

## JAZZ BASS TIPS!

Katie Thiroux

Jazz Bassist / Jazz Vocalist

[katiethiroux@gmail.com](mailto:katiethiroux@gmail.com)

I have TONS of educational videos on my IG: @katiethiroux  
(there is a link on my profile specifically for GREAT bass music to listen to)

### Concepts/Takeaways for Right Hand and Left Hand and Bass Position

- To quote John Clayton, "Minimum amount of effort, maximum results." Translation be economic and ergonomic with all of your movements and you will have access to everything on the instrument at all times.
- Make sure your left hand is strong and dig into the fingerboard to get maximum sound (but do not hurt yourself). This enhances the sound!
- Your LH fingers should be rounded, not flat.
- Ideally, our left arm should be a straight line without a bent wrist.
- Maintain your left hand position at all times - no squishing your hand formation, especially as you shift. You will start to form muscle memory in your LH when you shift. Use those landmarks on the bass, like the thumb stop to map out all the notes in that area like we did. Your index finger leads when you shift.
- Your LH hand should be round with open space in your palm. Your thumb is not digging into the neck, rather resting and providing support for your hand.
- Ideally, if you have all 4 fingers down, each finger should be able to play the proper note in that position. This is how we avoid the "buzz" sound.
- Keep those LH fingers as close to the finger board as possible when playing, that "stealth" elevator hand formation. It makes everything in bass-life easier!
- Your Right Hand - do not turn it on an angle. That causes tension in the wrist, forearm and under the armpit. Rather, approach the bass with a more natural hand position just resting and close to the strings. That looked good on you.
- For pizz, the attack and pull happens all in one motion. It is the balance of plucking without disrupting the vibration - when there is the disruption, we get that "extra" sound. The motion is all about gravity! This takes time and is best focused on during scales.
- For right hand alternating fingers for pizz: It's the same idea as it is with one finger, not disrupting the vibration. Once your index finger moves, your middle finger is ready to go. We want to achieve the cleanest and clearest sound possible! It is all gravity!
- Continue to raise your bass height until you feel like you can easily reach the fingerboard with your right arm and you don't have to raise your left shoulder. The more you have it leaning on you the better so that you have access to everything.

## DAILY CHECKLIST

This is a PDF that I adapted from John Clayton and he adapted from his teachers. I use it each time I practice. It really helps me organize what I am going to practice and for how long. It also helps to chart your progress. What I do before I practice is figure out how much time I have to practice. Then I assign a specific amount of time to each section. This way I don't spend an hour figuring out a scale then have no more time left for anything else! And if I have not done everything, I just move it to tomorrow. You will see and hear your progress much quicker once you organize and spread your focus on many areas.

\*\*\*Let me know if you want/need help on organizing your practice\*\*\* I'll just put an example here anyways

## PRACTICE ROUTINE

I will summarize a sample practice routine

- I plan my practice around 2 things: 1. What I need to work on technically 2. What new music do I want to learn? And it revolves around 3 things: Scales, Transcription, Learning New Music  
- And it's all cumulative!

1. So for technique: If I am looking to improve my Left Hand technique because I noticed that it needs work, I'll start there. I will look at my Daily Checklist. I will pick a 3 octave scale where there might be some nasty shifts, or a lot of closed strings like Db. Find a solo to transcribe that requires a strong left hand, something with a lot of 1/8th notes. Then I will pick up some old transcriptions of lines and solos that will also help my LH strength. Again, I assign a time limit to all of these.

2. Learning new music: So I may start backwards in planning and decide how to practice that way. If I want to do an uptempo bassline transcription in G major, then I would organize my practice around that. I would choose a fingering for a 3 octave major scale and run through it with subdivisions. Depending on how much time I have, I can do more or less and with the bow. Then I might pick an etude in G, and a few old transcriptions either in G or more uptempo transcriptions to get me ready for the faster tempo. Then I would get to work on the transcription. I give myself a time limit for each task. I might run over a little bit just to finish something, but the point is that I have not spent all of my time on one aspect with no time left for anything else.

At the end of the lesson it is very important for me to acknowledge what I have accomplished. And if I did not get to everything because of timing - I just move it to my next practice session. Maybe a good way to arrange your practice is to ask yourself: **Where do I want to see improvement?** The more specific you are, the more organized you can be with your practice.

AND - it is really fun and easy to organize your practice as long as you have a goal! If you don't have a lot of time:

### Here is a "mock" practice plan for a short amount of time

Sunday 30 min

- 15 minutes of scales/arpeggios
- 15 minutes of transcription

Monday 20 min

- 5 min of scales

- 15 min of learning/memorizing tunes

Tuesday 30 min

- 10 min scales/arpeggios

- 10 min transcription

- 10 min walking basslines

## HOW TO PRACTICE SCALES

- I know that you know how to practice scales! Here is how I like to do it in a way that I am practicing LH and RH technique and coordination between both hands.
- 2 octave F major scale. Sing the note you are shifting to before you shift, then play. **SING--->SHIFT--->PLAY.** (Do this to practice the shift, then when the metronome is on you can play it normally)
- Play the triad arpeggio as well...I will make that Assignment #2 :)
- Let me know if you want a scale book recommendation!
- **How to practice scales:** I attached a PDF of how I go through scales with sub divisions and a metronome, nothing fancy. (the very 1st line has the fingering above the notes for 2 octaves)
- If you have a lot of time, start where it says "**4:13**"
- If you have less time, start where it says "**9:47**"
- Set your metronome anywhere from 60bpm-70bpm (you'll feel in your hands where it is possible to start). You can make a goal of a final bpm but our goal is to learn slowly and correctly so that we don't have to go back and fix anything.
- When you get to 1/8th, triplets and 16th note subdivisions, start practicing alternating your fingers on your right hand with that really quick movement trying not to disturb the vibration.
- Play to a drone, I just look it up on YouTube, "[Cello Drone F Major.](#)"
- While you are doing this you are working on technique, working in front of a mirror is very helpful.
- **Focus on one thing at a time:** try once just looking at your left hand and making sure your position is good and all the fingers are down and then do it another time just focus on right hand sound. Then combine the two concepts.
- **Remember:** we focus on technique during scales so the rest of what we want to play is more focused on the music.
- Hold your LH fingers down for as long as you can! We don't want extra sound!
- With your RH, focus on making as little of the extra sound from attacks as possible. The attack and pull are all one motion.
- **REFERENCE POINTS** - start to really feel and memorize in your hand those reference points on the bass, like the F on the G string.

## ARPEGGIOS W/ CHROMATIC APPROACH

- We will add the arpeggio with these approaches - they really help to map out the bass and subliminally builds your jazz vocabulary by adding chromatic notes to your walking and solos! Sometimes the scale fingering is not the best choice. We can really utilize open strings to move around the bass. But to be honest the fingering doesn't matter so much here.
- Approach the arpeggio 2 different ways with chromatic approaches in 2 octaves w/ a metronome on: (It is a good idea to focus on one approach at a time until it is comfortable and natural)

### **DO THESE IN 2 OCTAVES IN WHATEVER KEY YOU'RE WORKING ON:**

1. 1/2 step below each target note Ex for a C Triad: B C / Eb E / Gb G /
2. 1/2 step above each target note Ex for an C Triad: Db C / F E / Ab G
3. 1/2 step below, 1/2 step above then target note: B Db C / Eb F E / Gb Ab G
4. 1/2 step above, 1/2 step below then the note: Db B C / F Eb E / Ab Gb G

## **BUILDING SOLID BASSLINES!**

*This works for any chord progression and I use a 12 Bar Blues to explain it:*

### **12 Bar Blues Progression**

I F7 /// I Bb7 /// I F7 /// I C-7 / F7 / I  
I Bb7 /// I Bb7 /// I F7 /// I A-7 / D7 / I  
I G-7 /// I C7 /// I F7 /// I G-7 / C7 / I

I I7 /// I IV7 /// I I7 /// I V-7 / I7 / I  
I IV7 /// I IV7 /// I I7 /// I iii-7 / VI7 / I  
I ii-7 /// I V7 /// I I7 /// I ii-7 / V7 / I

***You should write these out and practice with your metronome on 2&4:***

1. Play the blues with a "2 Feel" in F (or any key), only use half notes - mostly Root and 5th Do this a few times.
  2. Keeping beats 1 to 2 a half note on the root, add a 1/4 note on beat 4 and make it a chord tone. *Again, do this a few times, you can have different combinations of octaves. A chord tone is ANY notes from that scale, so for C7 you can choose any notes!*  
*Remember that*
  3. Now try turning that beat 4 into a chromatic note! Try and make beat 4 either 1/2 step below or above the next beat 1. Try this a few times with different chromatic notes and approaches
  4. Add a 1/4 note on beat 2 and make it a chord tone. Try this a few times, and start in a different octave so you are not repeating the same bassline
  5. Most importantly, SING your basslines and do not stop! If you make a mistake, keep going and make a mental note for the next time. Your singing doesn't have to be loud, just so you hear it and make the connection!
- Please focus on making your 1/4 notes long! How do you do that?!?!
  - Now, don't think about anything and just play a walking bassline!
  - Record yourself, listen back and assess yourself. How are your note choices? Do you repeat yourself? How is my tone production? etc.

## **RECORDS TO CHECK OUT!**

A list of my favorite records and bassists!

*(in no particular order)*

- Chairman of the Board by Count Basie Orchestra / Bassist: Eddie Jones  
This is loaded with a lot of blues and SIMPLE basslines that are melodic
- We Get Requests by Oscar Peterson Trio / Bassist: Ray Brown  
Ray Brown has THE sound. Great repertoire and different feels
- Night Train by Oscar Peterson Trio / Bassist: Ray Brown  
Great tunes and a lot of blues'
- Summerwind by Ray Brown Trio / Bassist: Ray Brown  
You can tell I love Ray Brown
- Relxain' with the Miles Davis Quintet / Bassist: Paul Chambers  
Paul Chambers has the best 2 feel and play simply
- Live at the Pershing by Ahmad Jamal Trio / Bassist: Israel Crosby  
Again, another great 2 feel and simple and effective playing.

## **DISCOVER DOUBLEBASS**

Online Course

I have course that is perfect for beginner bassists that your students can share.

<https://courses.discoverdoublebass.com/p/from-beginner-to-bandstand>

## **SPOTIFY PLAYLISTS!**

**Here are two listening lists that I have put together, the blues playlist is great to start transcribing!**

[kt's mix!](#)

[blues mix!](#)