and secure, although the floating-hand technique works just as well, if that's what you're accustomed to. Anchoring is usually done on a thumb rest, the top of a pickup, the low string (when it is not being played), or even on the body of the bass itself. This secure perch will allow you to pivot from the wrist and attack the correct string while playing *over* the unintended string. When doing this, it is critical to make sure that the notes are attacked evenly by the alternating first and second fingers of the right hand. The goal, as always is controlled dynamics and evenness in sound!

Chapter 2: Changing Positions

De-Tuning the Low E String

More often than not when playing cross-string bass lines, you will move from position to position as the music demands. At this point in your development, the easiest way to approach this is by leading to the new position with the first finger of the left hand. This will preserve your form and give you an economy of movement from one position to the next. By doing this consistently you will start to recognize bass patterns and intervallic relationships more readily, since the regularity of the bass's tuning and its associated intervals provides continuity throughout the neck.

It's not uncommon in rock music that the guitar and/or bass will tune down the low E string in order to make the music sound heavier and add low sonics to the harmony. Of course, this applies only to four string basses where the low string is the traditional E. Getting a low D or even a low C# from the E string has become such a common occurrence that there are low E *de-tuners* that can replace the tuning machine on your E string. These can be calibrated to lower the E by a half step, whole step, or more with a flip of the lever that's attached to the tuning peg. But if you are going to do this with regularity, be aware of the gauge of the low E string: the lower you tune down, the more possibility of fret noise there will be—as the string will become more slack. In such a case, you might want to switch to a heavier gauge string or even adjust your attack to minimize any extraneous fret noise. Note that when you tune down a whole step, you must adjust your fingering by two frets to compensate. Thus, the root note now falls on the same fret as the octave going from the fourth string to the second string.

This song can be executed in regular tuning if so desired. If the player prefers this, then play the Dmi bars an octave higher than written. The objective of this unit is to execute cross string bass lines, and this will happen regardless of what octave these notes are played in. Drop D tuning will be expanded upon, broken down and exercised in Technique 3 as well as Performance 3.

Ex. 1.1 E tuned down to D

♩ = 80

Ex. 1.2

♩ = 80

Chapter 3: The Hard Rock Shuffle

As we learned in Bass Performance 1, the shuffle feel is a tried-and-true groove that has found its way to every genre of music, from the blues and jazz to country and even hard rock. Bands like Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Smashing Pumpkins and ZZ Top have incorporated this feel into their music. As with all hard rock, the key to a hard rock shuffle is the intensity with which one needs to play while maintaining your focus on controlling the instrument. This gets harder to do at louder volumes, as every minute touch of the bass and fingering of strings is extremely amplified. The more experience you have playing at louder volumes, the easier it will be to control the instrument. But here's the important thing to remember: Never play at a volume that prevents you from hearing the other musicians that you're playing with, **especially the drummer!** The key to playing successfully in a hard rock setting is to **always** mix yourself into the on-stage sound and let the house sound engineer do the rest. The front-of-house soundman has the control to make your sound as powerful as it needs to be (and should be) in hard rock music. Playing too loudly on stage will remove that power and limit your chances of a successful mix. All too often, amateur musicians have their stage volume so loud that it becomes impossible for either the player or the listener to discern anything that's being performed. If you can't hear your bandmates clearly on stage, consider it a signal for all to pay attention to the volume.

Ex. 1.3

Shuffle feel

♩ = 128

8^{va}

Chapter 4: Basic Notation, Structure and Concepts

We will continue to reinforce the assimilation of sections of songs, accentuating the groupings of bars that comprise each section, whatever the number. Performance example 1.9 has a shuffle feel as the groove's foundation, with the quarter note at 128 BPM. Please refer to Bass Performance 1 for comments about stamina and execution. Another interesting thing about this next piece is the odd groupings of measures for each section. Since the bass line doesn't veer much away from eighth notes played in octaves, the task here is to distinguish the sections through increasing familiarity with the melody. Since there isn't the usual symmetry that we hear in pop songs, this may take several practice attempts, so please count your measures as you read through the exercise.

The performance chart has an eight-bar intro.

Ex. 1.4

Hard Rock Shuffle

♩ = 128

Intro

Intro

Dm Gm7 F G#5

A Gm7 F C#

4-string players play one octave up

8^{va}

The eight-bar A section is repeated with first and second endings.

Ex. 1.5

Sign

A

Dm Gm7 F

A Gm7

First ending Second ending

1. F C# 8^{va}

2. F C#

3. 3.

Repeat

Then there is an 18-bar B section with a D.S. to the A section, where you take the second ending only.

Ex. 1.6

B

Dm Gm7 F

A Gm7 F C#5 8va

Dm Gm7 F G#5

A G F C#5 8va

Dm

D.S.

→ (Take 2nd ending)

Then the chart goes into a ten-bar C section.

Ex. 1.7

C

Dm Gm7 F G#5

A Gm7 F C#5 *8va*

N.C.

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

Finally, there is a 16-bar D section, where we end with a tied note on the upbeat of 4 of the 16th measure into a whole note and what could be considered as the 17th and final measure of the D section—and the song.

Ex. 1.8

D

Dm Gm7 F

A Gm7 F C#5 *8va*

Dm Gm7 F G#5

A Gm7 F C#5 Dm