



BUILDING BASSLINES

A RHYTHMIC APPROACH

Jonathan Maron

COURSE BOOK

SCOTTSBASSLESSONS.COM

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Introduction

Join Jonathan Maron (with bandmates Genji Siraisi on drums and Christian Almiron on keyboards) as he discusses strategies to remain calm and centered in challenging musical situations, how to incorporate inversions and chromatic voice leading into your bass lines, and how to build on and embellish your bass lines. You'll also learn how to develop your internal pulse... all the while enjoying yourself and having fun, whether you're a beginner or an advanced player.



Genji Siraisi
Drums



Christian Almiron
Keyboards

INTRODUCTION (continued)

Jonathan's Pedalboard/Effects & Guitars

Jonathan only uses a few pedals—sparingly—but here's a look at what's on his board:



Univox
1970's Coily Hollow Body
Bass Guitar



Biegel Sound Lab
Mu-FX



DigiTech
Whammy Ricochet



Maxon
AF-9 Auto Filter



Yamaha
BB3000S
Bass Guitar



DigiTech
Cry Baby 105Q Bass Mini



Foxpedal
Magnifica Reverb



Wren & Cuff
Pickle Pie Hella Fuzz

Lesson 1

Chromatic Voice Leading

Have you ever noticed that the chords in a song may seem simple, but the bass movement isn't always from root to root? In many cases, it's the chromatic movement in the bass that helps to seamlessly connect sections of the song. The Beatles, for example, used this technique in countless songs. In this lesson, we'll explore voice leading through **chromatic bass movement** and **inversions**.

To help understand these ideas, here's a chord progression from Jonathan that chromatically walks the bass from B $\flat$ to B $\flat$. Pay attention to the bass notes in each chord and you'll notice it's not *always* the root—sometimes it *is* the root of the chord (black chord diagrams), sometimes it's the third of the chord (green chord diagrams), which is the *first inversion*, and in one case it's the fifth (red chord diagram), which is the *second inversion*:



"As a bass player, you have to be aware of what notes you're playing and how they relate to the chords of the song."

LESSON 01 CHORD PROGRESSION

♩ = 80

Chord progression diagrams and notation:

Row 1: B $\flat$ (black), F/A (green), Fm/A $\flat$ (green), E $\flat$ /G (green), E $\flat$ m/G $\flat$ (green), B $\flat$ /F (red)

Row 2: C/E (green), E $\flat$ 6 (black), B $\flat$ /D (green), D $\flat$ m6 (black), Cm7 (black), B6 (black), B $\flat$ (black)

Notation: Two staves of music in 4/4 time, showing the bass line for the progression. The first staff contains the first six chords, and the second staff contains the last six chords. The bass line is chromatic, moving from B $\flat$ to B $\flat$.

LESSON 1 (continued)

To interact with the music in a much more fluid and melodic way, it's important to look beyond just the bass notes themselves. A simple go-to is often to play a root-fifth-octave over a chord based on the bass note, but your ear may tell you something different! For example, playing a root-fifth-octave based on the A bass note in the F/A chord doesn't work because the E note (the fifth of A) clashes with the F in the F major triad.

Let's look at a simple bass line over this chord progression, using just one note between each chord based on the harmony of the progression*:

LESSON 01 EXAMPLE 01

♩ = 80

B $\flat$ F/A F $\flat$ m/A $\flat$ E $\flat$ /G E $\flat$ m/G $\flat$ B $\flat$ /F

4 C/E E $\flat$ 6 B $\flat$ /D D $\flat$ m6 C $\flat$ m7 B6 B $\flat$

To keep each chord “grounded,” Jonathan refers back to the root note when playing over the first inversions. For example, instead of perhaps playing the fifth of the F $\flat$ m/A $\flat$ (a C) as the “in between note,” he instead plays the F, which is the root of F $\flat$ m. For the B $\flat$ /F, a second inversion, he avoids the root altogether, playing the third and fifth. For the root-based chords, Jonathan mixes in roots, thirds, and a sixth.

*Jonathan occasionally plays ghost notes while moving between the chords of the sequence. They've been omitted here for the sake of simplicity.

LESSON 1 (continued)

Next, Jonathan gets a little more “playful” as he explores this idea a little further:

LESSON 01 EXAMPLE 02

♩ = 80

B♭ F/A Fm/A♭ E♭/G

E♭m/G♭ B♭/F C/E E♭6

B♭/D D♭m6 Cm7 B6

B♭ F/A Fm/A♭ E♭/G

E♭m/G♭ B♭/F C/E E♭6

continued →

LESSON 1 (continued)

LESSON 01 EXAMPLE 02 (continued)

11

B $\flat$ /D D $\flat$ m6 Cm7 B6

13

B $\flat$ F/A Fm/A $\flat$ E $\flat$ /G

15

E $\flat$ m/G $\flat$ B $\flat$ /F C/E E $\flat$ 6

17

B $\flat$ /D D $\flat$ m6 Cm7 B6 B $\flat$

Homework!

Create your own fretboard pattern or rhythm, then carry it through the entire progression, paying attention to the inversions.



"If this were a situation where I was playing behind a singer, I would be able to play very, very little. But the notes that I would choose would be in the chord, and I'd be able to interact melodically and harmonically with the song."

LESSON 1 (continued)

Of course, there are times when playing *just the root* can come as a welcome change of pace, and might even be a really “strong” move. Let’s look at the root movement of the tune, ignoring the inversions:

LESSON 01 EXAMPLE 03

♩ = 80

B $\flat$ F/A F $\flat$ /A $\flat$ E $\flat$ /G E $\flat$ m/G $\flat$ B $\flat$ /F

*Hit down on muted strings with plucking-hand fingers to produce a percussive sound, throughout.

4 C/E E $\flat$ 6 B $\flat$ /D D $\flat$ m6 Cm7 B6 B $\flat$



Recommended listening:

- The Beatles’ catalogue!
- “Someone Saved My Life Tonight” by Sir Elton John
- “Summer Soft” by Stevie Wonder
- Many, many more!



“Because you know what the harmony is, and you know how to interact with it, you’re able to make choices [to play the inversions or just the root].”

Lesson 2

Embellishing a Fixed Bass Line

Adding Life to Your Bass Line

Playing a bass line—in time, in the groove—may often be straightforward. But what happens when you come to a fill? Do you find yourself grasping for something to play? Do you have a hard time straying from what you’ve been playing to embellish the line? In this lesson, we’ll look at a few ways to add some life to your bass lines.

We’ll start quite simply—adding just *one* note to a simple bass line, but keeping in mind how it sounds over the current chord, but also how it leads to the next.

For this exercise, we’ll use this 4-bar vamp:



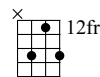
“If you’re just playing one note, it carries a lot more weight.”

♩ = 80

Am7



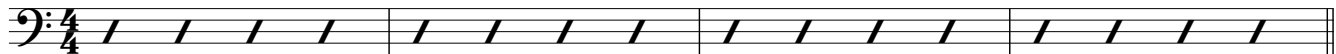
*Bm7



Em7



A6



*A “Phrygian” chord, consider playing a C♯ as an added note.

Goal

1. Play *one note* (then two, then three) as your fill in between each of the chords.
2. Pick your note based on how it will sound against the chord you’re in, and also as a way of *forecasting* the next chord. (“Hear” the note in your head before you play it!)

LESSON 2 (continued)

As you play through this exercise, start by playing just one note, then two, then three over the chord sequence, keeping in mind that the note you choose should fit well within the current chord, and lead to, or *forecast*, the next:

LESSON 02 EXAMPLE 01

Single Note

♩ = 65

Am7 Bm7 Em7 A6

P.M. throughout

5 5 5 5

5 7 0 5

5 7 7 5

7 5 3 3

continued →

*As before, Jonathan occasionally plays ghost notes while moving between the notes. They've again been omitted here for the sake of simplicity.

LESSON 2 (continued)

LESSON 02 EXAMPLE 01 (continued)

Two Notes

9 Am7 Bm7 Em7 A6

13 Am7 Bm7 Em7 A6

Three Notes

17 Am7 Bm7 Em7 A6

21 Am7 Bm7 Em7 A6

LESSON 2 (continued)

Notes:

- Really try to hear the cycle of the four chords in your head as you play. This will help you considerably with your choice of note. The idea here is to build within the bass line, rather than waiting for, say, Bar 4 of the sequence to play a fill.
- Because there's no written bass line in this example, you have a lot of freedom to create. But keep in mind that some bass lines don't require any embellishment. Be sure to determine what the "non-negotiable" parts of the line are. Is there a repeated phrase you need to come back to? In this case, the answer is no, so the only items you really need to pay attention to are the chords themselves and the pulse.
- You may play "a lot simpler" on a gig, but when practicing, be creative:
 1. Play a strong theme on Bar 1.
 2. In Bar 2, keep things "chill."
 3. Echo your theme in Bar 3.
 4. Tie things up in Bar 4.

In Examples 02 & 03 on the following pages, Jonathan gets more "playful" and builds on these ideas.



"When you're embellishing a bass line that's a definite theme, it's very important to get a sense of which part of the bass line is really 'non-negotiable.' You never want to give the signal to the listener that there's a 'new section,' or a 'different song!'"

"As bass players, we're always looking at the end of the phrase as the place where you can make your statement, but in fact, sometimes some embellishment at the top of the phrase is what's needed."

continued →

LESSON 2 (continued)

LESSON 02 EXAMPLE 02

♩ = 65

Am7 Bm7 Em7

4 A6 Am7 Bm7

7 Em7 A6

9 Am7 Bm7

11 Em7 A6

*Hit down on muted strings with plucking-hand fingers to produce a percussive sound.

**As before

LESSON 2 (continued)

LESSON 02 EXAMPLE 03

"Non-negotiable" theme in bass line.

$\text{♩} = 100$

2

P.M. throughout

5

7

9

11

13

9 9 7 9 5 5 7 X 7 9 9 9 9 5 5 7 0 11

7 10 9 9 0 5 5 7 X 7 9 7 9 9 9 9 5 5 7 7 X

7 9 7 7 7 5 5 7 X 9 7 7 9 9 7 5 5 7 X 7

9 7 7 9 9 0 5 5 7 X 7 9 7 7 9 9 0 5 5 7 7 11

7 9 9 7 9 5 5 7 0 11 7 9 9 9 5 5 7 X 7

9 7 9 7 7 0 5 5 7 X 7 9 7 9 7 9 0 5 5 7 7

Lesson 3

Training Your Inner Pulse

Keeping Your Stride

We've all experienced challenging musical situations in our playing—odd time signatures, ledger lines, unfamiliar key signatures, etc. Any of these can easily catch you off guard. You may get flustered or even lose your place. While we should all be striving for perfection in our playing, let's face it: we all make mistakes.

But there's good news: by maintaining your **inner pulse**, you can get right back on track. There's no need to necessarily pay attention to every sixteenth note of every bar; for every Bar 1 there's a Bar 2. Be sure to *keep things moving*. By staying in time with the music, the *next* bar always gives you the opportunity to recover from a "horrible mistake." There's no need to wait until the beginning of the next bar or phrase to get grounded again.

Internalizing the Beat

Each beat in a bar has its own "personality" and feeling. To demonstrate this idea, the following exercises use a repeated 4-sixteenth-note phrase played on each downbeat of a 4/4 measure. In each exercise, you're free to play whatever you'd like, but always return to the repeated figure in each bar where indicated. We'll place the phrase on beat 2 to begin, then beat 3, beat 4, and finally beat 1.



"You always hear people say, 'When you make a mistake, keep going' ... but there's a real art to recovery."

LESSON 3 (continued)

LESSON 03 EXAMPLE 01—Beat 2



"The point of this exercise is to really just get comfortable with playing it right—and playing it wrong—and coming back and just feeling that position in the bar. Once you start to internalize that, you can be a lot more relaxed when you're playing"

$\text{♩} = 100$ ($\text{♩} = \text{♩}^3$)

N.C.(A7)

Sheet music for Lesson 03 Example 01—Beat 2. The music is in 4/4 time, bass clef, with a tempo of 100 BPM. The key signature is one flat (Bb). The exercise consists of two staves. The first staff shows the bass line with fingerings (1, 2, 3, 4) and a triplet of eighth notes. The second staff shows the fretboard with fingerings (3, 5, 2, 5) and a triplet of eighth notes. The exercise is repeated four times.

LESSON 03 EXAMPLE 02—Beat 3

$\text{♩} = 100$ ($\text{♩} = \text{♩}^3$)

N.C.(A7)

Sheet music for Lesson 03 Example 02—Beat 3. The music is in 4/4 time, bass clef, with a tempo of 100 BPM. The key signature is one flat (Bb). The exercise consists of two staves. The first staff shows the bass line with fingerings (1, 2, 3, 4) and a triplet of eighth notes. The second staff shows the fretboard with fingerings (3, 5, 2, 5) and a triplet of eighth notes. The exercise is repeated four times.

LESSON 3 (continued)

LESSON 03 EXAMPLE 03—Beat 4

♩ = 100 (♩ = $\overset{\frown}{\text{♩}} \overset{\frown}{\text{♩}}$)

N.C.(A7)

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 etc.

3 5 2 5 3 5 2 5 3 5 2 5 3 5 2 5

5

3 5 2 5 3 5 2 5 3 5 2 5 3 5 2 5

LESSON 03 EXAMPLE 04—Beat 1

♩ = 100 (♩ = $\overset{\frown}{\text{♩}} \overset{\frown}{\text{♩}}$)

N.C.(A7)

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 etc.

12 10 12 10 12 10 12 10 10 9 10 11 10 9 10 11

5

5 2 5 5 0 0 3 5 3 5 2 5 3 5 2 5

9

10 9 10 11 10 9 10 11 3 5 2 5 10 9 10 11 10 9 10 11

LESSON 3 (continued)

In Examples 05–08, we'll start the same phrase on the “and” of each beat. This will help you get a better idea of the *eighth notes* in the measure, rather than the downbeats. Keep in mind that although there are rests shown in the notation to illustrate the phrase, you can also *play* on those beats. What's important is that you keep returning to the 4-note phrase at the correct place in the measure.

LESSON 03 EXAMPLE 05

♩ = 100 (♩ = $\frac{1}{2}$ ♩)

N.C.(A7)

Example 05 shows a 4/4 bass line. The notation consists of two systems of four measures each. The first system (measures 1-4) includes a rhythmic diagram below the staff: 1 & 2 & 3 4, 1 & 2 & 3 4, 1 & 2 & 3 4, etc. The notes are: Measure 1: quarter rest, eighth notes G4, A4, B4, quarter rest; Measure 2: quarter rest, eighth notes G4, A4, B4, quarter rest; Measure 3: quarter rest, eighth notes G4, A4, B4, quarter rest; Measure 4: quarter rest, eighth notes G4, A4, B4, quarter rest. The second system (measures 5-8) repeats the same pattern. The fretboard diagram below the staff shows the notes: 10, 9, 11, 10 for the eighth notes in each measure.

LESSON 03 EXAMPLE 06

♩ = 100 (♩ = $\frac{1}{2}$ ♩)

N.C.(A7)

Example 06 shows a 4/4 bass line. The notation consists of two systems of four measures each. The first system (measures 1-4) includes a rhythmic diagram below the staff: 1 2 & 3 & 4, 1 2 & 3 & 4, 1 2 & 3 & 4, etc. The notes are: Measure 1: quarter notes G4, A4, eighth notes B4, C5, quarter rest; Measure 2: quarter notes G4, A4, eighth notes B4, C5, quarter rest; Measure 3: quarter notes G4, A4, eighth notes B4, C5, quarter rest; Measure 4: quarter notes G4, A4, eighth notes B4, C5, quarter rest. The second system (measures 5-8) repeats the same pattern. The fretboard diagram below the staff shows the notes: 3, 5, 2, 5 for the first two measures, and 10, 9, 11, 10 for the last two measures.

LESSON 3 (continued)

LESSON 03 EXAMPLE 07

♩ = 100 (♫ = $\overset{3}{\text{♩}}$)

N.C.(A7)

5

LESSON 03 EXAMPLE 08

♩ = 100 (♩♩ = $\overset{\text{3}}{\text{♩}}$)

N.C.(A7)

[illegible]

LESSON 3 (continued)

Now, let's give each beat of the bar its own chord to better highlight the differences between beats 1, 2, 3, and 4:

LESSON 03 EXAMPLE 09

$\text{♩} = 100$ ($\text{♩} = \text{♩}^3$)

A Asus2 G Gsus2 A Asus2 G Gsus2 A Asus2 G Gsus2 A Asus2 G Gsus2

5 A Asus2 G Gsus2 A Asus2 G Gsus2 A Asus2 G Gsus2 A Asus2 G Gsus2

9 A Asus2 G Gsus2 A Asus2 G Gsus2 A Asus2 G Gsus2 A Asus2 G Gsus2

LESSON 03 EXAMPLE 10

$\text{♩} = 100$ ($\text{♩} = \text{♩}^3$)

A Asus2 G Gsus2 A Asus2 G Gsus2 A Asus2 G Gsus2 A Asus2 G Gsus2

5 A Asus2 G Gsus2 A Asus2 G Gsus2 A Asus2 G Gsus2 A Asus2 G Gsus2

Lesson 4

Rhythmic Displacement

In this lesson we'll extend the idea from Lesson 03 by playing a four- and an eight-bar phrase. "Feeling" these longer phrases is very useful, even without a bass in your hand—you could just be listening to a song making mental notes, or examining a chart.

Jonathan's Tips

1. Know your music.
2. Mark off four- and eight-bar phrases* on your chart to allow you to "re-ground" yourself if you get lost or off-track. This is particularly useful when phrases don't start or end on the same line of music.
3. Develop a feel for each section or phrase—an internal grid. This will allow you to enjoy the music itself, rather than feeling the need to count.
4. When playing, feeling 4s and 8s in a longer phrase is incredibly valuable. Any "disaster" can be fixed by starting again at the next four- or eight-bar section.



"If you have a stronger internal connection [with the tempo and phrasing], you can have a looser external connection. You can take your hand off the bass; the music is continuing."

*For meters other than 4/4, adjust your markings as appropriate.

LESSON 4 (continued)

To get a better sense for a longer phrase, let's look at a 4-bar loop, with a one-bar rhythm "hit" (highlighted) played on Bar 4, then Bar 3, then Bar 2, and finally Bar 1. Each 4-bar phrase is played twice.

LESSON 04 EXAMPLE 01

♩ = 110

(Bass Intro) 8

9

13

17

21

25 (Keyboard Outro) 4

Last, in Example 02 let's look at an 8-bar loop featuring a more developed chord sequence. In this case, we'll drop out in Bars 3 and 4, then 5 and 6, then 7 and 8, and finally Bars 1 & 2. Again, each 8-bar section is played twice, with the exception of the first time, which demonstrates the chord sequence.

continued →

LESSON 4 (continued)

LESSON 04 EXAMPLE 02

♩ = 110

Chord progression: C#m E F# F#m

5 Bb F#9/A Amaj7 C#m D E

9 C#m E F# F#m

13 Bb F#9/A Amaj7 C#m D E

17 C#m E F# F#m

21 Bb F#9/A Amaj7 C#m D E

25 C#m E F# F#m

29 Bb F#9/A Amaj7 C#m D E

33 C#m E F# F#m

37 Bb F#9/A Amaj7 C#m D E

