

TECHNIQUE 3

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BASS TECHNIQUE 3

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Introduction

As musicians, we want our musical ideas to flow like conversation, having direction and purpose. While not dismissing the effectiveness of pedaling a root tone, choosing notes—like choosing words—can create a mood, lead a phrase, resolve a cadence and even deceive the listener. As students of this book and previous books in the series (i.e. Technique, Reading and Performance) you have been exercising bass lines that have been composed to meet objectives. Those bass lines are the results of multiple considerations, including harmony and rhythm. Many elements of constructing those bass lines are the topic of this book. Finally, as a student of music, it is imperative that in addition to bass lines, you also analyze melody lines in reference to the harmony that is occurring in a particular piece of music. This is a great way to broaden your vocabulary and improve your musicianship.

Chapter 1: Eighth-Note Grooves

Bass lines consisting of repeated eighth notes are one of the most common devices used for creating a groove in popular music. Eighth note grooves are used in rock, pop, R&B, funk, hip-hop and other contemporary styles. Many well-known songs rely on a strong, pulsing eighth-note groove. Eighth notes can be played straight or swung, short or long. When played with the right feel, eighth note grooves can help to propel and bring intensity to the music, and can even make the music danceable. A variety of plucking hand techniques can be used to play eighth note grooves. You can use alternating fingers, a pick, thumb and palm muting and thumb slapping. It all depends on the style of the music you're playing and the sound you're trying to achieve. Regardless of the technique you use, it is important that the notes sound even, with a good tone, and a steady pulse.

Feel and articulation are the two most important aspects for creating eighth note grooves. The feel will depend on the style. For a rock or pop feel, the eighth notes will generally be played straight, not swung. While when playing certain forms of funk, R&B, hip-hop and reggae, the eighth notes may have a slight swing feel to them. This will vary from genre to genre. Articulation enhances the feel of the eighth notes. Two commonly used articulations for eighth note grooves are legato (long) and staccato (short). Using these two articulations will change the feel and character of the bass lines. There are no hard and fast rules as to which articulation to use in any particular style, but one articulation will generally work better than the other in different situations. If you are trying to achieve a fat and heavy rock groove (especially at a slow tempo), playing the eighth notes more legato will give you that. For a funkier groove, playing the eighth notes more staccato may work better.

Exercises 1.2 through 1.4 use the same I-vi-IV-V chord progression:

Ex. 1.1

E C#mi A B

Ex. 1.2 is marked legato (-) and Ex. 1.3 is marked staccato (.). Listen to how different the same bass lines sound by just changing the articulation. Play each exercise at the same tempo and at different tempos. Also try playing them with different plucking techniques.

Ex. 1.2

E C#mi A B

Ex. 1.3

E C#mi A B

A common practice when playing eighth-note grooves is the use of rhythmic anticipation. The chords of each measure can be anticipated by an eighth note on the “and” of 4. When playing these lines, “lean” into the anticipations a little—rather than accenting them. Constantly accenting anticipations can become monotonous and takes away from the effect.

Ex. 1.4

Ex. 1.4 shows a bass line in 4/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The chords are E, C#mi, A, and B. The line consists of eighth-note patterns with anticipations on the 'and' of 4.

If there are two chords in a measure, each chord can be anticipated starting on the “and” of 2 and then the “and” of 4.

Ex. 1.5

Ex. 1.5 shows a bass line in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The chords are A, D, E, A, D, E. The line consists of eighth-note patterns with anticipations on the 'and' of 2 and 4.

While pedaling eighth notes on the root of the chord can be very effective, you can vary your lines by adding octaves and other chord tones, such as the third and fifth. This can also help you move smoothly from chord to chord.

Ex. 1.6

Ex. 1.6 shows a bass line in 4/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The chords are E, C#mi, A, and B. The line consists of eighth-note patterns with anticipations on the 'and' of 4.

Ex. 1.7

Ex. 1.7 shows a bass line in 4/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The chords are E, C#mi, A, and B. The line consists of eighth-note patterns with anticipations on the 'and' of 4.

Ex. 1.8

Ex. 1.8 shows a bass line in 4/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The chords are E, C#mi, A, and B. The line consists of eighth-note patterns with anticipations on the 'and' of 4.

Using slides and fills to move from one chord to the next is also very effective and will bring character to your lines.

Ex. 1.9a

Ex. 1.9a shows a bass line in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The chords are A, D, E, D, E. The line consists of eighth-note patterns with anticipations on the 'and' of 2 and 4.

Ex. 1.9b

A D E

Ex. 1.10

E C#mi A B

The following exercises are eighth-note grooves in different keys and chord progressions. They incorporate the techniques and articulations that have been discussed in this unit. Each groove may suggest a different style depending on interpretation. Pay close attention to articulations, tone, time, and feel when practicing these exercises. Practice them at various tempos. You can change the character of the lines by using different plucking techniques and your own approach to the articulations.

Ex. 1.11

F Dm B \flat C

Ex. 1.12

E D C D B

Ex. 1.13

C F

C E \flat F G

Ex. 1.14

D F#m Bm Em A

D F# G A

Ex. 1.15

Ex. 1.15 is a bass line in 4/4 time, consisting of two staves. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The first staff contains the first four measures, with chord labels B^b7, D^b7, and C7 above it. The second staff contains the remaining four measures, with chord labels B^b7, E^b7, A^b7, and F7/A below it. The melody is primarily eighth-note patterns with some quarter notes and rests.

Ex. 1.16

Ex. 1.16 is a single-staff bass line in 4/4 time. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The melody consists of eighth-note patterns and quarter notes, ending with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Ex. 1.17

Ex. 1.17 is a bass line in 4/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The melody is primarily eighth-note patterns. Chord labels E, C#mi, A, and B are placed above the staff at various points.

Ex. 1.18

Ex. 1.18 is a bass line in 4/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The melody features eighth-note patterns and quarter notes. Chord labels E, C#mi, A, and B are placed above the staff at various points.

Chapter 2: Pentatonic Scales

Two frequently used scales in contemporary music are the major and minor pentatonic scales. A pentatonic scale is a five-note scale. The word pentatonic comes from the Greek word *pente*, meaning five, and *tonic* meaning tone. There are no half steps in a pentatonic scale. If you were to play only the black keys on a piano beginning on Gb, you would be playing a major pentatonic scale. Both major and minor pentatonic scales are derived from their respective major and minor scales. The major pentatonic consists of the root, second, third, fifth, and sixth degrees of a major scale. The minor pentatonic scale consists of the root, minor third (b3), fourth, fifth, and minor seventh (b7) degrees of the natural minor scale. Pentatonic scales are widely used, and their sound is most likely familiar to you. The major pentatonic has a familiar “Far Eastern” sound that I’m sure you will recognize. The minor pentatonic has a “bluesy” sound that is popular in jazz, blues, and other contemporary styles.

Major Pentatonic

Ex. 1.19

R 2 3 5 6 R

Minor Pentatonic

Ex. 1.20

R b3 4 5 b7 R

Just as a major key has its relative minor key, the same can be said for the major pentatonic scale. The relative minor of C major is A minor. The notes of the C major and A minor pentatonic scales are the same, only with the scales starting on their respective roots. This relationship is the same in all keys.

C Major

Ex. 1.21a

R 2 3 5 6 R

A Minor

Ex. 1.21b

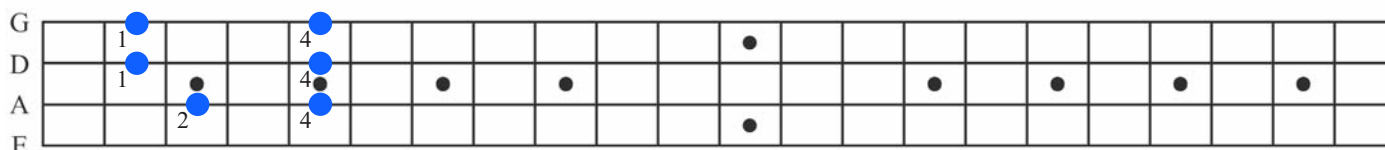
R b3 4 5 b7 R

The following fretboard diagrams show common fingering patterns for one-octave C major and C minor pentatonic scales in second position. These patterns can also be used for other keys and in other positions on the neck. You should also practice playing the scales up the neck on one string.

Ex. 1.22a



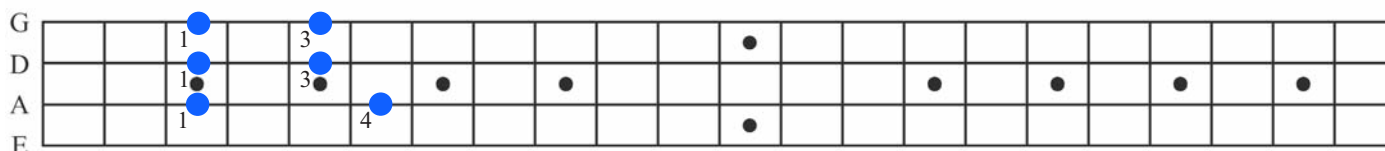
Ex. 1.22b



Ex. 1.23a

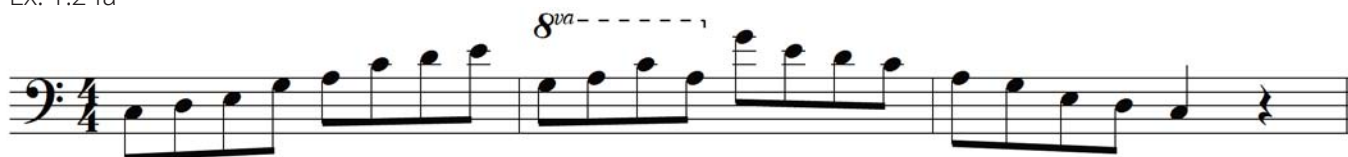


Ex. 1.23b



There are various fingerings that can be used for two-octave pentatonic scales. Practice the following two-octave pentatonic scales using the suggested fingering patterns. Try to work out different shifting points of your own. See how many different combinations you can come up with. This will help your knowledge of the fingerboard.

Ex. 1.24a



Ex. 1.24b

