A walking bass line is the most common approach to jazz bass playing. The term “walking” is used to describe the moving feeling that quarter notes create in the bass part. Just like walking with your feet, the walking bass line is one step after the other that takes you somewhere. This is an important concept to remember, the walking bass line is movement.

Walking bass is also used in rock music, blues, rock-a-billy, r&b, gospel, latin, country, and many other types of music. In other words, you don't have to be a jazzer to walk. The processes involved in developing a walking line are applicable to any style of music. Essentially, this process is looking at a set of chords, deciding which notes we want to use, and determining the order in which we will play them. Being able to make these decisions will make you a “conscious bassist” as opposed to a bassist that hits or misses. With this in mind, I hope you are ready to start walkin’!

Goal Statement

The specific goal of this method is to familiarize you with the techniques used to build walking bass lines, and to help you develop an awareness of how the process of walking works. By understanding how it works, you will find that the information is transferable to other styles of bass playing. By the end of this book you will have the information you need to play good, functional, straight ahead bass lines. You will also have learned a system for analyzing a bass line that will help you to understand why some bass lines work and others don’t. Rather than arm you with a few examples of walking bass lines, this book will show you the tools you need to build your own. Through the use of recorded rhythm tracks you will have the opportunity to put the new learning directly into action. It is crucial to your understanding that you are able to hear and feel how the bass line works in context.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to Dr. Linda Ostrander, Tom Hamilton, members of the Bass Department at Berklee College of Music, Sonia Friedland, LeeEllen Friedland, David Taylor, Aimee Rae Friedland, Shelly Roth, Michael Merrill, Larry Fishman, and everyone over at Fishman Transducers. Thanks to all my students through the years who have helped me learn the art of teaching. Thanks to all the great inspirational bassists past and present.

About the Author

Ed Friedland is a Boston-area bass player and teacher. He is a graduate of the High School of Music and Art in New York City and a former faculty member of the Bass Department at Berklee College of Music. He has been a featured columnist in Bass Player Magazine. His performance credits include Larry Coryell, Michael Urbaniak, Robben Ford, Mike Metheny, Linda Hopkins, Johnny Adams, Robert Jr. Lockwood, Barrence Whitfield & the Savages, Martha and the Vandellas, The Drifters, Brook Benton, the Boston & Tokyo Productions of Little Shop of Horrors, the Opera Company of Boston. Ed has a M.Ed. from Cambridge College, Cambridge, MA. Ed uses GHS strings and Fishman Transducers.
A recording is included to give you the hands-on learning experience that is crucial to this style of bass playing. Many of the great walking bassists never learned from a book, they just went out and learned on the bandstand. Because these opportunities are now few and hard to find, the tape will provide you with a supportive and comfortable accompaniment to your learning process.

The recording uses a split stereo mix with piano and drums on the right channel, and bass and drums on the left channel. This configuration will allow you to turn the bass track off and play with the piano and drums, as well as giving you clear access to the bass track for learning the lines by ear, and by transcription.

The examples in the book with an icon (redicate) next to them have a number that corresponds to the number on the recording. Each example is first stated (the number is given), then counted off with a click. The click is a two-bar count off, two half notes, and three quarter notes leaving beat four blank. Ex. 1... 2... 1,2,3,...(play).

There are many opportunities in the book to create your own lines. There are examples with chord symbols and slashes. Turn off the bass track, and play your own line. This is what you will be asked to do in the real world, you might as well start now! You can do this with all of the examples in the book. These examples have recorded bass lines that are not written in the book. They are provided to give you another example of the concept in action. To enhance your learning experience, learn these examples by ear. It is highly recommended that you actually write them down, too, since transcription process is a very powerful tool for your overall musicianship.

The last section of the book is the Appendix. It includes ten commonly played jazz standard progressions. There are no written bass lines, but there are recorded ones. I played these lines as I would normally play them without thinking about chromatic approaches, scale motion, etc. However, I made a conscious effort to avoid too much rhythmic embellishment at this point, though there is some. These lines will give you an idea of what comes out when all the ideas presented in this book have been assimilated. They will also challenge your ear much more than anything else in the book. So when you feel ready, definitely learn these lines by ear, and transcribe them if you can.

I hope you will enjoy playing with the other musicians as much as I do. Brad Hatfield on piano and Jim Gwin on drums are two of Boston’s greatest musicians. I have the pleasure of working with these two fine, upstanding citizens regularly, and now so can you!
Top Priority

Top priority for a bass player in any style of music is keeping time. Without this essential skill, anything you play is virtually useless. I don't mean to sound overly harsh. I'm trying to spare you the slings and arrows of irate horn players, guitarists, keyboard players, singers, and drummers. Oh yes, let's not forget drummers! The point is: if the time is not solid in a band, it doesn't matter how good everyone can play, how good you look, how nice your equipment is, etc., because the groove is not happening. Any style of music has to have a groove (unless the purpose is anti-groove), and this can only be achieved by the bass player and drummer hooking up into a solid rhythm section. Notice I mentioned the drummer here. Keeping the time is a shared responsibility between the bass and drums, and it requires individual strength and cooperation. For now, let's focus on individual strength. The first thing you need to develop your time is a metronome. If you don't have one already, buy one immediately!

Get the picture? You can not achieve good time without one. You may substitute the metronome with a drum machine, however use it with a simple click for practicing time. A drum machine, though more fun to play with, can lull you into a false sense of security. Because it gives you so much rhythm to play with, it makes it too easy, it can tug you along for the ride, and it wouldn't swing if you hung it from a rope! To develop your time and your walking feel, practice with the metronome clicking on beats 2 & 4. In a jazz drum feel, beats 2 & 4 are played with the foot pedal of the hi hat cymbal. Using the metronome this way will give you the most important part of the jazz feel to work with.

Here is a simple way to find 2 & 4 with the metronome:

1) Turn on metronome to a medium tempo.
2) Slap your knee with your hand in time with the click.
3) When your hand is in the air about to come down again, start counting. 1 is in the air, 2 is on your knee, 3 is in the air, 4 is on your knee. Keep this up for a while to get used to it.

By using the metronome this way you are being held responsible for supplying the downbeat. This is an important part of your job as a bassist. Time is an internal clock that ticks in the center of the chest. This clock runs on a rechargeable battery. Like all rechargeable batteries, when you use them for the first time, you must leave them in the charger for a long time. Once your internal clock is up and running, it will require regular maintenance to keep it fully charged. No one's time is ever "good enough." When the battery is charged, and the rhythm section hooks up, there is no finer feeling in the world.
Reading music is an important skill for any musician to develop. How far into reading you go depends on what your musical goals are. If you are interested in becoming a professional musician, I highly recommend that you make reading a priority. Even if you don't see yourself needing to read music to carry out your musical goals, being able to read will enhance your understanding of music, and make you a better musician. Reading music gives you a visual representation of the notes you are playing. Playing the notes gives you an aural understanding, as well as physical or kinesthetic knowledge of where the notes are on the bass. When you combine all three, you have a very complete understanding of what you are playing.

As a bass player, you will spend a large part of the time reading chord changes instead of actual notes. This book will help you interpret changes. By learning to walk over chord changes, you are discovering what notes you have available to you on a given chord. In order to get the most out of this book, you will have to read the examples. You will be able to hear the examples played on the play-along tape that accompanies this book, so using your ear to learn the written examples is fine. If you combine using your ears and your eyes, you will have a better understanding of the material, although it is possible to learn the examples either way.

On the next few pages is a basic reference guide to reading music. It is intended as a supplement to help you find the notes on the neck. It is not necessarily the definitive method for sight reading, just a tool to help you get the information you need from this book. Due to the nature of walking bass lines, the only rhythmic value you will see in this book is a quarter note. In 4/4 time there are four quarter notes in a bar, in 3/4, there are three. For further rhythmic training, I highly recommend the book, Modern Reading Text in 4/4, by Louie Bellson and Gil Breines (Belwin Mills Publishing).
Basics of Reading Music

Music is written on five lines called the **Staff**. Bass players read in **Bass Clef**. The bass clef has two dots that surround the line on which the pitch “F” is written. The notes are divided into two groups, notes on the spaces...

And notes on the lines...

So far we have found the natural notes on the bass. These are notes without sharps (♯) or flats (♭). Between the pitches B and C is a half step (one fret). Between the pitches E and F is also a half step. Between all other pitches is a whole step (two frets). The notes that occur in the middle of these whole steps are called accidentals.

Notice that all of these chromatic pitches have two names. A♯ is also B♭. This is called an enharmonic spelling. Which name you use depends on what key you are in. In the key of B♭, you would call a note “E♯,” where in the key of E, you would call that same pitch “D♯.” Most often, when a line is ascending, a pitch becomes raised. For example a chromatic line from A would be A-A♯-B. Descending from B it would be B-B♭-A.

Note: When an accidental appears in a bar of music, it applies to the whole measure unless it is
The first step in the walking process is to be able to read the chord changes. The chord symbol tells you all the specific information about the chord structure. It is up to you to decode the information and create a bass line that will say something about the chord.

Chords are made from scale tones stacked on top of each other. Triads (three-note chords) contain the root, 3rd and 5th. Four-part chords contain the root, 3rd, 5th and 7th.

C major scale

Here is a listing of the most commonly used chord structures and what they contain. To make things easier, all the example chords will be built off the root C. Refer to the numbered scale above if you need to. Notes with a [b] sign are lowered a half step from the original scale tone, notes with a [#] sign are raised a half step.

Triads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Cm</td>
<td>Cdim</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chord List - Triads
(1) C major triad - (R, 3, 5)
(2) C minor triad - (R, b3, 5)
(3) C diminished triad - (R, b3, b5)
(4) C augmented triad - (R, 3, #5).

The next five chords are four-note structures called “seventh chords.” They add a seventh from the root to an existing triad. The seventh will either be major (7), minor (b7) or diminished (b7).

Four-Part Chords – Seventh Chords

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cmaj7</td>
<td>C7</td>
<td>Cm7</td>
<td>Cm7b5</td>
<td>Cdim7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 5 3 5 5 3 5 5 3 3
Chord List - Triads
(1) C major seventh - (R, 3, 5, 7)
(2) C dominant seventh - (R, 3, 5, 7)
(3) C minor seventh - (R, 3, 5, 7)
(4) C minor seventh b5 - (R, 3, 5, 7)
(5) C diminished seventh - (R, 3, 5, 7)

From the chord symbol we know which notes we can use to bring out the quality of that chord. Obviously, the root is the most important note; it is the bottom of the chord. The 5th of a chord combines with the root to form a framework for the chord quality. That is why they are important notes to know: they will work on any chord regardless of quality.

Triads with a natural 3 are major, and ones with a b3 are minor. A seventh chord will be determined by what combination of triad and seventh you use. For example, a major triad with a natural 7 will be a major seventh chord. A major triad with a b7 will be a dominant seventh chord. On chords with a b5 or +5 symbol do not play the natural 5, play the 5 that the chord symbol says.