

TECHNIQUE 4

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BASS TECHNIQUE 4

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Chapter 1: Chord Voicings 2

In Bass Technique 3, Unit 10 you were introduced to double stops and simple chord voicings on the bass. In this unit we will expand on this topic. Playing chords on the bass is more of an ornament than a common component of bass playing. You are not going to be hired as a bass player to play chords. However, they can be used to great effect when used tastefully and can also help you expand your creativity. As we covered in the previous book, combining a root note with a third or tenth will successfully convey the harmony of a major or minor triad. The fifth of a simple major or minor triad is not needed, since omitting the fifth does not take anything away from the harmony. This is also true when playing major and minor seventh chords. The fifth of the triad is only essential to the harmony when it is altered by adding a sharp or flat to it, as in an augmented or diminished triad. In these instances just playing the root and third is not enough information to fully convey the harmony. The same is true for seventh chords and other extended chords. This now means that we are moving away from simple double stops and adding a third and fourth chord tone.

While it is possible to play just two chord tones and still convey the harmony or harmonic movement of certain chord progressions, it has to be done in context with what's going on musically and you must have the right note choices. You must know which notes to play and which to leave out. The notes that are omitted will depend on the chords and also the fingering patterns that you use. The bass was not created to play chords like the guitar or piano, so you will have to find voicings that are comfortable to play on the instrument and still convey the harmonic content you are trying to achieve. Using wider intervals such as sixths, sevenths and tenths will resonate more on the bass and give the illusion that more tones are being played. When using close voicings, it is better to play the chords in the upper register of the instrument. This will produce a cleaner and clearer sound. Another consideration when determining voicings is ease of movement. You want to be able to move from chord to chord efficiently and with as little movement as possible.

This first example illustrates how a chord progression can be played with just two notes for each chord. In this ii-V7-I progression in C major, the root and third (i.e. tenth) are used for the D minor and C major chords. The G7 chord only uses the root and seventh, but because of the context in which it is being played it is very clear that this is the dominant seventh chord moving to the one chord, even though there is no third in the chord.

Ex. 1.1a

The musical notation shows a bass clef staff with a 4/4 time signature. It consists of three measures. Above the staff, the chords are labeled as Dmi, G7, and Cma. Below the staff, they are labeled as ii, V7, and I. The notes are: Measure 1: D (two ledger lines below) and F (first line); Measure 2: G (two ledger lines below) and Bb (first line, flat); Measure 3: C (two ledger lines below) and E (first line).

These voicings work well on the bass. The notes easily resolve to one another and can be played within three adjoining frets. Notice how the F, the third in D minor, becomes the seventh of G. The next example is the same progression, but now all of the chords are seventh chords. This means that a third note must be added to the chords to fully convey the sound of the harmony and if we want to keep similar voicings and fingerings. This example can be played in the same position while adding sevenths to the D minor and C major chords, and also adding a third to the G7 to fully realize the chord. These fingerings, like those in the previous example, can be used in any key.

Ex. 1.2a

Ex. 1.2b: Minor 7

Ex. 1.2c: Dominant 7

Ex. 1.2d: Major 7

Example 1.2a adds the seventh below the third (i.e. tenth) of the D minor and C major chords. There is also a third added below the seventh to the G7 chord, which became the seventh of C major. In example 1.2e, the seventh of D minor becomes the fourth in the G7 chord to create a G7sus chord (see Ex. 1.2f). Where you place the notes will determine the sound and character of the voicings and also the movement of the progressions.

Ex. 1.2e

Ex. 1.2f: Dominant 7(sus4)

The previous examples are in root position. You can also play inversions of chords. The C major triad below is a second inversion. Combining root position chords with inversions can be very useful for voice leading and make it easier to move smoothly from one chord to the next.

Ex. 1.3a

Ex. 1.3b: Major Triad Second Inversion

As you experiment with playing chords, you will find that certain voicings work better than others. These are just a few examples of chord voicings on the bass. See if you can come up with your own voicings for these progressions.

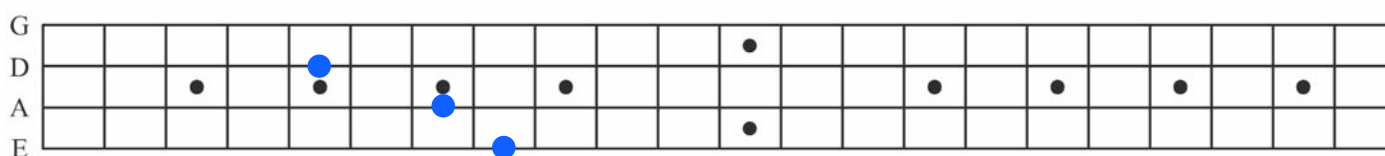
The previous and following exercises are diatonic triads and seventh chords as illustrated in examples 1.4a and 1.4b.

Ex. 1.4a

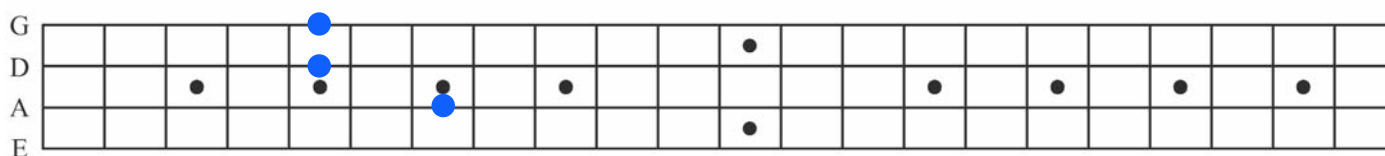
Ex. 1.4b

The following fretboard diagrams are common fingerings and suggestions for some of the voicings you will encounter. While these fingerings are in C major, the same fingerings can be used in various keys. It is important for you to know what the notes of the chords are rather than memorizing fingering patterns. It is also important that you find fingerings that work best for you. Everyone's hands are different. Some chord fingerings may not be suitable for everyone. The length of your fingers and how much you can stretch them will determine what fingerings and voicings you can comfortably use. The number of strings on your instrument will also determine the type of voicings you will use. Five- and especially six-string basses can be more suitable for playing chords.

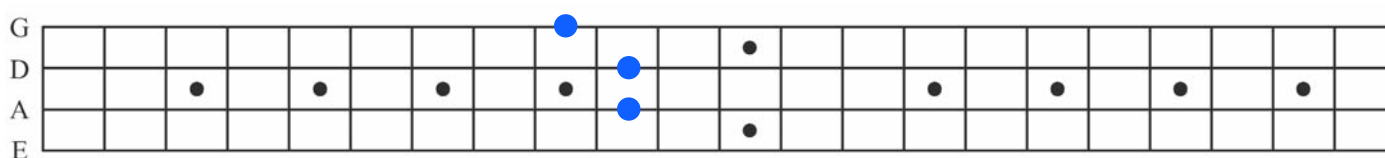
Ex. 1.A : Major Triad



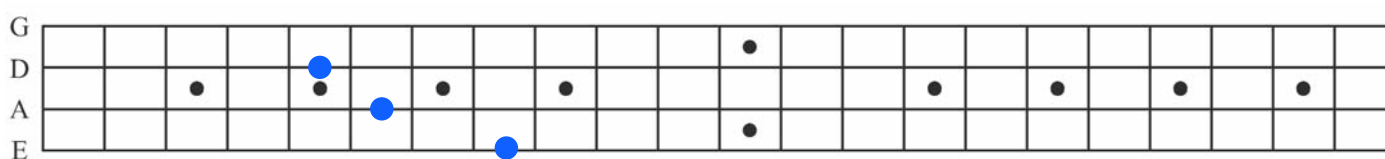
Ex. 1.B: Major Triad First Inversion



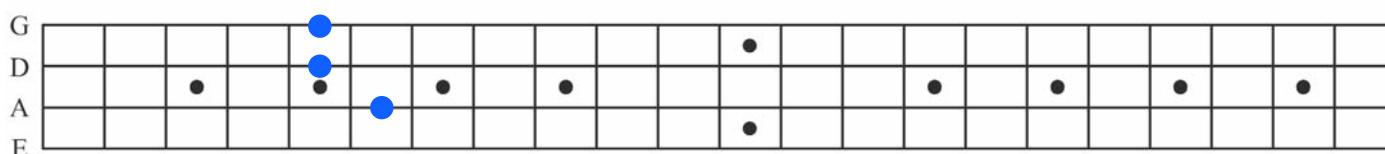
Ex. 1.C: Major Triad Second Inversion



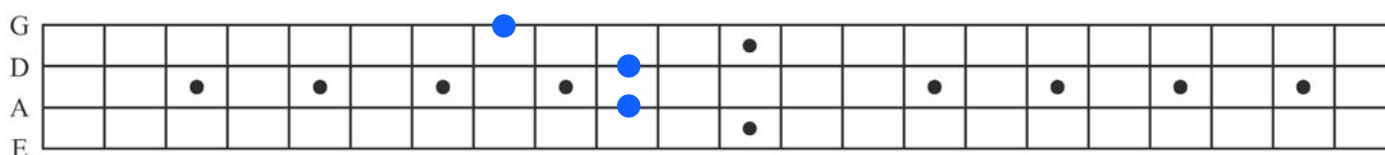
Ex. 1.D: Minor Triad



Ex. 1.E: Minor Triad First Inversion

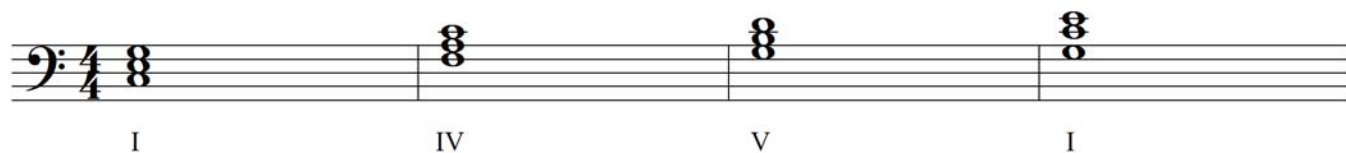


Ex. 1.F: Minor Triad Second Inversion



Practice the following progressions and try to create your own versions. Refer to previous diagrams for voicings. Many of the fingering patterns are the same for the various chords. You must look closely at the notes of the chord and move the fingering pattern to the appropriate string. Do not over-stretch or strain your hand when practicing these chord voicings.

Ex. 1.5



Ex. 1.6a

Musical notation for Ex. 1.6a, showing four bass clef chords in 4/4 time: I7, IV7, V7, and I7.

Ex. 1.6b C Major Seventh (Use this same fingering starting on the A string for the F IV7 chord.)

Fingerboard diagram for Ex. 1.6b, showing the fingering for a C Major Seventh chord. The strings are labeled G, D, A, E. Fingering: G (2), D (2), A (2), E (1).

Ex. 1.7b A Minor Triad Second Inversion

Fingerboard diagram for Ex. 1.7b, showing the fingering for an A Minor Triad Second Inversion. The strings are labeled G, D, A, E. Fingering: G (2), D (2), A (2), E (1).

Ex. 1.7c A Minor Triad (Play open A string.)

Fingerboard diagram for Ex. 1.7c, showing the fingering for an A Minor Triad. The strings are labeled G, D, A, E. Fingering: G (2), D (2), A (open), E (1). A red arrow points to the open A string with the text "Open A string".

Ex. 1.8a

Musical notation for Ex. 1.8a, showing four bass clef chords in 4/4 time: i7, iv7, V7, and i7.

Ex. 1.8b A Minor Seventh

Fingerboard diagram for Ex. 1.8b, showing the fingering for an A Minor Seventh chord. The strings are labeled G, D, A, E. Fingering: G (2), D (2), A (2), E (1).

Ex. 1.9a

$i7(b5)$ $V7$ $i7$

Ex. 1.9b: A Minor7 b5 Second Inversion

Example 1.10a is a I-vi-ii-V progression in C major using triads. Use the open A and D strings when playing these progressions. Use diagram Ex. 1.10b for the D minor ii chord.

Ex. 1.10a

I vi ii V

Ex. 1.10b D Minor (Play open D string.)

Open D string

Example 1.11a is I7-vi7-ii7-V7 progression in C major. The chords consist of the root, third and seventh. Use an open A string for the A minor vi7 chord, as illustrated in Ex.11b.

Ex. 1.11a

$I7$ $vi7$ $ii7$ $V7$

Ex. 1.11b A Minor (Play open A string.)

Open A string

Chapter 2: Raking and Strumming

Chords can be played on the bass by plucking the strings with the fingers of your plucking hand. This technique requires that you grab the strings with the tips of your fingers and pull them outward. Depending on the number of notes you are playing, you can use your first and second fingers; first and second fingers and thumb; first, second, and third fingers, and thumb; or any combination of these fingers that work best for you. Other techniques for playing chords are raking and strumming.

Raking is a very useful technique for playing chords and also consecutive descending and ascending notes on adjacent strings. To play descending notes with this technique, instead of plucking each note individually with alternating fingers you, use one finger in a downward motion across the strings to play each note. To rake ascending notes, use your thumb in an upward motion across the adjacent strings. The technique should be performed in one smooth motion across the strings, regardless of which finger you are using. Again, you can use this technique to play a chord where all of the notes sustain simultaneously or if you are playing them individually as an arpeggio. The key factor is that it must be performed on adjacent strings. Raking is especially useful for playing individual notes at fast tempos and ornamental flourishes such as multiple grace notes. In these instances it can be a cleaner and more efficient technique than using alternating fingers. You should practice raking with your index finger, middle finger and thumb individually. It is important that you maintain good time when raking. The momentum that can be achieved when raking can cause you to rush certain rhythms.

Strumming is another useful technique for playing chords. With this technique, use the tips of fingers to lightly graze the strings in either an upward or downward motion. This technique is similar to the strumming technique used by classical and flamenco guitarists. Your index, middle, and ring fingers are most suitable for this technique, but you can also add your pinky. Use this technique when you want multiple notes to sustain simultaneously and ring out. You can also use this technique to emulate a rhythm guitar.

Go back to the chord voicings in Chapter 1 and practice them using both the raking and strumming techniques. Use the raking technique for following exercises, practice playing the ascending lines with your thumb and the descending lines with your index and middle fingers separately.

Exercise 1.14 and 1.15 are tritone intervals moving chromatically up and down the neck. Use alternating fingers (normal finger style plucking) for the intervals that move up and the raking technique for the intervals that are moving down.

Ex. 1.14