

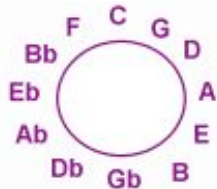
BASS MASTER CLASS
 As Published in *DownBeat Magazine*, August 2006
 by **Dr. J.B. Dyas**

Linear Bass Line Construction

It has been said that the definition of a jazz combo is a bassist and at least one other player, hence, the importance placed on the former's vital role in jazz. Indeed, the bassist has the dual responsibility of providing both a rhythmic and harmonic foundation simultaneously. In most straight-ahead jazz, this is accomplished through the use of walking bass lines, that is, quarter note lines performed with a long, warm tone in which the root of each chord is attacked (played) as each chord changes. The remaining notes "connect" one chord to another in deference to the harmony (chord) of the moment.

In analyzing the lines constructed by the walking masters (e.g., Ray, Ron, Rufus, Christian...), we find that the majority of their straight-ahead walking lines are comprised primarily of three elements: scales, arpeggios, and chromatics, and the combination of the three. The rule of thumb when constructing lines using scales and arpeggios is to be cognizant of each chord's scale and chord tones, i.e., use correct 3rds, 7ths, and appropriate alterations (e.g., #5, b9, etc.) as indicated. The guideline for using chromatics is that as long as you start your chromatic line on a chord tone of the chord you're on, and land on a chord tone (preferably the root) of the next chord as it changes, chromatics are cool.

The following exercises are meant to be practiced not only by up-and-coming bassists, but also on piano (left hand) by all musicians, especially jazz improvisation teachers and instructors of all instruments. When accompanying an improv class or private student, nothing beats walking a bass line in the left hand while comping the chords in the right.



Following are three one-measure bass lines that connect two chords that progress up a 4th (aka down a 5th), the most common progression in jazz. Called "cycle patterns" because they progress around the cycle of 4ths (up a 4th/down a 5th), the three lines are:

- 1) *down the scale* (1 7 6 5) – regarding the 7th: be sure to use a b7th for minor 7 and dominant 7 chords, and a major 7th for major chords
- 2) *1 3 5 chromatic* – regarding the 3rd: be sure to use a minor 3rd for minor 7 chords, and a major 3rd for dominant 7 and major chords
- 3) *whole, half, half, half* (steps going up)

Cycle Patterns

1 (down the scale)
2 (1 3 5 chromatic)
3 (whole, half, half, half)

With just these three patterns, nine combinations can be used to construct nine distinctive ways of walking a II- V7 IΔ progression. The combinations are 1&1, 1&2, 1&3, 2&1, 2&2, 2&3, 3&1, 3&2, and 3&3.

Cycle Pattern Combinations

The image shows three musical staves, each with three measures of music in bass clef. Above each measure are the chords C-, F7, and B^bΔ. Below each measure is a label describing the rhythm and scale used.

- Staff 1:**
 - Measure 1: 1 & 1 (down scale / down scale)
 - Measure 2: 1 & 2 (down scale / 1 3 5 chro)
 - Measure 3: 1 & 3 (down scale / w, h, h, h)
- Staff 2:**
 - Measure 1: 2 & 1 (1 3 5 chro / down scale)
 - Measure 2: 2 & 2 (1 3 5 chro / 1 3 5 chro)
 - Measure 3: 2 & 3 (1 3 5 chro / w, h, h, h)
- Staff 3:**
 - Measure 1: 3 & 1 (w, h, h, h / down scale)
 - Measure 2: 3 & 2 (w, h, h, h / 1 3 5 chro)
 - Measure 3: 3 & 3 (w, h, h, h / w, h, h, h)

After mastering these nine combinations in the key given, the next step is to practice the nine combinations in all 12 keys:

| | | |
|--|--|---------------|
| D- G7 CΔ | B ^b - E ^b 7 A ^b Δ | F#- B7 EΔ |
| G- C7 FΔ | E ^b - A ^b 7 D ^b Δ | B- E7 AΔ |
| C- F7 B ^b Δ | A ^b - D ^b 7 G ^b Δ | E- A7 DΔ |
| F- B ^b 7 E ^b Δ | C#- F#7 BΔ | A- D7 GΔ |

Similar lines can be constructed for II V I progressions in minor (II^o V7alt I-). Note that the following three patterns are altered from their major key counterparts in order to fit the chord qualities, i.e., half diminished (aka minor 7 b5) for the II chord, dominant 7 altered (meaning flat & sharp 5th and flat & sharp 9th) for the V chord, and minor 7 for the I chord. The “altered cycle patterns” are:

- 1) *down the altered scale* (1 b7 #5 b5)
- 2) *1 b2 3 b5* – regarding the 3rd: be sure to use a minor 3rd for half diminished chords and a major 3rd for dominant 7 altered chords
- 3) *half, whole, half, half* (steps going up)

Altered Cycle Patterns

1 (down the altered scale) 2 (1 b2 3 b5) 3 (half, whole, half, half)

Again, with just these three patterns, you have nine combinations that can be used to construct nine distinctive ways of walking a IIø V7alt I- progression. The combinations are the same (1&1, 1&2, 1&3, 2&1, 2&2, 2&3, 3&1, 3&2, and 3&3), we're simply substituting the altered cycle patterns for the regular cycle patterns so as to better fit the chord qualities.

Altered Cycle Pattern Combinations

1 & 1 (down alt scale / down alt scale) 1 & 2 (down alt scale / 1 b2 3 b5) 1 & 3 (down alt scale / h, w, h, h)

2 & 1 (1 b2 3 b5 / down alt scale) 2 & 2 (1 b2 3 b5 / 1 b2 3 b5) 2 & 3 (1 b2 3 b5 / h, w, h, h)

3 & 1 (h, w, h, h / down alt scale) 3 & 2 (h, w, h, h / 1 b2 3 b5) 3 & 3 (h, w, h, h / h, w, h, h)

Again, after mastering these nine combinations in the key given, practice them in all 12 keys:

|| Dø | G7alt | C- || || Bbø | Eb7alt | Ab- || || F#ø | B7alt | E- ||

|| Gø | C7alt | F- || || Ebø | Ab7alt | Db- || || Bø | E7alt | A- ||

|| Cø | F7alt | Bb- || || Abø | Db7alt | Gb- || || Eø | A7alt | D- ||

|| Fø | Bb7alt | Eb- || || C#ø | F#7alt | B- || || Aø | D7alt | G- ||

The next step is to apply these patterns to a tune that utilizes II V I progressions in both major and minor, such as *Autumn Leaves*. Using just these six patterns (i.e., three cycle patterns and three altered cycle patterns), plus a scale for the tritone progression (EbΔ to Aø in the 4th to 5th bar) and an arpeggio for the unison progression (G- to G7alt in the 7th to 8th bar), there are now literally hundreds of ways to walk the first 8 bars. Following are but a few:

Examples of the First Eight Bars of *Autumn Leaves*

C- F7 B^bΔ E^bΔ A[∞] D7alt G- G7alt

cp 2 cp 1 cp 1 scale acp 2 acp 1 arpeggio acp 1

C- F7 B^bΔ E^bΔ A[∞] D7alt G- G7alt

cp 3 cp 2 cp 3 scale acp 1 acp 2 arpeggio acp 3

C- F7 B^bΔ E^bΔ A[∞] D7alt G- G7alt

cp 1 cp 3 cp 3 scale acp 3 acp 3 arpeggio acp 2

Once you feel comfortable walking the first eight bars of *Autumn Leaves* and are able to vary the different cycle patterns and altered cycle patterns at will, the final step is to practice this eight-bar progression in all keys, say, one key per week for 12 weeks. I also suggest you say the name of each chord aloud as you land on it. At the end of the three-month stint, you will find that you have a much better handle on walking through changes, including being considerably more aware of correct 3rds, 7ths, and alterations. This exercise also will substantially increase your familiarity with the entire instrument -- low to high, common and uncommon keys alike. More importantly, it will give you far more confidence when approaching new tunes to walk, allowing your mind and spirit to focus less on the notes and more on TGIF (time, groove, interaction, feel) with that at-least-one-other-player in your combo.

Former Executive Director of the Brubeck Institute, bassist J.B. Dyas currently serves as Vice President for Education and Curriculum Development at the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz in Los Angeles. He received his PhD in Music Education from Indiana University and is a past recipient of the DownBeat Achievement Award for Jazz Education.

First Eight Bars of *Autumn Leaves* in All Keys

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|--------|-----|--------|--|
| D- | G7 | CΔ | FΔ | Bø | E7alt | A- | A7alt | |
| G- | C7 | FΔ | BbΔ | Eø | A7alt | D- | D7alt | |
| C- | F7 | BbΔ | EbΔ | Aø | D7alt | G- | G7alt | |
| F- | Bb7 | EbΔ | AbΔ | Dø | G7alt | C- | C7alt | |
| Bb- | Eb7 | AbΔ | DbΔ | Gø | C7alt | F- | F7alt | |
| Eb- | Ab7 | DbΔ | GbΔ | Cø | F7alt | Bb- | Bb7alt | |
| Ab- | Db7 | GbΔ | BΔ | Fø | Bb7alt | Eb- | Eb7alt | |
| C#- | F#7 | BΔ | EΔ | Bbø | Eb7alt | Ab- | G#7alt | |
| F#- | B7 | EΔ | AΔ | Ebø | Ab7alt | Db- | C#7alt | |
| B- | E7 | AΔ | DΔ | Abø | Db7alt | Gb- | F#7alt | |
| E- | A7 | DΔ | GΔ | C#ø | F#7alt | B- | B7alt | |
| A- | D7 | GΔ | CΔ | F#ø | B7alt | E- | E7alt | |