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4 String Basses

21669 - Cort Action 4 String Lefty, Black, Used

Cort

19701 - Cort Action Junior Bass, Walnut OPW
19278 - Cort Action Junior Bass, Black OPB
21466 - Cort Action Junior Bass, Black Cherry
16156 - Cort Action PJ OPB, Open Pore Black
16157 - Cort Action PJ, Open Pore Black Cherry
16323 - Cort Action 4 String Lefty, Black
21598 - Cort GB54JJ 4-String Bass, Olympic White
21493 - Cort GB64JJ Natural
15242 - Cort Jeff Berlin Rithimic 5 String Bass
12807 - Cort Jeff Berlin Rithimic 4 String Bass

Fender

21756 - Fender 60th Anniv RW J Bass, F.Silver
18725 - Fender Am Elite Jazz, Sat Jade Pearl Met
19643 - Fender Am Orig. 70s Jazz, Vintage White
21789 - Fender Am Pro II Jazz Bass, Roasted Pine
21858 - Fender Boxer Series PJ Bass, Torino Red
19238 - Fender Flea Active Jazz Bass Silver
21580 - Fender Ltd Trad 61 Jazz Bass, Sunburst
19570 - Fender Player Jazz Bass, Sunburst
21661 - Fender Player Jazz Bass Lefty, Sunburst
21772 - Fender Player Jazz Bass Polar White
21755 - Fender Player Precision Bass, Sunburst
21847 - Fender Player Precision Bass, PolarWhite
19316 - Fender Vintera Jazz Bass, Sunburst
19420 - Hofner HCT Violin Bass, Sunburst
12188 - Hofner Ignition Violin Bass, Sunburst
14498 - Hofner Ignition Violin Bass, Sunburst
19565 - Marco Bass N1 TFL 4-String, Orange, Used
19702 - Markbass MB JP Black Chrome 4 GD PF
15409 - Marleaux Consat Custom 4 String, Used
19460 - MusicMan Stingray 4 Bass with 3 EQ Blue
18114 - NS Design WAV4 Double Bass Trans Black

Rickenbacker

13012 - Rickenbacker 4003, Walnut
18083 - Rockbass Streamer LX4 Fretless, Blk Used

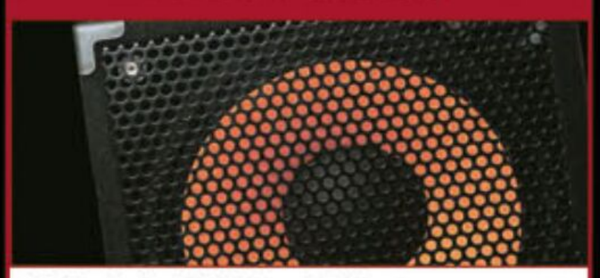
Squier

21464 - Squier Affinity Series Prec. PJ Bass Blk
21274 - Squier Classic Vibe '70s Jazz Bass, Nat
21825 - Squier Classic Vibe 60s Jazz Bass, Black
21679 - Squier Paranormal Jazz Bass 54 W.Blonde
14778 - Vintage ICON V74MRJP Fretless, Sunburst
14490 - Vintage LV4 Lefthanded 4 String
14407 - Vintage LVJ74 Lefthanded Bass Guitar, Natural
19680 - Vintage VS4 Reissued Bass, Cherry Red

Fretless Basses

14867 - Magic Fluke Timber Electric Bass
18083 - Rockbass Streamer LX4 , Blk Used
14778 - Vintage ICON V74MRJP, Sunburst

Bass Cabinets



13640 - Aguilar SL112 Bass Cabinet
16800 - BLUGuitar Nanoca

EDEN

13566 - Eden EGRW1264 Head & Cab Package
16054 - Eich 110XS Bass Cabinet 4 Ohm
16055 - Eich 110XS Bass Cabinet 8 Ohm
16042 - Eich 112XS Bass Cabinet 8 Ohms
16041 - Eich 112XS Bass Cabinet 4 Ohms
16075 - Eich 115L Bass Cabinet
16052 - Eich 115XS Bass Cabinet 4 Ohm
16053 - Eich 115XS Bass Cabinet 8 Ohm
16040 - Eich 1210S Bass Cabinet
16039 - Eich 1210S Bass Cabinet
16071 - Eich 210M Bass Cabinet
16069 - Eich 212L Bass Cabinet
16070 - Eich 212M Bass Cabinet
16048 - Eich 212S Bass Cabinet 4 Ohm
16050 - Eich 212S Bass Cabinet 8 Ohm
16068 - Eich 410L Bass Cabinet
16067 - Eich 610L Bass Cabinet
16061 - Eich 612XL Bass Cab
16065 - Eich 810L Bass Cabinet
16321 - Gallien Krueger CX115 Bass Cabinet
16444 - Gallien Krueger CX210 Bass Cab
16320 - Gallien Krueger MB210 Bass Amp Combo

Mark bass

5476 - Mark Bass STD104HR (4x10)
6241 - Mark Bass STD102HF (2x10)
6242 - Mark Bass STD104HF (4x10)
5477 - Mark Bass STD151HR (1x15)
9033 - Markbass Traveler 121H Bass Ext Cab
9034 - Markbass Traveler 151 P Bass Guitar Cab
4733 - Mark Bass Traveller TRV102P (2x10)
16013 - Markbass 123 Alain Caron Bass Cab
16014 - Markbass CMD Super Comb.K1 Alain Caron
17732 - Markbass Marcus Miller Cab 102
5431 - Mark Bass NY121 New York 1x 12 Bass Cab
10412 - Markbass NY122 2 x 12 Bass Cab
10409 - Markbass NY151 1 x 15 Bass Cab
10410 - Markbass NY151 RJ 1 x 15" Randy Jackson
15272 - Markbass New York 122 Ninja Bona Cab

ORANGE

6259 - Orange OBC115 (1x15)
10266 - Orange OBC210 Bass Guitar Speaker Cab
6260 - Orange OBC410H (4x10)
5241 - Orange OBC810 (8x10)
21597 - TC Electronic RS212 (2x12), Used
16856 - Trace Elliot 1x10 Elf Cab
19686 - Trace Elliot TE28E 2x8? bass cabinet

Acoustic Basses

19148 - Breedlove Solo Electro Acoustic Bass
21968 - Fender Kingman Bass, Black
10498 - Ortega D Walker Acoustic Bass, Black
19342 - Ovation B778TX Electro Acoustic Bass
12180 - Protection Racket Ac. Bass Case Dlx
15117 - Takamine GB30CE ElectrO Acoustic Blk

Bass Combos

13577 - AER Amp III Bass Amp Combo
5627 - AER Amp One (200W, 1x10)
21842 - Ashdown Studio 12

EDEN

13566 - Eden EGRW1264 Head & Cab Package
16046 - Eich BC112 Bass Combo
19163 - Eich BC112 PRO Bass Combo
16028 - Eich BC112 Bass Combo
19034 - Eich BC112 Bass Combo, Secondhand

Fender

13497 - Fender Rumble 100 Bass Amp Combo
4238 - Fender Rumble 15 (15W, 1x8)
12745 - Fender Rumble 200 Bass Combo
15113 - Fender Rumble 25 Bass Amp Combo
13083 - Fender Rumble 40 Bass Amp Combo
15114 - Fender Rumble 500 Bass Amp Combo

GK GALLIEN-KRUEGER

16765 - Gallien Krueger MB110 Bass Combo
16445 - Gallien Krueger MB112 Bass Combo
16446 - Gallien Krueger MB150S/112 Combo

Mark bass

9004 - Markbass 121 Lite Alain Caron Combo
6239 - Mark Bass CMD102P Bass Combo
5472 - Mark Bass CMD151P J Berlin (1x15)
5429 - Mark Bass Covers For Mark Bass Amps
6240 - Mark Bass Mini CMD121P (300W, 1x12)
19641 - Mark Bass Mini CMD121P, 300W, Used
5475 - Mark Bass CMD121H (300W, 1x12)
18371 - Markbass Marcus Miller CMD101 Micro60
18372 - Markbass Marcus Miller CMD 102 250
18370 - Markbass Marcus Miller CMD 102 500
9940 - Markbass Mini CMD 151 Jeff Berlin
16764 - Markbass 102 250 Richard Bona Combo
19729 - Markbass Ninja 102-500 Combo
9938 - MicroMark 801 Bass Combo

ORANGE

15715 - Orange Crush Bass 100 Bass Amp Combo
15716 - Orange Crush Bass 25 Bass Amp Combo
15714 - Orange Crush Bass 50 Bass Amp Combo
15111 - Orange OB1 300 Combo

Electric & Silent

14482 - NS Design NXT Electric Double Bass
16847 - NS Design NXTA Upright Bass, Active
14014 - Yamaha SLB100 Silent Upright Bass
6360 - Yamaha SLB200 Silent Double Bass
19938 - Yamaha SLB300 Silent Double Bass

Bass Heads

14618 - Aguilar Tone Hammer 500 Bass Amp Head
18854 - Bergantino Custom Padded Carry Bag
18850 - Bergantino Forte Bass Amplifier
21556 - Bergantino NXT210 Bass Cab
13566 - Eden EGRW1264 Head & Cab Package
16044 - Eich T1000 Bass Amp
16043 - Eich T300 Bass Amp
16027 - Eich T500 Bass Amp
16026 - Eich T900 Bass Amp
19468 - GALLIEN KRUEGER LEGACY 500 Head
16318 - Gallien Krueger MB500 Bass Amp Head
16319 - Gallien Krueger MB500 Fusion Bass Amp H
17147 - Gallien Krueger MB800 Bass Head

Mark bass

14828 - Mark Bass Nano Mark 300 Bass Amp Head
10408 - MarkBass Bass MultiAmp Stereo
6243 - Mark Bass Little Mark III Bass Head 500w
19081 - Mark Bass Little Mark III Bass Head USED
9035 - Markbass Little Mark III Tube Bass Head
5244 - MarkBass Little Mark Tube 800, 800W
9256 - Markbass Big Bang 500W Bass Head
19484 - Markbass Evo 1 Bass Amp Head
17254 - Markbass Little Marcus 1000 Bass Amp
17252 - Markbass Little Marcus 250 Bass Amp Head
17009 - Markbass Little Marcus 500 Bass Amp Head
17010 - Markbass Little Marcus 800 Bass Amp Head
9941 - Markbass Little Mark 250 Head Black
15271 - Markbass Little Mark Ninja Bona Head
19282 - Markbass Little Mark Vintage Bass Amp Head
9944 - Markbass MultiAmp
15151 - Markbass Randy Jackson TTE501 Bass Head

ORANGE

15110 - Orange 4 Stroke 500 Bass Amp
6261 - Orange AD200 MK3
8231 - Orange Dark Terror Valve Guitar Head
19674 - Orange Little Bass Thing Bass Amp Head
5351 - Orange Terror Bass 500 TB500
16531 - Trace Elliot Elf 200 Watt Bass Amp Head

5 & 6 String Basses

19147 - Cort A5 Plus SCMS Open Pore Natural
16526 - Cort GB75 5 String Bass, Black
18731 - Cort GB75JJ 5 String Bass Aqua Blue
16397 - Cort GB75JJ Amber Glossy 5 String Bass
21970 - ESP LTD RB1005 Rocco Prestia 5-String Used
16766 - Ibanez SR30TH5PII Premium, 5-String Bass
19381 - Marleaux MBass 5 String Bass, Burl Top
9009 - Overwater Contemporary 5-String, Used

Rickenbacker

21654 - Rickenbacker 4003S 5 Bass Guitar Jetglo
5121 - Rockbass Streamer LX5, Black, Used
21743 - Sandberg California TM5
21747 - Sandberg California 5 String Bass, Creme

Spector

19735 - Spector Bass Rebop 5DLX Blck Cherry
16773 - Spector Coda 5 Pro Trans Black
11196 - Spector Bass Legend 5 Classic Blk Cherry
12406 - Spector Legend Custom 5 String, Amber
13214 - Spector Legend Custom 5 String, Black
16776 - Spector SP5BK Performer 5, Black Cherry
19158 - Sterling by MusicMan SubRay 5 Bass, HBS
8999 - Yamaha RBX5A2 5 String Bass, Black
16000 - Yamaha TRBX505 Basss, Black
16000 - Yamaha TRBX505 Bass

For full guitar details, pricing and photos, enter the number next to each guitar model into our SKU search facility on the website.

WELCOME

Prince played bass from the depths of his soul. Can you say the same?

When Prince died in 2016, decades before his time, the world was deprived not only of a unique singer, songwriter and artistic force, we also lost a supremely talented bass player. The maestro didn't often play bass live, but when he did he played with total economy and groove. To remind our community of his sheer force as a bass player, and to commemorate five years since his passing, we talk to the many bassists from Prince's bands about his approach, and we also revisit a classic interview from 1999. *BP* writer Karl Coryat went to Paisley Park to meet him, only to be denied a recorder and obliged to play bass right in front of the legend. Could *you* have handled that amount of pressure?

Our objective at *BP* is always to cover as much ground as possible, so alongside Prince you'll find interviews with Jeff Berlin, Lou Reed's bassist Fernando Saunders, Alex Webster of Cannibal Corpse, and the great luthier Bill Conklin. We look back at a key moment in Lee Sklar's career, we celebrate the work of John Taylor, and – on the subject of pressure – we meet Jon Button, whose day-job in The Who requires him to step into the huge shoes of the late John Entwistle. Again, could you handle it?

You know what? With the right preparation and mindset, I think you could. Our educators, gear reviewers and bass theory and tech advisers know exactly what it takes to do our jobs at the low end, and they're here to pass that wisdom on to you. Take full advantage, and who knows, one day you might be the one up on that huge stage. See you next month!

Joel McIver, Editor

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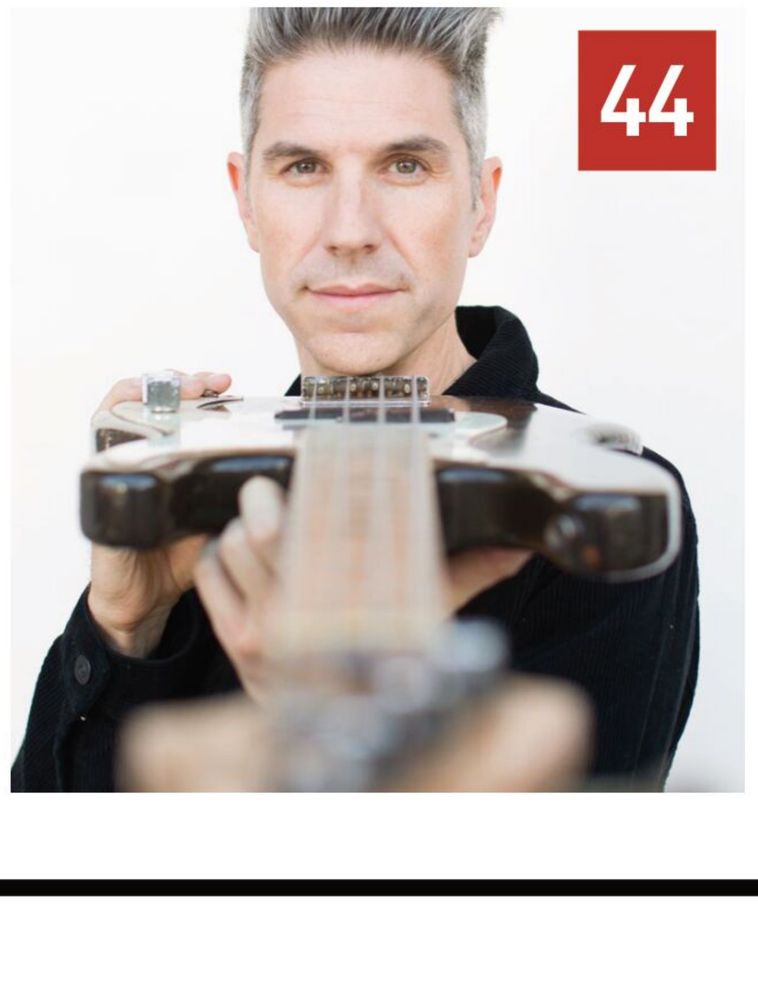

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THE Lowdown

News and views from the bass world, collated by BP's team of newshounds

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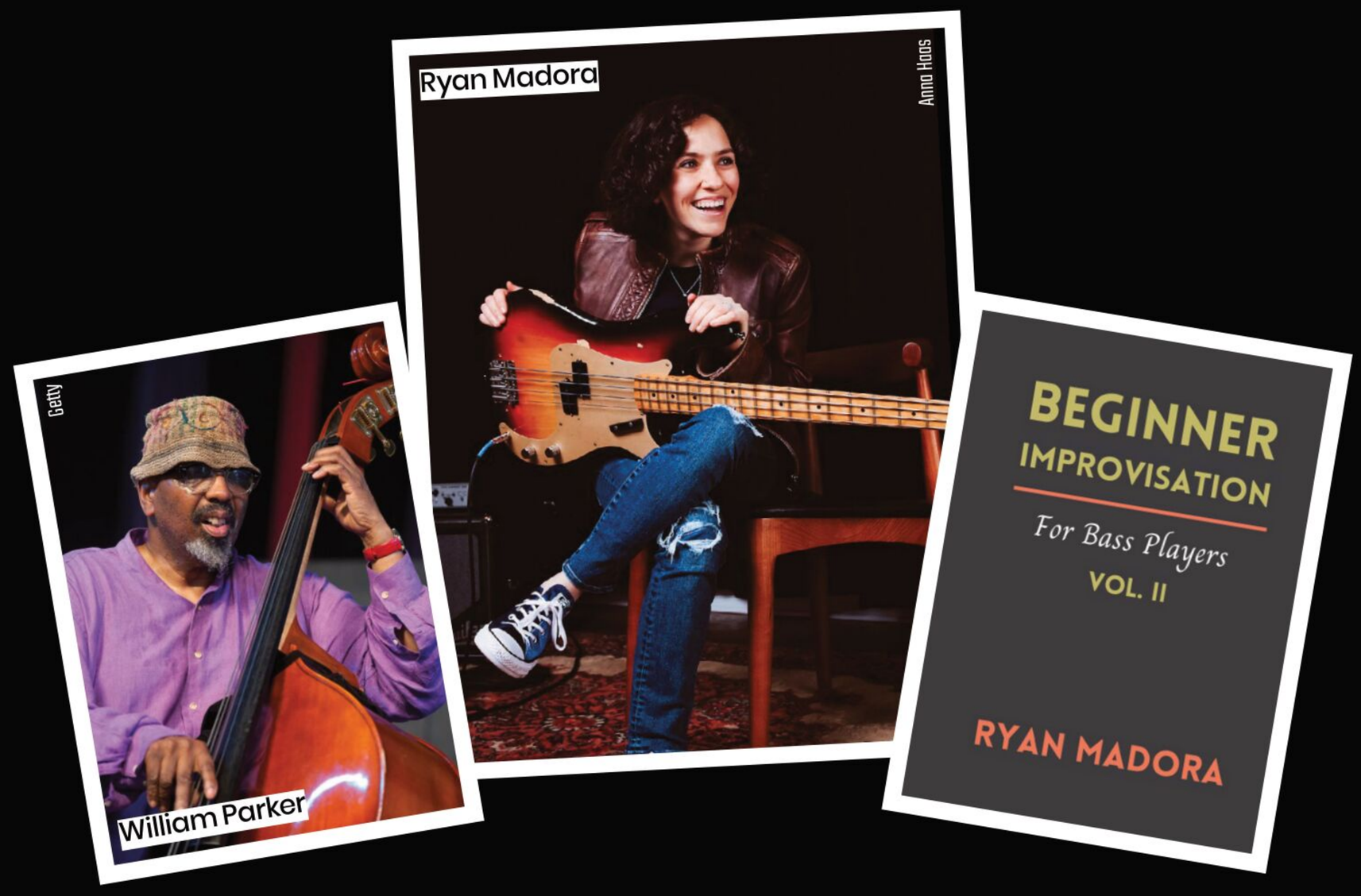


SHELF LIFE

There's no better time to read – or write – a bass book.

It seems that bass players, educators and all-round low-end experts have been using their time wisely over the past gig-free year, committing their knowledge to a plethora of new books. First up is the acclaimed *BP* columnist **Ryan Madora**, whose new tome *Beginner Improvisation For Bass Players, Vol. II* continues her excellent education series (https://ryanmadora.com). Then there's the great **Ariane Cap**, who is releasing *The Pattern System For The Bass Player – Sharpen Your Musical Mind Through Fretboard Proficiency, Improvisation And Mental Practice*, co-written with Wolf Wein (https://bit.ly/3d55DIS).

Bass adventures of the more unnerving persuasion will no doubt be plentiful in **Geezer Butler**'s forthcoming, as-yet-untitled autobiography. The Black Sabbath bassist has often talked of the many exploits he and his bandmembers committed while "over-served at the bar", one memorable example told to this magazine's editor being the time he headbutted a statue – and suffered the consequences – after having mistaken it for a real person.

Slightly more peaceful thoughts are available via *The Spirit Of Music*, written by our chum **Victor Wooten** (www.vixmerch.com), and a new biography by **Cisco Bradley** titled *Universal Tonality: The Life And Music Of William Parker* will also make for an illuminating read. Head to Amazon for **Dave Hunter**'s Fender 75 Years, a self-explanatorily-titled document of the Big F's first three-quarter-century in business

Stuart Clayton, also of this magazine, has a new book out called *The Bass Guitarist's Guide To Reading Music – Intermediate Level*, and as we mentioned last month, the renowned physician and bassist **Dr. Randall Kertz** has partnered with Stu's company Bassline Publishing for the re-release of his acclaimed book *The Bassist's Guide To Injury Management, Prevention And Better Health*.

Out of print for several years, the book is now available to purchase in physical form and contains detailed information on the common physical pitfalls encountered by bass players. Interviewees include Stuart Hamm, John Patitucci, Ariane Cap, Ed Friedland, Chi-chi Nwanoku and more.

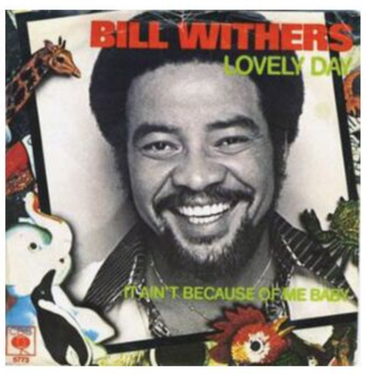
What better time to shell out for one of these eminent volumes? We're lucky that there's so much collective wisdom to share about our instrument – which is, as we know, the coolest of them all.

THE Lowdown

New Heights

Michael Kelly Pinnacle basses inbound.

New four- and five-string basses from Hicksville, NY-based luthiers Michael Kelly Guitars are incoming, with street prices of $699.99 and $739.99 respectively. The Pinnacles come with a natural burl finish, swamp ash bodies, five-piece maple and walnut necks and ebony fretboards, while custom-wound, coil-splittable Rockfield MDC humbucker pickups deliver the tones. A three-band EQ and push-pull active/passive selector adds options. We've played and reviewed Michael Kelly basses before, and been impressed by their playability and build at this price point, so we'll be testing these instruments as soon as we get hold of them.



Love Lines

A great bass-line saluted in less than 100 words.

Bill Withers, 'Lovely Day' (1978)
You've probably never thought of 'Lovely Day' as being driven by a bass-line, as it's well-known for its mellow vocal hooks, specifically the "lovely daaaaaaaaaaay" chorus which closes it. Well, think again: the song comes complete with a sweet, descending line that adds a funky fill each time it goes down a step and then adds a dexterous, sixteenthy turnaround on the way back up. Writer and producer Jerry Knight played the line, one of the most recognisable in the history of R&B, and perhaps the best-known Withers song.

Sand Men

Spector Basses have announced the new sandblasted NS Pulse Series of instruments, whose three-dimensional finish brings new meaning to the word 'groove', as it's covered with them. The basses' swamp ash body allows players to see and feel the grain pattern of the wood, we're told..

Three Cheers

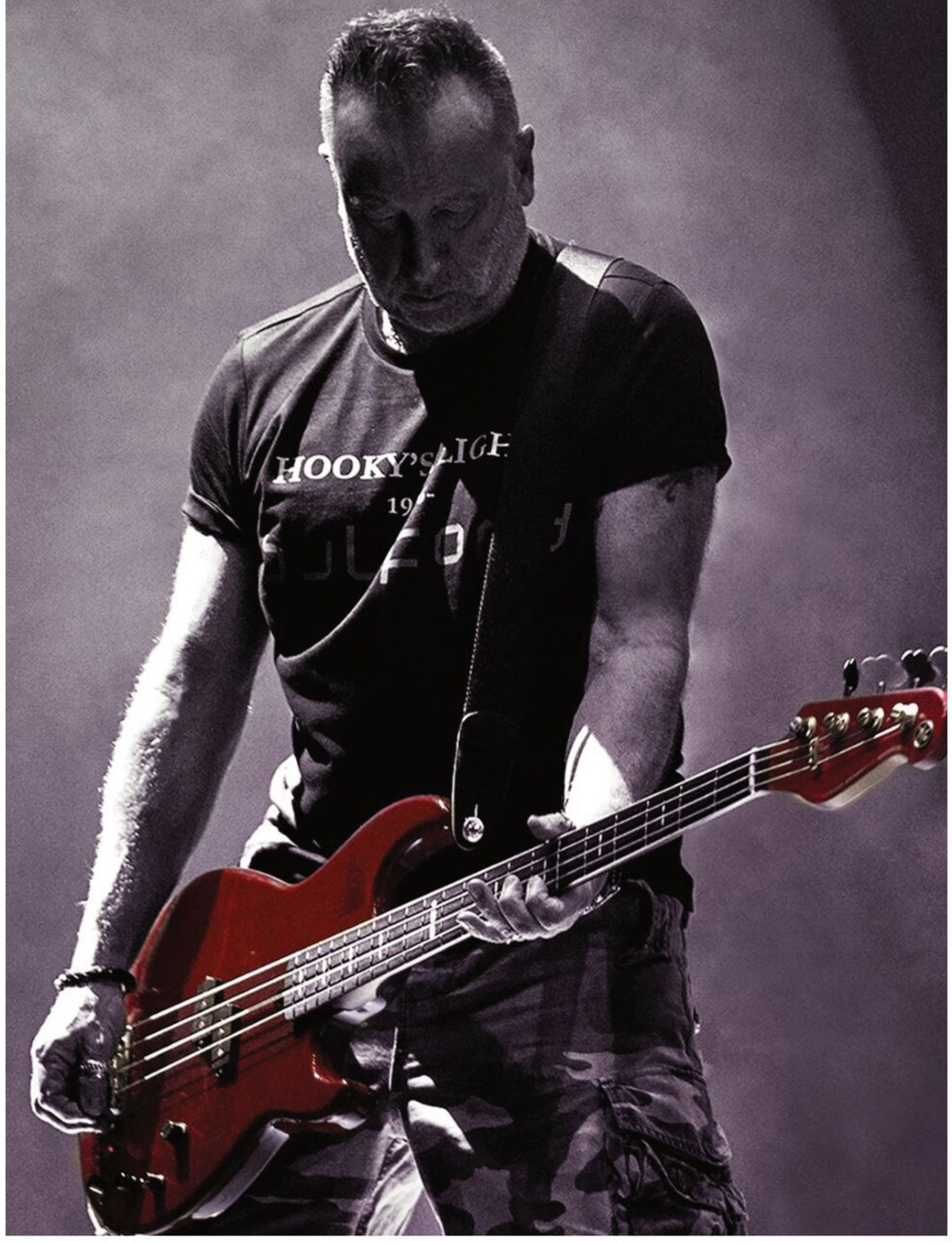
Sir Paul McCartney has issued a remixed version of *McCartney III* in the form of *McCartney III Imagined*, featuring a ton of celebs 'reimagining' the songs. These include Damon Albarn, Beck, Blood Orange, Phoebe Bridgers, Josh Homme, Khruangbin, Massive Attack, St. Vincent, ace actor Idris Elba and more.

Loved Up

Italian bassist Alberto Rigoni has released a new album, *For The Love Of Bass*, featuring a wide range of guest bassists including Nathan East, Leland Sklar, Michael Manring, Tony Franklin, Doug Wimbish, Cody Wright, Mohini Dey and David Pastorius.

Sadowsky

In *BP* 408, we incorrectly stated that Sadowsky's German-made Metroline Verdine White bass is made in Korea. Its UK SRP is £2439. Apologies!



STRING THEORY

Peter Hook announces orchestral Joy Division performances.

The renowned Joy Division and New Order bassist Peter Hook will be performing the former band's music alongside the Manchester Camerata orchestra in September. These events sold out the Sydney Opera House and London's Royal Albert Hall in 2019, and involve over 50 artists, musicians and guest vocalists.

"This has to be one of the most nerve-wracking things I have ever done," says Hooky. "To sell out the Royal Albert Hall before anyone had even heard it was a fantastic compliment, it has to be said. The reaction has been wonderful and this time around I'm looking forward to being able to enjoy it myself. To bring it to [Joy Division's home town] Manchester for the first time will be very, very special."

We recently reviewed Yamaha's new Peter Hook signature bass, a BB with a thoroughly modern makeover when it comes to the spec. "The BB shape is old enough by now to look traditional, even classic, but Yamaha and Hook have evidently put their heads together with the aim of supercharging the design for the demands of the modern day," we said. "Flip it over and you'll find a six-bolt neck join with the final two bolts angled in for extra strength; at the end of the body you'll see a funky little chamfered face where the strings exit the body. These touches add a very modern sheen to this resolutely trad bass design, which ties in with the superpowered preamp." We're looking forward to seeing it in action.

"This has to be one of the most nerve-wracking things I've ever done!"
Peter Hook

The two Sound Of Joy Division Orchestrated shows will take place at London's Palladium and the O2 Apollo Manchester on 10 and 17 September. Tickets are on sale now at: gigst.rs/PHMCOrchestrated.

IN THE
Groove

DURAN DURAN · SEVEN & THE RAGGED TIGER (1983)

Each month, we celebrate a classic, bass-loaded album. Has it stood the test of time?

Note hair and Aria bass in matching scarlet...

Whether you liked it or not, in 1983 the pop world was in thrall to the New Romantics, who looked highly ridiculous with their ruffs, pointy hair and stupid tippy-toe dancing, but who also sold over seven bazillion records in a short period of time. Who knows why we were suckered in? Perhaps the musicians were just too pretty to ignore, and the prettiest of all were undoubtedly Duran Duran, a quintet who combined their love of New York disco with punk and the fledgling synth-pop sound. Whether you liked their stuff or not, for a few years back then it was impossible to escape them.

Duran Duran's second album, *Rio* (1982), may be their best-known thanks to the shiny suits the band wore in the videos, but the following year's *Seven & The Ragged Tiger* is the deeper, more mature work of the two. Of course, 'mature' is a relative term given the ludicrous antics the young band got up to, as has been detailed in these pages and elsewhere, but in terms of musicianship and songwriting the members of Duran were frighteningly evolved for their age.

Prominent among the five band-members was bassist Nigel 'John' Taylor, who laid down some incredibly catchy lines alongside the two other unrelated Taylors Andy (guitar) and Roger (drums), meshing perfectly with the hooks supplied by keyboard player Nick Rhodes and singer Simon Le Bon.

Bernard Edwards of Chic was Taylor's stated biggest influence, and the funky, staccato fingerstyle which John used on this album stood proudly out of the mix – which was just as well, as his bass parts were a huge part of the songs' appeal. Duran's sound always focused more on Rhodes' synth hooks and the rhythm section than the guitars, leaving the bass plenty of room for octave pops and slides, while Andy Taylor was confined to complementary chord stabs, the occasional solo and unison riffs.

The funky, staccato fingerstyle which John Taylor used on this album stood proudly out of the mix.

Listen out for the chunky, slide-heavy line on the big single, 'The Reflex'; the ghost-noted line in '(I'm Looking For) Cracks In The Pavement'; and the speedy, partly slapped bass in 'Of Crime And Passion'.

A noticeable element of a given Taylor bass-line is how he builds them from verse to verse, where a simple line might evolve into a fuller figure by the song's end. He was a master of the fretless too, all of which makes him one of the Eighties' most valuable bass players. Hats off to that man.

Getty

Photo: Getty Images

THIS MONTH

Tony Hall

New Orleans bass legend Tony Hall has worked with a host of top names over a stellar career. He's been hugely in demand for his work from the likes of the Neville Brothers, Bob Dylan, Herbie Hancock, Maceo Parker and Harry Connick Jnr. His latest group project is the mighty Dumpstaphunk, a classic funk-fusion band that also features Ivan and Ian Neville, trombonist Alex Wasily and drummer Deven Trusclair. Oh, and the small matter of another bass player – the storied Nick Daniels. It's a modernisation of the Neville Brothers' groove along with the ingrained old school R&B, rock and down-and-dirty New Orleans funk, and it is fantastic. Hall's natural syncopation and elasticated swing playing are instantly recognisable, though of course he's equally happy playing in the pocket when the material demands it. Recently *Bass Player* had the great pleasure of talking with Tony, using the magic of the internet, as he shared his insights into some of the records and recordings that have had an impact on his continuing musical escapades. There's also a nearly-lost gem that may yet find itself emerging into the world after some 35 years – but more of that later. Over to Tony...

MUST-HAVE ALBUM

DUMPSTA-PHUNK

Where Do We Go From Here (2021)

★★★★★

"Dumpstaphunk is that rare thing, a band with two bass players; I wouldn't say we play duelling bass, exactly, but there are two bass-lines that coincide with each other. Usually I play the main line and Nick will play a Mu-Tron line against my line, a counterpart, and sometimes one part will become two parts with us playing.

"He normally does more of the effects, like a Mu-Tron or octave divider – he has a whammy pedal too. We'll also play in different octaves. I'll play a line, he'll answer the line, and it sounds like one bass. He uses the envelope filter a lot, and my bass is mainly straight. Sometimes I'll play like straight bass and then in a certain line I'll pop the envelope filter on, just on a certain little line and go back.

"It's crazy – it just kind of comes together when we write these songs. It's not like 'You play this part, I'll play this part'. We just all play and you know, we have to fine-tune some things, but it just falls in naturally without us trying too hard.

"When it comes to choosing bass guitars, I'm playing my new Spector Tony Hall custom model on here: it's in production at the moment. For cabs, I have a Peavey 4x10: I used to have the TVX cabinets, but now I've been using a PVH cab."

WORTHY CONTENDER

HARRY CONNICK, JR

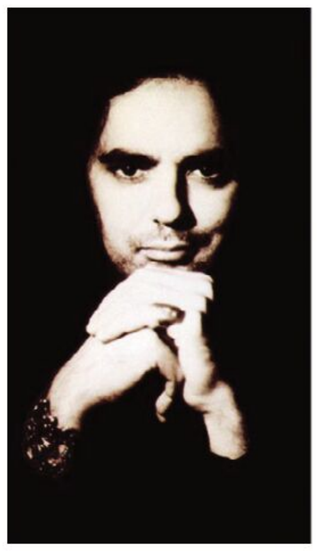
Star Turtle
(1996)

★★★★☆

"I really like 'How Do Y'all Know' on here. The bass is really, really soul funk – almost behind the beat. Harry would ask me at times: 'So how do you play the head, fall behind the beat and be in time?' I guess it must be a Louisiana thing.

"I'm playing a custom Peavey Dyna on there, and also on the Neville Brothers records. Having the right drummer is really important. It's Raymond Weber drumming on here, and we always play good together. Raymond plays really well with bass players. He understands the instrument [and the interaction]. For example, he will play some stuff that's really laid back and I'll play against that, and we entwine with each other, but he also knows how to stay out of the way, and I know how to stay out of his way. So we'll never clash: if he plays a fill I will play something that enhances that feel, or lay out until we finish and come right back in on it.

"My lines are pretty much clean on this record, same as the Neville Brothers' *Yellow Moon*. It was all straight bass, with no effects at all. Real bass-heavy, kinda spooky, slow. I guess they were trying to capture a really serious, New Orleans-type kind of thing on the album. That record really gave me a whole lot of recognition."



COOL GROOVES

DANIEL LANOIS

Acadie
(1989)

★★★★★

"There's a song called 'The Maker' on this album, on which I play probably five overdubbed bass parts. First, there's the main line, and then there's harmony lines together.

"We played, and we recorded the song, and then we were sitting there waiting to do some more stuff, so I was just there doodling. Dan was like, 'Oh, cool, cool. We're going to put that on it too. Give me some more' – and he just kept adding parts to it.

"I have to say it came out really good. When I first met Dave Matthews, he was like, 'You're the guy from 'The Maker'!' because he played that song with his band. Emmylou Harris also recorded it on her album.

"With this, the Emmylou Harris and Bob Dylan LPs that I worked on, we could spend one day on a song, and do like 23 different takes. It wasn't your average recording where you turn the tape on, and you play the song and jump around and it's okay, we got it. No, it was like, when you thought you had it, he was like, 'Okay, let's try this again, and this time. Let's do this. So let's play this register here. Yes. Try that. Yeah. Oh, yeah. Didn't work too well. Let's go back to what you did before'. Then you'd fine-tune that one. That was just the way it worked on those records."

WILD CARD

TROMBONE SHORTY

The Parking Lot Symphony (2017)

★★★☆☆

"This was a real fun record to play bass guitar on. Some of the stuff had a hip-hop feel, and some of it was funk – it was cool. There were a lot of nice changes to the songs. It was experimental in the way that some of the parts came together – everything was kind of written right there, pretty much on the spot.

"You know, we went in there and Trombone Shorty already had all these ideas about what we were gonna play. There were a few ideas that we got together and worked on beforehand. Mostly, though, we got there and he wrote them as we went along. It turned out really good, because he knew what he wanted and he had the right people to deliver the parts.

"The amp I was using was a Peavey. I've got a Peavey MiniMega: you get 1000 watts from this really small head that you can put inside a briefcase. It's amazing how powerful that head is.

"But you know what, I don't just change my bass gear because something new has come out, though. It has to fit me, and when I find something that works for me I tend to stick with it. These days I also have Deep Impact and Future Impact pedals, and an ABS envelope filter, plus an Octave Divider and an Octave Divider 2."

WHEN THINGS GO AWRY...

TONY HALL

Untitled
(1985)

★★★☆☆

"We were going up to Alexandria, Louisiana to record with a friend who has a studio up there, and on the way the fuel pump went out on the car, in the middle of nowhere. We decided we'd just push the car and keep going down the highway. It was before cellphones, so we had to find a phone somewhere.

"Eventually we found this house and the lady who lived there made a phone call for us. We stayed out there all night, parked in front of her house on the highway, and slept in the car. It was really crazy. The next day, we hitched a ride to a parts place, bought the part, and the car was fixed, so eventually we continued our journey.

"We laughed about it, because we were kids – we just joked all night until we fell asleep in the car. You know, we were young musicians, trying to make it. Getting there was a nightmare, but we did get there. We did wind up making it to the studio and we recorded some good tracks. My plan is to try to finish those songs – transform them from two-inch tape into Pro Tools and work with them. Sadly, both of my friends that were with me are deceased now. One of them, Gary Clemens, was the first guy who ever believed in me and cut some songs with me. We had some fun times together."

THE Lowdown

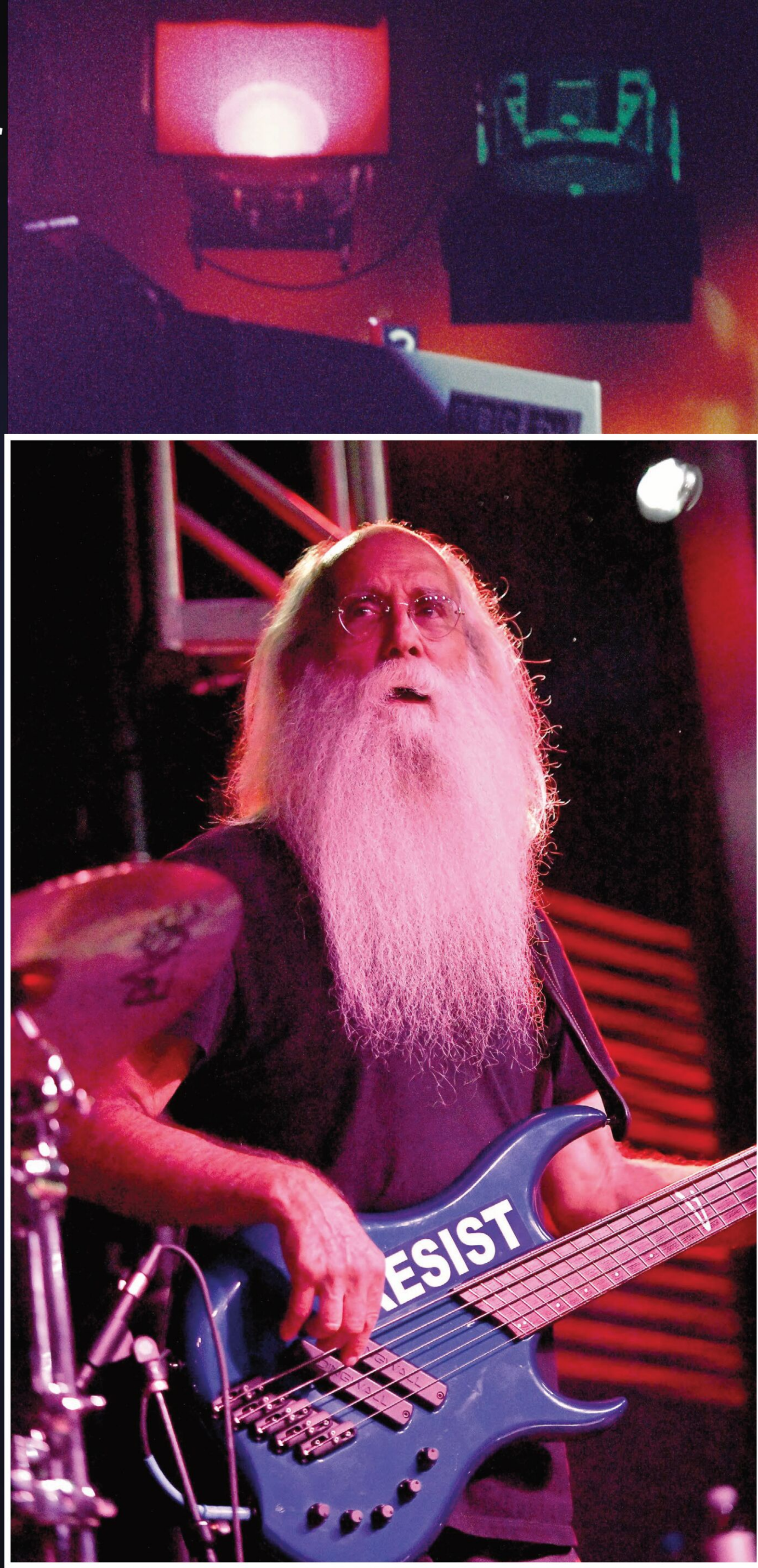
James Taylor recruits Lee Sklar for *Mud Slide Slim And The Blue Horizon* in 1971

The singer-songwriter James Taylor makes sweet music – sometimes too sweet. More than a few critics have accused him of ladling on the sentimental treacle a little too lavishly at times, but when he hits the right balance – as he did 50 years ago, with his third album *Mud Slide Slim And The Blue Horizon* – he writes songs that will twang the heartstrings of even the hardest-hearted rocker.

Twanging strings of a different kind, Taylor's bassist Leland 'Lee' Sklar pulled off the tricky task on this album of laying down exactly the right kind of bass-line for the sleek, acoustic songs in which his boss specialised. On this 1971 record, the bass benefits from that luscious production that only crackly old vinyl can really reproduce.

Neither inaudible nor hogging the limelight, Sklar delivers bass parts that wind themselves slinkily around Taylor's enormously dexterous acoustic lines, occupying a frequency space that doesn't interfere with the lowest guitar strings and kick drum and never gets in the way of the piano. He's absent on some songs – the remarkable 'You Can Close Your Eyes' is the most obvious example – but elsewhere, as with 'Love Has Brought Me Around' and 'Riding On A Railroad', the lines are thunderous, with scale runs and passing notes way down at the lowest end.

The album's best-known song, and Taylor's signature tune after his 1970 hit 'Fire And Rain', is a cover of Carole King's 'You've Got A Friend'. You may never have listened to the bass part before, as it's a largely acoustic song, but check it out after you've read this. It's full of elaborate fills, to most people's surprise, matching a walking line in some of the chorus parts and adding plenty of soft, high-register runs to the loping, mid-tempo chord sequence. The line isn't mixed low, but it does lack almost any mids and top end, hence its lack of obvious presence. Never has there been a stronger argument for an instrumental-only version.



Above: Lee Sklar now. Far right: the great man in action with James Taylor circa '71.

I WAS THERE!

A historic moment in bass world – recalled by those who were there to see it

Getty

Low Life

REBUILD ENDURANCE

Get that stamina back up

Maximise your live bass performance with Tax The Heat bassist and BIMM tutor Antonio Angotti.

BIMM INSTITUTE

Hello bassists! As I did in our last issue, I want to look ahead to the return of live shows and tours post-pandemic, and what that means for us as performers. With it being over a year now since most of us last played live, there are going to be elements of our live performance skills that may have regressed, to some degree. This might mean learning to play and lock in with other musicians again; relearning and retaining material; anxieties around returning to the stage and playing in front of audiences – or even just having the stamina to play for an extended amount of time under gig conditions. I'll be tackling all of these areas over the next few issues, but first we'll start with endurance.

It's important to take our time in rebuilding endurance: anything too taxing to begin with can lead to aches, pains and longer-term issues. I appreciate that some of you may have replaced gigging with an increase in personal practice, so some of the endurance needed will have been preserved through that simple switch. However, this completely depends on what you focus on in your practice – if it's transcription or theoretical study, then it's not going to play into the development of your playing stamina. So, with that in mind, here is what I would recommend focusing on.

Warm-ups and exercises

Starting off simply, with a finger-per-fret-based exercise, can help to re-establish your stamina by working through permutations of this against an increasing tempo. The beauty of this exercise is that it can be customised to push your fingers and stamina further and to promote constant development. You could start with ascending patterns, then descending, then alternating direction, up or down one string, across all strings, across all strings with a semitone shift up or down, or one finger per string as well as per fret, and many other variations.

Replace the metronome

The metronome has always been our go-to timekeeping tool, but when re-acclimatising to live performance, you could switch yours out for a non-programmed drum loop. There are plenty of free loops out there at differing tempos, styles, feels and time signatures, which will give you a more authentic playalong tool for practice.

Plan your live set

Try creating playlists of different set lengths or types, so that you get used to learning material and retaining it for playback. By starting at 30 minutes and then working up to longer sets, this will help with the transition back into live performance. The material used could be your own band's, or you could even pretend you're the bassist for another band or artist and curate your own live sets of their music as a challenge to perform.

The Woodshed

SWAMP THING

What's the status of swamp ash?

Ace luthier Rob Elrick brings decades of wisdom to the table. Listen up!

Fraxinus americana, more commonly known to the guitar community as swamp ash, has been a coveted material for electric guitars since Fender began using it over 70 years ago on the original 1950 Broadcaster. However, with North American ash species at risk, limited availability has put its future as a wood for guitars in limbo.

Swamp ash grows in swampy areas around the Mississippi river in the south central United States. While seasonal flooding is not unusual in these areas, local flooding has become more frequent and severe over the past 150 years, with 2018 and 2019 the wettest on record. The U.S. National Oceanic And Atmospheric Administration reported that spring flooding along the Mississippi in 2019 was also among the most damaging in modern history.

Annually, when the Mississippi retreats within its banks, the adjacent bottomlands become dry enough to cross with the heavy equipment used in logging; this is when crews set out to harvest timber. Unfortunately, the severity of recent flood events has made those bottomlands virtually inaccessible over the past three seasons, resulting in the poorest harvests in recent history.

Despite these conditions, ash trees have long endured the typical seasonal flooding of the lower Mississippi River. Early seasonal floods that recede in weeks are not problematic to their survival, but sustained flooding – when high waters persist for months at a time – makes the survival of seedlings tenuous, particularly when they occur year after year. Severe conditions in recent years has led to the loss of many young trees.

Another imminent threat to the long-term availability of swamp ash is the emerald ash borer beetle. First spotted in Michigan in 2002, this invasive species has since spread across 35 U.S. states and five Canadian provinces, killing millions of native ash trees. The U.S. Forest Service believes it to be the most efficient invasive insect to ever attack trees in the States. While the emerald ash borer has not yet reached the lower Mississippi floodplains, its arrival is only a matter of time.

Beginning in 2015, the threat of the beetle led some lumber companies to abandon the practice of limiting the take of mature trees in designated areas to 30 percent, instead taking any adult tree before the beetles can claim them. This has been a controversial decision that leaves fewer mature trees for the future.

For now, swamp ash remains available in limited supplies. Large manufacturers dependent on outsized supplies of raw materials will likely continue abandoning it as a standard material. As an increasingly valuable commodity, expect to pay more for this prized material in the future.

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PLAY SCALES OVER DOMINANT CHORDS

Nik Preston takes us through three ways to exploit this useful theory

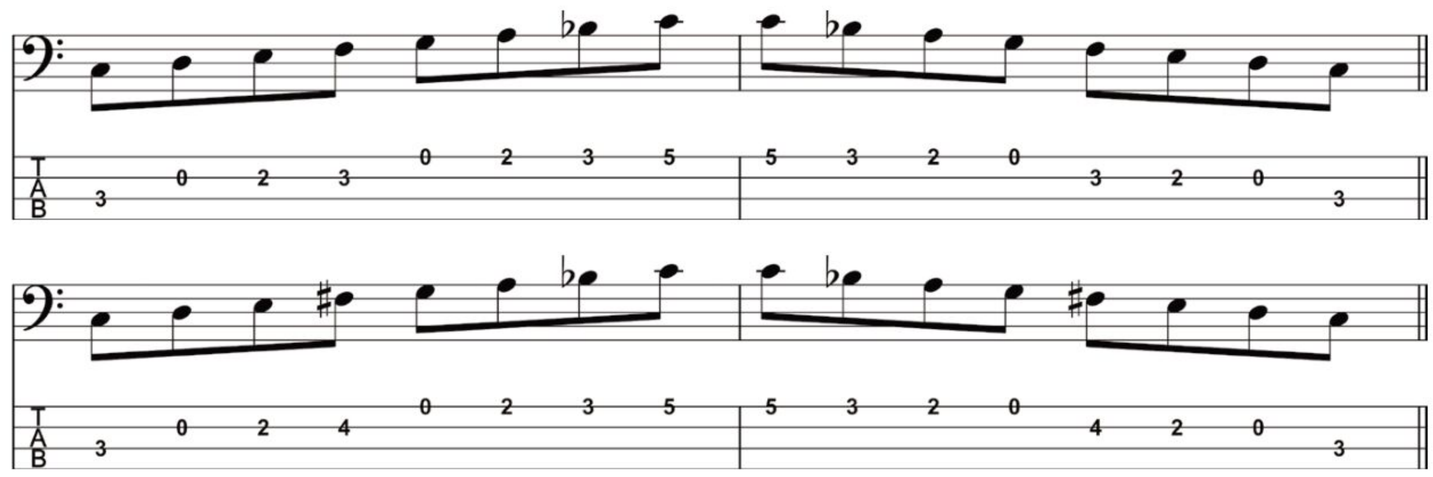
Welcome once again, theorists! This month we're looking at some of the scales played most often over dominant chords. In many contexts, the scale we choose to employ over a chord is the choice of the player, but in some way it is also governed by the nuance of the particular composition and/or by the genre. This can often be a case of convention as opposed to hard and fast rules.

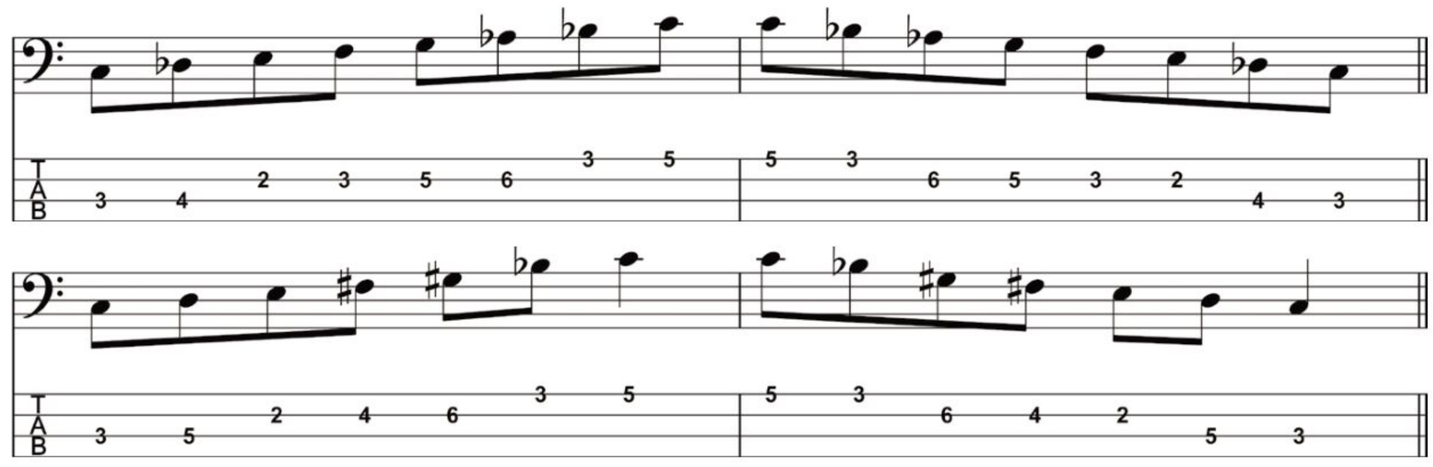
One such convention may be if the original note found in the melody happens to belong to any one of the particular scales. Another may be the quality of the chord to which we're resolving. For example, if we're resolving to a minor chord, often a dominant chord which contains a ♭13 or #5 may be preferable – as this note is also the minor third of the subsequent chord. Immersing ourselves in the sound and developing our aural understanding of these harmonic conventions is vital, regardless of how much theoretical knowledge we may choose to assimilate.

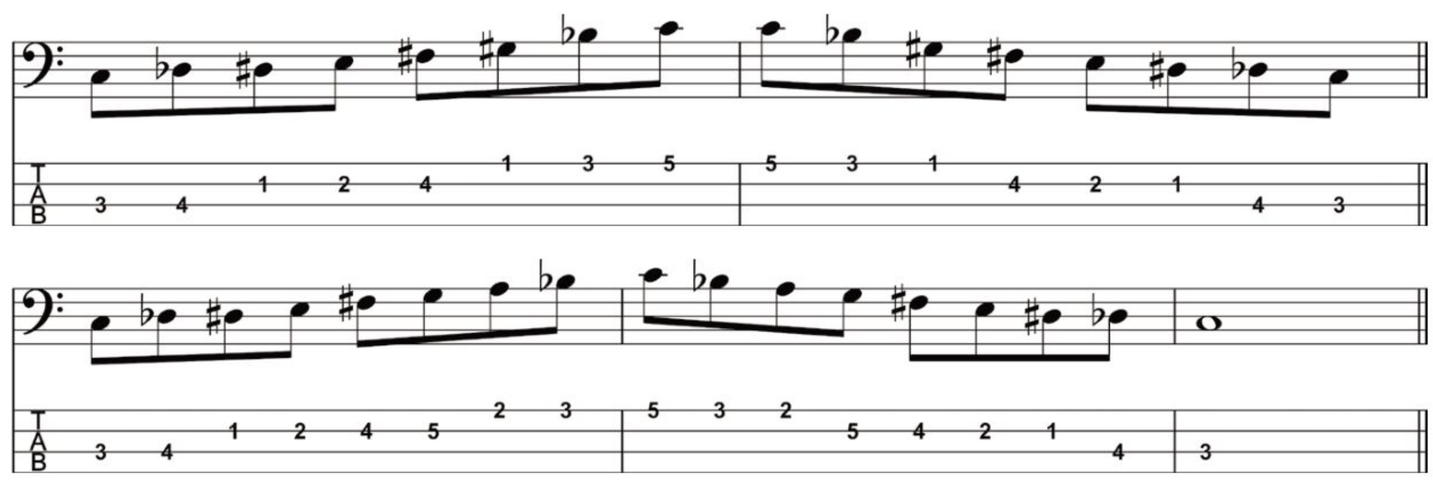
From a purely harmonic perspective, whenever a dominant chord is resolving – moving up a perfect fourth, or down a perfect fifth – it can sound harmonically correct with a wide variety of different scales or modes. Your particular preferences may well come down to genre or stylistic-specific convention, or maybe just familiarity. But as always, freedom is about having options, and the more familiar we can become with a wide variety of sounds for a specific harmonic context, the more versatile we become.

In the following examples we have organized these dominant scales – each built on a C root note – in a rough order of dissonance. They're at three levels, and their complexity progresses based on the level of harmonic sophistication, not just the physical difficulty. This is not a comprehensive list: we've left out less-used scales such as Mixolydian nat 9, ♭13 and the Augmented scales for now. These examples will give us a solid harmonic foundation and improve our fretboard familiarity and aural skills. As always, take it slowly, and make sure to leave the practice room with more options than you entered with!

Exercise 1 contains both the Mixolydian mode (the fifth mode of the Major Scale) and the Lydian Dominant mode (the fourth mode of Melodic Minor). Mixolydian is found in the widest variety of Western musical contexts,

EXERCISE ONE

EXERCISE TWO



EXERCISE THREE

and provides the chord tones and extensions which make up a Cdom13 chord. Lydian Dominant can also be found in many styles including jazz, fusion, classical and prog rock/metal, and provides us with a Cdom13#11 chord.

Exercise 2 features the Mixolydian ♭9, ♭13 scale (the fifth mode of Harmonic Minor; also referred to as Phrygian Dominant or Spanish Phrygian) and the Whole Tone scale, a six-note (hexatonic), symmetrical scale. The first of these can be found in a wide range of genres and styles including rock, jazz, Latin, classical, metal and fusion and provides us with a Cdomb9, ♭13 chord. The Whole Tone scale has been used most commonly in settings from impressionist classical music to the present day, and can also be found in pop, rock, metal, jazz, fusion and Latin settings. It provides us with a C9#5 chord.

Exercise 3 features the Altered Scale (the seventh mode of Melodic Minor) and the Half-Whole Diminished Scale, an eight-note (octatonic), symmetrical scale. These are particularly dissonant scales and are found most in jazz, fusion, Latin, prog-rock, metal and relatively modern classical styles. The Altered Scale provides us with a Cdom, #9, #5 chord and the Half-Whole Diminished Scale provides us with a Cdom13, ♭9, #11 chord.

ROYAL PERFORMANCE

It's been five years since the untimely death of **PRINCE ROGERS NELSON**, and with interest in his music still fanatical, it's the perfect opportunity for us to recall the occasion in 1999 when *BP* writer Karl Coryat was summoned to Paisley Park to interview the great man – only to be handed a bass and commanded to play in front of his legendary subject...

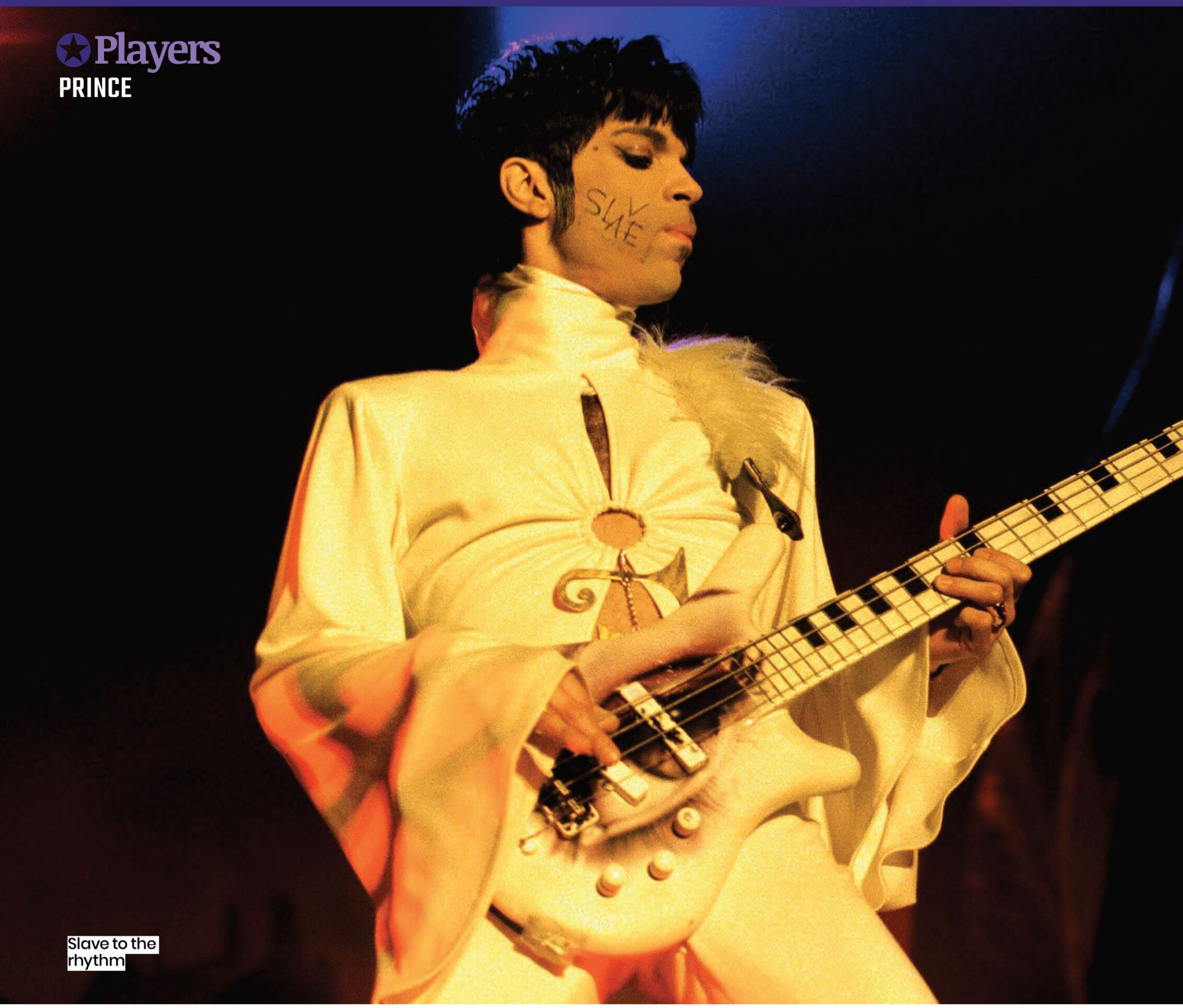
Photography: Getty

When Prince died on April 21, 2016 at the age of only 57, the world was stunned. This prolific, clean-living, supremely creative mind had apparently succumbed to an overdose of the painkiller fentanyl, many years before his time. In the music-making community, we were deprived of the talents of a multi-instrumentalist and composer without parallel. In the specific tribe of bass players, we lost a musician whose grasp of groove and economy made him one of the finest of his generation.

Most of us in the press never met Prince, and regret that fact. He didn't exactly make himself widely accessible to us, preferring to maintain a mystique about his personality and private life that endures to this day. When he did allow interviewers into his private sanctum, Paisley Park Studios in Minneapolis, they tended to walk away speechless, having spent time with a man who was arguably not quite of this world.

One of these privileged few was *Bass Player*'s Karl Coryat, whose story is reproduced in full below. Published as *His Highness Gets Down!* in November 1999, Coryat's story was a milestone for this magazine, emphasising *BP*'s authority in what was then essentially a field of one. Notice that Prince wasn't calling himself by his given name at the time, making it tricky for anyone to actually address him: he permitted only 'The Artist' as a temporary name while he went through a legal battle with his then-record company.

Respect to Karl for rising to the challenge: could *you* have pulled this interview off?



Slave to the rhythm

It started out simply enough. The Artist was coming out with a new record, his people told us, called *Rave Un2 The Joy Fantastic*. Did we want to come to Minneapolis and do a story on him?

The Artist? Is he *Bass Player* material? Yes, he is. The man can play every instrument sickeningly well, bass certainly being no exception. A listen to any of his early-Eighties LPs, on which he played nearly all the parts, bears this out. Being an old Prince fan myself – who still can't quite cop the vibe of his disarmingly simple 'Let's Work' – I jumped at the chance.

There was a small catch: The Artist doesn't allow his interviews to be tape recorded. Perhaps something about losing domain over the sounds he creates. Would he allow me to bring along a stenographer? Apparently, no problem.

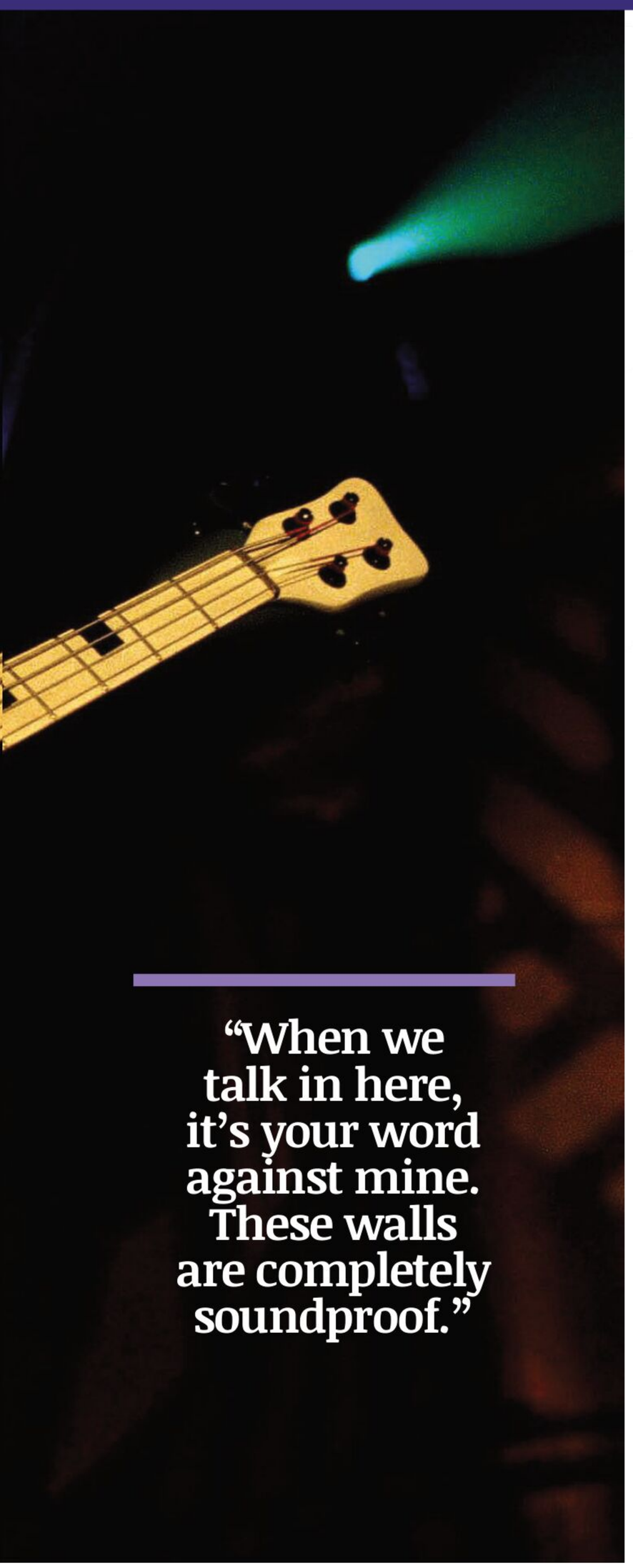
Several months later I'm in the foyer of Paisley Park, The Artist's decade-old recording/performance complex just outside the Twin Cities. Accurately described by one journalist as a "musician's *Alice In Wonderland*," the plain-exterior place is an eye-feast inside – painted with countless bright colours, adorned by scores of platinum records and other awards, and outfitted with such necessities as a fitting room (for the two on-staff clothes designers), a faux diner (complete with menus), and a covey of unseen doves, cooing somewhere from 20-plus feet above.

While waiting for the Great and Powerful Oz to arrive, I chat with our hired stenographer – who, like many, was once a Prince fan but hasn't followed his career since the late Eighties. "Are there names or technical terms I should be familiar with?" Not really – Larry Graham and "bass" are all that come to mind with the scary moment fast approaching. After reading numerous accounts of The Artist's often combative demeanour toward journalists, I was still unsure how to keep the conversation steered toward music specifics and away from his usual fashion-mag spiel: God, the millennium, and record-label wars.

Finally The Artist appears – and seems a bit surprised to be meeting a stenographer. "Okay," he hesitates with a slight smile, "but that hasn't worked out too well in the past." In a flash he commands her to stay put and whisks me off to a studio control room. Before I can even orient myself, the door slams behind me with an airtight thud.

Even the Cowardly Lion had Dorothy and friends to quiver with. And a place to run.

"I like to start by feeling out a person through conversation," says His Highness as I scrawl whatever I can in my notebook. "When we talk in here, it's your word against mine. These walls are completely soundproof. I prefer it this way." Still hoping the real interview had yet to begin, I manage a few general questions about the nature of funk, causing The Artist to wax spiritual in his rich but slightly nasal



timbre. Finally he bursts forth with a delighted cackle and then pauses to think. "See that? Would words on a page capture my laugh, or the irony in what I just said? I'd much rather you write about the vibe of our conversation, rather than trying to get my exact words so people can analyse them to death. Why do you need to know exactly what I'm saying? How would that make for a better article?"

Hoo-boy. Beginning to sweat, I try to explain I had planned a Q&A; in which I'd ask very specific, technical questions that would interest only other musicians – in a context where bassists would want to absorb every word. "Then ask me something," he replies. "Ask me any question on that list of yours, and we'll see what happens."

Skipping my planned opening query, I quick-search the page for the most technical question I can find. "Okay. Do you have a tone recipe for great funk bass?" Without a pause: "Larry Graham. Larry Graham is my teacher."

The Artist continues, veering quickly away from funk tone to God, to all of us being connected by the Spirit – but just as suddenly he claps his hands sharply, jumps up from his seat, and bellows a joyful noise. "Why do you need a stenographer to type out 'Larry Graham'? That's my answer to your question – it is all you need to know. Just write down 'Larry Graham' in your notebook!"

Time to find that man behind the curtain.

The Artist's gaze shifts slightly sidelong. "Why do you want a witness, anyway? This isn't a deposition." A pause. "Are you a spy?" he asks with a sly smile. "Who sent you here? What did you do before you worked for this magazine? Are you working for someone else? Did somebody put something in your ear?"

Resisting an urge to flee, I try to think of something – anything – to settle myself and keep the interview intact. "Okay. No stenographer then. But the least I can do is go out there and tell her she's free to leave."

"Fine," says The Artist with a flick of his hand, turning toward the massive console. "I'll be right here."

When I return less than a minute later, he's singing into a mic poised over the board. "There," he purrs as I sit back down, hoping some colour is returning to my face. "Now we can have a conversation."

Once I had been paisley-whipped into shape, things went much smoother. It seemed no matter what I asked, the conversation turned to either God, Larry Graham, or both – The Artist freely admitting he modelled his bass style after Graham's. Prince first briefly met the slap pioneer at a Warner Bros. company picnic in 1978, by which time Larry had moved on from Sly & The Family Stone and was a star in his own right fronting Graham Central Station. The two met again a few years later, this time at a Nashville gig.

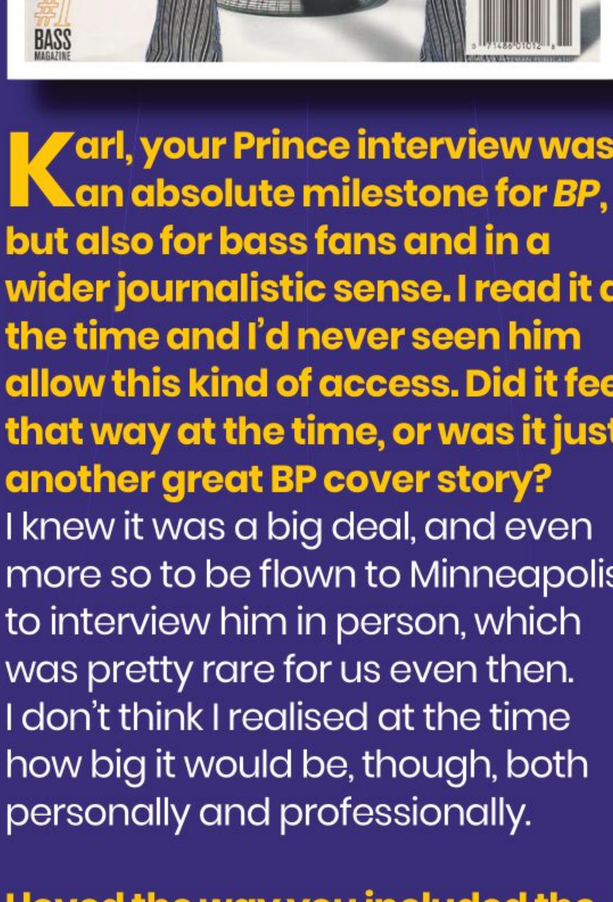
"Larry's wife came up to him and pulled an effects box and cord out of her purse," The Artist remembers warmly. "Now that's love." But Graham and the man he calls "Little Brother" didn't develop a real relationship until the Nineties – "relationship" perhaps being an inadequate description. "Once Larry taught me The Truth," says The Artist, "everything changed. My agoraphobia went away. I used to have nightmares about going to the mall, with everyone looking at me strange. No more." The couple forged an ocean-deep spiritual connection – The Artist is a Seventh Day Adventist, Graham a Jehovah's Witness. "I mean, Larry still goes around knocking on doors telling people The Truth. You don't see me doing that!"

The Artist invited his "older brother" to Minneapolis, set him up with a house of his own, and welcomed him into the Paisley Park family. Before long Graham was playing with The Artist's band New Power Generation and

WRITE ON

Twenty-two years on, Karl Coryat recalls his career-defining, and recorder-free, meeting with Prince.

Interview: Joel McIver



Karl, your Prince interview was an absolute milestone for *BP*, but also for bass fans and in a wider journalistic sense. I read it at the time and I'd never seen him allow this kind of access. Did it feel that way at the time, or was it just another great BP cover story?

I knew it was a big deal, and even more so to be flown to Minneapolis to interview him in person, which was pretty rare for us even then. I don't think I realised at the time how big it would be, though, both personally and professionally.

I loved the way you included the details about the stenographer. It sounds as if you were jerked around a lot by Prince's handlers.

I found out later that it wasn't the only time they'd done this – tell an interviewer they could bring a stenographer, only for Prince to dismiss them. It was a mind game, a power play. A test. I was not prepared for it at all, and at least at the beginning of the interview, I failed the test badly. I'm a bit of a control freak myself, and finding out I'd have to write a cover story based on notes – when I had a tape recorder running for every other interview I'd done – really knocked me off my game. I wasn't kidding in the story that I had an urge to flee the scene. It was one of the most uncomfortable moments of my life, until I was able to just let go.

feasting Graham Central Station on Paisley's incredible rehearsal and studio facilities. And ever since, after years of always picking up the bass for at least a few numbers per set, The Artist has hardly touched the instrument onstage. "I can't even physically reach for it anymore," he laughs. Why? "I don't know. I hope it's out of respect for Larry, and not because I feel inadequate compared to him."

The night before our interview, New Power Generation and GCS co-headlined the last night of the Mill City Music Festival, a kind of Woodstock-in-a-parking-lot in Minneapolis's warehouse district. The Artist's performance was as energetic as any Eighties Prince show, the only down moments coming with his between-song proselytising and boasting. "People say to me, 'Congratulations on your new [record] deal.' But they ought to go find the president of the record company and congratulate him!" Years ago that would have been a sure cheer line – but on this night the mostly thirty-something crowd stood reserved, waiting for the next 'Let's Go Crazy' or 'U Got The Look' sprinkled among the newer, unfamiliar tunes. Later The Artist reclined on a riser and pouted, "You might love Larry Graham, and you might love Morris Day – but you don't love me!"

Yet The Artist has plenty to say about the dangers of ego in a musical context. "My first bass player was Andre Cymone," he remembers, "and Andre's ego always got in the way of his playing. He always played on top of the beat, and I'm convinced that was just because he wanted to be heard. Andre and I would fight every night, because I was always trying to get him to sound like Larry Graham. Larry's happy just going [mimics thumping open-string quarter-notes] – he's not interested in showing off. When you're showing off it means you aren't listening." The Artist shifts gears to describe a present-day rehearsal and grows excited again. "Space!" he bellows. "Space is what it's all about. I'm always telling people in rehearsal you've got to shut up once in a while. Solo spotlights are fun and everything, but you've got to make some music people want to hear. You can listen to one groove all night, but if everyone's playing all over the place all night and not hearing each other, ain't nobody gonna want to listen."

The Artist cues up a rough mix of a tune slated for *Rave Un2 The Joy Fantastic*. Hands flying over the board, he solos the drums and bass, which he played on Graham's Moon four-string. "Hear that? That's the bass sound. I just turn it up full," he says, pantomiming diming all the knobs at once with the edge of a hand. Meanwhile, the old Prince bass feel is right there, ghost-notes and vibrato laden with greasy funk. "This is one seriously funky record," he adds as he hits stop after only a few bars. "One of the

All that Jazz: Prince in full funk effect

funkiest of recent years. There's no good funk happening these days. I'm still waiting for George Clinton to do something."

The Artist first picked up bass years after he began playing guitar in 1975 – which, in turn, was years after he started playing the family piano. "Bass was a necessity," he confesses. "I needed it to make my first record." Already a solid drummer, he translated his rhythmic chops to the bass, and everything fell into place fairly quickly. "That's the thing about playing both bass and drums – the parts just lock together. Lenny Kravitz is the same way. If you solo his drum part on 'Are You Gonna Go My Way,' it sounds like, hey – he ain't that good. But put everything on top and it comes together. He just gets high on the funk."

So how can a bassist achieve that kind of lock with a live drummer? "I'll tell you how Larry Graham does it: through his relationship with God. Bootsy plays a little behind the beat – the way Mavis Staples sings – but Larry makes the drummer get with him. If he wants to he can stand up there and go [mimics 16th-note slap line] all night long and never break a sweat." Like the whirling dervishes of Sufi tradition? Exactly. But isn't it possible to create music as deep as Graham's without drawing inspiration from a higher power? "No, it isn't. All things come from God and return to God. I wouldn't say it necessarily needs to come from a higher place – but it does need to come from another place."

Of course, The Artist is less known for bass than for the controversial eroticism of such early songs as 'Head', 'Do Me Baby', and 'Darling Nikki'. Yet it seems many of his more lurid lyrics are backed by bass-heavy arrangements. Is there a connection between the two? "I've never thought about that," he muses with a smile. "But no, there isn't. Bass is primal, and it reminds me of a large posterior – but both spirituality and sexuality originate higher up in the body. I see both as angelic."

The Artist's all-time biggest hit, 'When Doves Cry', is most distinctive because of its lack of a bass-line. The oft-repeated story is that the song had one but it was pulled at the last minute. "They were almost done editing the movie," he explains, referring to his big-screen debut in *Purple Rain*. "It was the last song to be mixed, and it just wasn't sounding right." Prince was sitting with his head on the console listening to a rough mix when one of his singers, Jill Jones, walked in and asked what was wrong. "It was just sounding too conventional, like every other song with drums and bass and keyboards. So I said, 'If I could have it my way it would sound like this,' and I pulled the bass out of the mix. She said, 'Why don't you have it your way?'" From the beginning Prince had an inkling the tune would be better bass-free, even though he hated to see the part go. "Sometimes your

Did you do much preparation?
Not a ton. I usually don't write out a bunch of questions in advance. I like to let answers lead to other questions and not try to force the direction. But my fellow *BP* editor Bill Leigh, another big Prince fan, gave me some questions to ask.

What were you told about addressing him by name – presumably that the word 'Prince' was forbidden?
I don't think it was discussed, and I never addressed him by name. It was bizarre, though. I knew I could tell the Paisley Park staff that I was there to interview The Artist, in the third person – but how do you say, "I have one more question, The Artist"?

The big question: what kind of person was he? You describe him in the interview, of course, but 22 years later and five years after his death, I wonder if you'd describe him differently now.
When he walked through the door, my immediate impression was that he was a tiny, tiny man. Maybe that affected how he treated strangers – I'm 6'2". He had one goal at the outset, and that was to knock me down, to establish who was in charge. Bass players are usually so kind and polite and unassuming, so that alone was a shock. But he really softened up, once I softened up, and by the end it was very comfortable being with him. Super nice guy; all of the bravado was gone. I'm pretty sure he was proud of himself for melting me and reshaping me into someone he wanted to talk to.

One detail I didn't include in the story, which is hilarious looking back, was that he didn't even want me to take notes. He'd start answering a question and I'd grab my pen, and he'd say, "Don't write that down!" Eventually I stopped altogether.

The killer moment for me was when he handed you the bass and asked you to play. I can't think of a similar instance in the whole of music journalism. What were your emotions at the time?
Abject fear, probably. I never know what to do when someone hands me a bass. It's awkward at NAMM shows, because I don't have a slap lick or other party trick to pull out.

brain kind of splits in two – your ego tells you one thing, and the rest of you tells you something else. You have to go with what you know is right."

So bass can work against a song then? "Not necessarily. 'When Doves Cry' does have bass in it – the bass is in the kick drum. It's the same with 'Kiss': the bass is in the tone of the reverb on the kick. Bass is a lot more than that instrument over there. Bass to me means B-A-S-E. B-A-S-S is a fish."

Prince's first four albums were basically one-man efforts, with a few guest spots (though he kept all bass duties to himself). One of the most prolific artists in rock history, he also wrote, produced, and recorded for others – most notably fellow Minneapolis band the Time. In fact he performed nearly all the instrumental parts on the Time's first two records, choosing to take only a production credit under the pseudonym Jamie Starr (which he also used for vocal and engineering credits on two of his own records). "I was just getting tired of seeing my name," he explains. "If you give away an idea, you still own that idea. In fact, giving it away strengthens it. Why do people feel they have to take credit for everything they do? Ego – that's the only reason."

He adopted yet another pre-symbol nom de plume, Camille, for "female" sped-up vocal parts. Ever the gender bender, Prince had begun performing in women's undergarments as early as 1979. His opening slot on a Rolling Stones tour, where he was pelted with garbage by disco-hating hooligans, is now part of rock legend. "Don't say that was because of me," he admonishes, wagging a finger. "That was the audience doing that. I'm sure wearing underwear and a trench coat didn't help matters – but if you throw trash at anybody, it's because you weren't trained right at home."

Starting with 1982's *1999*, Prince began crediting a band, the Revolution, on his recordings. Though he still played many of the parts, over the next few albums the Revolution played an increasingly important role. "I wanted community more than anything else. These days if I have Rhonda [Smith, formerly The Artist's live bassist] play on something, she'll bring in her Jaco influence, which is something I wouldn't add if I played it myself. I did listen to Jaco – I love his Joni Mitchell stuff – but I never wanted to play like him." The Artist still raves about the original Revolution bassist, Brown Mark (who took over for Andre Cymone), calling him the tightest bass player next to Graham himself.

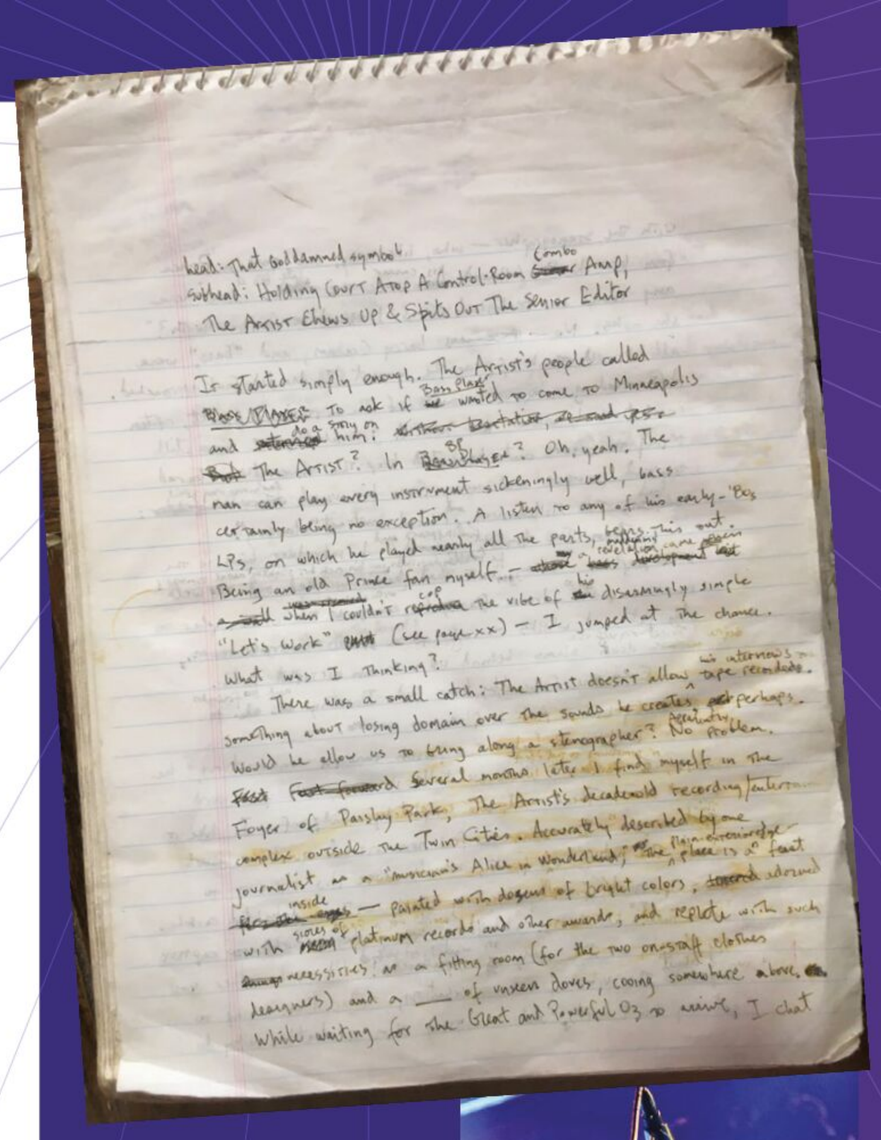
The latest version of New Power Generation is The Artist's most skilled band to date; in addition to Graham, the Mill City Music Festival performance included James Brown saxophonist Maceo Parker, who also has free rein over the Paisley Park facilities for his own projects. Of course, Graham fits seamlessly into New Power Generation – and you can be sure The Artist never needs to tell him to play less and listen more.

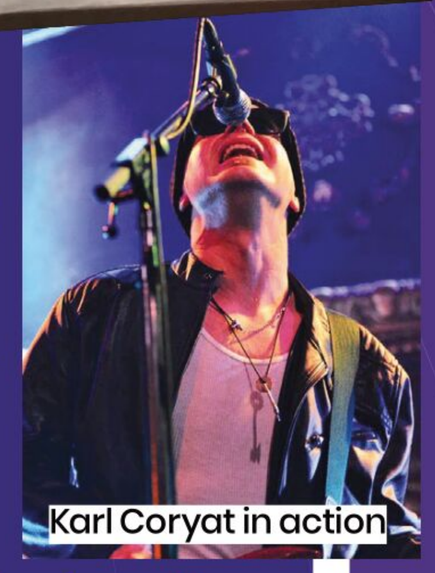
The interview is winding down. With most of my questions answered (or at least chewed up and spit out), I pose another: of all the bass-lines you've created and played over the years, which stands out the most? As if he's answered the query in every interview, he instantly volleys back, "777-9311" (the Time's *What Time Is It?*). Why? "Simple: Because nobody can play that line like I can. It's like 'Hair' [1974's *Graham Central Station*], or Stanley Clarke's 'Lopsy Lu' – nobody can play that part better than Larry." I mention I was glad to hear him dig up 'Let's Work' for the previous night's show. "Hmmm … that might be a tie with '777'." The Artist gets up and heads over to the bass sitting in the corner but then waves a hand at it. "Oh, five-string – a mutant animal." I start to scribble down the quote. "Don't print that! People will say I don't like the five-string because I can't play it. We do have to keep an open mind to things. We need to be open to evolution."

The Artist picks up a phone receiver and – without dialling – summons Hans-Martin Buff, his engineer, who fetches Graham's white Moon bass. "Now imagine me teaching Larry Graham how to play this," he scoffs as he plugs into the board and lays into the 'Let's Work' line. With no rhythm track, his feel isn't quite as slinky as on record, but all the elements are there – subtle ghost-notes, vibrato, funky push-and-pull.

Suddenly he stops and hands me the bass. What? "Let's see what you can do," he says. (Sure am glad I'm not a spy.) As I grab the neck he snatches my notebook and crosses his legs. "Now I'm gonna ask you some questions," he toys. Stalling, I inquire about the XLR jack on the upper horn. "For his mic," he says, as if I needed to ask. I tentatively try out a generic finger-funk line in A. (I am not going to slap in front of the 'Let's Work' guy.) "That's the sound, isn't it?" asks The Artist. The tone is indeed perfect, but aside from the very low action and super-zingy strings, there's nothing terribly magical about the instrument's feel. And of course it sounds like me coming out of the monitors, not Graham. "Do you ever practise?" I ask, handing back the bass. "Do you get rusty when you don't play for a while?" "No," he sighs, almost bored. "Playing is like breathing now."

We get up and start to move to the door. "I was a little worried there at the beginning," he says. "I told you you'd do fine." And I'm out of there – but not before one last awkward moment as I shake his hand, unsure how to address him. "It was very interesting. Thank you. Um, yeah – thanks." ■




Karl Coryat in action

How did you write the story with no tape and almost no notes?
I had to catch my flight home immediately after the interview, and in the car I was still feeling shellshocked. But the second I sat down in the plane, I took out my notebook and began scrawling down what I could, and I just kept going. Over the years I've often encountered Prince quotes that were taken from that story – and there's a good chance he never said them the way I ended up writing them!

Is there anything you wish you'd said to Prince that you didn't say?
It would have been nice to revisit how the interview started, and apologise for being such a stiff ass. But most of all, I regret not having a tape of that conversation. The peak of my professional career was a 90-minute private audience with Prince, and I have no physical evidence to show that it really happened.

What are you doing nowadays?
I'm semi-retired, trying to learn how to play baseball, making video recreations of classic songs for my YouTube channel Eddie Current Covers, and starting a Nineties tribute band called Black Hole Sun.

YouTube: eddiecurrentcovers

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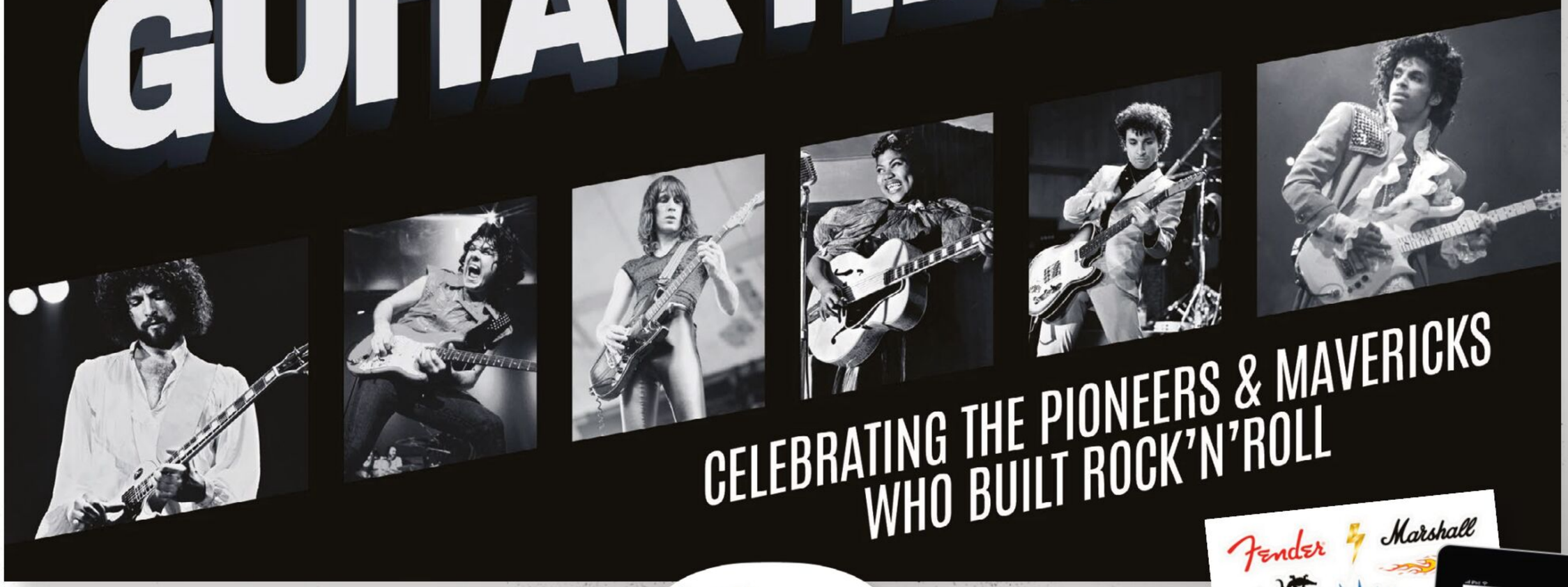

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1984: In the air tonight, with Brown Mark on bass (far left)

THE BAND PLAYED ON...

Prince, a masterful bassist in his own right, employed a series of phenomenal bass players over his four decades as a professional musician. Meet the team...

Interview quotes: E.E. Bradman, Simon Price, Lindsey Borders, Joel McIver **Photography:** Getty

ANDRE CYMONE

Worked with Prince 1979–81.

"The bass that's on a lot of the original records, like The Time records, I still have it. It's a Jazz bass. All the early pictures of me with Prince, and I'm wearing the clear pants, I've got that bass. I have black nylon strings on now, that's the only difference. For a while I pasted on some leopard print, but I took that off. We got it a long time ago.

Me and Prince used to go to this guitar shop that they used to kick us out of, at first, because we were kids. We'd go there and they'd say 'You guys don't have any money – get out!' And it's true that we couldn't afford anything, but eventually they let us play, because they'd say 'You guys are good!' So they let us sort of jam. And when we finally got some money, we went in there, and even though Prince told a different story and I hate to say he's wrong, he bought that Telecaster that he plays on everything, the Hohner. And I bought the Jazz. If not the same day, then around the same time.

"The greatest bass player that ever lived? I'm gonna say Sonny Thompson. We were in Rotterdam, with the NPG, and we played at this club called Birds, just jamming, I was on guitar, and he did this bass solo and it started out like it was gonna be bad, because he changed the time, but he completely flipped the time signature. And I was just looking at

Levi Seacer Jr on guitar in '93

him, shocked. And it blew me away. Afterwards I said to him, 'Man, that was the most amazing bass solo I ever heard'."

MARK 'BROWN MARK' BROWN

Worked with Prince 1981–86; appears on *Purple Rain* (1984), *Around The World In A Day* (1985), *Parade* (1986), *Sign O' The Times* (1987).

"Playing with Prince was like attending an intense school of raw funk-rock. With freedom to express myself, he enabled me to grow not only as a bassist, but also as a performer. The work ethic I gleaned from him helped me in every aspect of my music career, from songwriting to stage performance. You can do anything you put your heart and mind into."

LEVI SEACER JR.

Worked with Prince 1987–91; appears on *Lovesexy* (1988), *Graffiti Bridge* (1990).

"Guitar is my main instrument, but Prince taught me how to be a bass player. At first, it was hard for me because I was used to guitar solos, but I had to hold it down – I was part of the foundation of the house. A lot of players want to be Stanley Clarke or Marcus Miller, but that had no place in our band. Unless Prince gave you a solo… In rehearsals, the bass player stood next to the hi-hat, and the pocket was supposed to be a little behind the drummer, so you get that funky drag. The guitar player was kind of in between those two, and the keyboard was on top, adding colours. Prince was a stickler for the instruments staying in their areas. And he didn't mind looping a part until it felt right."

SONNY THOMPSON

Worked with Prince 1990–2009; appears on *Diamonds And Pearls* (1991), *Love Symbol* (1992), *Come* (1994), *The Gold Experience* (1995), *Chaos And Disorder* (1996), *Emancipation* (1996), *3121* (2006), *Planet Earth* (2007).

"Prince, Andre and I grew up together, but I didn't realise Prince played bass until he came over to my house one day. We were down in the basement, where I had all the equipment set up, and we were playing around. He was cold on the drums! When he picked up bass, he was trying to match it, and I said, 'Hold on, let me show you something, man'. I taught him a lot about bass, guitar, and using his falsetto."

"The last time I saw him, at Bunker's in Minneapolis, I told him, 'Man, I love you till the end of time'. He said, 'I love you, too, Sonny'. That was the last thing I got to say to him. When I found out he died, I couldn't do anything for two weeks. It's still so hard. But I've got to move forward."

RHONDA SMITH

Worked with Prince 1996–2010; appears on *Emancipation* (1996), *Crystal Ball* (1998), *Rave In2 The Joy Fantastic* (2001), *One Nite Alone… Live!* (2002), *Xpectation* (2003), *C-Note* (2003), *N.E.W.S.* (2003), *Musicology* (2004).

"The years that I spent with Prince were absolutely incredible. There were lots of ups and downs, but it was a relationship that spanned from 1996 to 2010, when I joined Jeff Beck. It was on and off sometimes, and then we'd get back together, because we had a relationship where we needed to get separated, you know – so we'd get back together and then separate again, ha ha! But it was really amazing to be part of his experience. At the time it was the biggest thing that I had ever walked into, and it changed the trajectory of my life.

"I auditioned for him quite a while before I got the gig, because he was not quick about making a decision like that. When I first met him, I brought a fretless bass down to the audition with me, because at that time in the Nineties a lot of people were using keyboard samples. I guess he liked the instrument, because he had me play on the *Emancipation* album.

"The last time I saw Prince, I said 'Man, I love you till the end of time'. That was the last thing I got to say to him."

Sonny Thompson

The New Power Generation with Sonny Thompson (far left)

The great Rhonda Smith

It was maybe 95 percent done, not completely finished, and he asked me to play the fretless on two songs. One was 'I Can't Make U Love Me', which was a version of a Bonnie Raitt song, and the other one was 'Dreamin' About U'. That was his own composition, a very beautiful ballad – and he asked me to take a solo on it, with the fretless. I was thinking 'What? I must have done something right'. So there's a lot of special moments there. It was the most amazing musical experience that I have ever had.

"Prince was a monster bass player. He used different techniques: in fact, he used a lot of hybrid stuff that from an educational standpoint was bad technique, and wrong, and you'd think that he shouldn't have played like that. But that, to my mind, was part of the sound that he got. That guy could play some bass, you can believe it – and it was all about the feel. It's not about how fast he could play or whatever, it was his feel, which was phenomenal. He was from that Willie Weeks kind of school, where he could take two notes and do a solo with them, and make you go 'What?'"

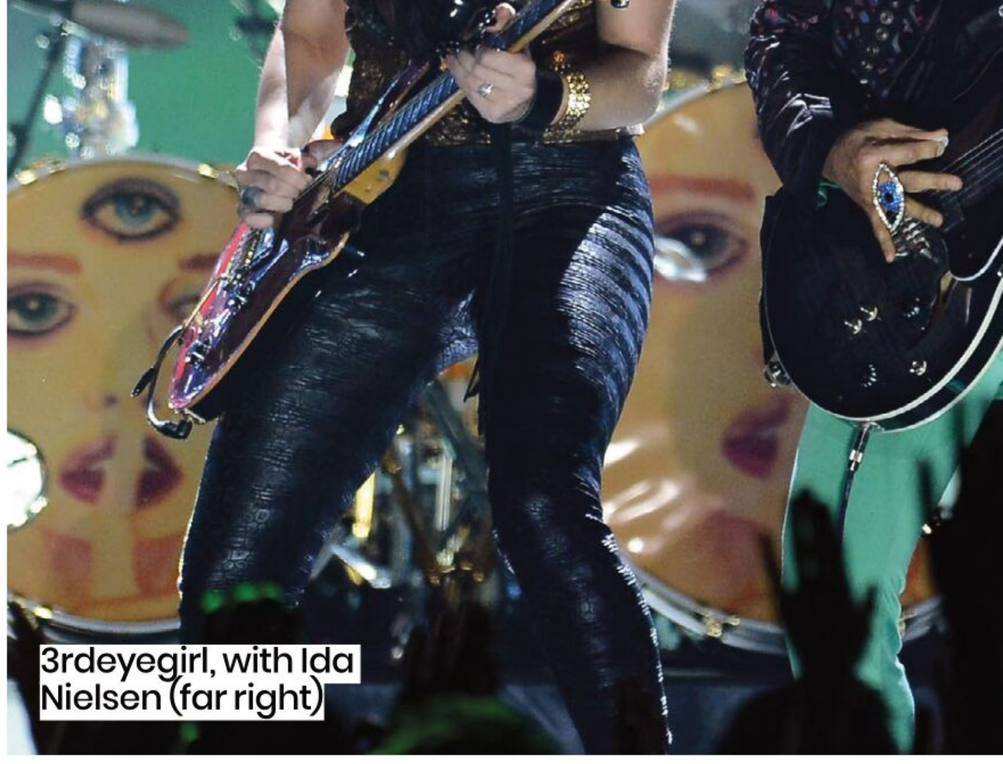
"Prince was a monster bass player. That guy could play some bass, you can believe it."
Rhonda Smith

LARRY GRAHAM

Worked with Prince from 1998.

"There are some bassists that I've played with, where we can play at the same time and complement each other. For example, Marcus Miller and I work well as he plays his lines like a vocalist. When Stanley Clarke and I work, he plays piccolo bass, and they don't clash as his choice of part is different. And Prince and I play bass – and again it works, even though it's different."

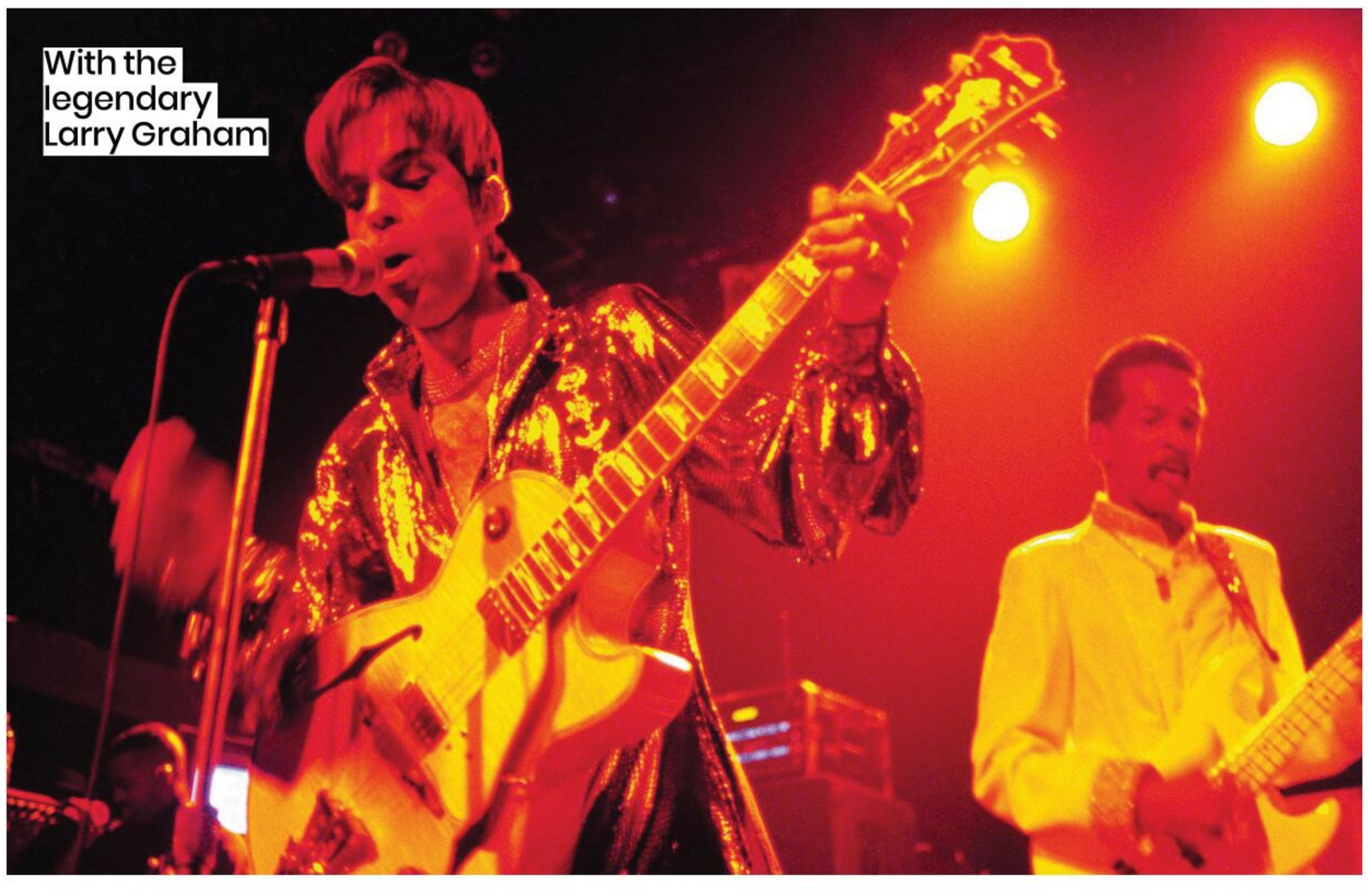
"Bass players are always aware of other bassists. I went through a long period of time where I didn't realise my influence on other bassists. There weren't lots of videos of my stuff around, so people couldn't see what I was doing, but as we did more TV shows, people realised they had to play like me, especially in covers bands playing the tunes I'd played on. Over time, I became more aware of players playing like me – players in other genres started thumping and plucking. To me, they are like my bass children. I have high respect for the overhand style of playing, and when I see a player pull that thumb back, it's another of my bass children right there."


3rdeyegirl, with Ida Nielsen (far right)

JOSH DUNHAM

Worked with Prince 2005–10; appears on *3121* (2006).

"I once asked Prince if he would show me some stuff on bass, and he was like, 'No', and he walked out. But he would come to rehearsal and say, 'Let me see the bass', and that would be his way of sharing his ideas and approach to playing… Prince was serious about getting that tone right. He asked me, 'Why are you using the bass [knobs] on the amp and on the bass? Don't you just need one?' So then I started putting the bass on my amp on zero and controlling my tone from the bass guitar. I heard all the low notes, but it wasn't boomy, especially when we played big stadiums. It made so much sense."


With the legendary Larry Graham

TAL WILKENFELD

Worked with Prince 2009–10; appears on *Welcome 2 America* (2021).

"At one point, Prince played my Sadowsky four-string, and it sounded like a completely different instrument. It reinforced my belief that tone is in your fingers. Prince recorded to tape and worked very quickly – and he never wanted to punch in unless it was absolutely necessary. That taught me how to how to work fast and effectively, and commit to my decisions… When you approach music from that place, everyone has something to say, and something to learn from a conversation. There's no way you can walk away from situations like that without picking up on some of the nuances and the subtleties they bring to the music. I love collaboration. If I can enhance a project with

something I can contribute creatively, I'm in. Ultimately, I'll listen to what my heart tells me to pursue, as I've always done, and follow the inspiration."

ANDREW GOUCHÉ

Worked with Prince 2011–14.

"I tried to get him to play my bass, but he wouldn't touch it because it was a six-string. When I first joined the band, he joked, 'Why you gotta have all those strings? Larry's bass only has four strings'. And I told him, 'Well, this bass has those four strings on it, too'. But when I hit him with that low B flat in 'Purple Rain' – I tune my six down a whole step – he turned around and looked at me like, 'Ooooh, damn!' He loved it."

IDA NIELSEN

Worked with Prince 2010–16; appears on *Plectrumelectrum* (2014).

"When I joined Prince's band 3rdeyegirl in 2010, I thought I knew a lot of his songs, but we were just getting started. There was no quick route other than sitting down and learning the songs, and I was joining a band that was already there, so I had a month to catch up which added some pressure. That was a lot of work! But at a certain point, I got to a place where I was able to learn really fast and remember stuff clearly. In the beginning, I would write everything down and keep it – but then I amazed myself at how quickly I was able to learn, remember and recall quickly. It was training, just like everything else is training. Prince used to modify songs on a daily basis, and changes happened very quickly. It was always on the spot. There might be a whole new arrangement at soundcheck, and then that would be the version we would play that night. Some of it could be on the spot in the show; he would say 'Watch me' and direct stuff. When it worked, it was really cool. We did the craziest thing once – we were doing a live TV show in France, and he didn't tell us up front what we were going to play, so every song was called on the spot. That kept us on our toes!"

NIK WEST

Worked with Prince 2012–16.

"Larry Graham is my bass hero. Prince wanted to introduce me, and he was shocked we had never met. Every time I was at Paisley Park, we talked about it, and he called him a few times while I was there, but he wasn't available. So, we kept missing each other. It wasn't until Prince passed that Larry reached out to me. He told me that he loved the way I played. He said, 'Many bass players have a million notes under their fingers and in their head, but we don't feel what's in their heart. You play with all of your heart, and that's why I want to work with you.' He told me that he was crowning me Queen of Funk and I would be the new funk hero. I took it and ran with it! I was just so shocked that he had been watching me for so long."

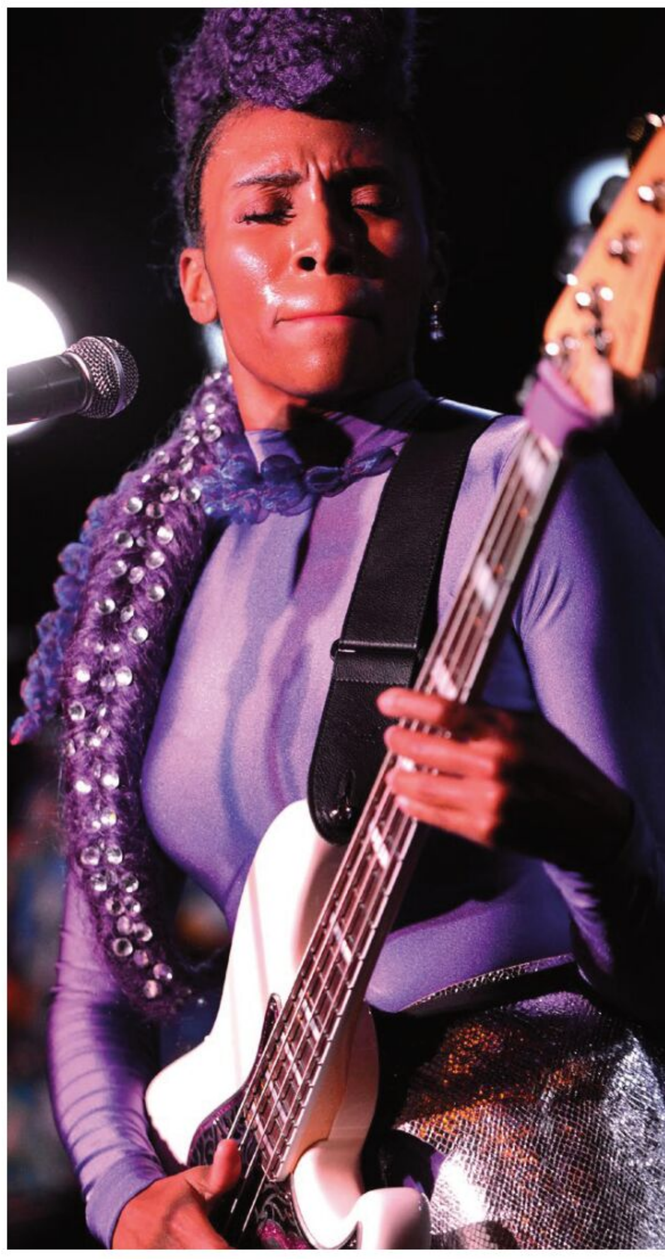
Lindsey Borders, Guitar Girl Magazine

MONONEON

Worked with Prince 2015–16.

"Prince allowed me to be myself. He saw my colours, saw the sock on my bass, heard the way I played, and simply welcomed me into his world. He gave me a chance without a compromise. The one thing I learned from Prince just by watching him work is how to be confident with your ideas and move forward without shame. Overall, playing with Prince taught me how to embrace the moment, the now, when playing my bass."

"Larry Graham told me that he was crowning me Queen Of Funk."
Nik West



MonoNeon: a vivid talent

Players
JEFF BERLIN

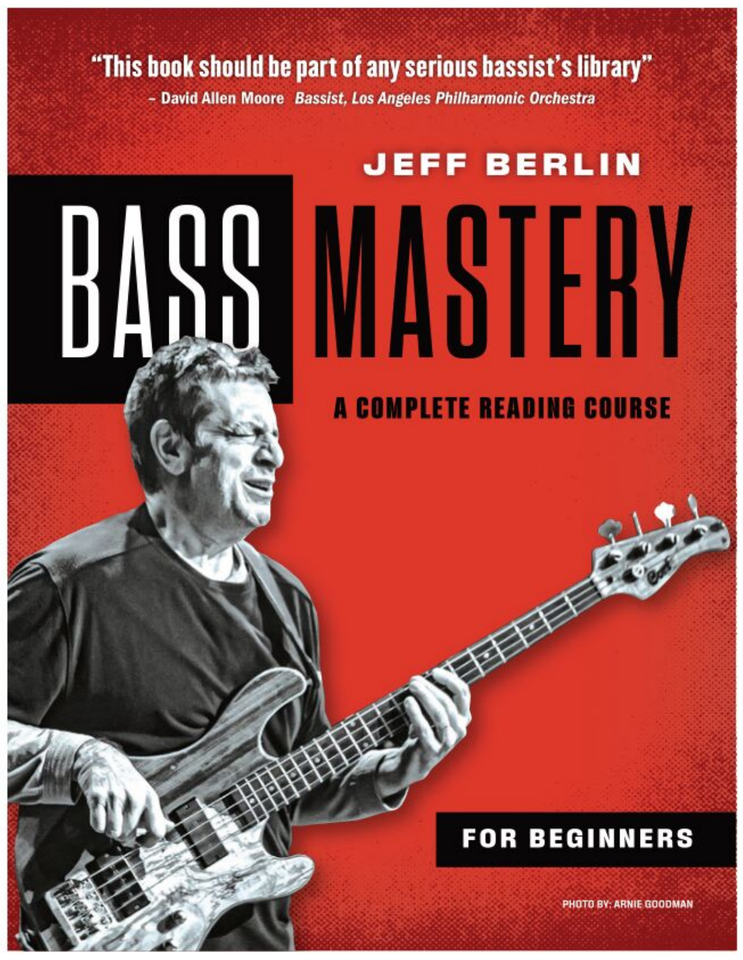
TIME TO TEACH

The outspoken fusion legend **Jeff Berlin** discusses his new Music Group with Phil Mann

Although it's only natural that educational platforms will evolve, it's rare that the academic principles they deliver follow suit. Revered as one of his generation's more confrontational academic personalities, Jeff Berlin's musical insights are now directly accessible through the worldwide web. But with the internet proving such an oversaturated environment for educators to make their mark, we sat down with the Jedi master to find out more about what's on offer from the Jeff Berlin Music Group, and invited him to give us a brief synopsis of the platform's principles.

"Well firstly, I didn't create these methods. These are academic principles that have history and are still in use by most other teachers teaching other instruments," comments Berlin. "I just took them and used them myself. The principles reflect a total separation of art from learning, because the two concepts don't relate."

He adds: "Learning is different than playing because the goals are different – completely incompatible. I wanted to get people to learn better, freeing them up to play better. The only proven way to accomplish this is by knowing what the right notes are and where they are on the bass neck. The platform of my lessons is to do just that. Even if I'm unpopular for some of my views, this never deterred me from offering top-quality music and practice concepts that almost all other instruments are taught by, just not ours. The betterment of all bass players is my interest."



With so many resources supplying bass education online, we wondered how he felt his platform would compare? "I deliberately avoided teaching all popular concepts and approaches, normally learned by being self-taught. For example, 'slap bass' or 'groove'. Most styles that are popular with bass players have always been learned by self-teaching. Even the teachers teaching these styles are self-taught, which is ironic!"

He goes on: "The only thing left to teach people are the things they couldn't figure out on their own, which would be academic music itself. My lessons come from the history of music that's been proven to produce excellent players – a methodology abandoned by most modern bass educators."

As with all online education platforms, the diversity in consumers is huge, as literally anybody, from any background, can access the materials. We wondered how Berlin intends to cater for this potentially enormous audience? "Good question! If you're into rock, jazz, blues, R&B, techno, it doesn't matter – there's probably a major triad in the music somewhere. This is the core-tying element of academic music."

Expanding on this, he states: "No matter what style of music you love to play, they all use the same notes, rhythms and harmony, so it makes sense to learn what these notes are. If you add academic music to your day, there will be almost no music or style anywhere that you can't figure out on your own. This is the freedom that I mentioned

"Learning is different than playing because the goals are different – completely incompatible. I wanted to get people to learn better, freeing them up to play better"

earlier, and it comes from practising academic principles."

What are his views on virtual learning, we inquire? "You will miss some transfer of communication," states Berlin. "The camera is no substitute for one-on-one interaction, but this form of interaction via camera and video is this generation's staple method of communication. I've gotten very good at communicating through the camera to where I'm able to get right to the root of the musical principle that I wish to share. In some ways, the directness and isolation of a camera are valuable, because I'm required to present my lesson as clearly and as specifically as possible. This means that more people can learn better, which always makes me feel good."

Berlin's bass-playing credentials speak for themselves – but with such an extensive catalogue of seminal projects, would collaborations with distinguished guests be a prospect in this digital renaissance? "It isn't likely that bass students improve by hearing a guest lecturer telling people how they did it. This is why I see clinics as more entertainment than educational. If I did include any guest lecturers in my site, they would have to share

"Every top bass player plays with freedom. The best way to acquire freedom as a player is by practising great academic musical content"

something substantial that people would learn from. Bass clinicians and guest lecturers often say, 'This worked for me, but it might not work for you'. This shows me that these bass clinics are actually more entertaining than informative."

Berlin's obviously thinking about long-term sustainability – capitalising on social media as a platform to conduct student support – but with so much historical controversy surrounding various elements of his teaching practices, are public forums a wise idea, or something that could potentially instigate confrontation? His response is clear: "It's been great to interact with people. You can almost feel their enthusiasm through their posts. So many ask really great questions, and often my best suggestion to them is that they take my materials and go and study it with another music teacher, so that they don't have to go it alone if they don't want to. The groups are there to support progress, not to generate publicity."

What positive effects does he hope that his education platform will have on today's generation of bass students? "The main one is to get bass players to play with freedom. Every top player plays with freedom. Other than being self-taught, the best way to acquire freedom as a player is by practising great academic musical content. Most bass educators don't seem to agree with this, which is why I've decided to go it alone and not teach at a school. Practising well is simply an addition to the day. It's an academic skill that I wish more would dedicate time to – gigs come to those who are the most musically qualified to get them. Or, at least, that's what I believe."

Info: www.jeffberlinmusicgroup.com

Getty

Players
FERNANDO SAUNDERS

REED PLAYER

The great **Fernando Saunders** is best known for his long-standing collaboration with the late Lou Reed, and like that maverick genius, creativity runs deep in him. We meet the maestro

Few musicians have as advanced a resume as Fernando Saunders, the Detroit-born singer, songwriter and producer who has worked alongside a host of major names. He first came to prominence alongside the disco musician Hamilton Bohannon, before finding wider fame with the Jeff Beck/Jan Hammer Group. This in turn led to fruitful partnerships with Lou Reed and Marianne Faithfull, as well as the beginning of a solo career that endures to this day, alongside recordings and performances with Joan Baez, Steve Winwood, Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page, Joe Cocker, Slash, Heart, Pat Benatar, Tori Amos and John McLaughlin. A recent project with the Seattle musician JR Smith was released recently as Adams Traktor, giving *Bass Player* the opportunity to sit down and discuss the low frequencies with Saunders, one of the true greats of our community.

“Former Czech President Vaclav Havel visited the White House and asked for us to play”

How did you first meet Lou Reed?

I was playing with Jeff Beck, and Lou was a big fan of Jeff. His manager Eric Kronfeld said, ‘Fernando, Lou’s looking for a bass player – but not just any bass player. They need somebody to bring something new to the project, like a different personality’. So Lou came to watch me play, and after the concert, he said, ‘Wow – I like how you play the bass with melody’. I played him a song of mine called ‘Reviens Cherie’, which I’ve always thought was ahead of its

"They told me, 'Lou's looking for a bass player... but not just any bass player'"

time. Lou said, 'If you wrote that song, you understand my music', and we ended up recording that song together.

How would you describe Lou?
Obviously, he was a big star, but he was a good-hearted person, you know. He just wanted to feel accepted. When I first met him, I didn't know his whole history. He did tell me some things. He told me that he'd stopped doing drugs and drinking a lot. He was painfully honest about that, but I didn't know about the electroshock treatment he'd been through when he was young, or any of that stuff. I just knew that we got along, and as the years passed, we built a deep friendship.

What was he like to record with?
The first time we went into the studio together, which was when we recorded *The Blue Mask* in 1982, Lou talked to me about music. He said, 'You hear this chord? This is a G chord. You don't have to fill it up with a lot of music. You can just listen to the chord. You can play an arpeggio, or just strum it'. I knew what he meant. He was saying that there's a lot of music in a single chord. That meant I had total freedom with the bass. As a matter of fact, I'd played with all these people – Jeff Beck, John McLaughlin – but the biggest showcase of my bass playing was with that very non-commercial album. But you know, he trusted me. He'd say, 'I'm going out for a few hours, Fernando' and leave me to work on the songs in the studio. I didn't know where he was going. I realised later that he just wanted my input.

What bass gear do you use nowadays?
I played Modulus Graphite basses for years, and then a few years ago I met a luthier in the mountains of Switzerland called JMC. At the time they were making acoustic guitars and they wanted to switch to making electrics, so they made me a fretless five-string with double-wound EMG pickups. It's really, really beautiful and I've been using it ever since then. I'd like to add a graphite neck to it, because with wood necks, you always have to adjust them, and graphite doesn't change. I use D'Addario strings, and for amps, it's Aguilar and Ampeg.

You divide your time between the Czech Republic and the USA these days.
Yes. How that happened was that Lou had a very close connection with [the former Czech President] Vaclav Havel. We played there in the mid-Nineties, right after it opened up – you know, when it became free – because they invited Lou to play there. Previously, we had played in the White House when Bill Clinton was the president. Clinton wanted to give a special dinner in honour of President Havel, so they said to him, what music would you like to hear? And out of all the people in the world, he said, 'Lou Reed'. So we go to the White House, we do the concert and it's really great, and then the next day, we go back to New York. Two days later, Havel calls, and says that he wants to go to Harlem and listen to jazz music. So we go to some clubs in Harlem – and it was really kind of funny, because we were with all these policemen, you know, and you feel like you're really important. Anyway, I got to know him really well, and some years later I met a booking agency over there and they said, 'Fernando, why don't you come over and play your own music here?' The album I released in 2007, *I Will Break Your Fall*, was doing really well there, so this agency started bringing me over here a lot.

Your son András Kállay-Saunders is a well-known singer in Hungary.
He is. He competed in Eurovision in 2014 for Hungary, and he did really well. He came second in their version of *American Idol* and fell in love with the girl that won. In fact, I think he let her win!

Fernando's new album We Are People will be out in the fall. Info: www.fernandosaunders.net

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Players

LAURA GREENBERG

TAKING NOTES

Laura Greenberg on the best bass advice she's ever heard, courtesy of Mr V. Wooten

I began playing guitar as a teenager and started a band. Eventually, I bought a bass, intending to play just for fun. Then I heard of a band that needed a bassist, and I figured it might be fun as a side project. Fast forward a few years, and I was in a bunch of different bands playing only bass, and my guitar was gathering dust.

My first bass was an inexpensive Ibanez; I think it was only around $200. Still, it was a surprisingly good bass, especially for the price, and I played it for years. After the Ibanez, I moved on to a special edition Fender Jazz bass with a quilted maple top. That bass has the best feel, and just felt comfortable from the moment I picked it up. It has a full 24 frets, and it was fun to experiment with playing melodies up high on the neck. That bass really helped me through my performance exams when I was studying music at Carleton University in Ottawa.

My favourite bass at the moment is a 1969 Fender Telecaster. I have flatwounds on it to get that thumpy, vintage sound. These days I'm playing mostly blues and roots music, so it's the perfect bass to get the warm, round tone I am looking for. I play through Eden amps. I have a very versatile 2x10 cabinet, paired with an Eden TN501. I love that the cab is lightweight, and compact, but still sounds great. The TN501 has tons of options, but it's incredibly easy to dial in the tone I like. Not only does it sound great, but I love the design too – it almost looks like the controls for a spaceship.

I've been really lucky to perform and record all over the world, in about 15 different countries. Some of the more unusual gigs included a train in Durango, Colorado; a library in Monroe, Michigan; a prison in Norway; and even a festival in Svalbard, which is almost as far north as the North Pole. Some of the most memorable gigs, though, have been the ones with surprise special guests. On a few occasions, I was joined on stage by the legendary Buddy Guy, at his club in Chicago. On another gig, I got to jam with Chad Smith of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, at the iconic Blues On Whyte in Edmonton, Alberta. The bassists I admire the most are the ones like James Jamerson and Jack Myers, who could sneak beautiful, melodic or unexpected bass-lines into songs that were otherwise fairly straightforward pop or blues tunes.

Lately I've been working on some video and recording projects that will be released in the coming months. A few of the great artists I am proud to work with on these projects are Murray Kinsley and Wicked Grin, Matthew Chaffey, the Yvon Leroux Band, Al Wood, and D.B. Cohen.

"The world doesn't need another good bass player, but the world needs another good person"

The best advice I've ever been given is that the world doesn't need another good bass player, but the world does need another good person. I heard that while attending Victor Wooten's Bass Nature Camp in Nashville, Tennessee. The music business is hard, and those words always come back to me when things get tough. More specifically, though, the best advice I have ever had about playing bass is very simple, and not too difficult to accomplish. Learn all of the note names on the fretboard inside out. It only took a few weeks to learn thoroughly, and it made a huge and instant improvement in my playing.

Info: www.lauragreenberg.ca

CALL HIM AL

Behind the ferocious death metal of Cannibal Corpse, there's a bass genius: **Alex Webster.**

Interview: Joel McIver **Photography:** Getty

Alex Webster is best known for his fleet-fingered lines in the death metal band Cannibal Corpse, a name which instantly unnerves many people even before they hear the group's songs, which are relentlessly aggressive and much loved by millions of headbangers worldwide. He's one of the band's founder members, along with drummer Paul Mazurkiewicz, and does most of their press, as he's doing now because their fifteenth album, *Violence Unimagined*, is out.

Webster is also a respected educator, having authored the *Extreme Metal Bass* book in 2011 and written columns for *Bass Guitar* magazine from 2013 to 2015, and also plays progressive bass parts in projects such as Blotted Science and Conquering Dystopia.

You might assume that Webster is a pretty extreme character based on the above, but meet the man himself and you'll be struck by how calm and reasonable he is. Just the bassist you want in your band, in fact, when a pandemic strikes and you need to figure out what to do with your new album.

Alex, does it feel strange to issue *Violence Unimagined* and then not be able to tour?
Absolutely. Generally, you put out an album, and you're immediately touring. That's how we like to do it, and most bands do, I think. At first we were like, 'We'll delay the release a little', but eventually, you just have to put it out. We knew that we probably wouldn't be doing much in 2021, but at least we got an album out. Maybe we'll end up doing a live stream later in the year. We're not sure, so we'll see what happens. It's different for all the bands. No-one's dealt with something quite like this before, so we're all figuring it out as we go.

There are bass parts on the new album that we don't normally hear from you, like the fills in 'Follow The Blood', which almost have that fretless, Steve DiGiorgio feel.
That's a song that Rob [Barrett, guitar] wrote, and after I recorded the basic tracks he said 'Could you go back in and do fills on these two parts?' He didn't give me instructions beyond that, so I thought, 'Let me see what I can come up with' and I took a good listen to what the guitars were doing there and picked scales that I thought were appropriate. Major thirds were happening there, but I thought a major scale would be a little too happy, so I went with Lydian because it has the augmented fourth, so there's that tritone in there. For one of those little licks I started from the third note up, which is a cool thing I've learned to do over the years – instead of starting on the root note, start on the third. I'm glad that Rob had it in mind for me to have a little bass feature in there, because I didn't write much of that kind of stuff for my own songs. I think it's the first time I've played Lydian in Cannibal Corpse.

> **"This album is the first time I've played the Lydian mode in Cannibal Corpse"**

People like me who admire your bass playing would love to hear more stuff like that.
Yeah, but with Cannibal Corpse it's always a 'song first' kind of thing for me. Some of the side projects I've done have allowed me to stretch out a little bit more, but Cannibal is really about being a big, heavy rhythm machine, and stepping out too much might detract from that. So when there's an opportunity like this, it's great.

Another cool part is in 'Overtorture', when the band stops and you're just pounding out a cool solo line.
That's just the root note. I asked myself if I should bother putting in more notes than just the root, because anything else at that speed is going to be a little bit hard to hear. Erik [Rutan, guitar] wrote that one, and he wanted me to do something there. The difficulty was that I was playing those notes on the low B string, but on that song we tuned to G sharp – so that open note is way down there. It's a pretty quick tempo, so I'm doing the picking with two fingers, not three, for extra consistency.

You once told us that when the guitars are playing sixteenths, above a certain tempo you'll switch to eighths for accuracy. At what point does that occur?
Below 180bpm I'll give it a shot – somewhere

Alex's gear endorsements include Spector, Aguilar, Seymour Duncan, DR Strings, Darkglass Electronics and Radial Engineering.

Webster (left) with Cannibal Corpse in the early Nineties

up in that range. Above that, sixteenths are a little much, so I'll cut the notes in half. There's been a few times in the past where the guitars were playing sixteenth notes and I wound up playing as fast as I could, but I ended up playing more like triplet eighth notes. That probably sounded a little jumbled, so at that point, I'll cut it in half, which usually lines me up perfectly with the kick and snare. That sounds nice and tight – and nobody's ever complained about a bass player who sounded too tight.

You'll also tap in order to get those accurate sixteenths.
That's also a way to get a bunch of notes pretty fast. I do that on the new album, in the middle of 'Necrogenic Resurrection'. I'll take the note – say, A – and grab an octave of A with my left hand and an octave of A with my right hand, higher up on the neck. Then I'll tap those in sequence, because then you can get really clear notes.

We bass players sometimes beat ourselves up about not being able to keep up with a fast guitarist, but the physics of the way the notes bloom on a bass doesn't always allow that.
Yes, absolutely. You know, it's a choice that bass players in this kind of music have to make. Sometimes it makes sense to try and go as fast as you can, even if it is a little jumbled, maybe in a tremolo picking part. If both guitar players aren't quite lining up anyway, then I think it's okay to have things sound a little jumbled. It gives it a frantic sound, and that might be exactly what you're going for. You're right about the notes – they don't have the chance to bloom, especially when they're really low – and if there's double bass drums too, they almost create an illusion that the bass player is picking everything. There's a lot of options that can sound good. What's important is that you're landing on the accents in time.

"What's important when playing really fast is that you're landing on the accents in time"

You had a case of focal dystonia a few years back. Tell us about that.
Focal dystonia is essentially an injury, but not the kind of injury that people would normally think of – it's not carpal tunnel, or a tendon problem, or something like that. It's essentially a neurological problem, and it happens in a lot of disciplines that require precise, repetitive movements, and not just in music.

What were the symptoms?
The normal finger-picking that I would do would become very strained. It seemed as if my pointer finger would be going left instead of down. When I first noticed something was going wrong, it was very confusing and frightening. I was like, 'What's going on with my right hand? Why isn't it behaving the way it's behaved for the past 30 years?'

What specifically were your fingers not doing that you wanted them to do?
Basically, the signals from your brain are going wrong on the way down to your fingers. Imagine your legs walking. What if the signal from your brain was telling both legs to go forward at the same time? That's not exactly what was happening with my picking fingers, but certain signals were definitely getting through and certain signals weren't.

How did you solve the problem?
I saw a specialist named Joaquin Farias, who helped me out very much, and I also spoke with a classical guitarist, Apostolos Paraskevas, and the bassist Scott Devine, who gave me tips on their bouts with this. It's something that can often be resolved, which is good news for anyone who gets it. You just have to work through it, learn what you need to correct, and then take the time to correct it. What's interesting is that in some ways, I'm playing better than I did before.

In what way?
I think part of the reason people get focal dystonia is that there may be fundamental flaws in their playing technique that they never knew about. They can trigger this thing. I'm not an expert, and anyone who really wants to learn about this should read the books Dr Farias has written, but it could be that part of the trigger is having imperfect technique. I think I was maybe digging in a little too much. Fluidity and economy of motion are really the key. After having something like this happen, I'll never take it for granted again.

***Violence Unimagined* is out now on Metal Blade.**
Info: www.cannibalcorpse.net

SEASON OF JOY

KillJoy Stephens on taking a philosophical, but practice-based, route into the low end

What was your way into bass?
Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World. That movie showcased how integral to a narrative a bassist could be, but seriously, I bought a bass guitar and learned all Scott Pilgrim's parts soon after. Beck did a great job capturing teenage angst in musical form, and it was just for a movie. I still go back and listen to the movie soundtrack to appreciate different parts of the music, and I was recently gifted a 'Sex Bob-Omb' T-shirt for my birthday by my partner.

What was your first bass guitar?
A beaten up Aria P/J bass. I sold my PSP for it – a sound investment. I was going through a phase when I had her, so she's all covered in stickers and tape nowadays, though I've held onto her through the years.

> **"Being able to practise timing and experimenting with tone is the most valuable thing to me as a bass player"**

Which other basses have you played since then?
I moved onto Ibanez after that, a dual humbucker white four-string. My school band broke up after that so she didn't get much live action. Then I discovered six-string basses, Ibanez again – an SR506 in brown. I learned a lot from that bass, but I found the string spacing too close for my current style of play. A five-string Fender Jazz bass came later, and then I found myself playing a Dingwall. There was no question, I'd fallen in love. I still use a Dingwall today, though I've traded my Combustion for an old AB1. My love for Dingwalls really inspired the design of my signature SBC guitar. I've started playing fretless basses since then, and at some point during lockdown, my next SBC should be fretless if all goes to plan.

What bass gear do you currently use?
My SBC bass is my axe of choice. The fanned frets keep the lower notes tight and the higher notes warm. I'm able to craft melodically diverse pieces. I use the Battalion bass preamp by Electro-Harmonix – it was recommended to me by my bandmate and producer Will Troman. It helps me keep a careful ear on my tone with its all-in-one compression, EQ and noise gate. My main bit of gear is Logic, though. Being able to practise timing and experiment with tone is the most valuable thing to me as a player.

What's the best advice you've ever been given about playing bass?
Practise to a metronome.

Which bass player do you most admire, and why?
Steve Lawson. As a student of Steve's for a few years, my opinion is a little biased, but he has taught me an incredible amount about the bass guitar, and more importantly how to learn in my own time. He's taught me that technique is just about understanding the options available to you, so as long as it isn't physically or psychologically damaging you, it isn't necessarily a bad technique, just something unique to your style. He also mentioned something about my timing.

Where can we hear you play?
My band Storm Season formed during the pandemic, just as friends collaborating, but it soon turned into its own thing. We all put so much effort in, that having all the time away from our otherwise busy schedules allowed the sound to really grow and develop into something special. I also release my own live cinematic musical arrangements across Youtube and Instagram, and I work on a lot of different projects as a session bassist.

www.killjoystephens.com, @killjoystephens

ALL IN

Everything Everything bassist **Jeremy Pritchard** digs deep into a world of tone

Art-rock is alive and well in the hands of Everything Everything, whose five albums to date have nabbed them a shelfload of awards. Holding down the low end is Jeremy Pritchard, who also toured with the indie band Foals in 2019. In both cases he is required to play major stages, and delivers the low frequencies via some suitably hefty gear, he explains.

What's your go-to bass rig?
Live, I use an Orange AD200 head and a 8x10 cab. I've been using those for a couple of years. At first, I didn't expect to take to it in the way that I have done, because in my head, I associated it with a vintage sound. What I really appreciate about it, though, is how simple it is and how high-quality the components are. The controls are just bass, mid, treble, gain.

Presumably it gives you a warm, fuzzy Seventies tone when you want one.
It does do that, but it's also very sensitive. You can set it anywhere – it's going to sound great. I'll use that for life. When I was playing with Foals last year, it was the same cab, but with a Fender Bassman head, which I sometimes use with Everything Everything as well.

And the basses?
Basically Fenders, but I throw in a few other bits and pieces too, like a Hofner Club, which I love. And I've got an old Rickenbacker, which I got when I was 19 for £200, and it's worth about 10 times that now. It's a 4000, and it's an unusually good-sounding Rick, considering it's only got one pickup. I got lucky with that. When I first started playing, it was the only bass I had that was in working order. After that I got really into playing a P-Bass and I've never looked back.

Do you play Jazz basses too?
I do use Jazzes with Everything Everything, and I used a Jazz entirely with Foals last year. Despite having huge hands, I really love a Jazz neck. They're just so easy to get around.

Are you strictly a four-string guy?
I've never played a five; I don't really have the brain. I do quite a lot of downtuning, though, sometimes down to C sharp, but whenever I try to play a five the physicality of it just blows my mind. I could get used to it, I'm sure. The other bandmembers in Everything Everything would love it. They're really pro five-string, and really pro fretless. It's me that's the stick in the mud. It's really interesting: our ethos is to do away with anything that's deemed to be uncool. We want to embrace it.

Do you have a pedalboard?
I do. I use a Cali 76 by Origin Effects, which is basically an 1176 compressor. I'd never used a compressor before that, and it's such a subtle pedal. It really makes a huge difference. It's never off. It's got very well-calibrated attack and release settings on it – you can really make pick playing seem quite cocky and tight, but it's not going to overwhelm and shock the sound. And then I have a Boss OC-2, and a chorus pedal. I got really into those two pedals about five years ago, partly because there was a lot more synth programming going on in the music. I was like, 'How can I fit into this, and how can I emulate what the synthesisers are doing?'

> **"I wouldn't go so far as to say that bass is egoless, but it's an ensemble instrument, isn't it?"**

Do you keep the chorus subtle, or is the tone very effected?
Chorus is more of a functional thing – just to lift the bass out of the dirt. You don't hear it and think Peter Hook, necessarily, although there's one or two spots where I'm quite deliberately ripping him off. It's quite subtle. And then I have a SansAmp Tri-A.C. for three different stages of gain. For fuzz, I have a Malekko B:Assmaster, which is really, really volatile – you have to be incredibly careful with how you set it. It's really an amazing sound. Then I have a delay pedal, which I used for a couple of songs on Everything Everything's *Fever Dream* album. Again, that was not something I ever expected to do, but I have the delay set in such a way that it doubles the rhythm. But on the whole, my board is quite minimal – I don't really use effects a huge amount. If I'm changing the tone, it tends to happen at the bass guitar rather than down at the pedalboard.

How many basses do you take out on tour?
It would be the main P-Bass – the old 1969 Precision in Olympic White, which I love – and then a spare for that. Then a Jazz, the Hofner Club and a Fender Mustang, and the Rick as well. So that's six plus spares, but I'm trying to pare that down, keep it simpler, and just stick to the idea of having one bass. I think I've got through the stage where I want to have multiple instruments and show off, but there are certain songs that I think demand a particular sound or a particular approach. It's quite difficult to get away from those. If it's a long-haul flight and I can only take two basses, I'll take a Precision and a Mustang, because I feel like I can do everything with between the two of those. I love the Mustangs. I'm really into them – they're so hard to beat, sonically. I'm always surprised how they stand out of the mix: they combine with synths and effects really well. The only reason I don't play them more is because I'm so tall that I look kind of ridiculous with one.

How tall are you?
Six three – tall enough to look a bit silly with a short-scale Mustang. It might be different

Getty

if they did a full-scale Mustang, I'm always wondering why Fender never did that.

That'll be a custom shop job for you when you make your first million.
Maybe… but the short scale is part of the punchy sound.

Tell us how you got into playing bass.
When I first started high school, I really wanted to play the drums, but my parents talked me out of that because they were loud and expensive. My dad was a guitarist, so he steered me in that direction, and I got an acoustic guitar for my twelfth birthday. I'd played the cello as a kid, though, so I subconsciously understood the role of a bass instrument within an ensemble – and the school had an electric bass, but no electric guitars, so I gravitated towards this much cooler instrument.

Were you better suited for the role of bassist?
There is something to be said for the mindset of bass guitar players. It's a less glamorous job. I wouldn't ever go so far as to say it's egoless – nobody would accuse me of that – but it's an ensemble instrument, isn't it? The thing I like about playing bass is playing with other people. I don't really like playing bass on my own that much. Also, what I really enjoy about it is the limitations of the instrument. It's forced me to think and be creative with the basic building blocks of music. I really like the rigorousness of that.

Did your cello playing facilitate your electric bass playing?
I think so, once I got my head around the different tuning and that it was fretted. The way that you control the harmony from the ground up was something I already understood, subconsciously.

Who were the bassists that you admired?
When I first started playing bass, I was listening to Blur a lot, and I've since realised how influential Alex James was. He's very interesting, because – like another one of my favourite bass players, Andy Rourke from the Smiths – he's overshadowed by a visionary guitar player, and he doesn't take himself very seriously as a musician, but he's better than he knows or cares about. As well as those two, I also loved Paul McCartney, Colin Greenwood of Radiohead, and James Jamerson. Obviously Jamerson was influential on everybody, and Colin Greenwood had this sort of cellular thing – he would play like a loop a lot of the time, which I loved – and I got really into the personality and the presence, as much as the playing, of people like Paul Simonon. Nicky Wire of the Manic Street Preachers was the same, because he was a key polemicist. They were people who presented the role as not something that was retiring or backline: there was a personality there as well.

Do any current bassists impress you?
The last bassist to really blow my socks off was Carlos Dengler from Interpol, who seemed to have no regard whatsoever for what you were supposed to do, or not do, on bass guitar. He's all over it. His playing is full of really cheeky stuff, like octave leaps in an almost disco style, along with New Order and Joy Division. On that note, there was Peter Hook as well: it's so hard to overlook him. His playing was so powerful and unusual.

These are all players with authority and presence, mostly without being bandleaders.
Yes – I suppose the thing is, they're not the kind of bassist that Victor Wooten or Flea is, but they're memorable without being a frontliner. If you can manage that, that's the discipline that really matters most.

Everything Everything's album Re-Animator is out now. Info: http://everything-everything.co.uk

DEAR BILL

The great **Bill Conklin** has served the bass community for close to four decades with his innovative designs and superb build standards. Dan Veall finds out what inspires him these days

"The fun never ends. We have so many ideas for builds that we want to try."

Bill, you're celebrating 37 years since Conklin Guitars was founded. What was the spark that lit the fire back in 1984?
My inspiration to get into guitar and bass building was fuelled by everything that was going on at that time, combined with my love of art and music. All the triggers were firing together – bands like Van Halen were hitting the scene, ads were coming out for new guitar companies like Dean and Tobias, and my friends and I were starting to get into playing. At some point I began creating numerous designs for wild, original guitar ideas. It was the late Seventies. I was young, I was intrigued and I was captivated.

What was your first build?
Towards the end of my high school years I decided to take some general woodworking classes, and decided to take on my first guitar build for my senior class project. It was a six-string shaped like an M-16. I pretty much had it already laid out and ready to roll, but it was a challenge and took most of the year to complete. I ended up playing that guitar in a cover band I was in for the next two summers following graduation, and it garnered lots of attention and compliments. At that point it seemed there was no turning back. I had already attended three years of college at a notable engineering school in my area – University of Missouri-Rolla, studying Geological Engineering – but the GE field was having some issues at that time, and it was the perfect time to put up or shut up.

We hear of some truly great companies beginning life in a shed or a garage. Was it a similar story for you in the early days?
I spoke with my parents about setting up a small shop area in a portion of the large garage at our home in Lebanon, Missouri. They were very understanding and even agreed to use some of what would have been my fourth year tuition to acquire some light machines and hand tools to get me going. It was just the boost I needed. I started off doing mostly modification work and refinishing – fret levels, tremolo installations and so on. I would add a piece of equipment or two when I could, and slowly built up the shop capabilities. In May of 1984, I was approached by the editors of *Guitar World* to submit a listing in their annual Buyers Guide. Soon after that issue, the custom orders started trickling in. I immediately filed for a business license – and *voilà*, the company was official!

Did music come before woodwork, and was music in the family?
Yes, music definitely came first. At that early

age I had no other calling and no real woodworking skills. There was some musicianship throughout my ancestry, but no major business backgrounds in my recent past.

Tell us about the standard line of Conklin basses and how they differ from your custom work.
What we aimed to do with the standard line was to take many of the most popular options from our custom line, and incorporate them into models that were easier to order and hopefully more affordable.

You're well known for your extended range instruments.
Honestly, the whole extended range thing evolved out of customer requests. We didn't intentionally go there. The first seven-string bass, nine-string bass and eight-string guitar were all customer requests, and we just rolled with it.

"I feel that it's important to push boundaries and not get stuck recycling the old... luthiery is going strong"

Some bassists out there frown upon instruments with 'too many' strings...
As with everything else we're all going through these days, everyone just needs to be tolerant of what other musicians choose to play or enjoy doing. It is what keeps things evolving and growing.

Of course, the basses speak for themselves, crafted to the highest specifications, but what is it that drives you from within?
My favourite word or term from clear back when I first started the company has always been 'integrity'. It's such a strong word, and I always strive to build with integrity.

How does it feel to see your basses being played by musicians all over the world?
It is a wonderful feeling to have the representation and support of so many incredible players. I definitely feel blessed.

Access to design technology and machine tools seems easier today than it was back in 1984. How has your business changed with technology?
At the time we were getting our start, all of the guitar designs were drawn by hand, and we made numerous drawings and templates in order to get everything as accurate as possible. About 12 years ago we invested fairly heavily in Computer-Aided Design technology and acquired a computer-controlled router (CNC) for the shop. It has been a huge learning experience, but we're getting it down pretty well – and it allows us to do much more precise work, especially with our push into the standard models.

Does modern technology make it easier or harder to build a career as a luthier?
For those wanting to get into the field, I can assure you there are hundreds of amazing builders out there these days, and the competition will be fierce – but at the same time there are constant technological advancements that are creating new opportunities for those just getting involved.

Where would you say luthiery is going? Are there still boundaries to push?
It certainly appears that luthiery is still going strong. I'm intrigued by a lot of the green building materials that many builders are currently experimenting with. I still feel it is important to push boundaries and not get stuck recycling the old. It's always a good idea to find a niche to call your own.

Have you made the ultimate Conklin instrument yet?
When we were putting together our standard model line, our minds were definitely on past projects that we were excited about, or ideas that we had for something new and fun. My thoughts incorporate aspects of several instruments such as hollowbodies, non-traditional pickups and configurations, the use of pickguards to give a more traditional or timeless look, and of course unique finishes. The fun never ends. We have so many ideas for builds that we want to try – there's no way we'll ever get to them all!

Info: www.conklinguitars.com

PRESS TO PLAY

Jon Button has a long resume of gigs with artists such as Sheryl Crow, Shakira, Mandy Moore, James Blunt and Robben Ford. His most recent gig with The Who saw him faced with the daunting task of playing the bass parts of the much-missed John Entwistle. Could *you* pull that off?

Did the gig with The Who come about because you'd already played with Roger Daltrey, Jon?
Yes. I'd been playing with Roger for eight years, and obviously that included playing songs by The Who.

What does it feel like to step into the shoes of John Entwistle and Pino Palladino?
No pressure, right? Ha ha! I try not to think about it too much. I'm not trying to be either of those guys, because I can't be either of them. I feel like I do me, with a large tip of the hat to John, but I'm not trying to be a replica of him. Nobody can be, and Pete [Townshend] and Roger absolutely don't want me to be.

Do you try to replicate Entwistle's tone, though?
To an extent, yes. I definitely go for a brighter sound with roundwounds and distortion. I don't get a lot of direction with that, though – they're like, 'Do what you do'. It's like that with most bands, so I think I have a pretty good gauge for what needs to happen.

Do you stick meticulously to the original bass parts, or do you bring your own interpretation?
There are certain things that absolutely need to be there. For example, with the song 'The Real Me', I play probably 80 percent of what John did on the record – and when he played it live, he stayed pretty close to what was on the record too. On most of the material, there are signature parts that need to be there – hooks and whatnot – but a large part of it, I would say 70 or 80 percent, is improvised within a certain framework.

When it comes to the famous bass solo in 'My Generation', even Entwistle didn't play it the same way live as it was on the record.
Right – and I don't play it note for note at all. I try to change it a little bit here and there. I usually play that first lick pretty close to the original – not exactly, but pretty close – and the rest I play somewhere in the realm of what he did. Pete really likes that. When you do something unexpected, you might get a little look from him – like, 'That was different and cool'.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, you've got much simpler lines like 'Baba O'Reilly'.
You know, I even find that challenging, because I want to get a certain tone on every note and have every note be right in the pocket. Something that's that simple can be a challenge, because you want it to be perfect every time, you know. I really focus on that and try to make every note powerful, because the bass is pretty exposed. In the beginning it's just me and the piano, and if you're playing those three notes in a stadium, it's all you.

What's your bass of choice with The Who?
I play a 1965 P-Bass. I went out one day in the late Nineties to this one little area in Hollywood where there were a number of vintage guitar shops. I went and played all the basses I could find, and I really liked this particular one. I've used it on everything. I just put that on, and that's it. It translates in a mix really well. It sits in a place where you can hear everything, but it's not super harsh. It feels like home to me.

What else is in the chain?
When I initially started with The Who, my rig was an Ampeg SVT, and then I split my signal and added a Suhr amp – a 50-watt head with a single 12" cab, cranked up so it sounds like a Marshall. I ran those on full, and that was amazing. But for the last tour, we were with a full orchestra, which meant there were 20 or more condenser mics within three feet of me, so I switched over to the Line 6 Helix. That has two channels, so it enables me to do what I was doing before; I use it to create an SVT model and a Marshall model. I send those separately to the front of house.

Is there another Precision as backup?
Yeah, I have a Fender American Original. It's killer. I've always been pretty old-school when it comes to basses. I was lucky enough to get a Frankenstein '64 Jazz bass when I was 16. Before that, I had a Rickenbacker, which I ended up using with Sheryl Crow on a few songs.

"I've never had a real job in my life. It's something to be proud of, but it's also kind of scary!"

She's a great bass player, too.
Yes, she can play anything on any instrument. She knows her theory inside and out, and she's got incredible time and feel.

Who were the bass players you admired when you were starting out?
I was a Jaco fan real early on. Somebody gave me his first solo record and I was like, 'What is this?' It's such a good record, with fantastic playing. I got really into James Jamerson in high school, but it's funny, I didn't really grow up with the Beatles, so I learned about McCartney when I was in my early

twenties, sadly. The same with Entwistle – I didn't get into The Who until later on. I liked Carol Kaye, because I wanted to be a session player when I was at high school. I was also into Will Lee and Marcus Miller, and those other session guys.

Which do you prefer, live or studio?
I do love touring, but I also love going in the studio and being creative. Often, when I do a session, somebody comes in with an acoustic guitar and the vocal, and my job is to come up with the bass parts and help with the arrangements and stuff. It's really creative, which I like.

Do you find that as the years pass, you play bass differently?
Yeah. Playing with Roger for eight years, and then The Who for another few years, has totally changed my playing. I'm always working and practising and trying to figure out new stuff. I like to work on my time and pocket and finding a certain feel. I'll hear some music and think, 'Wow, that sounds challenging – I'm not sure if I could nail that'. Maybe it'll be some kind of New Orleans, swung, crazy, swampy thing. I'm like, 'Can I do that? I don't know'. So I'll find some song that has a cool feel that I feel I need to work on, and I'll EQ out some of the bass and record myself along with it. I'll listen back and think 'That sucks. Try again!' I do a lot of that.

Is your technique improving?
I've been working on that. With The Who, there is some really fast sixteenth-note stuff. I had trouble getting that to happen, so I ended up using the first and third finger of my right hand, especially up on the G string. I left out my second finger because somehow those two didn't go as fast. It's weird. So I worked on that for a while and then I was like, 'Well, I'm getting my third finger together – why don't I just learn to play with three fingers?' So I've been working on that over the past few months.

Have you always been a bass player, or have you done other jobs?
I have never had a real job in my life – I've always been on tour or in the studio. I guess that's something to be proud of... but it's also kind of scary!

Info: www.jonbutton.com

Cameron Jordon

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Over £90,000 worth of gear won
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GEAR Reviews

Welcome to our expert road-tests of state-of-the-art bass gear

Behold our world-beating bass gear review section, where we bring you the crop of each month's new, interesting or otherwise relevant bass guitars, bass amplifiers, bass cabs and bass effects. Occasionally we'll review a guitar effect if it's useful for bassists, but generally speaking, this zone is reserved for bass-specific gear.

We take our reviews seriously. *BP* is the last English-language print magazine devoted solely to bass in the world, and we have readers all over the planet, so we're responsible about our conclusions. If a product is worth your time, we'll say so; if it's flawed, we'll make that clear. We're not answerable to advertisers in any way, and our tests are independent of the views of musicians, manufacturers and distributors.

When you read about a product here, you're getting a fair, balanced review from a highly experienced gear tester. Value for money is at the top of our agenda in these cash-strapped times, but on the other hand, we believe in paying for quality. Let us know what you think of our conclusions. Did we get it right?

Joel McIver, Editor

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Reviewed this month...

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FENDER
AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL II PRECISION
£1739, www.fender.com

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MARKBASS
MARCUS MILLER CMD 101 MICRO 60 COMBO
£400 approx, www.mslprofessional.co.uk

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DARKGLASS ELECTRONICS
ADAM
£443-£499, www.musifacts.eu/darkglass

FENDER

American Professional II Precision

FENDER
www.fender.com

One for the money, two for the show: meet Fender's new APII P-Bass, says Kevin Sanders.

By 1957, Leo Fender had developed his original Precision bass design from what was basically a slab-bodied, long-scale four-string Telecaster guitar, to the modern P-Bass that we all know and love today. This time, he'd nailed it – game over, right?

Well, here's the thing. Fender have always made subtle changes to Leo's design. Most of these have contributed to the gradual refinement in the playing experience and sound of the bass, and it's a credit to Fender's design team that during this process, they've never lost sight of the brilliance of that original design. But is there a point when more tweaks are just overthinking it? Let's find out.

Build Quality

Modern Fender Precisions are consistently better built than ever before. Although there's a degree of artisan involvement at the Corona plant in California, they've never claimed that these basses were hand-built or unique. They're mass produced using cutting-

£1799

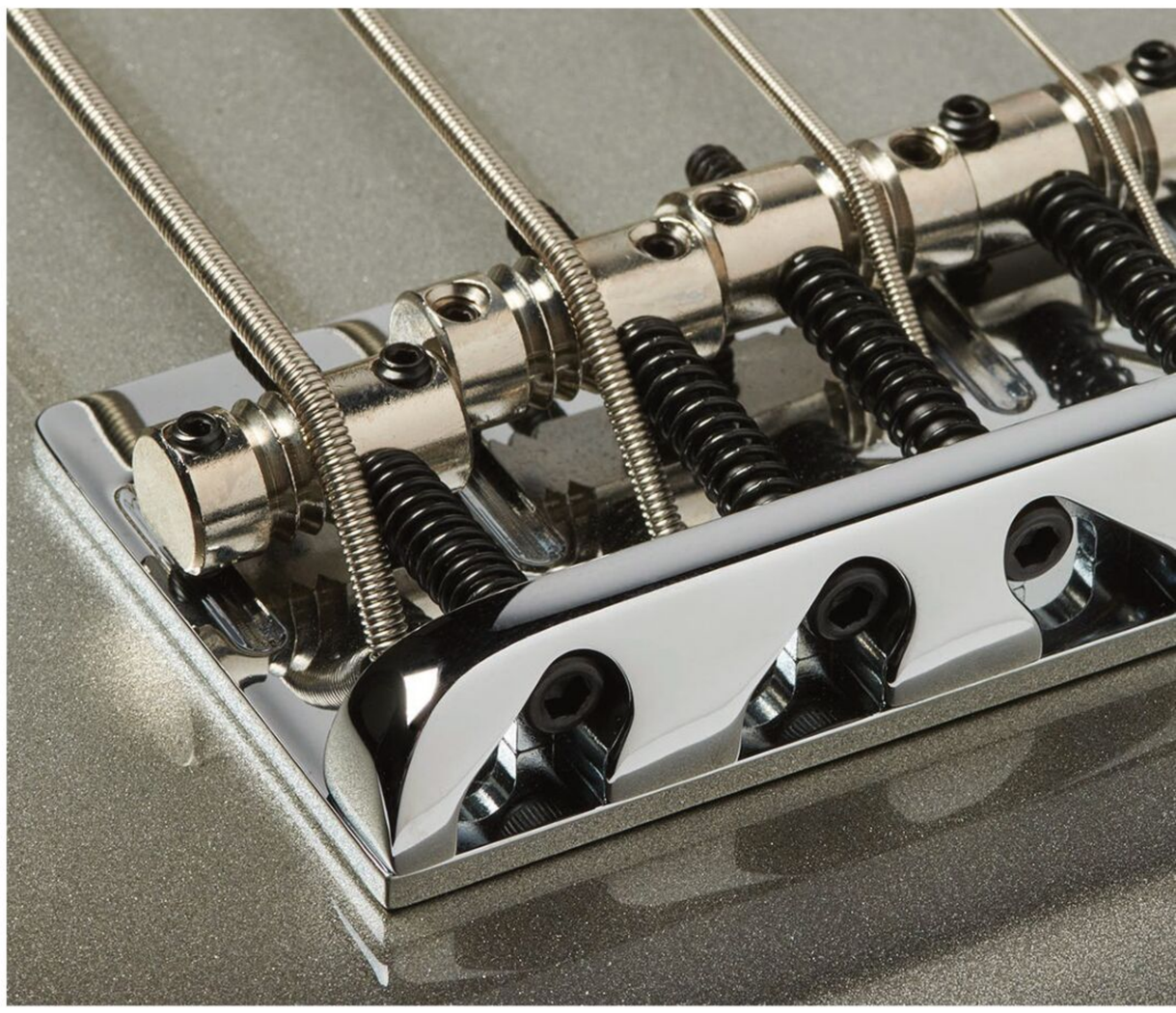
edge technology and automated manufacturing processes – and that's not necessarily a bad thing. Think about it: this means that each and every bass is made to incredibly tight tolerances in terms of construction and finish.

This latest APII is testament to this. Picking it up, it just oozes quality. That's partly down to the stunning Mercury finish of the review sample. This is a kind of metallic gun-metal silver with a subtle two-tone sunburst, perhaps as a nod back to the two-tone finishes of those mid-Fifties Precision basses. Also available are Dark Night, Miami Blue and another favourite of mine, Mystic Surf Green, as well as the traditional black, white and sunburst.

Just like the early P-Basses, the body is alder – and in terms of resonance and weight it's the perfect tonewood for the job. It imparts a warmth and harmonic richness, and is lighter and less dense than the ash or maple used on some past Precisions. The neck is a flawless piece of maple finished in the new 'super-natural' satin. Like all American Pro Fender guitars, it features internal 'Posiflex' graphite reinforcement rods which help stability while still enabling a degree of truss rod adjustment. The dark rosewood fretboard is again of beautiful quality with a long straight grain, making a dark, chocolate-coloured background for the large white plastic dot markers on the front and top edge of the neck. A new feature of the AP II is the sculpted heel joint. This was a feature on the later versions of the American Deluxe Precisions, as well as the Elite series, although the latter had a slightly different contour.

The hardware is functional, but very much up to Fender's recent high quality. Like its predecessor, it has the Hi-Mass bridge, with smooth contours that make it much more comfortable when palm muting while using a pick, or going the 'full Macca' and playing with your thumb.

Along with the heel joint, one of the headline changes for the new APII is the development of the Michael Bump-designed split coil pickup, the V-Mod II. This uses different types of alnico for each of the treble and bass sides of the coil. Other recent changes to the American Professional P are the updated tuners,



The new American Professional II is among the best of the 'standard' Precisions ever made

with fluted shafts which help guide the string windings downwards, creating a better contact with the bone nut.

Sounds And Playability

Strapping on the AP II is like pulling on a favourite pair of jeans. It's comfortable and familiar, and oh man, does it feel good… The balance is perfect and the weight is just about spot on. The neck has the same '63P' profile as its predecessor. For many, myself included, the '63 Precision neck profile is the standard by which all other bass necks should be judged. Its slim depth and generous width makes it almost effortless to play, and the new 'supernatural satin' feels cool and smooth in your hand. The quality of the fretting really is extraordinary: it is impeccably levelled and polished, with fret ends that seem to melt into the smooth radius of the fingerboard's rolled edge.

If you're used to playing twin pickup 18-volt active basses with multiband EQ, pickup pan and pull-pots, you might feel a bit short-changed with only a single passive tone and a volume – but there's no shortage of tonal variation here. A good place to start is to crank up the tone and max out the volume. Some players will leave things like this for a whole song, a whole gig – perhaps a whole career – but slowly backing off the tone to cut the treble and soften the tone in a consistent and controlled way, you get a wide choice of sounds. These range from a warm, loved-up mellow thud to an aggressive snarling clang – that classic Precision sound, and one of the most recognisable sounds in popular music.

The difference between the new V-Mod II pickup and the previous version is very subtle, with perhaps just a little more weight and definition to the low mids – but even with an A/B comparison, there's very little in it. The good news is that the bass still that distinctive Precision tone – a sound that's been the foundation of thousands of hit recordings of every possible kind, from metal and rock, through funk, dance, R&B and country. It's hard to overstate the influence it's had on popular music.

Conclusion

If you're looking at owning a Fender Precision for the first time, the new American Professional II is among the best of the 'standard' Precisions ever made. Like all Precision basses, this new Fender AP is hardly a complicated thing, it's just fundamentally right – partly down to the quality of materials and partly down to how it's made. Mostly, though, it's down to the genius of Leo Fender's original design.

This new American Professional II is a fairly subtle update from the original AP series, but thankfully the improvements that made the AP such a brilliant bass have largely been retained. Keeping loyal customers happy while continually improving a given product must be a tricky balance to pull off, but Fender regularly seems to achieve just that – and here's the proof.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £1799
Made In | USA
Body | Alder
Neck | Maple, 34" scale
Neck Joint | Bolt-on
Nut Width | 1.63" / 41.3mm
Fingerboard | Maple or rosewood
Frets | 20
Pickups | V-Mod II humbucker
Electronics | Passive
Controls | Volume, tone
Hardware | Fender chrome Hi-Mass bridge and lightweight fluted tuners
Weight | 8.4lbs / 3.8kg
Left-hand option available | Yes
Case/gig bag included | Yes, deluxe moulded hardshell

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | New pickup and heel joint add up to a small but significant improvement
Minus | Another price hike over the previous version
Overall | Subtle improvements keep the Fender Precision as relevant as ever

BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY

SOUND QUALITY

VALUE

WILCOCK BiSonic

A short-scale bass with one neck pickup: think you know how it's going to sound? Think again, says Mike Brooks

WILCOCK (LONDON)
www.wilcocklondon.com

£1900

Wilcock Basses have been building up a head of steam recently, with some familiar names taking their instruments to heart and achieving very impressive sonic results. The moment we open this BiSonic's case, it's clear that a great deal of love and attention has gone into its construction. As it's equipped with Thomastik Infeld flatwound strings and features a short scale length, we predict that the tones on offer are likely to be of the 'rounded' and 'thick' variety. Are we right?

Build Quality

Plucked from its hardshell case, the BiSonic feels solid, well-balanced and not especially heavy, all of which are good signs. Weighing in at eight pounds (3.6 kg), this is not a bass with balance issues, and there are no headstock bias considerations to contend with. Whether you're playing it sitting down or standing up, the bass sits perfectly against your body. Front and rear contouring afford the player plenty of comfort, while the well-proportioned curves and slender upper and lower horns imply an effort-free physicality to the instrument.

The flame maple neck is eye-catching, continued across the front facing of the headstock. This clean, simple visual is continued across the 20-fret Indian rosewood fingerboard, with no position markers on display, although white side markers have been used along the side of the neck. The neck profile is a sleek C- and D-shaped hybrid: after five minutes of playing it, you will be in love with it, such is the attention afforded to the construction.

Chrome Hipshot hardware has been used throughout, and along with the three-ply white pearloid scratchplate, Olympic White gloss finish and single Curtis Novak BiSonic pickup, this bass has a tangible air of simplicity. With a master volume control and a push/pull tone control to access the pickup's coil tap, there isn't much to worry about when it comes to dialling in your sounds.

Sounds And Playability

Fitted with flatwounds, the tone is more rounded and hefty, but the shorter scale length instills a suppleness into the string response. String bending is a little easier and zipping across the neck is a whole lot faster than it would be on a standard-scale bass. Unplugged, the natural tone is reminiscent of a Hofner – it's very Sixties-influenced, with a full, clear sound.

Plugged in, the BiSonic produces a fat, earthy tone, almost sounding like an upright at times: the lower frequencies have minimal attack when a note is played, before blooming to achieve their full effect. Classic, plummy bass tones are readily available, and thankfully, both controls work across the whole of the pot turn: the tone control offers plenty of discernible light and shade. The pickup response can be

changed by activating the push/pull facility on the tone control and selecting each setting: you'll instantly hear the difference between both options.

The standard setting offers a straightahead bass tone, well-defined with a low-mid thump and a smooth low end that sits well with the well-defined highs. Activating the pulled setting provides a very noticeable increase in low-end content; thankfully, it doesn't drown out the instrument's sound. Instead, it provides some additional power to the tone, creating a hefty signal with considerable bass response. Pick players will no doubt move towards this setting as it works well with the attack that a pick provides, while dub and reggae players will also be impressed by the sonic possibilities.

The bass feels very smooth in its design and execution: the human, handmade nature of the BiSonic should not be underplayed. The bridge permits adjustable string spacing, but is set to 20mm on this example, which feels very comfortable alongside the 42mm nut width. With an excellent setup and finish, the bass plays like butter melting on a warm knife.

Conclusion

There's no getting away from the pricetag, but you may have gathered that I was quite taken with this bass. With the continuing popularity of short-scale basses, it's quite clear that there is a segment of the bass playing public who adore this format. If you are such a player, I can highly recommend Viv Wilcock's work – you will be very impressed.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £1900
Made In | UK
Colour| Olympic white, gloss finish
Body | Alder
Neck | One-piece flame maple, 30.5" scale, gloss finish
Neck Joint | Bolt-on, four-bolt attachment
Nut Width | 42mm
Fingerboard | Indian rosewood
Frets | 20
Pickups | Curtis Novak coil-tapped BS-DS pickup
Electronics | Passive
Controls | Volume, tone (pickup coil-tap via push/pull operation)
Hardware | Chrome hardware, Hipshot adjustable bridge, Hipshot Ultralite machine heads
Weight | 3.6 kg / 8 lbs
Case/gig bag included | Hardshell case
Left-hand option available | Yes, as a custom order

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Simplicity, build quality
Minus | Limited tonally
Overall | Pricey but impressive

BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY

SOUND QUALITY

VALUE

MARKBASS

Marcus Miller CMD 101 Micro 60 Combo

MSL PROFESSIONAL
www.mslprofessional.co.uk

£400

Mike Brooks appraises this cute Marcus Miller amp – and asks whether usable combos can get any smaller...

With bass amplification becoming ever lighter and smaller, the lines of separation between a home practice combo and a functional live amp are becoming increasingly irrelevant. In-ear monitors and minimal backline requirements on gigs are blurring those lines even further. This unit from the Marcus Miller range of amplification from Markbass is small, portable and compact, and although its output rating is limited at 45 watts – or 60 watts with an extension cabinet – it comes equipped with all the necessary features required of a home practice combo. So... is it up to the job?

Build Quality

Finished in a black felt covering and furnished with plastic protective corners, metal grille and a top-mounted carry handle, the Micro 60 bears all the hallmarks of a Markbass combo and can

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £400 (approx)
Made In | Indonesia
Power | 60 watts at 4 ohms, 45 watts at 8 ohms
Features | Gain, master volume, low, middle, high, dual voltage switch, internal speaker on/off switch, ground/lift selector
Speakers | 1 x 10" Markbass custom speaker, piezo tweeter
Dimensions | 366mm (H) x 370mm (W) x 334mm (D) / 14.4" (H) x 14.56" (W) x 13.14" (D)
Connections | 1/4-inch jack input, 3.5mm auxiliary input, balanced XLR DI output, 1/4-inch jack speaker output, 3.5mm headphone output
Weight | 11.5 kg / 25.35 lbs

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Simple, effective, versatile
Minus | Limited output – but this can be addressed with an extra cab
Overall | A very impressive combo, well worthy of investigation

BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

easily be stacked atop other similarly-sized Markbass cabinets. The familiar yellow 10" speaker is supported by a piezo tweeter, with the obvious intention being that clarity and definition are not compromised. To ensure a solid low-end response, the rear of the cab has extensive rear reflex porting.

In terms of features, the control set is limited but gives you everything most of us will need: Gain and Master volume controls, a three-band EQ, an auxiliary input for adding a music source, headphone and XLR DI outputs, and an additional speaker out enabling the addition of an extra cabinet. A clip indicator LED shows the player when the bass signal is a little too hot, safeguarding the speaker's performance.

As it weighs in at 25 pounds (11.5 kilograms), portability has been addressed, assisted by some effective unit dimensions. Not only can the unit be carried with ease, it will take up very little room at home or on stage – very useful for those small club gigs where space is at a premium.

Sounds

We tested the combo with a variety of basses, concluding that the Micro 60 is capable of delivering a surprisingly full low-end performance. Whether presented with a passive, active, four-string, five-string, fretless or acoustic instrument, the individual tonal characteristics are conveyed with a fair degree of power and finesse. Slapped and tapped passages benefit greatly from the addition of the tweeter, making subtle playing stand out without getting lost. Obviously, as the unit is fitted with a 10" speaker, the probability of concocting a truly bass-drenched signal is fairly low.

The simple but effective control layout makes dialling in your tonal requirements easy. It may lack frills but on a unit such as this, which has been designed to do a simple thing very well, why would you want frills? A great, usable tone is the order of the day and the Micro 60 certainly delivers that. Fingerstyle and pick applications are conveyed with authority, although once you start digging in and pushing the unit, you may find that its limitations start to become obvious. This is where attaching an additional cabinet comes into play, and shows sensible forethought from the Markbass team.

Sixty watts may not sound like much, but with an additional 8-ohm cabinet attached, the low end is further reinforced, making the setup more efficient when it comes to conveying the spread of frequencies. This will definitely appeal to five-string bassists, who want the notes to jump off the B string, not merely make a thud.

In use, the tweeter makes a lot of difference to the overall performance and gives the combo versatility, creating a full tonal display with articulation and detail. Thankfully, increasing the Treble control doesn't result in a thin response, but rather a sweeter high end. Using the combo with basses equipped with active EQ showed no limitations as such; adjusting the onboard preamps merely highlighted how capable this combo actually is.

Conclusion

Markbass combos are popular for their portable nature and useful control set, and this example certainly carries on in that tradition. Its simplicity is apparent, but that is the ace up its sleeve. Sure, it has limitations, but I can see many players making full use of it at home, at rehearsals and live.

DARKGLASS ELECTRONICS

ADAM

Bob Brinkman gets in over his head with the Darkglass ADAM, a true tone monster

MUSIFACTS
www.musifacts.eu/darkglass

£443-£499

If you had asked me five years ago to play through any sort of modelling gear, I would have laughed and walked away – but that was before discovering Darkglass. I've been consistently impressed by the build and sound quality of their products, which led me to buy the ADAM – and after spending some time with it, I can tell you that the Aggressively Distorting Advanced Machine lives up to its name.

I ran it through a Darkglass Microtubes 900 head and an Aguilar 412DB cab, and started by doing what I would normally do with any new toy, pressing all the buttons and spinning the five dials – Compression, Drive, Blend, Character and Level – to see the range of extremes which the unit could produce. This turned out to be a terrible idea, because the ADAM allows you to tweak and retweak the tones so much that you could spend hours on it and still fail to dial in the exact sound that you have in your head. Instead, I went back to basics and worked through the three A, B and C presets that come as standard. This is where the ADAM started to live up to its hype and its price.

Preset one provides the perfect amount of brightness, for me, without any of the sizzle or crackle often associated with the high end. Preset two is quite different from that first, brighter distortion: if you like scooping your midrange, you're in for a treat. The third preset is reminiscent of the late Metallica bassist Cliff Burton's sound on his famous solo, 'Anesthesia (Pulling Teeth)', but even more fuzzed out. My clean signal remained completely unaffected by any of these, so much so that I had to roll back the low end on my Microtubes head – I have become accustomed to compensating for the low-end loss I get from my usual distortion pedal by cranking the bass on the head itself.

When it comes to refining the presets, this pedal offers a lot of options – perhaps too many for the average bass player. Most of us will, like me, find a preset that we favour, adjust the Blend control slightly and forget about the rest of the dials. Conversely, if you're a professional studio bassist, and you have the ear and time for it, you'll enjoy exploring the ADAM's virtually limitless possibilities.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £443-£499
Made In | Finland
Controls | Touch slider EQ, three dual push button and rotary preset switches, Compression, Drive, Character, Blend, Level, headphone out with independent volume control, ground lift
Features | Three presets, DI, USB-C audio interface
Weight | 1.5 lbs / 680g
Dimensions | 7" x 4.7" x 2.3" / 178 x 119 x 58mm
Power | 9 volt, not included

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Completely transparent clean signal
Minus | Costly, and that is a lot of buttons
Overall | All the quality you'd expect from Darkglass

BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★★★★★½
VALUE
★★★★★★★½★★

If you're a professional studio bassist, and you have the ear and time for it, you'll enjoy exploring the ADAM's virtually limitless possibilities...

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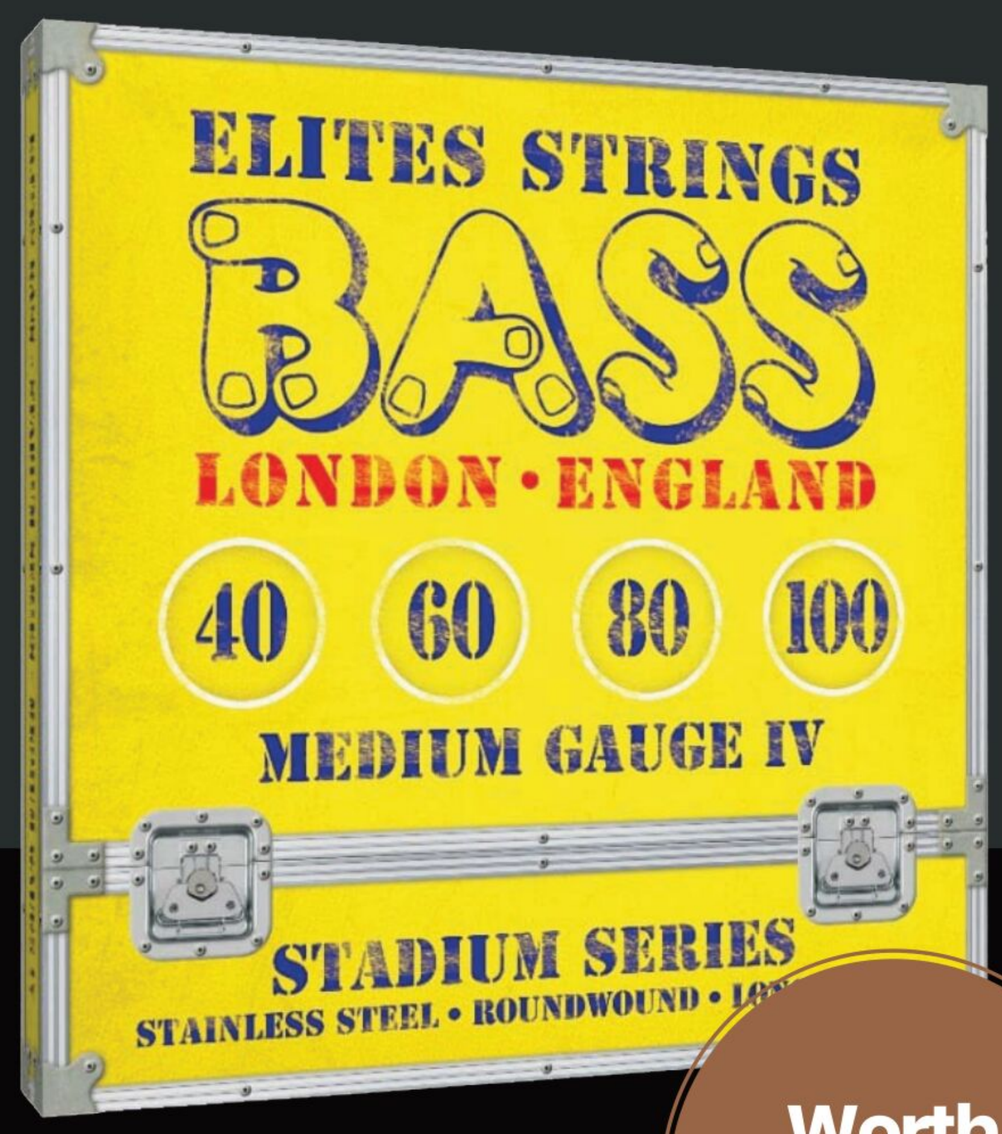

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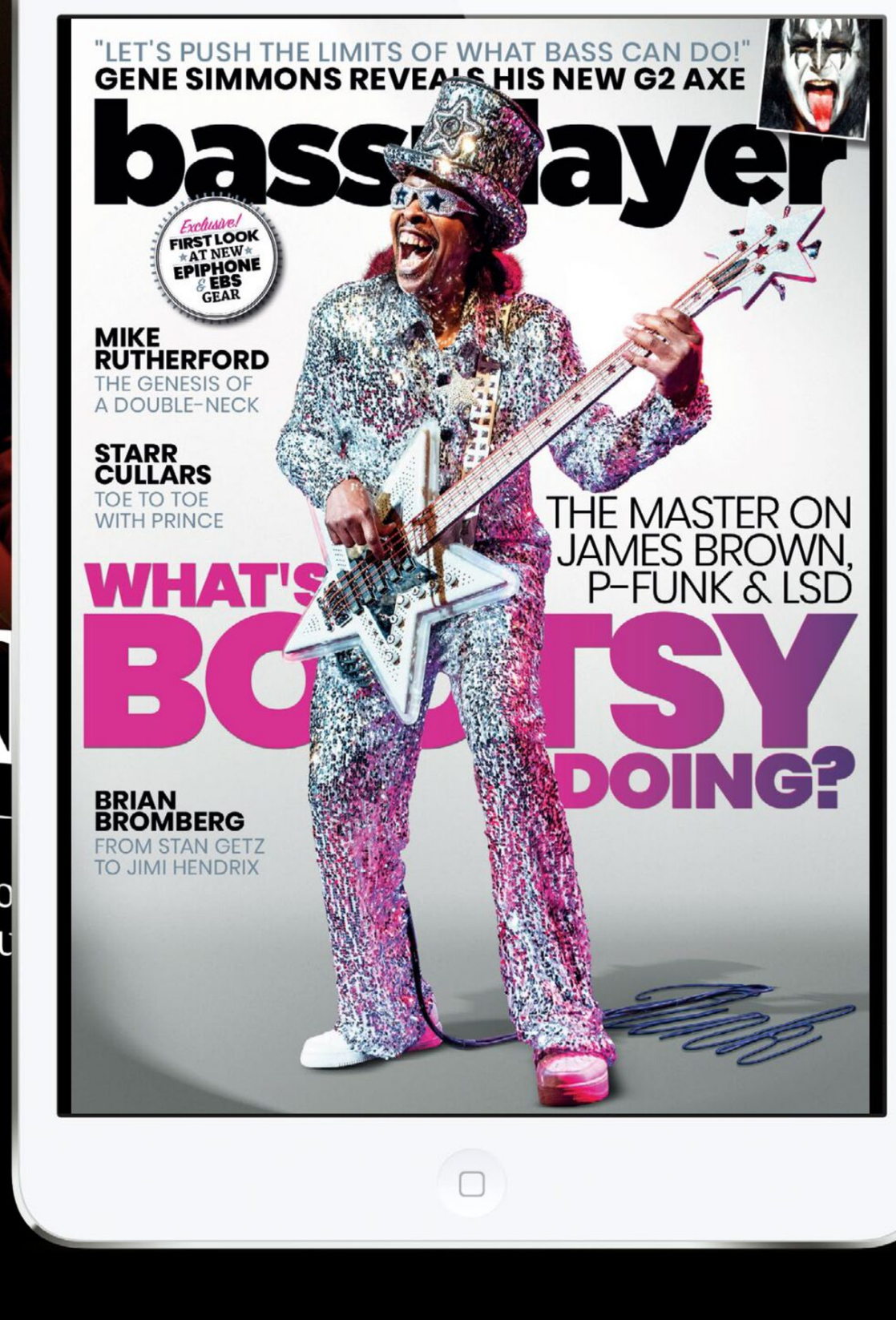

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Bass Lessons

Making you a better bass player in every issue, our state-of-the-art team of educators will guide you every step of the way. Say hello to them here!

I SPY... 62

RYAN MADORA

Dig into your favourite bass parts... and discover treasure!

Ryan Madora is one of Nashville's most sought-after touring and session bassists. Recent touring and session credits include Robben Ford, Kyshona Armstrong, and her instrumental trio, The Interludes. For the past five years, she has served as musical director for Bobby Bones and has played with Garth Brooks, Darius Rucker, and Carrie Underwood. In addition to instructing at Nashville's campus of Musician's Institute, Ryan has taught at Gerald Veasley's Bass Boot Camp, Rock'n'Roll Fantasy Camp, and at universities across the USA. She has contributed columns to No Treble for over a decade and in 2019, published her first book, *Bass Players To Know: Learning From The Greats*. Ryan offers online education at TrueFire and her website.

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BEGINNER 64

STEVE LAWSON

Kickstart your journey to the top of the bass world here

Steve Lawson is the UK's most celebrated solo bass guitarist. Across more than two decades of touring, and a huge catalogue of solo and collaborative albums, he's built up a worldwide audience for his looping and processing approach to bass sound. Recent collaborators include Beardyman, Reeves Gabrels, Andy Gangadeen, Tanya Donelly, Divinity Roxx and Jonas Hellborg. He been teaching bass for almost three decades, and lectures at universities and colleges across the globe. Victor Wooten once commented, 'Steve Lawson is a brilliant musician. I've known about him and listened to him for many years. He may not be one of the most famous bassists – but he is definitely one of the most talented'. Who are we to argue?

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INTERMEDIATE 70

PHILIP MANN

Now you're rolling, it's time to hit the next level

Philip Mann studied at the London College of Music, securing bachelor's and master's degrees in performance before receiving a scholarship to study under Jeff Berlin at the Players School of Music in Florida. Endorsed by Overwater and Eich, he's a busy, internationally freelancing electric and double bassist. His performance and session credits include work with Grammy Award-winning artists Van Morrison and Albert Lee, five-time Grammy Award nominee Hunter Hayes, Deep Purple's Steve Morse, Leo Sayer, Billy Bragg and country artist Peter Donegan. Author of the *Chord Tone Concepts* texts, Philip is currently a member of the visiting faculty at the Players School while simultaneously lecturing for Scott's Bass Lessons.

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ADVANCED 76

STUART CLAYTON

Take the bass world by storm with advanced study

Stuart Clayton has been a professional musician, writer and transcriber since 2002 and has worked in function bands, on cruise ships, theatre shows and more. He spent four years recording and touring the world with Emerson, Lake & Palmer drummer Carl Palmer and was one of the original writers at *Bass Guitar* magazine. From 2007 to 2019 Stuart worked as the Head of the Bass Department at BIMM Bristol, where he taught all levels of the degree course. In addition, he has also worked as the Bass Guitar Technical Specialist for the Rockschool exam board. Stuart now runs Bassline Publishing, which publishes transcription books for bassists such as Mark King, Stuart Zender, Marcus Miller, Stuart Hamm and Bernard Edwards, as well as an acclaimed range of tuition books.

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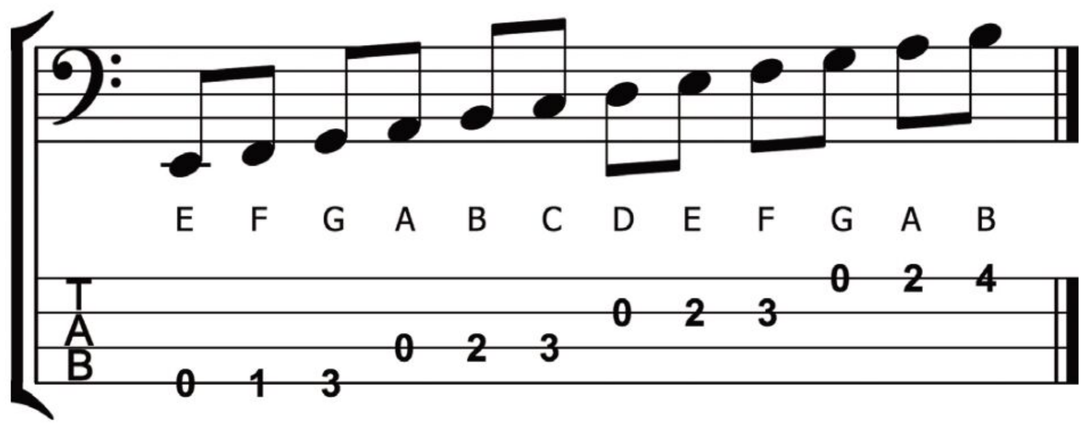
BP Notation Legend

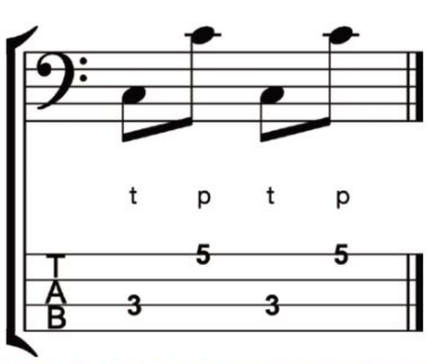
The following is a guide to the notation symbols and terminology used in Bass Player magazine

The Stave: Most music written for the bass guitar uses the bass clef. The example to the right shows the placement of the notes on the stave.

Tablature: This is a graphical representation of the music. Each horizontal line corresponds with a string on the bass guitar, with the lowest line representing the lowest pitched string (E). The numbers represent the frets to be played. Numbers stacked vertically indicate notes that are played together. Where basses with five or six strings are required, the tablature stave will have five or six lines as necessary.

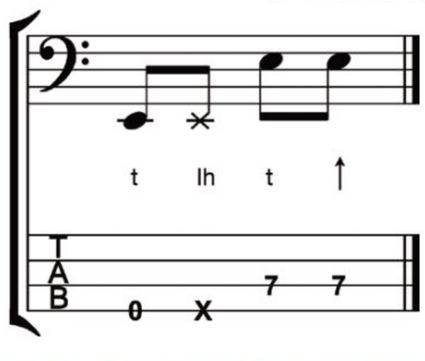


PLAYING TECHNIQUES



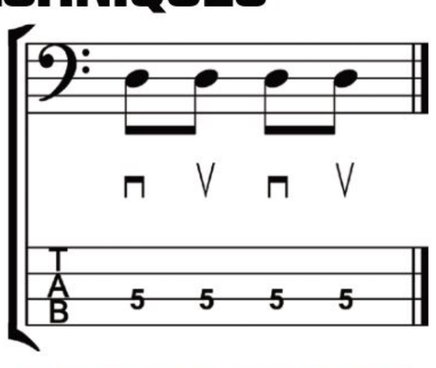
SLAP AND POP TECHNIQUE

Notes slapped with the thumb are marked with a 't', notes popped with the fingers marked with a 'p'.



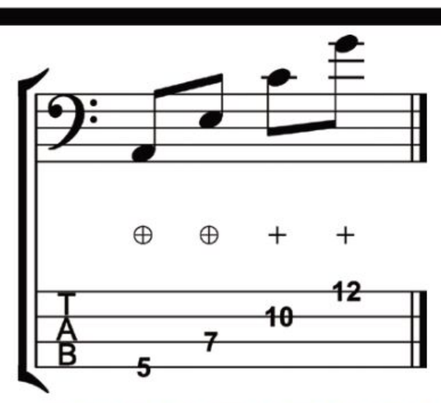
ADVANCED SLAP TECHNIQUE

Fretting hand slaps are marked 'lh' and double thumbing upstrokes are shown with an upward pointing arrow.



PLECTRUM TECHNIQUE

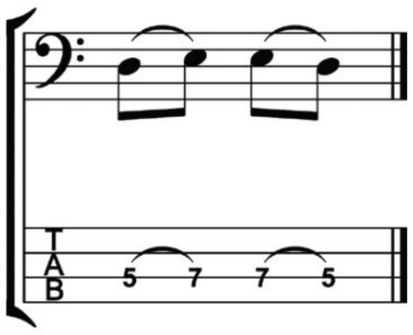
Where necessary, down and upstrokes with the pick will be shown using these symbols (down-up-down-up).



TAPPING TECHNIQUES

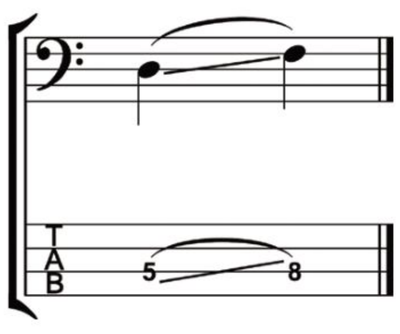
Fretting hand taps have a '+' in a circle. Picking hand taps are just '+'. Particular fingers may be shown with numbers.

FRETTING TECHNIQUES



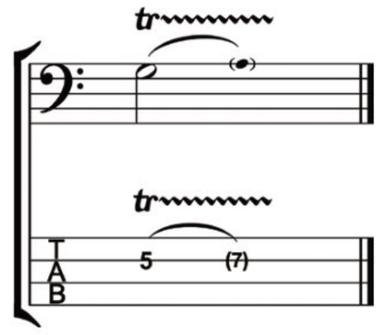
HAMMER-ON AND PULL-OFF

These are shown with a slur over the notes. Only the first note is plucked by the picking hand.



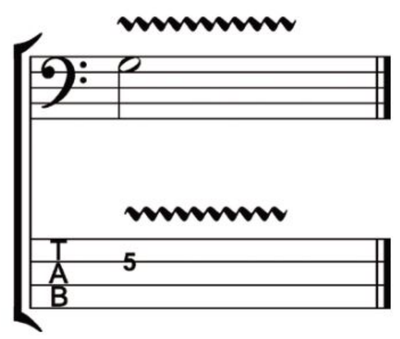
SLIDE (GLISSANDO)

Slides are performed by playing the first note and then sliding the fretting finger up to the second note.



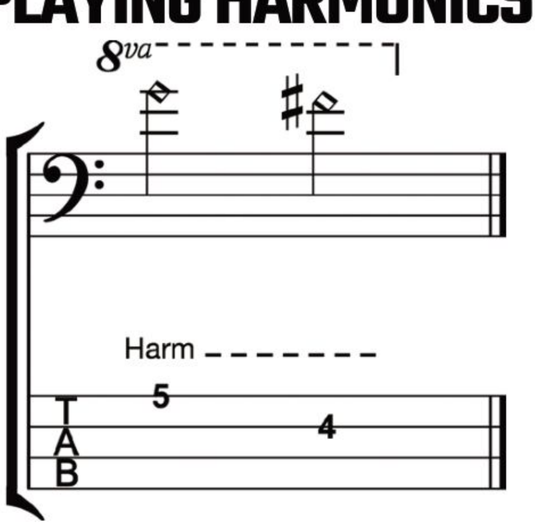
TRILLS

Trills are performed by rapidly alternating between the two notes shown, using hammer-ons and pull-offs.

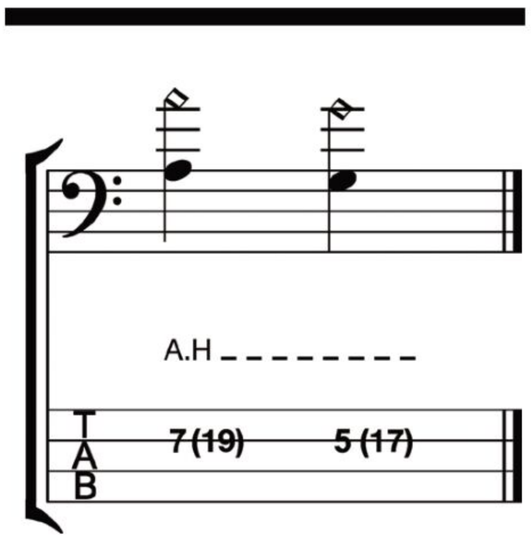


VIBRATO

The pitch of the note is altered by repeatedly bending the string up and back with the fretting finger.

PLAYING HARMONICS

NATURAL HARMONICS

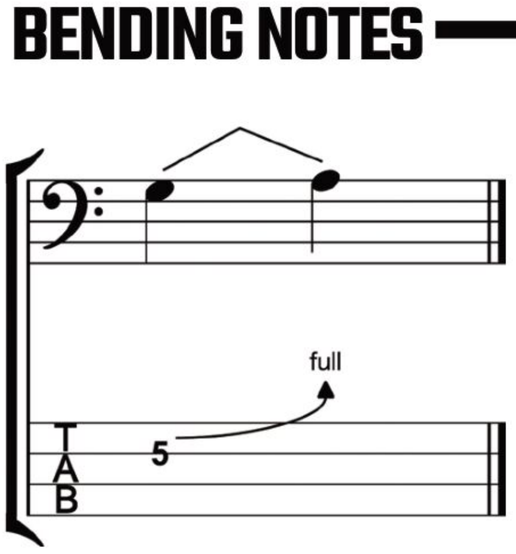
The note is played as a harmonic by lightly touching the string above the fret indicated.



ARTIFICIAL HARMONICS

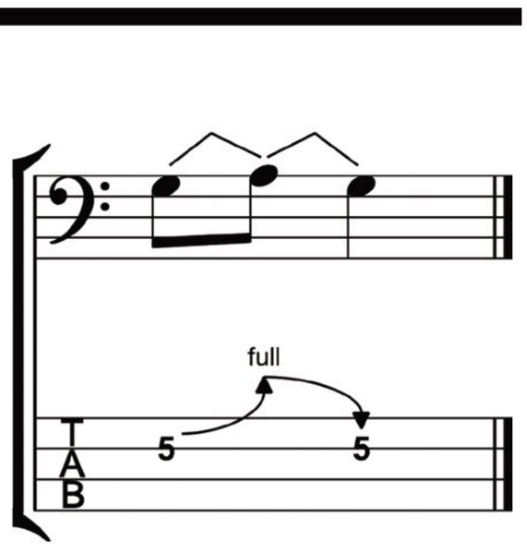
Pluck while fretting the lower note and touching the edge of the picking hand thumb to the note in brackets.

BENDING NOTES



BEND

The note is bent upwards to the interval specified: ½ indicates a semitone, 'full' indicates a tone.



BEND AND RELEASE

The note is bent up to the interval indicated and then released back to its original pitch.

Ryan Madora

I SPY...

EXPLORE SEVENTH CHORDS: PART ONE

Nashville-based session and stage bassist Ryan Madora is here to dig into bass parts that we know and love for useful information. Pay attention!

Hey there, bass players! Welcome back to another instalment of musical I Spy. We took a brief departure from chords in favour of pentatonic scales, but don't worry, it's time to pick up where we left off. Previously, we discussed major and minor triads, the harmonic outfit ready to be dressed up or down to suit any musical occasion. Now, it's time to accessorise a bit by adding the seventh. The additional voice provides us with character, complexity, and plenty of musical tension.

Both major and minor triads can easily be turned into seventh chords. This creates a four-note chord by adding the seventh scale degree to our triad. Similar to how the third defines major or minor, the seventh provides a unique and identifiable tonal character; the chord quality will change depending on whether we add a major or minor seventh.

For now, let's focus on creating seventh chords with our major triad. Believe it or not, we have a couple of options. First, we can create a major seventh chord by using our major triad and tacking the major seventh on top. To play C Major 7, also written as CMaj7, we use our triad C-E-G and add B. It's an airy-sounding chord that carries a bit of tension; the major seventh provides a higher voice that would love to resolve a half-step up to the octave.

The major seventh chord naturally occurs in two places as we harmonise the major scale, firstly on the tonic chord, CMaj7 (C-E-G-B). Moving up the scale, we acknowledge that the ii and iii triads are minor, so we can save them for the next lesson. We then land on the IV chord and build FMaj7 (F-A-C-E). Again, we recognise that our seventh scale degree, E, is a half-step from the octave, resulting in a major seventh.

Let's practise arpeggiating these major seventh chords in **Exercise 1**. We'll move back and forth between CMaj7 and FMaj7. Begin on the 3rd fret of your A string (C) and play the arpeggio ascending and descending. Next, move to the lower F on the first fret of the E string and do the same thing. Repeat this a few times and then shift positions. Find C on the 8th fret of the E string, play the arpeggio, and then shift the pattern over one string to grab F on the 8th fret of the A string.

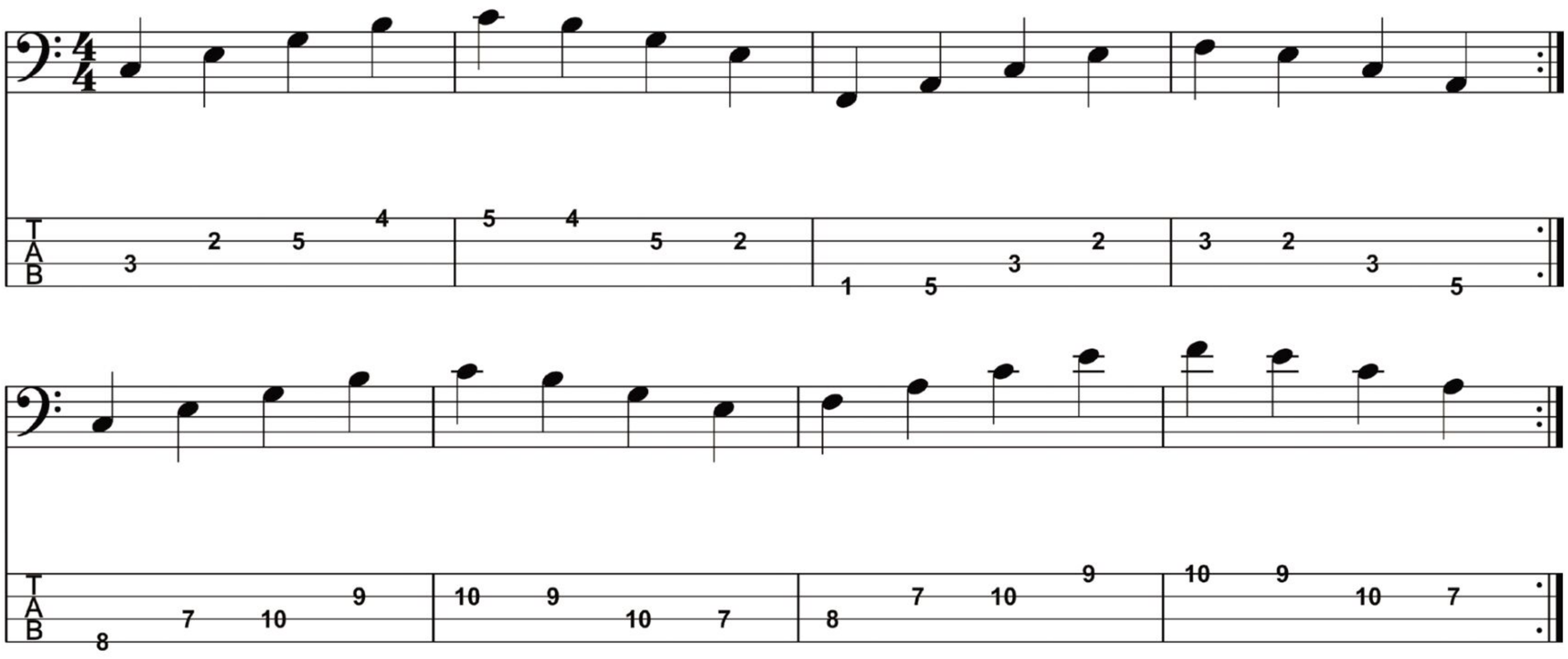
Now, you may be wondering, 'What about the V chord? That's major, right?' Great question. It turns out that a major triad doesn't necessarily guarantee us a major seventh chord. In the key of C, we harmonise the V chord to be G-B-D-F. The seventh, F, is a whole step away from G, resulting in the minor (or flat) seventh. Behold, the 'dominant chord'. This chord is simply written as the note name with a seven attached: G7, E7, B♭7... you get the idea.

The dominant chord features a major triad and minor seventh; it sounds particularly bluesy, funky and slightly dissonant. In fact, the standard blues progression exclusively uses dominant chords. The I, IV, and V in a 'C Blues' would be played as C7, F7, and G7. This chord also sounds tense, as if it wants to resolve somewhere. It just so happens that the voices in the V (or dominant) chord want to resolve to I, the tonic. This is often referred to as the 'dominant-tonic' relationship.

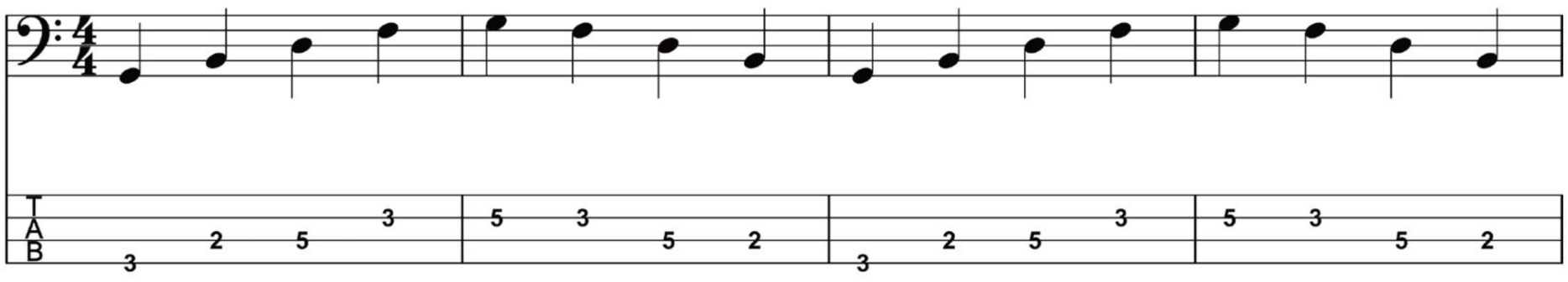
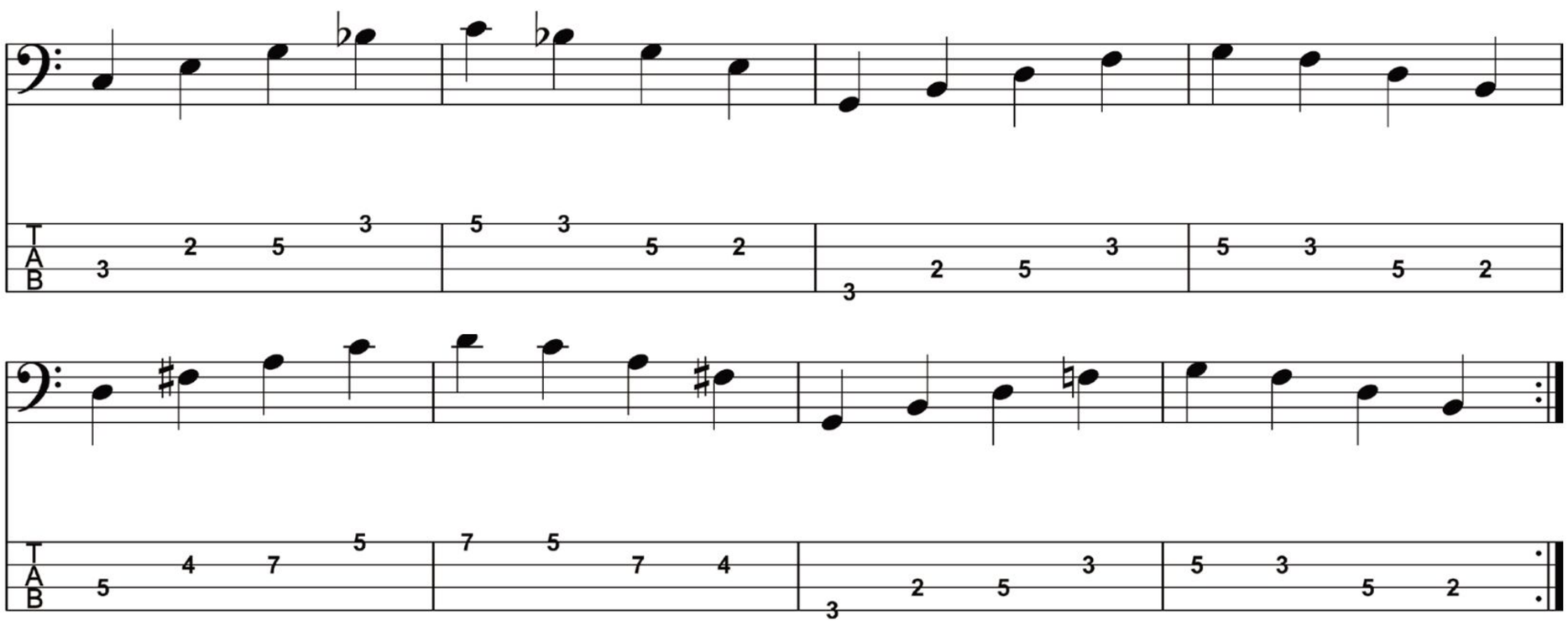
Before we go further down the theory rabbit hole, let's get this dominant chord under our fingers. In **Exercise 2**, we'll take a blues-inspired chord progression and arpeggiate the I, IV, and V as dominant seventh chords. Begin with G7, starting on the 3rd fret of the E string. Play the arpeggio ascending and descending twice, then move the pattern over one string to play C7 and return to G7. Head to the V chord and play D7 starting on the 5th fret of the A string. Lastly, return to G7 to finish out the chord progression. This should inspire you to put Chuck Berry or BB King on the stereo.

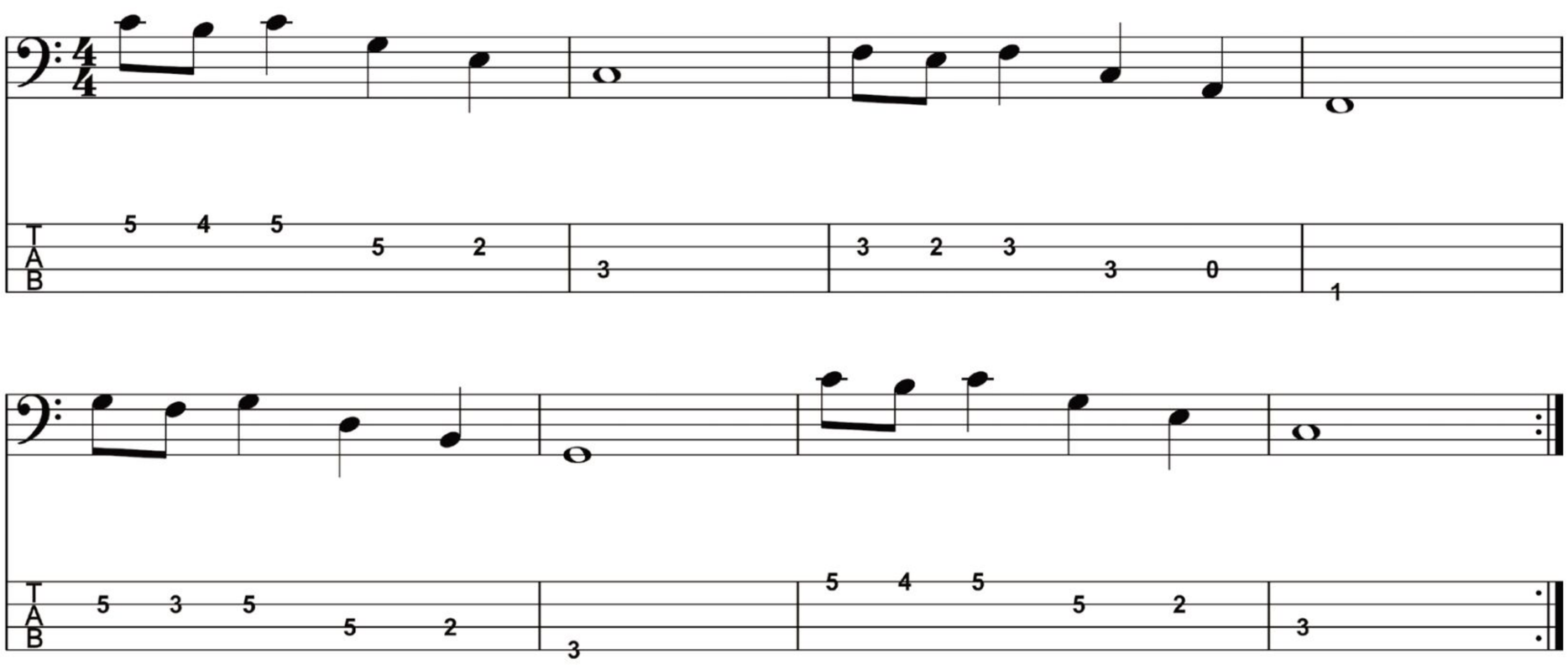
Let's return to the diatonic rules and play a 'by the books' I-IV-V chord progression in

EXERCISE ONE



EXERCISE TWO



EXERCISE THREE

Exercise 3. We'll arpeggiate CMaj7, FMaj7, and G7 instead of taking the bluesy approach like we did in Exercise 2. This time, we start at the octave, play the seventh scale degree, and return to the octave before descending the arpeggio. It should help you to hear the tension between the voices and visualise the arpeggio in a descending manner.

Now that we've got these chords under our fingers, let's do some spying. 'And So I Know' by Stone Temple Pilots puts Robert DeLeo's harmonic aptitude at front and centre. He gracefully plays the root note, jumps up the octave, plays the major seventh, and lands on the fifth. It provides a psychedelic, dreamlike quality to the song and makes us appreciate the importance of composing a bass-line that highlights the major seventh chord.

Turning our attention to the dominant seventh chord, listen to Freddie King's version of 'Key To The Highway' from *Getting Ready...* The groove outlines the chord exactly, ascending 1–3–5–♭7 before descending with the addition of the 6th. As with any blues standard, this tune has been performed a thousand different ways, but outlining the dominant chord never goes out of style.

Finally, for a particularly clever usage of seventh chords, listen to 'Kiss Me' by Sixpence None The Richer. Instead of moving through a progression and shifting root notes, the song keeps the triad in the same place and the harmonic movement happens with the highest voice, thereby changing the chord quality. The verse progression goes from E♭ Major to E♭Maj7 and E♭7, demonstrating how powerful it can be to keep the triad steady while the seventh changes. Familiarise yourself with these major sevenths and dominant chords and prepare to take a minor turn next time!

START HERE!

PICK PLAYING PART TWO

The great Steve Lawson brings us a new approach to studying bass at beginner level. The journey begins...

Welcome back! I hope you've had a fun month experimenting with pick playing and getting your alternating up- and downstrokes to feel more comfortable and controlled. Keep going – it's important to maintain a foundational practice even as you feel yourself moving onto more advanced concepts and applications.

I remember the first time I toured with solo bass legend Michael Manring. I was surprised that his pre-gig warm-up mostly consisted of playing long, sustained notes, checking the intonation on his fretless and getting super-comfortable with controlling every aspect of his sound. He didn't jump in and play all that incredible tapping and slapping stuff that we see him do so effortlessly. Instead, he built the foundations every time he picked up a bass. There was very evidently a direct correlation between making sure that the essentials were constantly attended to and his ability to play unique, dexterous compositions and improvisations.

We ended this lesson last month by talking about alternate picking, and specifically our ability to see the up and down movements as distinct from one another, with a view to choosing the best possible pattern for a given line. Notice the parallels here with our thin-stringed guitar cousins' approach to pick technique. There are entire schools of guitar playing centred around strictly alternate picking, in contrast with those who employ what is referred to as 'economy picking'. The principle of the latter style is that if you are playing two consecutive strings in any direction, you can use the same picking motion to carry you through both notes. On bass, we have a number of considerations that may not impact our guitarist friends in quite the same way, and we also have strings that are heavier and a lot further apart – but there are still things that we can learn from these methods.

Let's try an exercise. Play **Exercise 1**, firstly with strictly alternate picking, starting on a downstroke on each string. Then, try the picking as indicated on the score – but take it very slowly. How does that feel? If it feels pretty alien, try practising it slowly for a while until the notated picking pattern feels more comfortable. Watch your picking hand, and compare the range of motion required for each pattern.

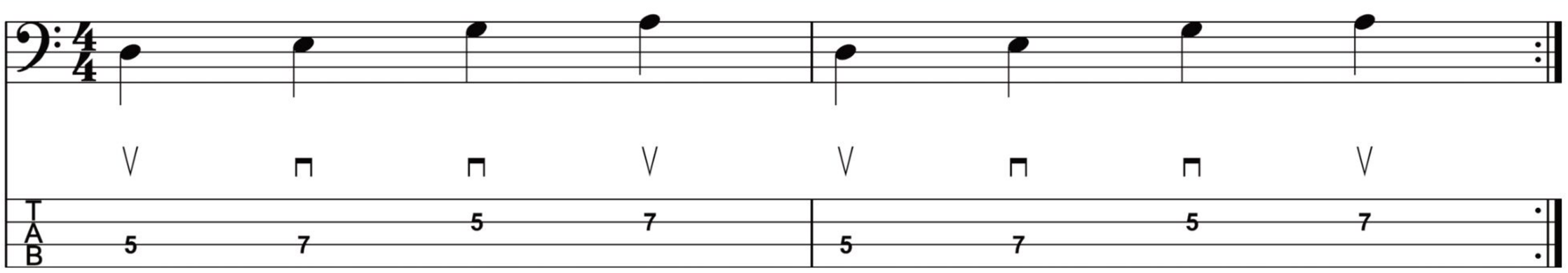
This has implications for a number of different aspects of our music-making. One really obvious one is speed. Economy picking is often favoured by very fluid jazz and fusion guitarists, although shredding isn't really our concern just yet. Another aspect much closer to home is stamina. Economical playing can really help when we're trying to maintain a solid groove for a long period of time. You may have already found that your fingers and forearm can get very tired when playing with a pick, if you're used to fingerstyle. Here, a more economical approach to picking may help us play for longer, or perhaps it will just give us a different pattern to switch to, in order to use different muscles for a while.

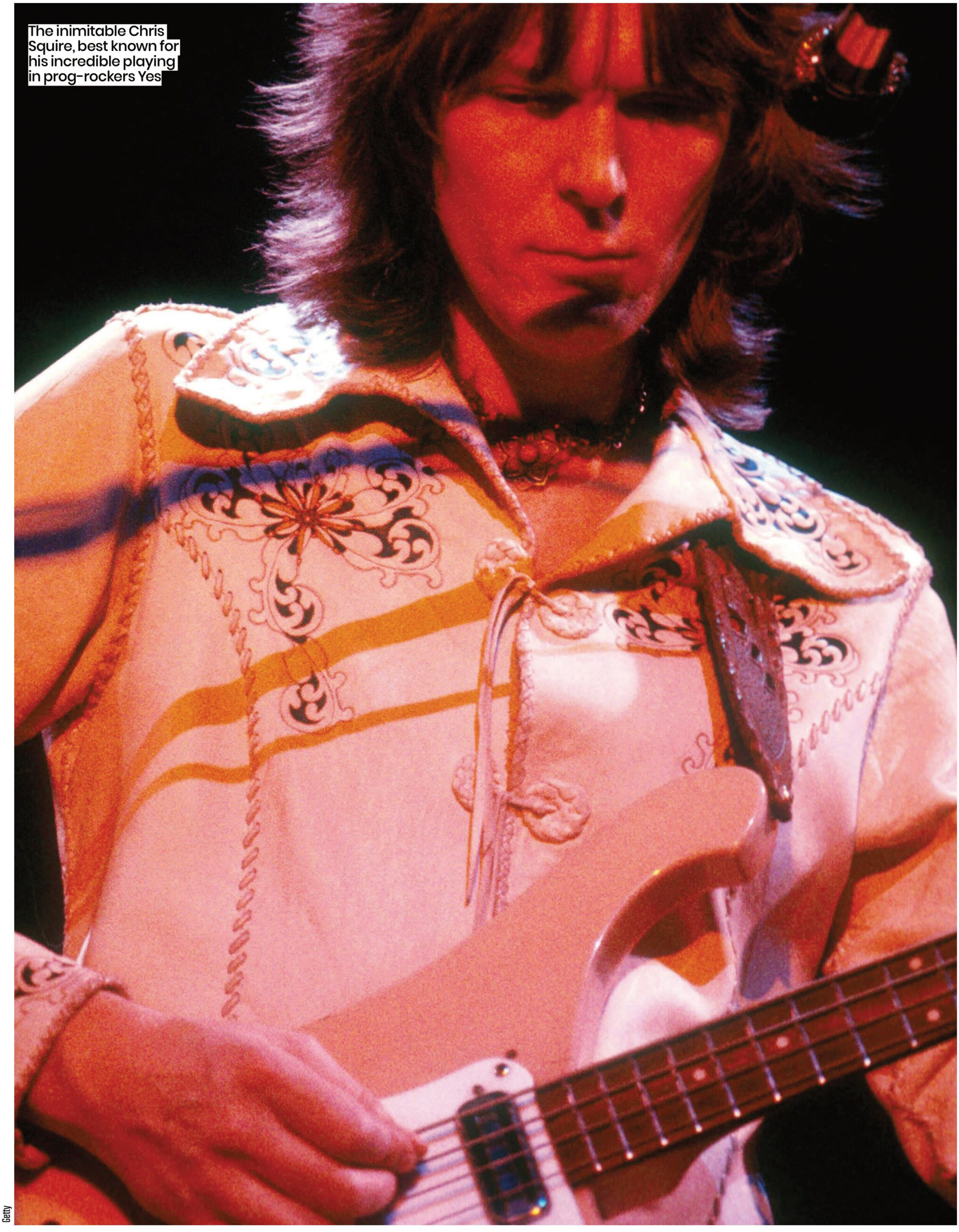
More significant than either speed or stamina is tone. We should always ask with any change in technique, 'What does this do to the sound I make?' Switching picking patterns has implications for the angle at which we strike the string, and for the nature of any rhythmic accents in the groove we are playing. So whenever we try out a new approach, we need to insert it into a song or two to understand how it enables new ways to impact the feel of the music. If you hear no difference, that's fine – it means that you can switch picking patterns based on stamina and comfort considerations. But if you do hear a change in how heavily certain notes are accented, you can then choose to make that a feature, or alter your technique to get rid of undesirable traits.

We often talk about the difference between advanced playing and advanced listening. A relative beginner can still apply their lifelong accumulation of taste and discernment to playing simple lines as well as possible. One of the true joys of bass is that being an amazing player is often not about your dexterity or incredible chops. Instead, our greatness is measured by the impact we have on the song we're playing. Pretty much every dexterous bass hero got to the position where we were able to hear them by playing simple bass parts with great tone and feel.

Respecting the work that goes into playing straight eighth notes or simple repeated groove patterns will lead to a lifetime of people wanting to play with us – because we provide the foundation that makes the band sound great. Even in my solo career, an ability to play the simple parts that make up a lot of the loops over which I play busier parts is an integral part of what makes the music interesting. I've always paid at least as much attention to those seemingly simple aspects as to the more dynamic parts of my playing.

EXERCISE ONE





The inimitable Chris Squire, best known for his incredible playing in prog-rockers Yes

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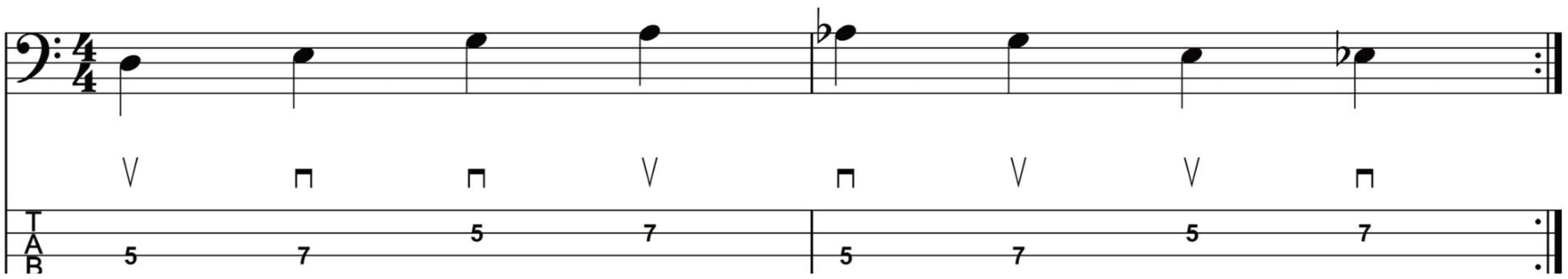
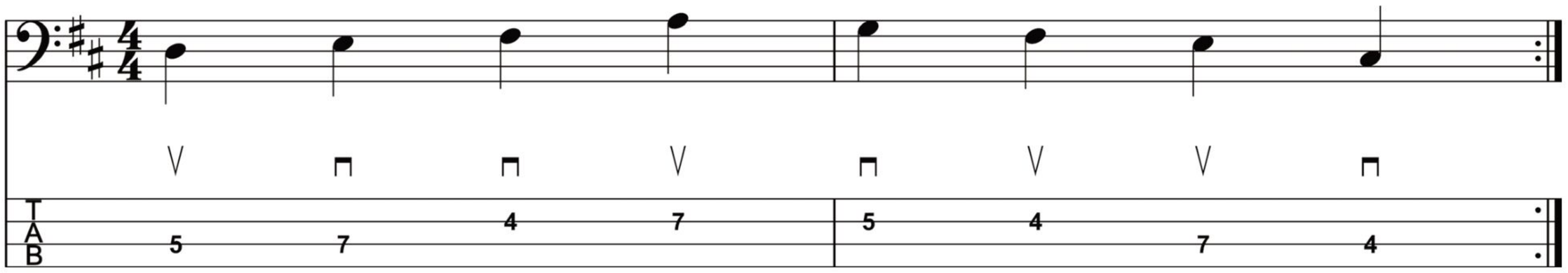
EXERCISE TWO



EXERCISE THREE



Exercise 1 gives us a simple exercise to focus on what playing consecutive notes, both up and down a pair of strings, can feel like – but very few lines are that simple. So let's look at other combinations of notes and see what happens to our picking patterns:

In **Exercise 2**, we've started with the same ascending line, but on the way down we've added extra chromatic notes in to introduce more alternate picking on each string. This is still a pattern that lends itself comfortably to our economy-picking plan to move across the strings by picking in the same direction in one motion. Here we encounter another interesting aspect of learning a technique like this – it helps us develop new patterns and ideas that can become part of our vocabulary.

For the majority of musical situations, it makes sense to allow the music to dictate our technical choices. We either hear what's needed and refine our technique to fit, or if we're playing a cover tune we can explore the technique of the original bassist and use their ideas to help us navigate the part. However, developing a new technical approach can sometimes open up possibilities that can really help with composition. For this reason, it's important to take any of the picking patterns we have heard and try them with other combinations of notes.

Melissa Auf Der Maur, a powerful pick bassist

Let's apply the identical picking pattern in Exercise 2 to a scalar sequence for **Exercise 3**: This is exactly the same picking pattern – and even the same direction for the notes in our fretting hand, but reapplied to a major scale pattern. Try and find two or three other possible patterns for the same picking pattern, to help you become comfortable with picking it – but also to get a sense of the range of sounds that it makes possible.

It can be confusing to ask our hands to move in opposite directions – it's a bit like trying to pat your head and rub your stomach at the same time, because the pattern in our fretting hand disrupts the pattern in our picking hand. Again, slowing down is the key here. Let's try a shape that changes direction and mixes up the rhythm a little, to see what the implications are:

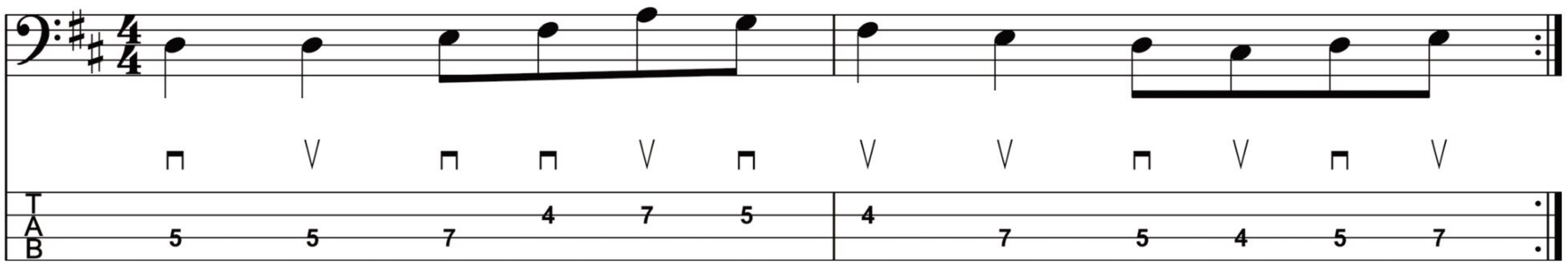
Exercise 4 requires us to use a number of different ideas that we've addressed so far. The two string-crossing moves are at different speeds: the first one is an eighth note, the second a quarter note, so we can understand how this changes our degree of comfort when following the picking pattern as written.

Again, we can try the same line with both strict alternate picking, and even all downstrokes, to see which gives the desired effect. You'll probably find that there's a finite upper limit to the speed of playing that feels comfortable when using all downstrokes. A lot of punk players through the years have developed quite extraordinary dexterity, using all downstrokes to really drive the songs forward, whereas old-school thrash metal bassists tended to favour

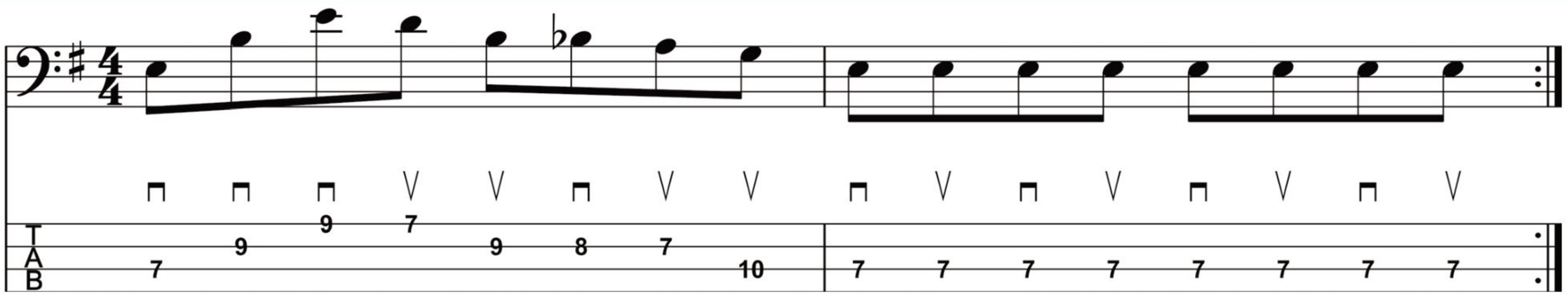
Frank Bello of Anthrax, who plays with a pick on a key song: a cover of Joe Jackson's 'Got The Time'.

Getty

EXERCISE FOUR



EXERCISE FIVE

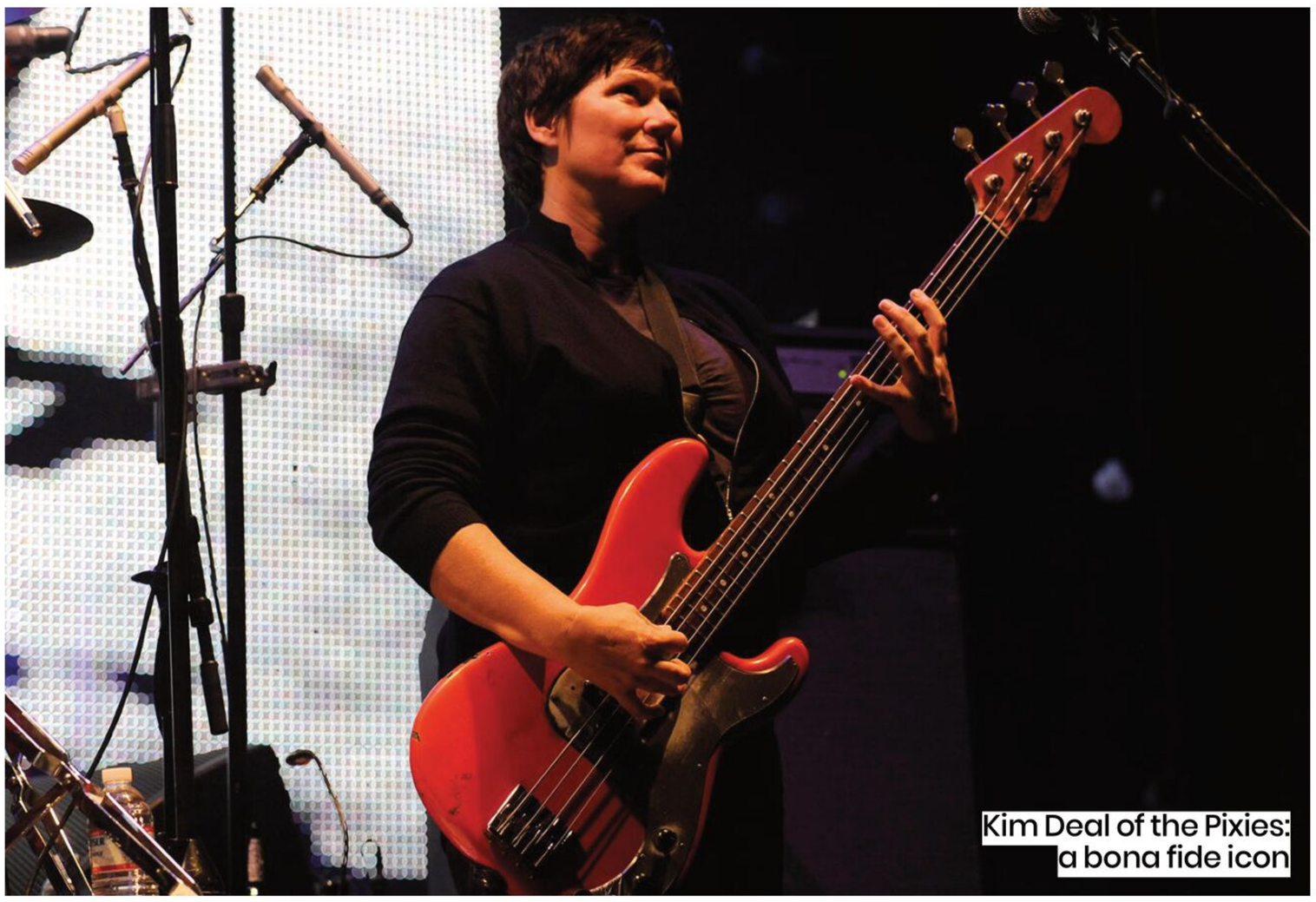


alternate picking. This was because the advent of double kick drums and the higher-gain rhythm guitars meant that the dynamic contribution of the bass to the forward motion of the music was lessened in thrash, compared to punk and hardcore.

This is another opportunity for you to choose your area of focus, based on what sounds 'good' in your context. Technique is never context-neutral. We've introduced a concept here based on our trajectory towards more efficient, economical, controlled playing, but every choice is subject to the needs of the music we're playing. Sometimes 'economical' and 'controlled' aren't really what the music is looking for – so you get to decide.

We're going to finish today by looking at a line that crosses three strings consecutively. **Exercise 5** is a big test of our ability to control the time of the 'sweep' motion across the three strings. The fast version of this on guitar is referred to as sweep picking, and is used for lightning-fast arpeggiated patterns. Here, our focus is being in time and moving the groove forward, not just blazing through the licks as fast as we can!

Controlling the time of those first three notes will take a little bit of focus and effort. I've included a second bar of eighth note Es to make sure that we remember that any new technique doesn't require us to use it 100 percent of the time. We can use it sparingly to enhance our regular bass-line ideas, and we definitely need to get comfortable coming in and out of applying a particular picking pattern when the bulk of the song requires a different approach.



Kim Deal of the Pixies: a bona fide icon

As with all the patterns here, start very slowly. We're assembling a wonderfully economical, efficient technique that requires a significant shift in how we previously thought about the back and forth momentum of alternate picking. It's not 'difficult' in and of itself, it's just different enough that it will probably mess with what we've spent the last few months or years training our hands to do. Switching between alternate picking and economy picking will help us follow our progress, as we feel our comfort level catch up with the more familiar technique.

You can, of course, try all of these techniques with your fingers too. It's really important that we are able to focus our energies and attention on the task at hand and stay focused for the duration of a practice session, but it's equally important to pull back and see the broader context for any progress or newly added technique.

At first, it feels like our new party piece and we want to use it all the time, but soon we need to get to a place where it's just another layer of finesse that we can bring to any playing situation. It's another choice we can make when deciding the kind of feel that a particular line should have, and another set of possibilities. Enjoy, take it slow, and keep grooving!

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Phil Mann has built an enviable stage and studio career, and is here to help us take a leap to the next level. Let's go!

MOVE ON UP!

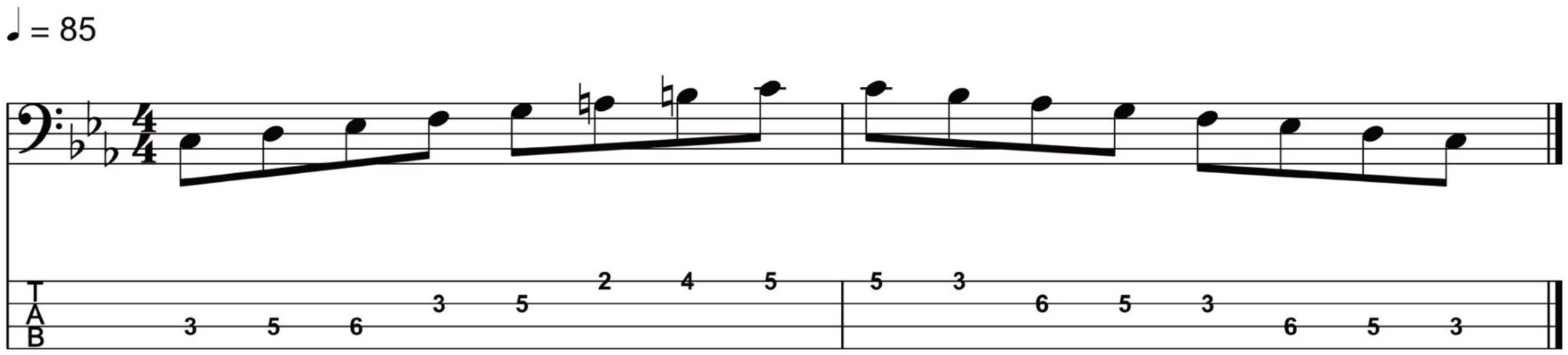
MASTER THE MELODIC MINOR

Hello there! Many bassists find themselves treading similar paths when first starting out. Although the bass guitar can be perceived as a reasonably accessible instrument, without strong guidance, trying to progress beyond basic fundamentals of theory and technique can become a laborious task.

For many of us, there's a natural progress in our studies. Triads flow into 7th arpeggios; pentatonic scales follow up on modes… but there comes a time where we have to ask themselves, 'What's next?' In contemporary studies, so much emphasis is given to major tonality, and all of its subcategories, that many of us aren't even aware that there's an entire minor tonality to investigate.

This month we'll be taking our first steps into this vocabulary with a study of melodic minor, a scale which employs two different series of notes, with the ones in the ascent differing to those in the descent. **Exercise 1** introduces us to this melodic phenomenon. Play through it, ensuring that you're able to reproduce the structure off by heart, chromatically in all keys.'

EXERCISE ONE



The melodic minor is essentially the major scale with a flattened third, but in order to harmonise a scale, it ideally needs to have the same structure in both the ascent and descent. Thus, the 'jazz minor' scale was born – the melodic minor's other name. It's a wonderfully employable scale, used to create and interpret minor tonality.

Billy Gould of Faith No More (second from left), guesting with the MC5

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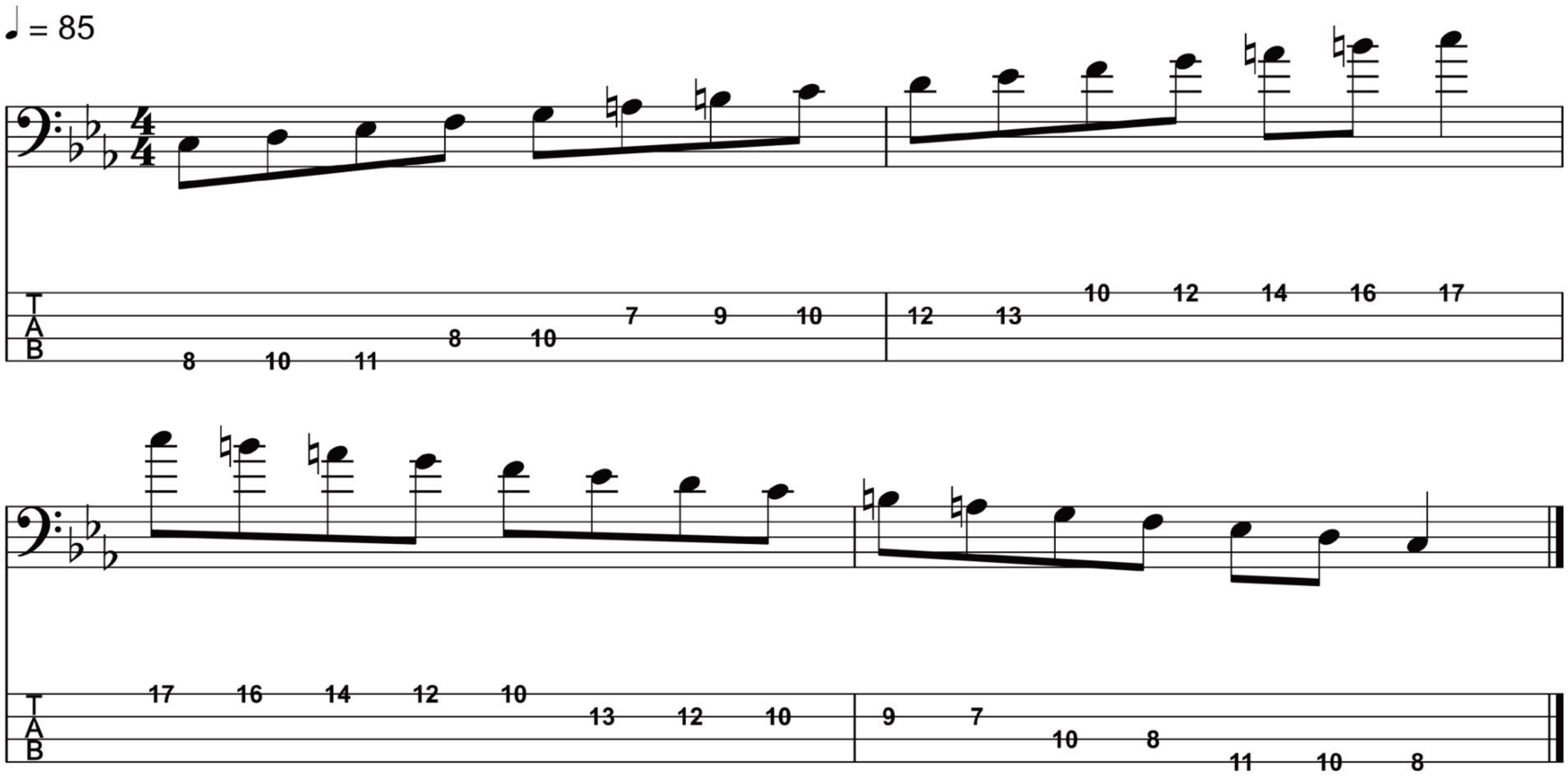
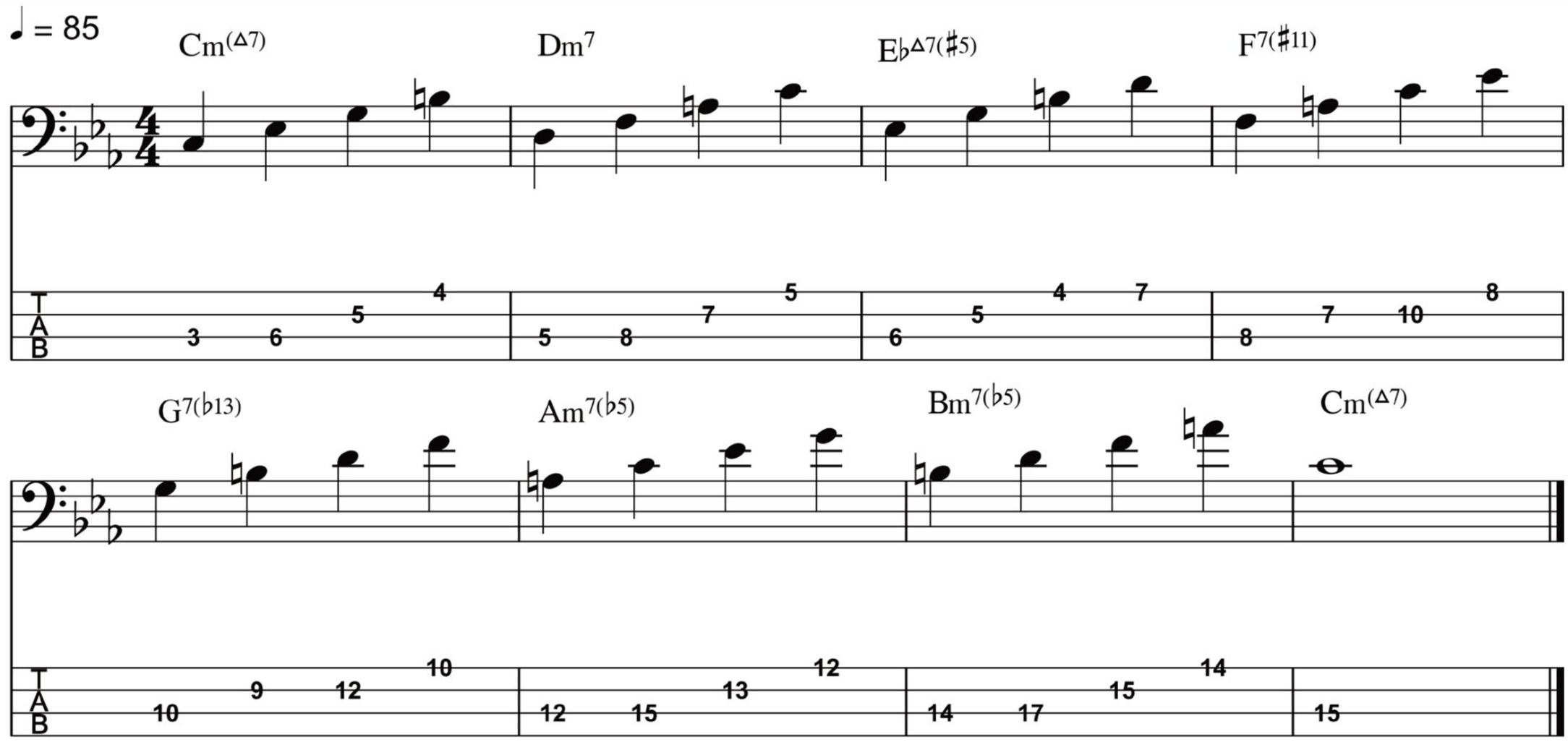
EXERCISE TWO



Our second study familiarises us with the melodic minor in its contemporary form, where both the ascending and descending orders mirror one another. It's worth noting at this point that melodic minor, like harmonic minor, doesn't actually belong to a key signature, it only suggests one. Therefore, it's highly likely that when spelling out this vocabulary you'll encounter both sharps and flats in the notation. Take the time to become familiar with the 'jazz minor' scale, presented here over two octaves.

EXERCISE THREE



With melodic minor now presented as a rigid structure, we can begin the process of harmonisation; an intriguing topic which produces seven diatonic structures all related to the parent scale. In the case of major harmony, this would be where you commonly encounter names such as Dorian, Mixolydian and Aeolian, a subject previously covered by Stuart Clayton in these pages. Using the same process, melodic minor can also generate seven modes, which in turn, also provide seven coinciding triads and chords. It's these chords that will eventually be employed to interpret minor chord progressions. This month's third example identifies those structures, presented as 7th arpeggios. Two of these arpeggios – Min/Maj7th and Maj7#5 – may be new to you, but persevere for the time being. We'll become more acquainted with the structures in future instalments.

Intermediate Lesson

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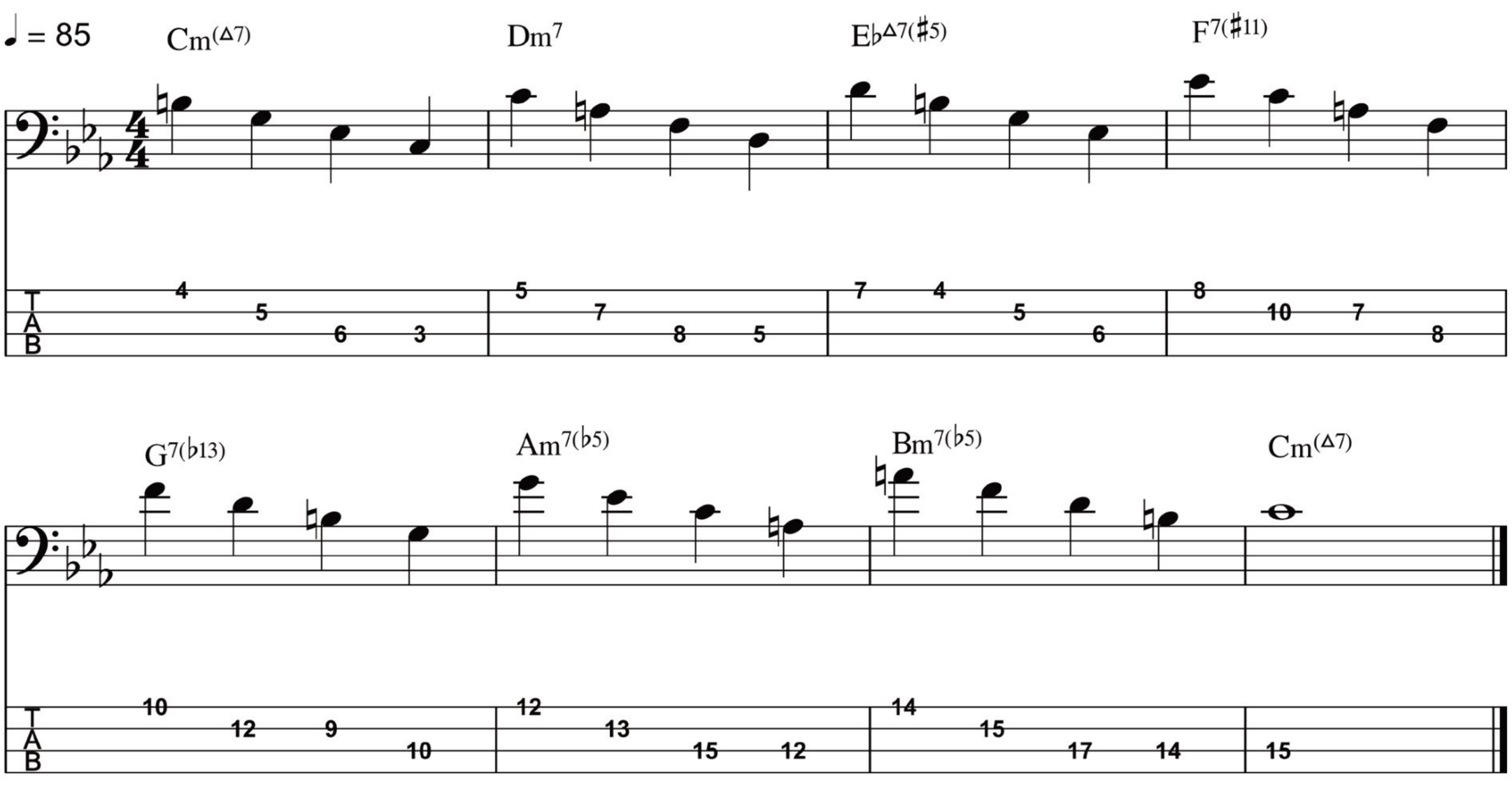
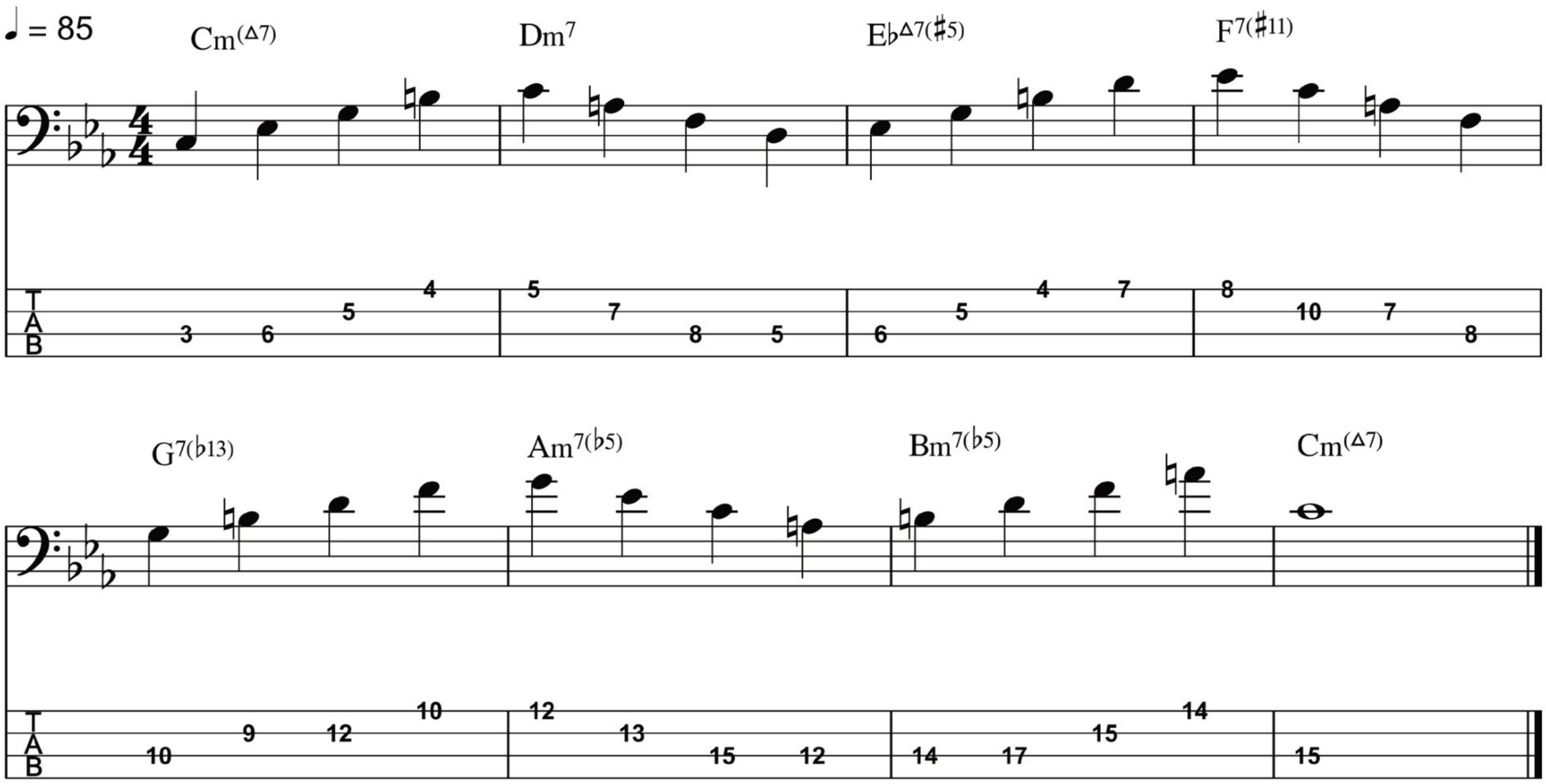
EXERCISE FOUR



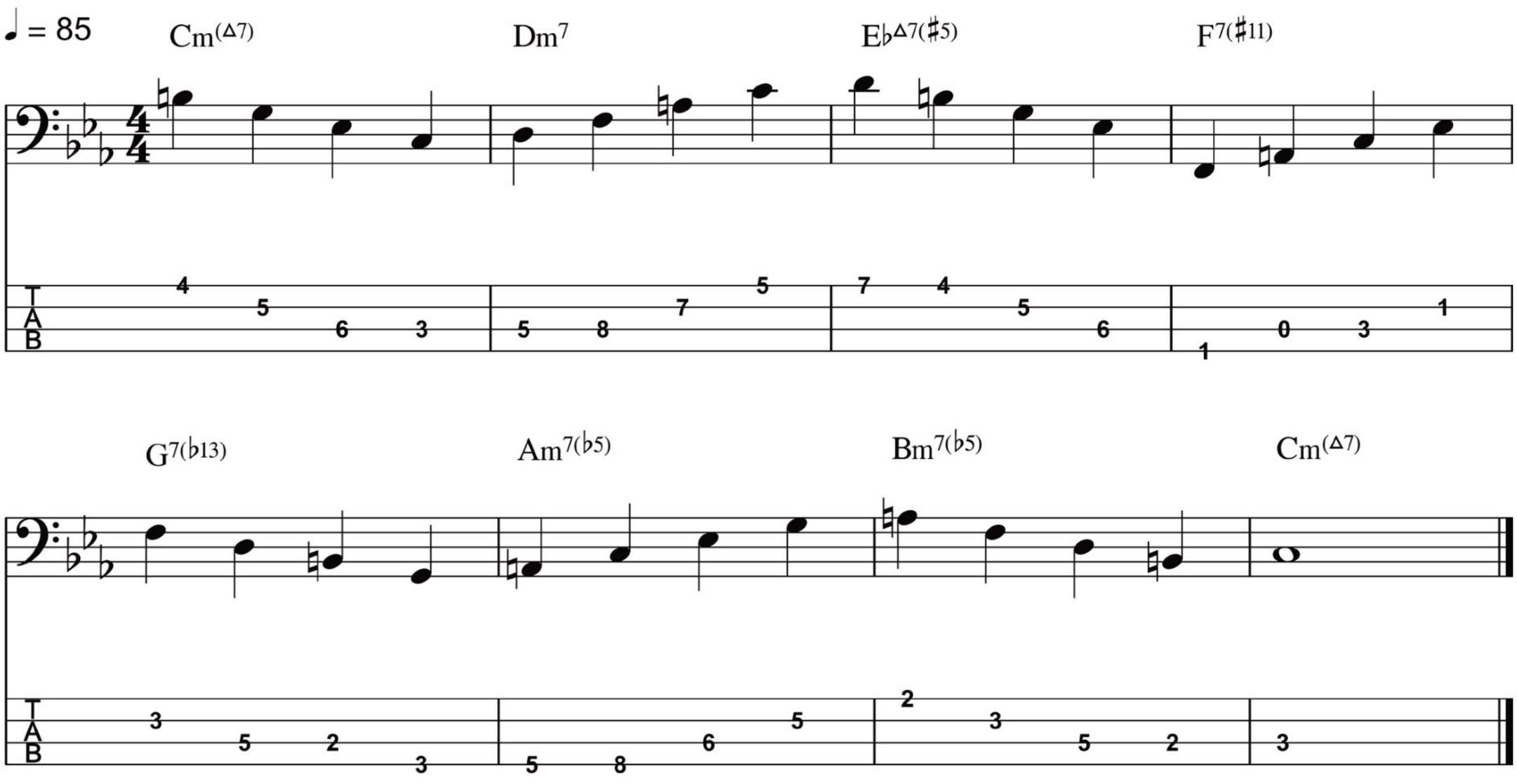
This month's goal is to familiarise yourself with the harmonised melodic minor scale. Let's aim to learn, practise and internalise the order and the names of all of the arpeggios you encounter. In Exercise 4, you're asked to reproduce the arpeggios in Exercise 3. This time, we play each melodic structure in descending order, starting from the 7th of each chord. Try not to let this change of perspective catch you out.

EXERCISE FIVE



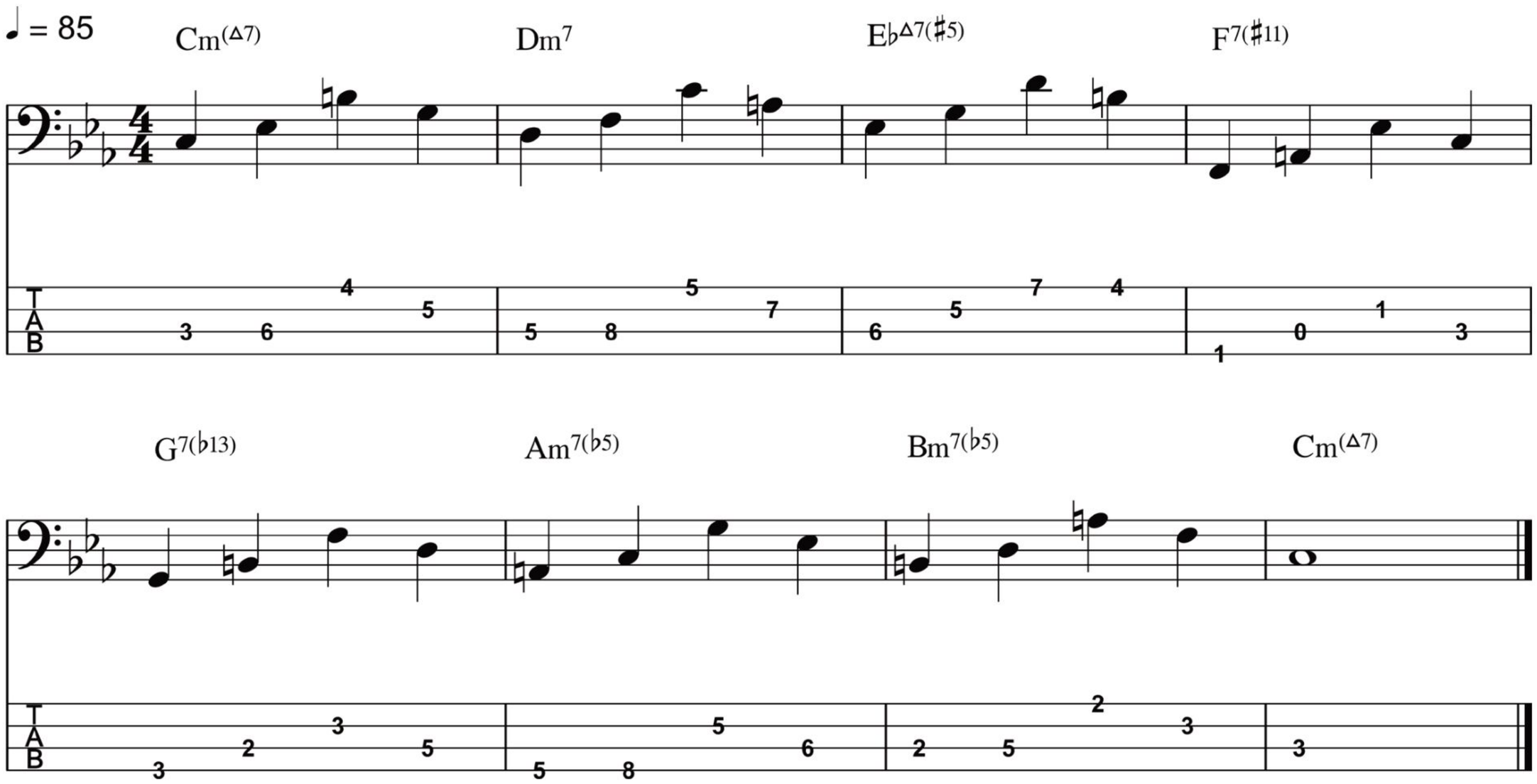
Let's continue our examination of the harmonised melodic minor scale, alternating the 7th arpeggios in an ascending and descending fashion. Extra consideration should be given to the fingering in this study.

EXERCISE SIX

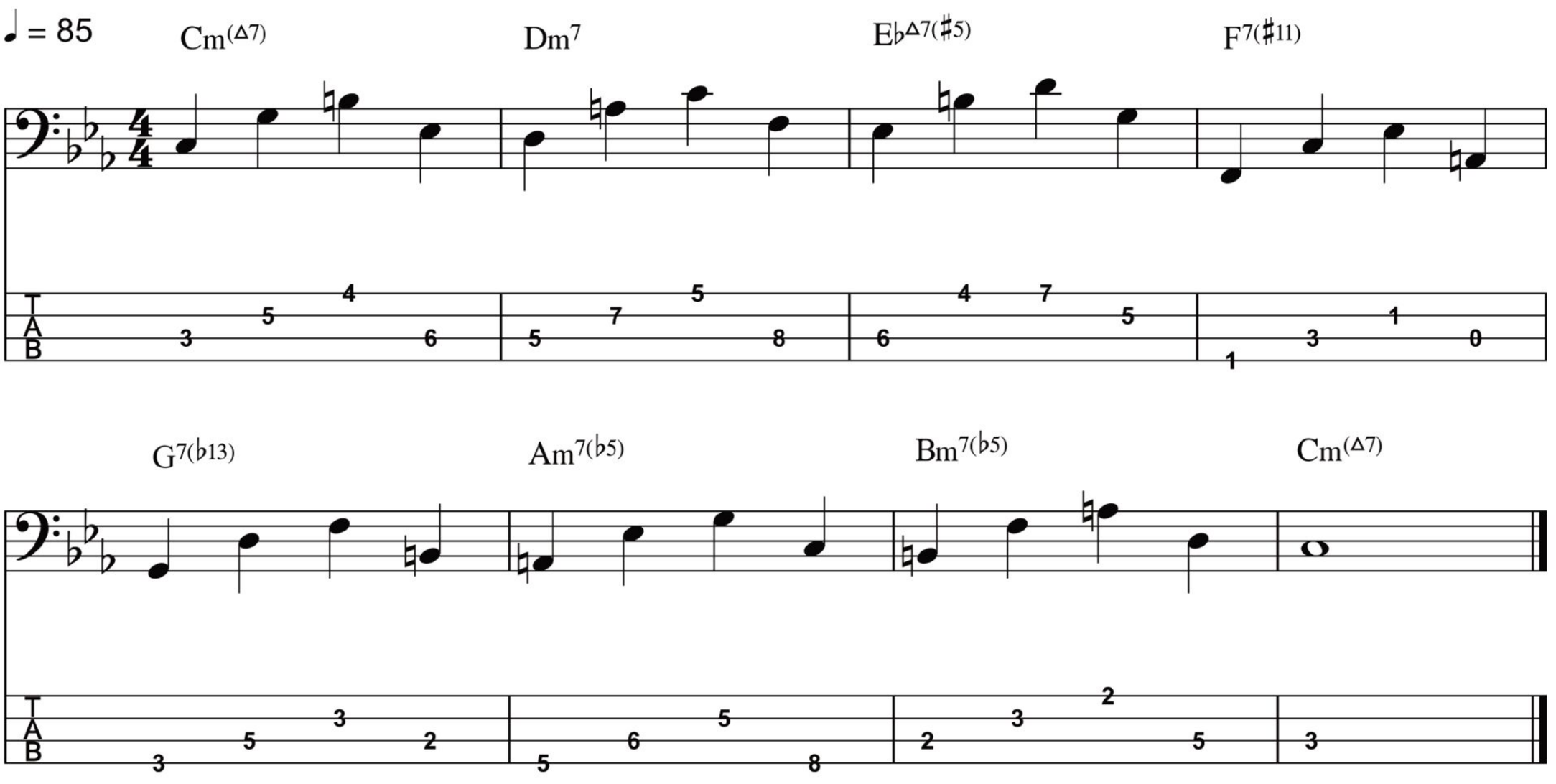


Let's play the 7th arpeggios of the harmonised melodic minor scale in reverse. Where we previously alternated through the 7th arpeggios, starting with an ascent, you'll now be asked to commence with a descent. This exercise's most significant alteration is found in measure four, where the remainder of the study has been transposed down an octave to embrace the lower register of the fingerboard... we are bassists, after all.

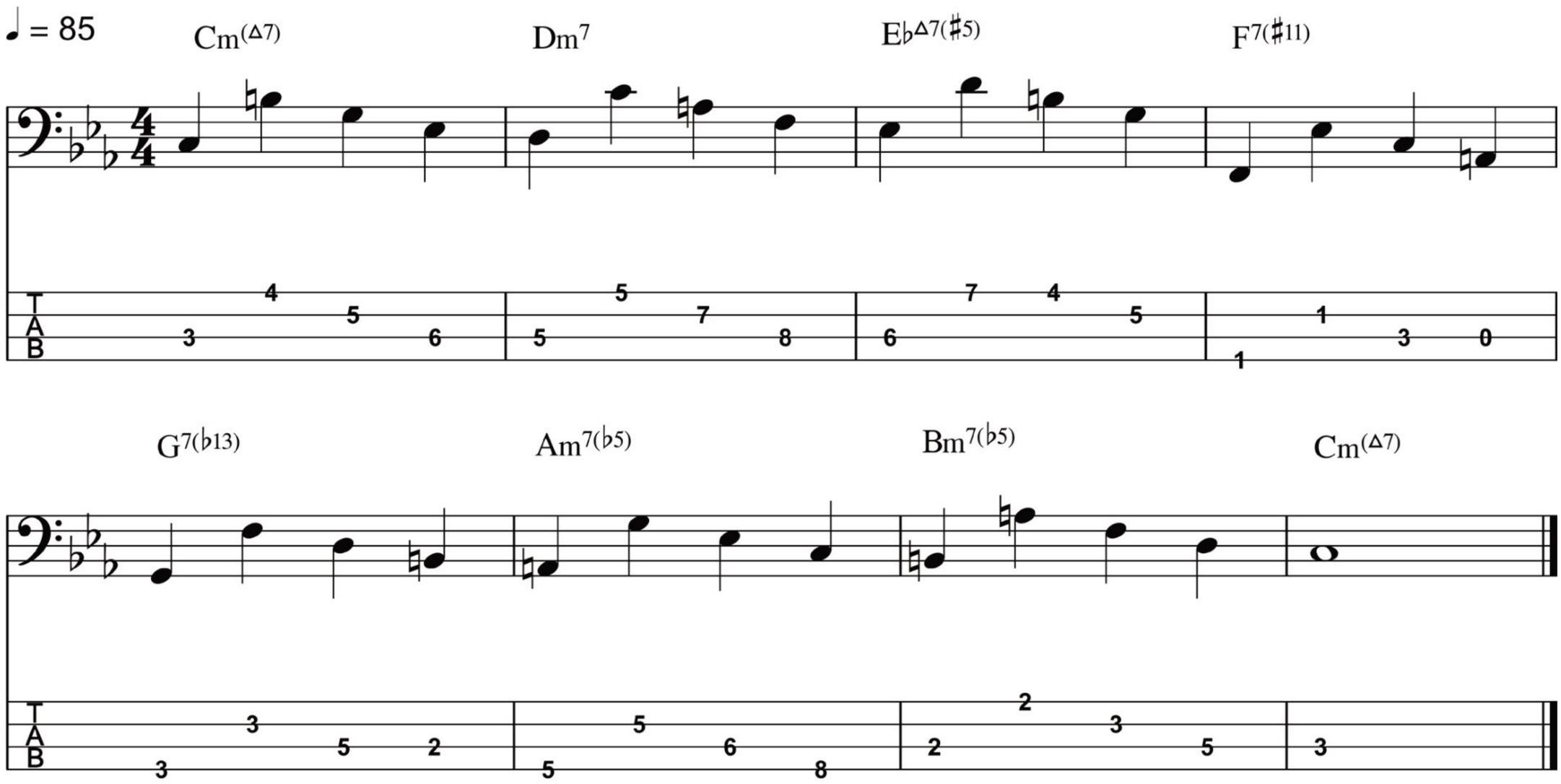
EXERCISE SEVEN



Permutations are a wonderfully effective way of expanding melodic vocabulary, without the need to learn new structures. In root position, a standard arpeggio is habitually played I-III-V-VII, but are you aware that there are 24 different ways in which these notes can be delivered in exactly the same register? This exercise demonstrates how melodic minor harmony can be delivered using a I-III-VII-V configuration.

EXERCISE EIGHT

Let's look at a I-V-VII-III permutation. As you work through other configurations of this vocabulary, you'll discover a number of new patterns. These finds are really positive, as they suggest a fretting configuration previously absent from your vocabulary. You've just discovered a new interpretation.

EXERCISE NINE



This month's objective is relatively straightforward: to become introduced to melodic minor, and then to become familiar with the harmonisation of the scale through sequential patterns and permutations. Our final exercise follows suit by delivering the aforementioned harmonic content using another permutation – this time I-VII-V-III. From here, I suggest you grab a pen and paper and attempt to write out all 24 permutations available in a root position 7th arpeggio, then deliver them all over the harmonised melodic minor scale. That will keep you busy until next month. Good luck!

The fleet-fingered Catherine Popper (far right) in action

Getty

MILLER TIME

PLAY LIKE MARCUS MILLER

Stuart Clayton takes us into the most challenging work of a bass superstar. Warm up those fingers!

Welcome back to my long-running series on the slap bass technique. Having covered many advanced applications of the technique in previous instalments, in the last two columns we've been focusing our attention on bassists who have contributed to the advancement of this way of playing the instrument. We'll be continuing this theme this month, focusing our attention on another key player: Marcus Miller.

Miller was born into a musical family, and after early flirtations with the clarinet, saxophone and piano, he finally settled on bass in his teens. He continued to play clarinet alongside the bass, and after attending the New York High School of Music and Art, he progressed to Queens College on a clarinet scholarship. During this period, he was gigging on bass most evenings, and studying the work of players such as Robert Bell, Wilton Felder, Jaco Pastorius, Stanley Clarke and Larry Graham.

Miller possesses an extremely comprehensive command of the slap technique

He quickly made a name for himself on the New York scene in the late Seventies, and was soon playing TV and radio jingles as well as working with artists such as David Sanborn, Bobbi Humphreys and Roberta Flack. Sanborn's 1981 release *Voyeur* is notable in that it features a number of tracks co-written by Miller, as well as the first recorded version of 'Run For Cover', a tune that Miller later re-recorded and which has become a bona fide slap bass anthem.

After playing on several albums with legendary trumpeter Miles Davis in the early Eighties, Miller began his solo career with two commercial R&B albums, *Suddenly* (1983) and *Marcus Miller* (1984). However, it was with his 1993 album *The Sun Don't Lie* that his solo career took off. Featuring a sophisticated collection of jazz-funk instrumentals, the album is notable for pieces such as 'Panther', 'Rampage', 'Scoop', 'Moons' and 'Teen Town', a slapped re-working of the Jaco Pastorius-penned bass anthem. Since 1993, Miller has pursued a successful solo career, with albums such as *Tales*, *m2*, *Renaissance* and *Afrodeezia* all adding to his status as one of the key exponents of the slap bass approach.

The man himself in full, energetic flow

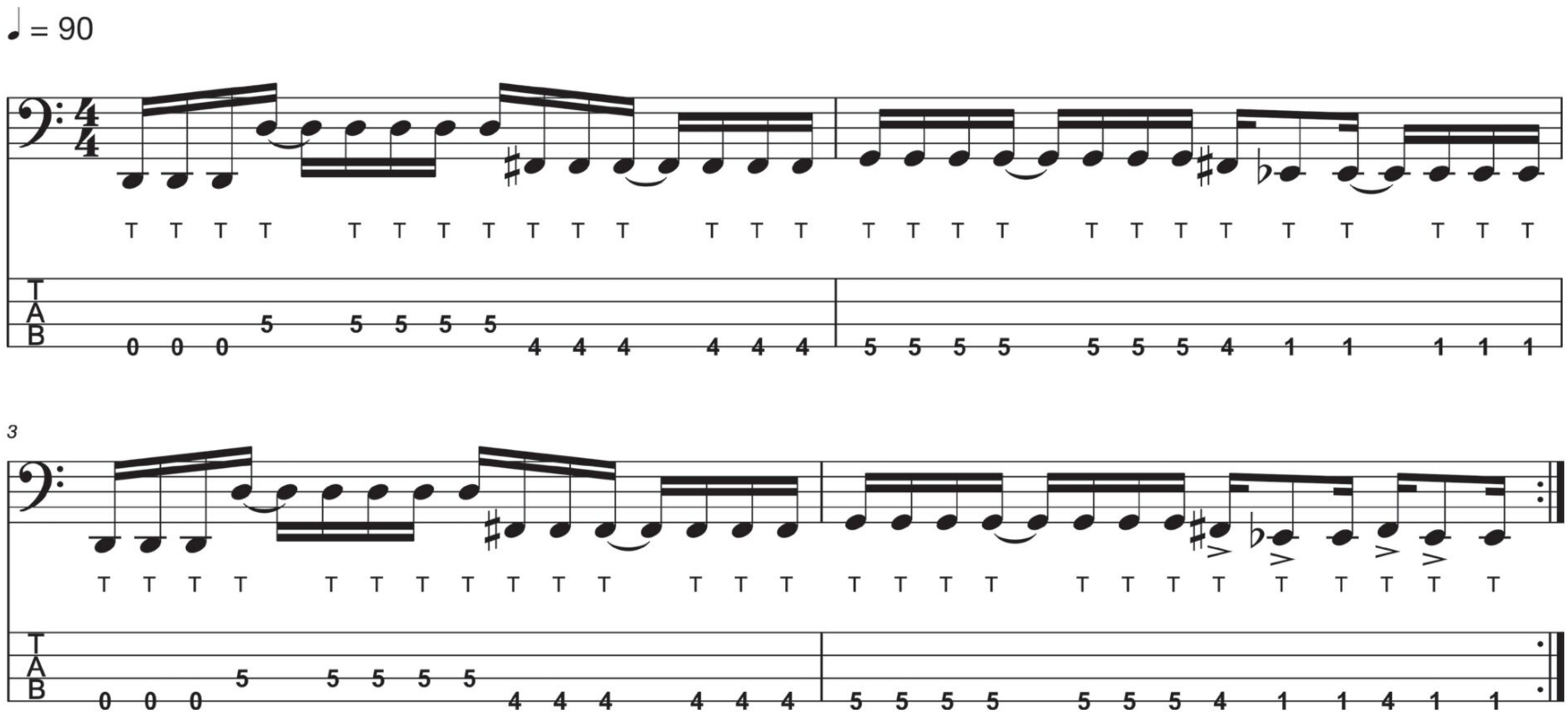
Getty

Miller possesses an extremely comprehensive command of the slap technique, refined through his extensive studio experience in the late Seventies. He typically slaps with his thumb in front of the chrome pickup cover on his bass, close to the end of the neck. An interesting point to note regarding his slapping is that his thumb does a lot of the work: whereas other bass players might employ fretting hand slaps, hammer-ons or pull-offs to lessen the number of notes that the thumb needs to play, he does not. A good example of this is the song 'Redemption' from 2012's *Renaissance* album: the main bass groove is a sixteenth note-based line that is quite relentless. Miller slaps each note individually, despite there being ample opportunities to use hammer-ons, pull-offs or even double thumbing.

However, in doing so, he ensures that each note has the same level of attack, making for a punchier sound. This is one of the more difficult aspects of his slap playing to master. You can hear further examples of those thumb-heavy lines during the middle section of 'Blast' and the riff in 'Frankenstein'.

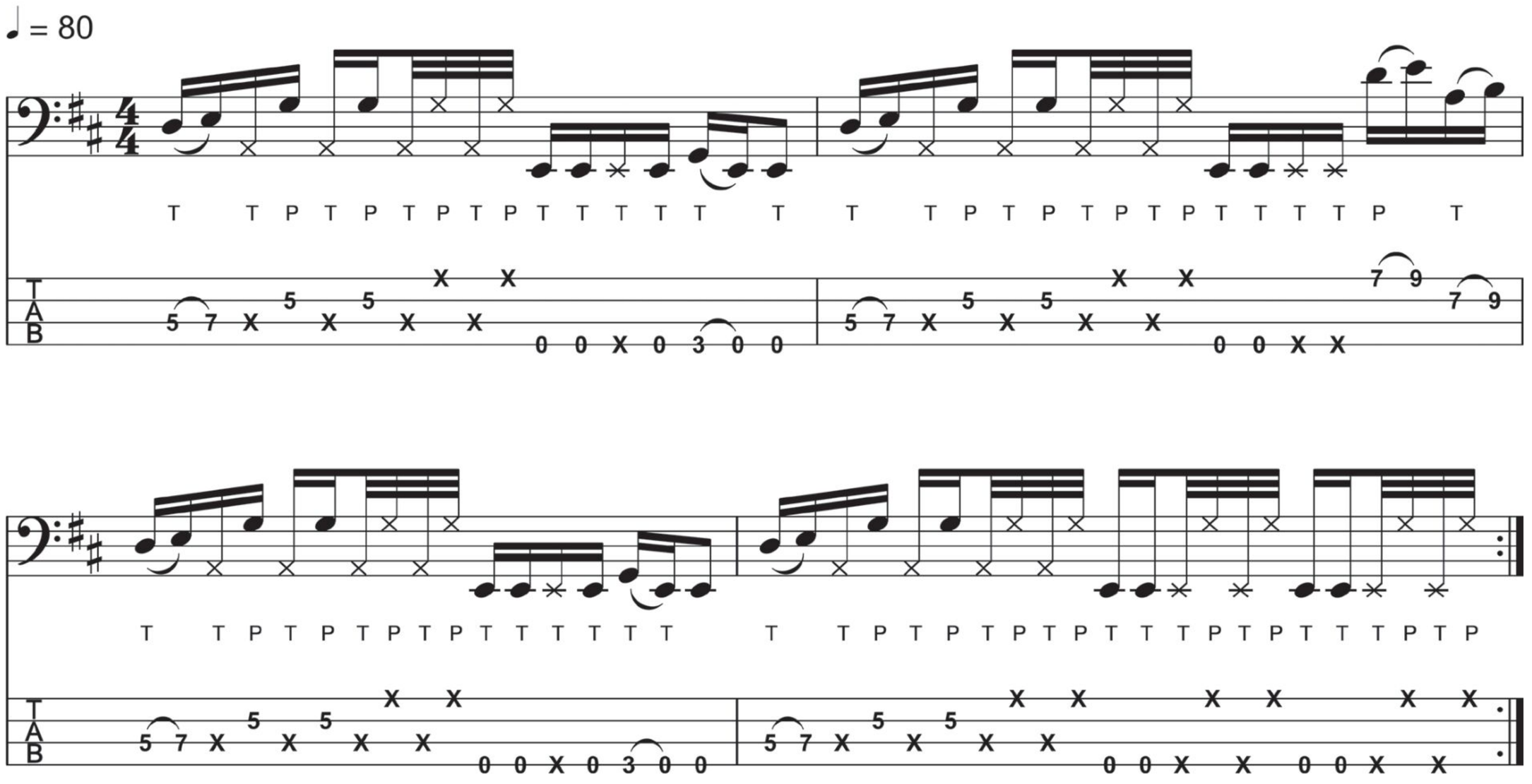
Let's take a look at some exercises which illustrate Marcus's playing techniques.

EXERCISE ONE



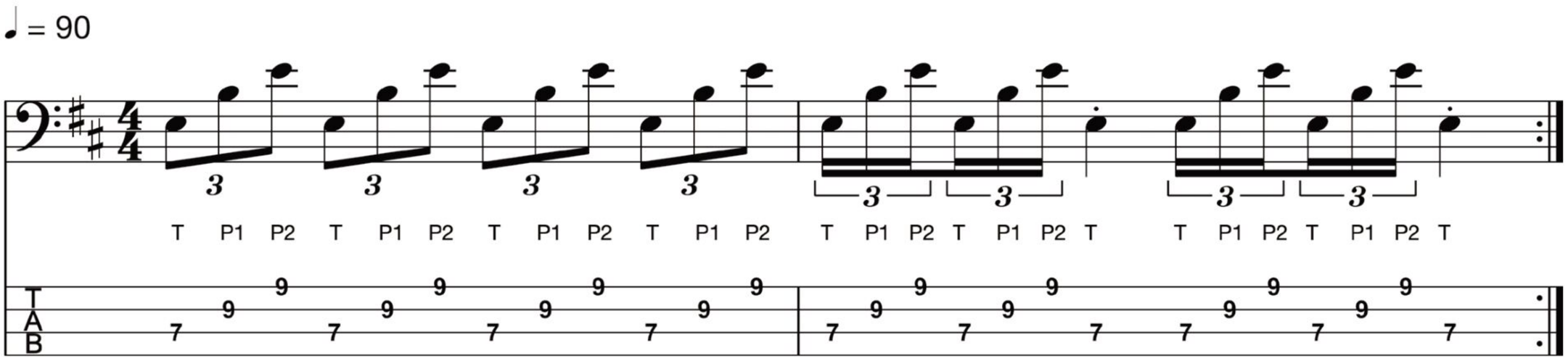
This exercise is played using drop-D tuning and is a real workout for the thumb. When playing lines such as this, aim for consistency in tone and volume. Miller often uses rapid flurries of slapped and popped ghost notes in his bass-lines and solos. He has sometimes compared this rhythmic element of his playing to the ghosting that a jazz drummer might do on the snare drum between beats. Good examples of this can be heard in the main riff from 'Detroit', the bass solo in 'Panther' and the solo in 'Scoop'.

EXERCISE TWO



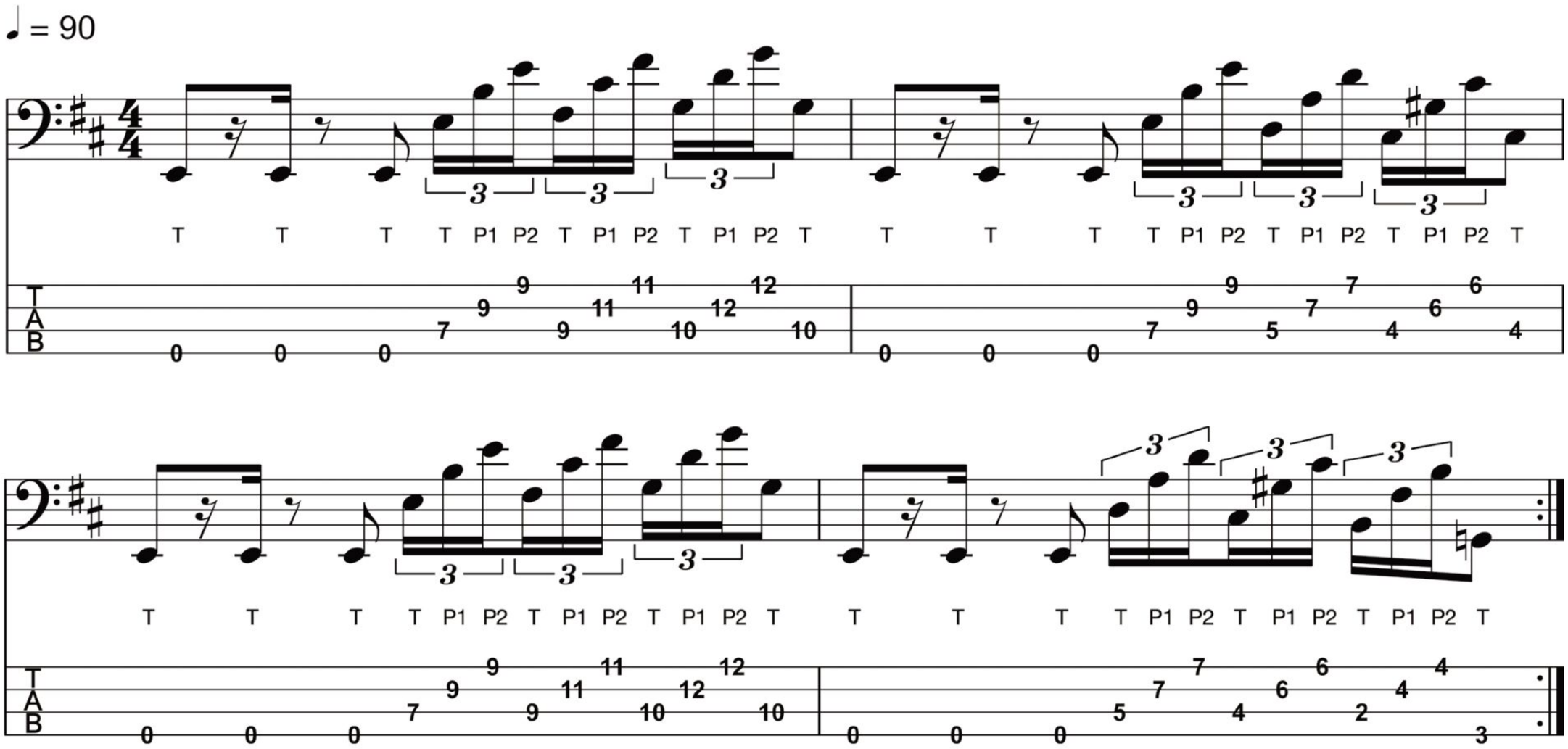
Here's an example of a bass groove that employs this 'rhythmic ghosting' technique. Triplets are a popular rhythmic device for many slap bassists, and Miller is no exception. However, those who have studied his work in detail will have discovered that he has a wide variety of ways in which he incorporates triplets into his slap playing. Let's look at a few examples of this.

EXERCISE THREE



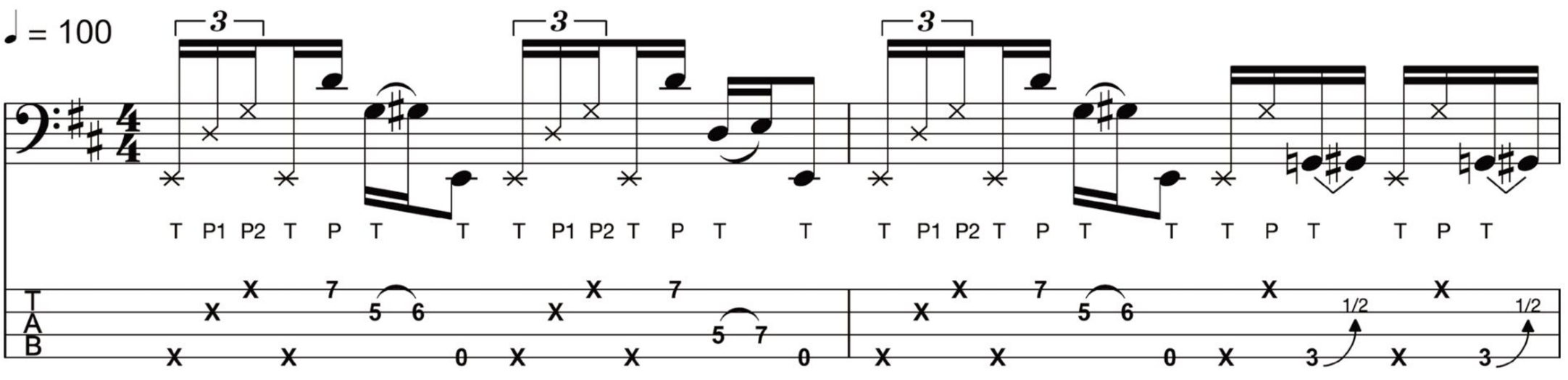
This first triplet exercise is performed by slapping with the thumb, followed by two popped notes, performed by the first and second fingers of the picking hand, respectively.

EXERCISE FOUR

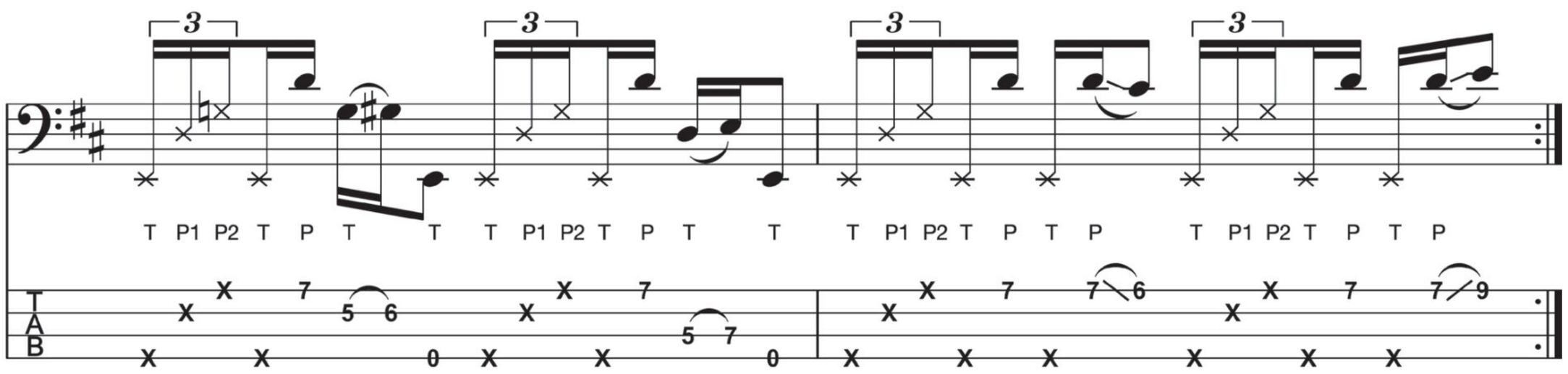


Here's an exercise that puts this first triplet figure to use in the context of a groove. You can hear Miller use this technique during the intros of 'Bruce Lee' and 'Boogie On Reggae Woman', both from the *Silver Rain* album.

EXERCISE FIVE [CONTINUED OVER]

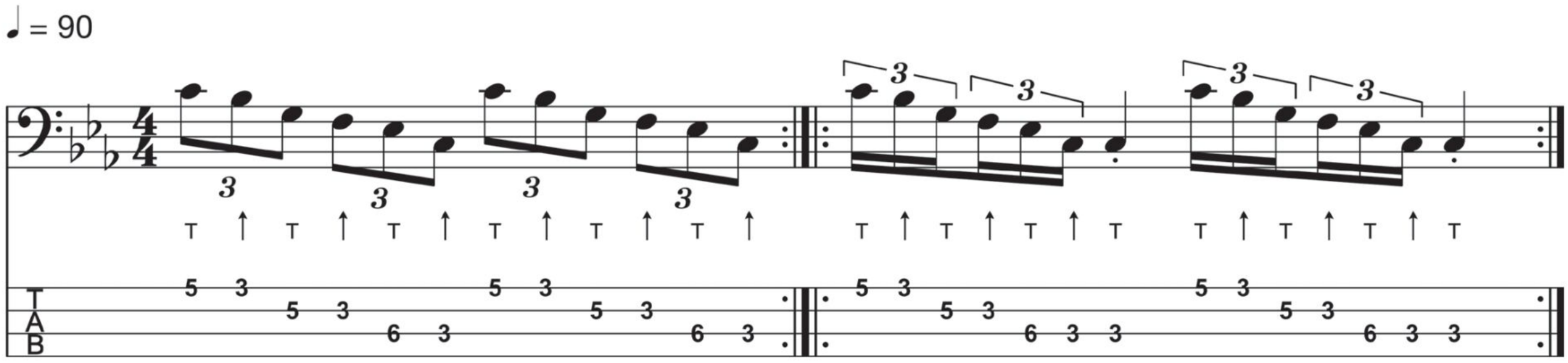


EXERCISE FIVE [CONTINUED]



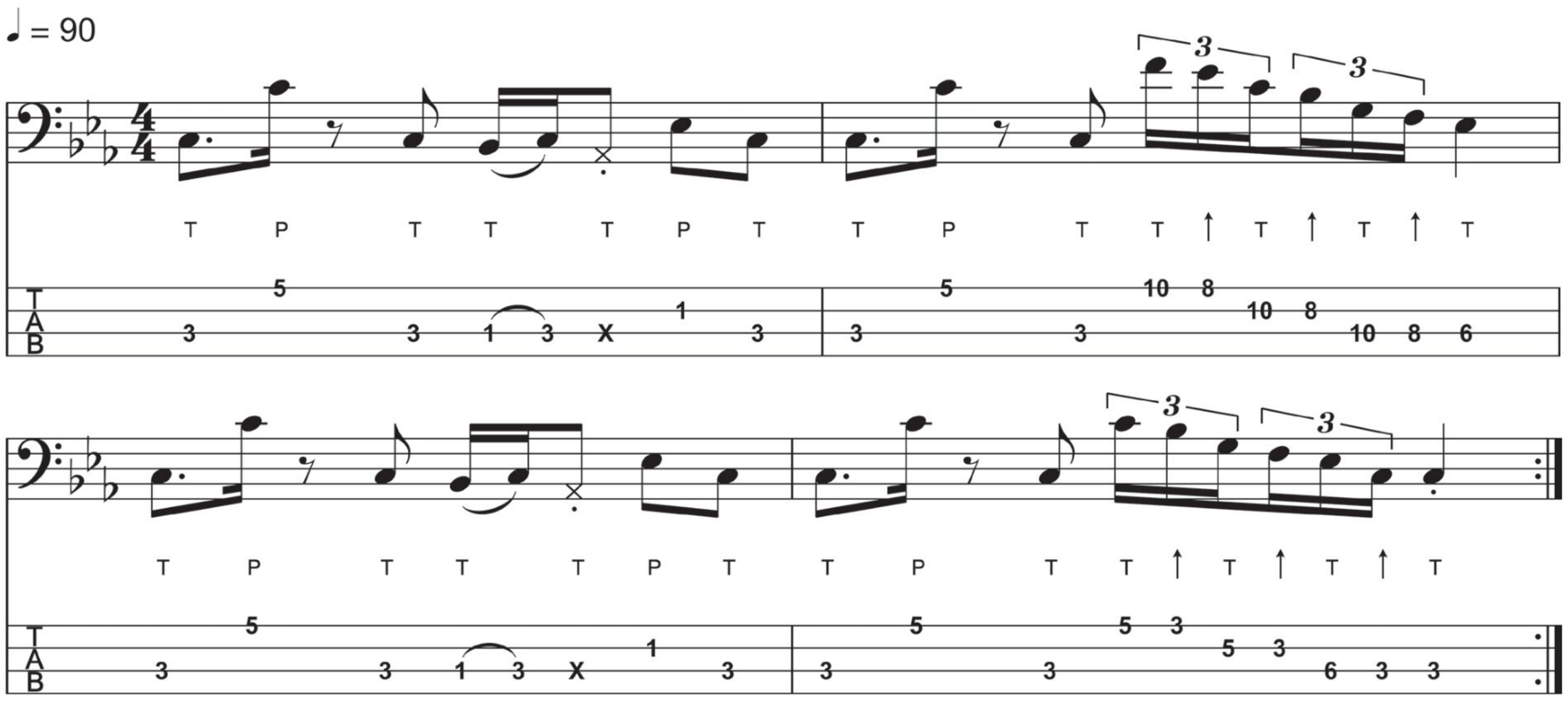
This is the same technique, now performed as ghost notes. You can hear Miller use the technique in this way in the main groove of the song 'Run For Cover'.

EXERCISE SIX



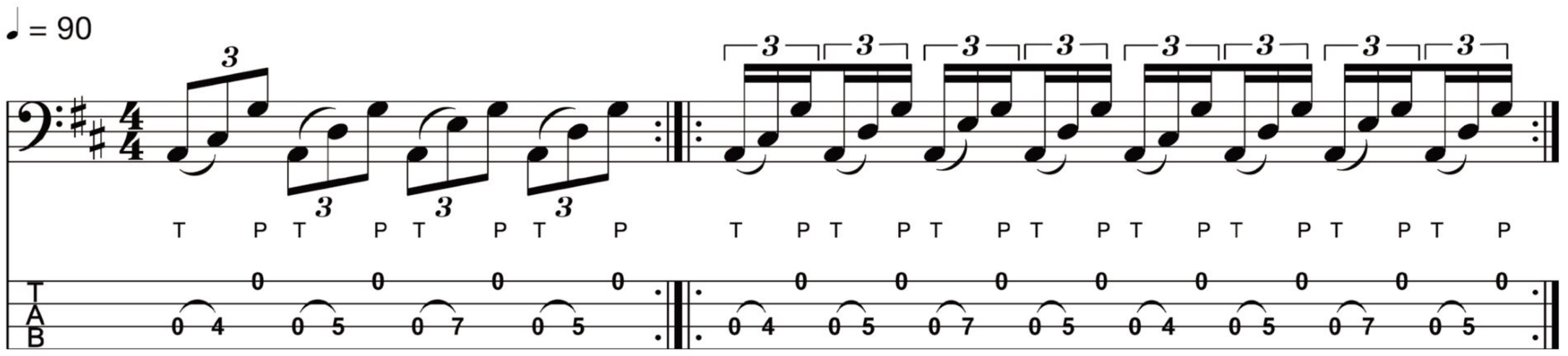
Miller also plays triplets using the double thumbing technique. When doing so, he most commonly plays two sixteenth-note triplets. This is a total of six notes, meaning that the thumb strokes can be down-up-down-up-down-up. This simple exercise will get you started.

EXERCISE SEVEN



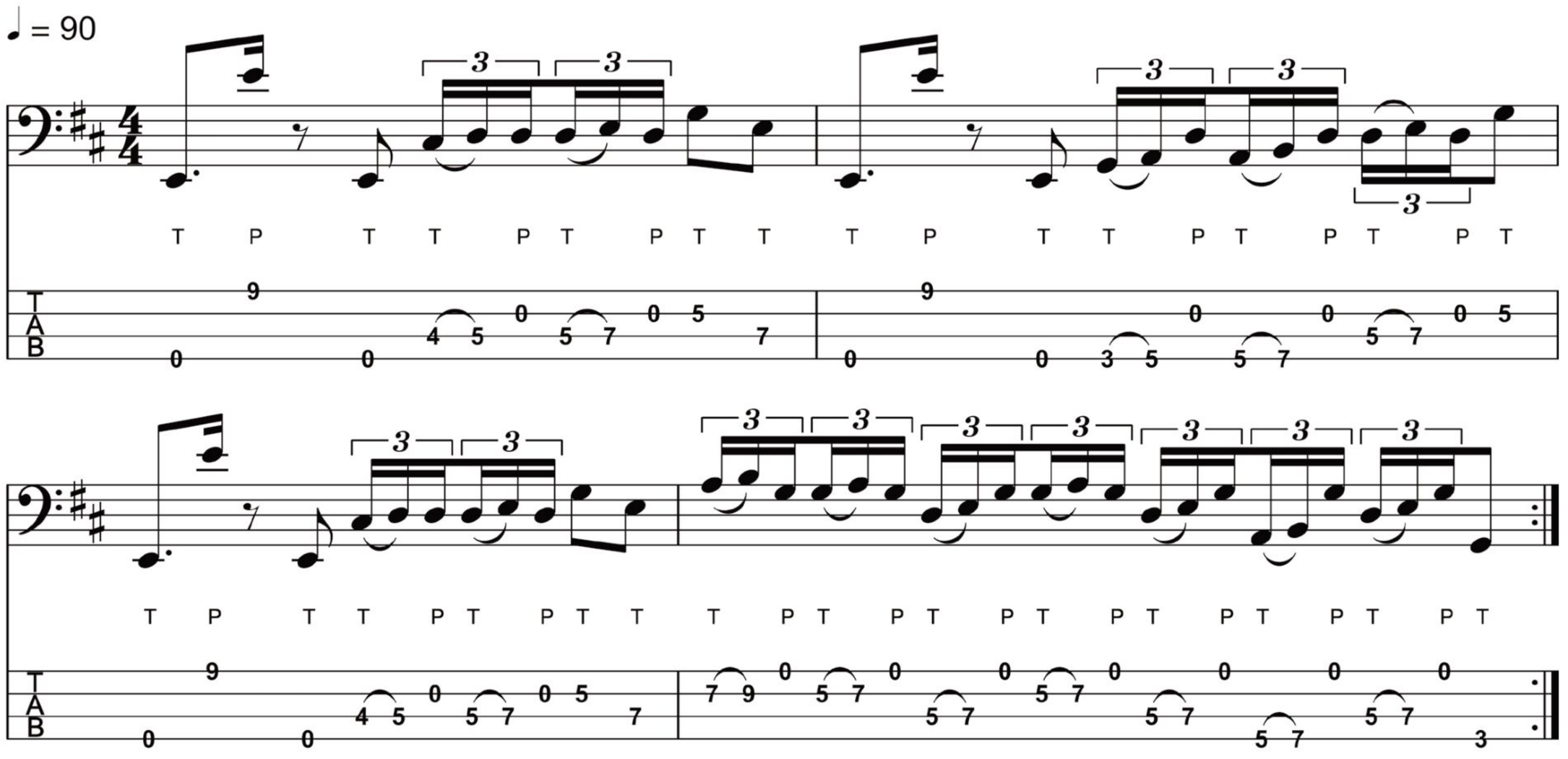
This example features the double-thumbed triplet lick from the previous exercise in the context of a groove. Miller often uses this technique to play descending pentatonic phrases, as heard in the main riffs from 'Power', 'Bruce Lee' and 'Blast'.

EXERCISE EIGHT



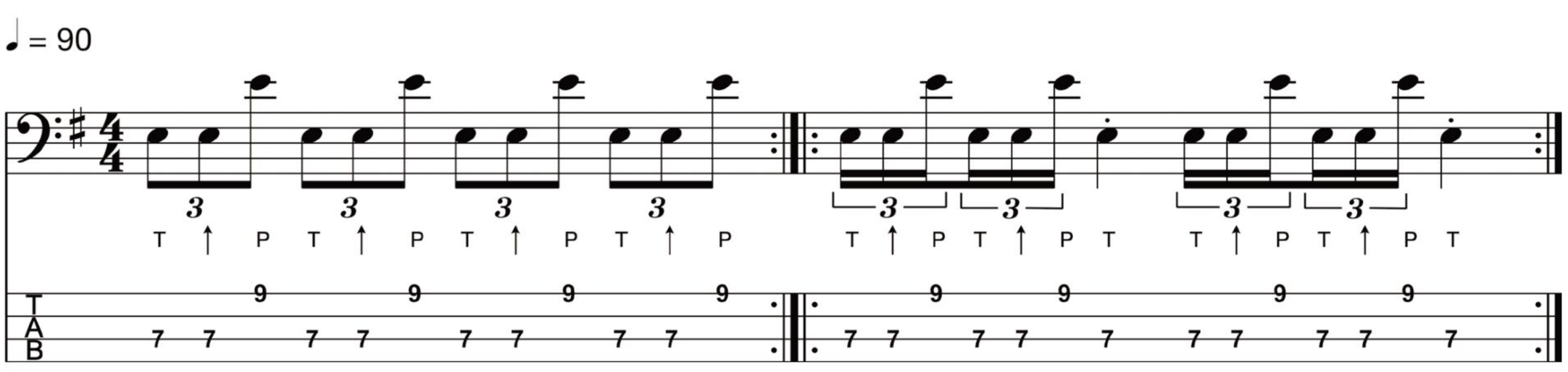
Let's take a look at another triplet figure commonly used by Miller. In this example, a note is slapped by the thumb, followed by a hammer-on, then followed by a popped note. The popped note is often an open string, or a ghost note.

EXERCISE NINE



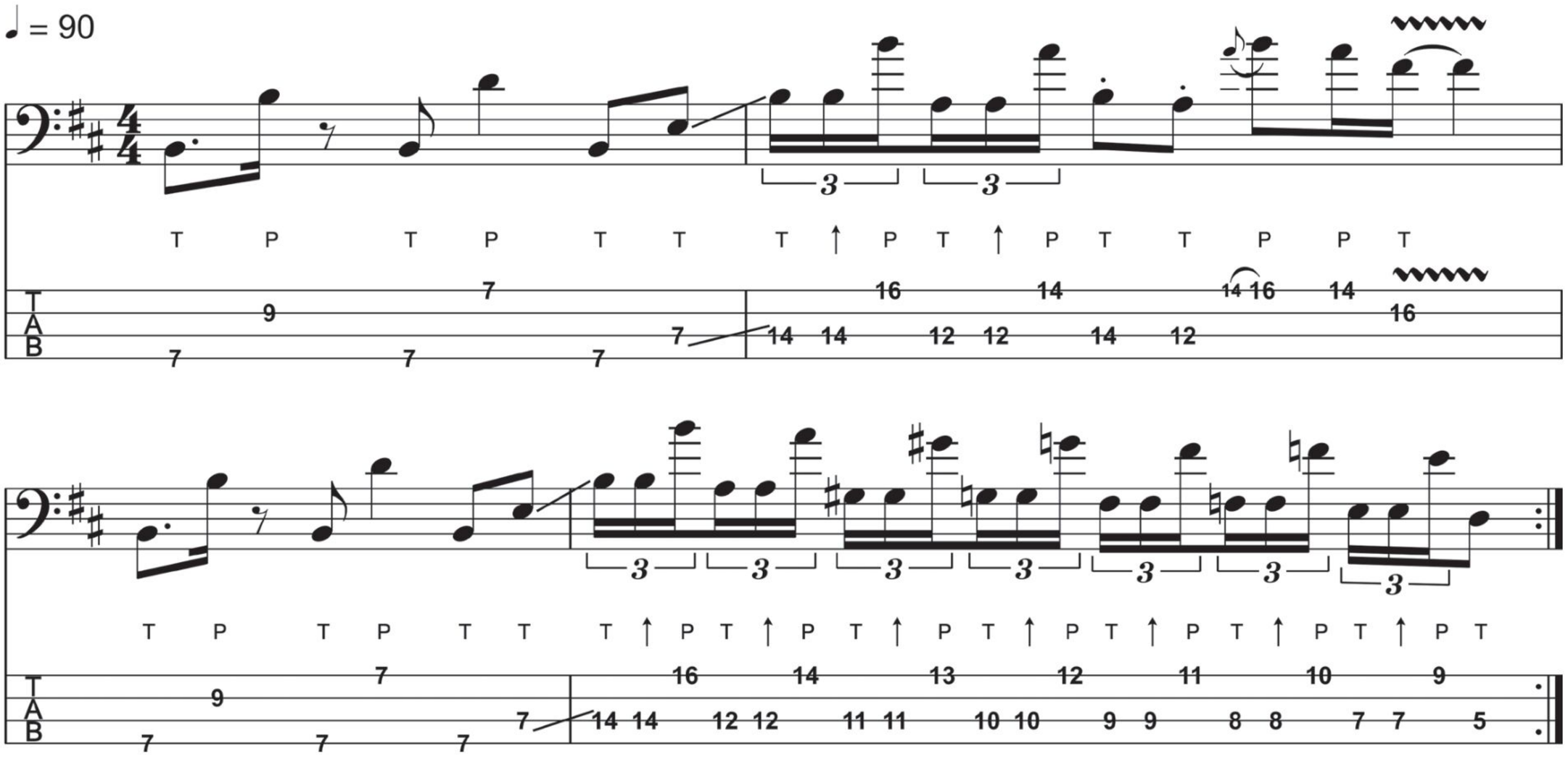
This triplet figure can sound very effective when used in bass grooves and solos. It allows for rapid flurries of notes, with little effort. This is quite a simple way to play fast triplets and you can hear Miller use it during the solos on 'Bruce Lee', 'Cee-Tee-Eye' and 'Lonnie's Lament'.

EXERCISE TEN



A more recent development in Miller's playing has been the use of the down-up-pop technique to play triplets. To do this, slap the string, allowing your thumb to travel through it. Then, thumb an upstroke and follow this with a pop. Although this will take some getting used to, you should find that you are able to work this up to fairly fast tempos.

EXERCISE ELEVEN



This exercise illustrates this triplet technique in the context of a groove. You can hear Miller use this technique during his solo on 'Cee-Tee-Eye'.

Getty

That's all for this month, folks. I hope you've enjoyed this deep dive into the playing of Marcus Miller and if so, I strongly recommend that you check out all of the songs and albums that have been referenced throughout this column. Next month we'll be moving on and looking at another bassist who has contributed heavily to the slap style. Until then...

Personalised IEMs? We're paying him too much

IN-EAR MONITORS

Now hear this! Dan Veall is all ears... in-ears

Welcome! An in-ear monitor or IEM is like a set of headphones, but by using a design that creates a barrier between your eardrum and the outside world, cuts down environmental – by which we usually mean on-stage or in-studio – noise. This means that IEMs can be run more quietly for better sound quality and less ear fatigue.

Rock and roll is about massive amps and massive volume. Change my mind, Veall.
It's simple. Imagine being able to hear all the things you want to hear, with no distractions, no ear-splitting, headache-inducing ambient noise, and no struggling to hear through a poor stage mix... and no hearing loss after a few years.

That's fair. What types of IEMs are there?
In-ear monitors can be as simple as a single driver in each ear, or as complex as 64 Audio's 18 drivers per earpiece sets. In practice, there are two main variants of in-ear monitor: 'Universals' are a fixed shape and come with either foam or rubber earplug tips. They fit most – but not all – ears, and are often cheaper than their moulded counterparts. On the other hand, moulded earplugs are shaped specifically to a user's ear and will not fit anyone else. A mould of the ear is required, as is a visit to an audiologist: this results in a not-at-all-uncomfortable procedure using expanding foam, or possibly a digital scan using an electronic device. I've had my ears moulded twice now and have enjoyed the experience. The benefits of a moulded set are a greatly improved audio experience, plugs that don't fall out of your ears when you move around, better low end and better isolation.

What speakers do they use?
Well, different types are utilised in IEMs, all of them very accurate at producing sound. You'll hear of variants such as 'balanced armature' and 'dynamic' drivers. While we're talking IEM jargon, you may encounter ambient ports, filters and valves, which are all ways to bleed outside sound into your mix via a physical, pluggable hole in the earpiece, or just to improve the hearing experience. The latter seems to work well – but ambient ports, as they break the seal, could mess with the IEM sound. There are a couple of brands that I can think of that choose to employ microphones in the IEM package to feed in ambient sound via a wearable pack. Of course, there is a cost implication.

On that note, what do these damn things cost? Remember, I'm a musician. I'm broke.
You won't be happy with your IEMs if they're cheap. A flimsy headphone amplifier to drive them and a lead to plug you into the PA will only get you so far. This is why many amateur musicians don't like IEMs – because the budget isn't there to do it properly. Think of it this way: you're replacing your bass stack with a set of earphones, and you're expecting the same experience. They'll be doing the job of all the on-stage monitors too, remember. To do this monitoring properly, even on a budget, is going to cost and affect all musicians in the group. Cheap systems are only likely to frustrate you and perhaps put you off using them.

When I wear IEMs, I can't hear anyone on stage. I don't like this. It's weird.
Look into running a set of ambient microphones on stage, preferably high-quality condensers, to blend into your overall stereo in-ear mix. Go full stereo if you can. A busy mono mix will sound congested – and could give you a headache!

Should I go wireless?
Don't buy wireless transmitter setups to pair with your IEMs yet. Spend your money on a better set of IEMs first. I have gigged the entire time that I've owned my IEMs, which is over five years now, with a wired setup. I don't need a wireless guitar system, so it doesn't hurt to use a combined single cable or two cables hooked over my guitar strap.

What else do I need to bear in mind?
Don't run one IEM on its own. Don't run IEMs too loud. Don't use phone earbuds as in-ear monitors. You really don't want a burst eardrum, ear damage or long term tinnitus. I'll address these points next month!

Dan Veall is a session and stage bass player, educator and gear expert and is here to answer your questions. Contact: @DanVeallBassist

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