

Practicing the Bass

By John Goldsby



Here are sixty things you can practice that will improve your bass playing:

1. open-string exercises: single-string exercises and string-crossing exercises
2. major scales 1 octave (all scales should be practiced in all twelve keys)
3. dorian scales, 1 octave
4. dominant scales, 1 octave
5. major and minor triad arpeggios
6. bass line construction: 4/4 walking blues, standards, "I Got Rhythm" changes
7. play with recordings, emulate the sound and feeling
8. play with a metronome on 2 & 4. Also practice steady time without the metronome
9. read and learn simple melodies – standards & ballads
10. chromatic scale
11. blues scales
12. pentatonic scales
13. all modes of the major scale (dorian, phrygian, lydian, dominant, aeolian, locrian)
14. all scales two octaves
15. triad arpeggios, 2 octaves
16. arpeggios to 7th and 9th
17. bossa nova/latin bass lines
18. scale patterns
19. melodic patterns
20. transcribe a bass line from a famous bass player
21. V-I patterns and ii-V-I patterns, walking and soloing
22. melodic minor scales (the ascending melodic minor, also called the "jazz minor")
23. all modes of the melodic minor scale (melodic minor, sus b9, lydian augmented, lydian dominant, mixolydian b6, locrian #2, altered/diminished whole-tone/super-locrian)
24. altered dominant chords, arpeggios and patterns (C7#9#5, C7#9b5, C7b9#5, C7b9b5)
25. whole-tone scales (there are only two) and whole-tone scale patterns, whole tone triad arpeggios
26. diminished scales (there are only three)
27. diminished arpeggios
28. diminished scale patterns
29. major/dominant scales with chromatic half-steps (bebop scales)
30. harmonic minor scales, harmonic major scales
31. bebop melodies
32. transcribe a bass solo
33. thumb-position scales
34. thumb-position arpeggios
35. long tones with the bow
36. string crossings with the bow
37. arpeggios and scales with the bow
38. vibrato

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39. all styles of tunes – swing, bebop, standard, hard-bop, modal, contemporary, free-jazz, fusion, Brazilian, Cuban. Memorize the form and chord changes
40. ballads: learn chord changes and melody
41. play songs in all twelve keys
42. play all scales from the lowest possible note on the bass to the highest. Also start on upper notes of the scale and play down and back up.
43. use metronome only on 2 or only on 4
44. use tri-tone substitutions
45. use pentatonic scales to imply altered scales
46. use pentatonic and chromatic scales to go “outside” of the key-center
47. super-impose triads on top of chords to imply the upper extensions of the chords
48. improvise on a single chord/scale for a long time without stopping
49. use pedal points when walking and soloing
50. use classical method/etude books. Play etudes pizzicato and arco
51. use method books for other instruments (trombone, piano, guitar)
52. practice with and without your amp
53. record yourself while you practice or perform
54. write out your own exercises
55. transcribe horn, piano, guitar, drum solos
56. “break-up” the time in 4/4 and 3/4
57. odd meter time signatures
58. practice using dynamics
59. Sing!
60. Learn to play the piano...