

You will also find that you sometimes need to make big jumps across the neck to keep bass lines going.

Keeping a solid bass line is more important than smooth voice leading. For example it's more important to keep a bass line constantly going using simple chords rather than trying to find the hippest chords you know

Day 24: Comping with Bass Lines

After learning how to use a bass line with chords in the bossa nova, today's lesson is about how to comp with bass lines in a more traditional jazz setting.

Background on Comping with Bass Lines

An essential comping technique that every guitarist learns at some point is to comp with bass lines. The two most important ingredients to this comping style are the feel and the bass line. As Joe Pass says "A good bass line must be able to stand by itself", meaning that you add the chords where you can.

Like many other subjects in this book, bass lines could fill up an entire book of their own, but this section will teach you the fundamental principles such as how to construct a bass line and apply it over the ii-V-I progression.

What Chords Should I Use?

As with bossa nova comping, it's best to use simple voicings that are easy to grab to keep the bass line flowing as smoothly as possible.

The chord diagram below shows the chords that are going to be used, notice that these are all simple inversions with no extensions, but they give the ear enough information to recognize the chord type and have roots on the bottom two strings.

The image displays two sets of guitar chord diagrams for D-7, G7, and Cmaj7. Each set includes a treble clef staff with a chord symbol above it, and a guitar fretboard diagram below it. The fretboard diagrams show the strings from top to bottom as Treble (T), A, B, and Bass (B). The first set shows a standard voicing for each chord, while the second set shows an alternative voicing where the root is on the bottom string.

Chord	Staff	T	A	B	B
D-7	1	2	3	2	1
G7	1	3	2	3	2
Cmaj7	1	3	2	1	0
D-7	2	2	3	2	1
G7	2	3	2	3	2
Cmaj7	2	3	2	1	0

Any chord with the root on the bottom two strings will work well with bass lines, especially drop 3 chords.

Before chords are added it is important to feel completely comfortable with the scale and arpeggio notes for every chord in a II-V-I in C on the two bottom strings.

In this II-V-I this is fairly easy because each chord has all the same notes, but different notes from each chord type must 'light up' as the chord changes.

Practice each scale and arpeggio on the two bottom strings individually going down to the lowest possible note for each chord.

Check out the example below for all the scale notes available to you when you're creating a walking bass line in the key of C.

Musical notation for a walking bass line in the key of C. The top staff is a treble clef with a 4/4 time signature, showing a sequence of eighth notes: C2, B1, A1, G1, F1, E1, D1, C1, B0, A0, G0, F0, E0, D0, C0. The bottom staff is a guitar fretboard with strings T, A, B. Fret numbers are indicated below the strings: 0, 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12, 0, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12.

Bass lines are based on scales, arpeggios, and are usually a mix of both. The example below shows a diatonic II-V-I bass line in C which uses notes from each parent scale of the chord, but notice that the root of each chord is on the first beat of each bar.

Musical notation for a diatonic II-V-I bass line in C. The top staff is a treble clef with a 4/4 time signature, showing a sequence of eighth notes: D2, E2, F2, G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4. The bottom staff is a guitar fretboard with strings T, A, B. Fret numbers are indicated below the strings: 10, 12, 13, 12, 10, 13, 12, 7, 8. Chord symbols D-7, G7, and Cmaj7 are placed above the staff.

Although this bass line works perfectly well the next step would be to add some passing tones to make it sound a little more hip by adding chromatic tones that approach the root from a half or whole step above or below.

Check out the below example and notice the F# (a half step below the G in the next bar) on the last beat of the first bar and hear the added crunch it provides.

When creating walking bass lines you must always be thinking of approaching the next chord well in advance, notice how in bar two I was already thinking of approaching C in the last bar with a chromatic enclosure of a half step above (C#) and a scale step below (B).

To get started with this technique, construct a bass line over the ii-V-I in C but for the first three beats of the bar only think of notes belonging to the chord in context and on the last beat of the bar use a chromatic enclosure of the next chord.

Besides thinking a half step below you can also think a half step above a root which sounds very effective because the approach note for each new chord is also the b5 of the previous one giving a strong feeling of tension and resolution.

For example in the exercise below Ab is the last note of the first bar which is the b5 of D-7.

Once the above concepts have been practiced, the next step is to add some chords. I've used our first example with passing tones and added chords on the upbeat of the first beat of the first two bars.

Audio Example 28

The syncopated feel of the chords mixing with the sold quarter note rhythm of the bass line provides solid and effective comping.

Start to experiment with different chromatic enclosures as shown earlier and keep the chords of the same beat of the bar as shown in the last example. You'd be surprised at how much mileage you can get from just changing one or two notes in each example, rather than thinking of new bass lines every bar.

You must also feel comfortable walking the same changes around other parts of the neck. Check out the next example which use the 2nd set of chord inversions from the earlier example and use the same walking techniques.

Audio Example 29

The image shows a musical score for a walking bass line. The top staff is in treble clef and contains a melody of eighth notes: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. The bottom staff is in bass clef and shows the bass line with fret numbers: 5, 3, 5, 4, 2, 3, 5, 4, 2, 3. Chords are indicated above the staff: D-7, G7, and Cmaj7.

These positions can be mixed too; our final examples shows how you can start a bass line in one area of the neck and move it up to connect it with chords in a different position.

Audio Example 30

The image shows a musical score for a walking bass line. The top staff is in treble clef and contains a melody of eighth notes: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. The bottom staff is in bass clef and shows the bass line with fret numbers: 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 9, 10, 9, 7, 8. Chords are indicated above the staff: D-7, G7, and Cmaj7.

Right Hand Technique

The smoothest right-hand techniques for the walking bass line technique are hybrid picking and finger style, because with these techniques you can have more control of chords and bass lines.

If you prefer the hybrid picking technique, I recommend playing the bass line with your plectrum and using the 2nd and 3rd fingers to hit chords.

If you prefer to use fingers for this style play all the bass line parts with your thumb and use your 1st, 2nd, and 3rd fingers to grab the chord.

Using the fingers to grab the chords on the off beats makes it easy to grab the chords on an upbeat because our fingers can only really do upbeats, which gives our walking lines a good syncopated jazz feel.

Final Points to Remember

- When creating bass lines try and stick to the 6th and 5th strings as much as you can get to avoid getting in the range of other instruments.
- The goal is not to create the hippest bass line you can, but to concentrate on keeping a strong, consistent groove.

- Rhythmically most swing bass lines sound best with quarter notes, but are no means limited to that one rhythm.

Adding walking bass lines to chords is great fun and will make you a solid accompanist.

How to Practice Comping With Bass Lines

Practice applying these walking bass comping techniques to jazz standards that you know. You will find that tunes with more changes in them such as ‘All The Things You Are’ will be easier to do because they already contain so much motion so not many notes are needed.

Day 25: Walking Bass Line Etude

Now that the fundamental comping with bass technique is understood, let’s see how we can apply the techniques learned from yesterday’s lesson over a musical example, which in this case is a 12 bar jazz blues in Bb.

Audio Example 31

The musical notation consists of three systems, each with a treble clef staff and a guitar tablature staff. The key signature is Bb and the time signature is 4/4. The walking bass line is written in quarter notes, and the guitar chords are indicated by letters above the staff.

System 1 (Bars 1-4):

- Bar 1: Chord B^b7, Bass line: Bb4, Gb3, F3, Eb2
- Bar 2: Chord Eb7, Bass line: Eb3, D3, C3, Bb2
- Bar 3: Chord B^b7, Bass line: Bb4, Gb3, F3, Eb2
- Bar 4: Chord F-7, Bass line: F3, Eb2, D3, C3

System 2 (Bars 5-8):

- Bar 5: Chord Eb7, Bass line: Eb3, D3, C3, Bb2
- Bar 6: Chord B^b7, Bass line: Bb4, Gb3, F3, Eb2
- Bar 7: Chord A7, Bass line: A3, G3, F3, E3
- Bar 8: Chord D-7b5, Bass line: D3, C3, Bb2, A2

System 3 (Bars 9-12):

- Bar 9: Chord C-7, Bass line: C3, Bb2, A2, G2
- Bar 10: Chord F7, Bass line: F3, Eb2, D3, C3
- Bar 11: Chord B^b7, Bass line: Bb4, Gb3, F3, Eb2
- Bar 12: Chord G7, Bass line: G3, F3, Eb2, D3