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Michael Gundlach

WALKING BASS

for Piano

An easy method for creating Walking Bass Lines on Piano

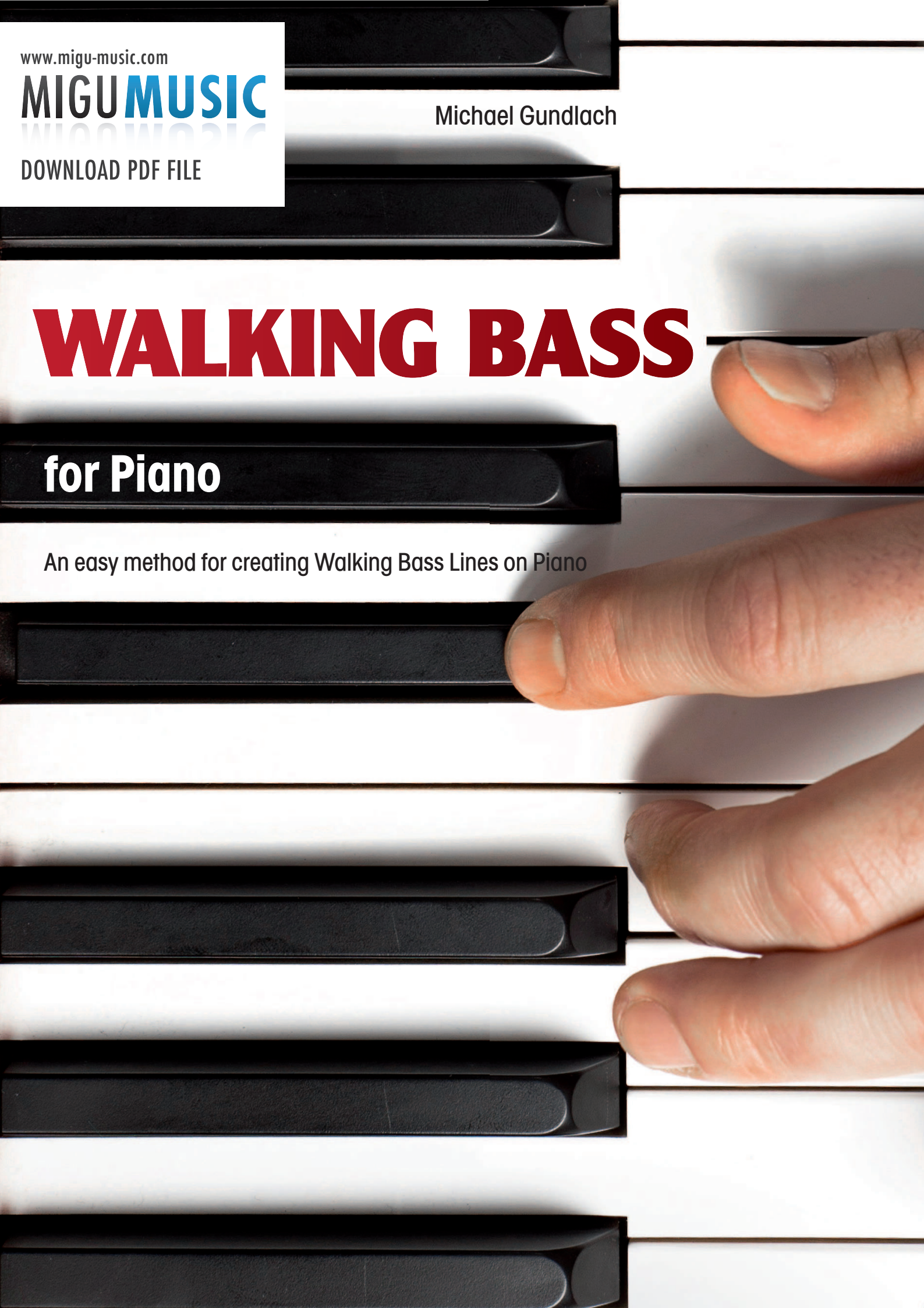


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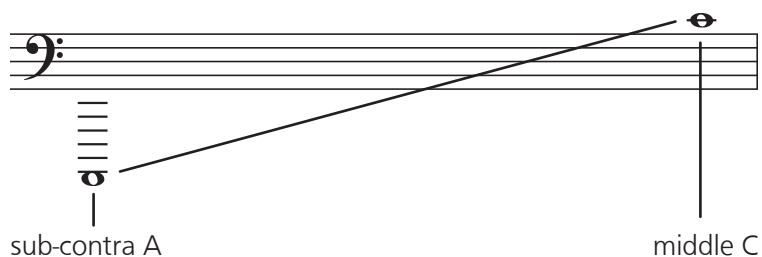
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Chapter 1

Walking Bass Note-Range

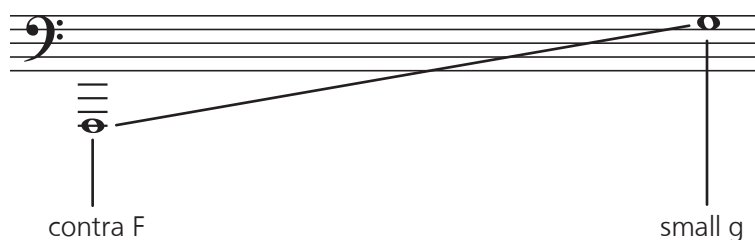
Usually the bass lies in the lower sound range of the music. Therefore, the bass is played by the left hand on the lower part of the keyboard of the piano. The possible note-range of a walking bass can reach from sub-contra A to middle C.

possible note-range of the walking bass



It is recommended to put the walking bass line in a note-range between contra F and small g. Bass lines above small g tend to sound "thin", while bass lines under contra F sound very "dull".

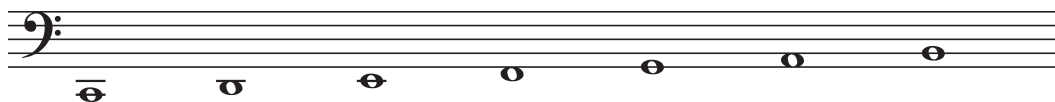
recommended note-range of the walking bass



Diatonic Harmony

By diatonic harmony we mean chords that can be formed from the notes of a major scale. If we take the key of C major, the scale looks like this:

C major scale

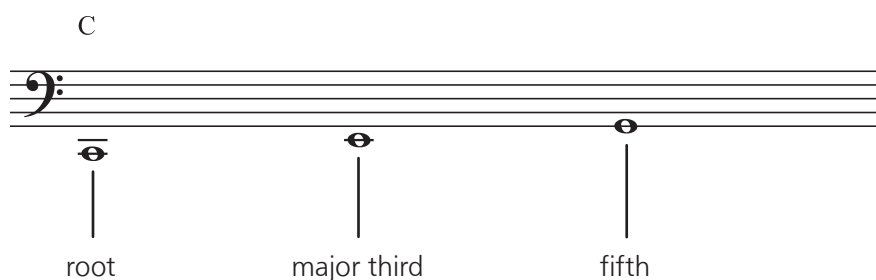


As we will see as we go through this course, the notes of the major scale can be played in sequence up and down with a walking bass.

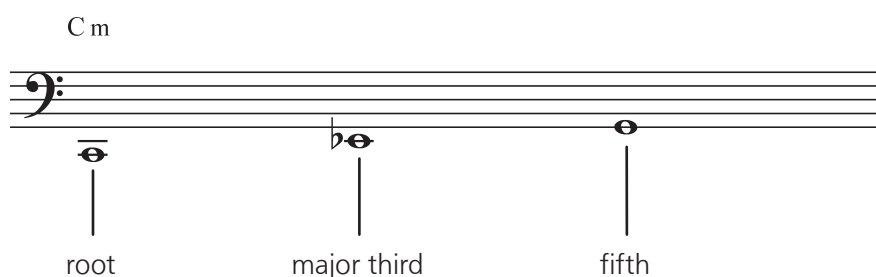
Walking Bass Two-Note-Sequence

In principle it is possible to create with yet just 2 notes of a chord a good bass line. A simple major (or minor) chord is composed of the root, third and fifth, as we see in the two illustrations:

C major triad



C minor triad



In the beginning we can ignore the third of the chord and just use the root and the fifth for a walking bass. We want to practice the walking bass with the help of typical harmony sequences as are very often found in songs. The first harmony sequence that we want to learn, is composed of the I., IV., V. and I. degrees:

harmony sequence 1, key of C major



In our first harmony sequence we will practice the walking bass with the root and fifth in three different keys with the examples 1a–c:

1a

Diagram illustrating the walking bass line for the C major harmony sequence (C, F, G, C, C). The bass line consists of the following notes: C (5), E (2), G (1), C (5), F (3), A (1), C (2), E (5), G (4), B (2), D (5), C (1), E (5), G (2), A (1), C (5). The sequence is labeled C, F, G, C, C.

Major / Minor Triad extended with the Major Second

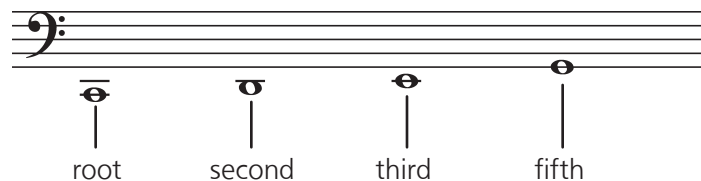
The second possibility to achieve a four-note-sequence for the walking bass is to take the ordinary major or minor triad and insert a second:

major triad extended with the major second

C add2



split into
individual notes

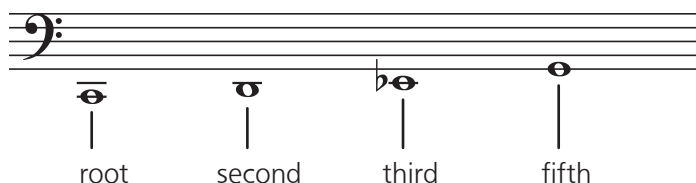


minor triad extended with the major second

Cm2



split into
individual notes



We will now practice the two new four-note-sequences with harmony sequence 4 (see page 16), with a minor cadence composed from I., IV., V. and I. degree:



Mother's Face

Version 2

Music: Traditional
Arr.: Michael Gundlach



13

♩ = 136

G

C

D

G

G

C

D

G

G

C

D

G

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Chapter 3

Ascending and Descending Scale

In the first two chapters we have dealt with using the notes of a chord for the walking bass. In addition to this you can form a walking bass from the notes of a scale. Take, for example the key of C major, we can use all the notes of the ordinary C major scale. For the beginning, it is advisable to play the notes of the scale in an up or down sequence. For example if we want to go from C major (I. degree) to F major (IV. degree) in a 4/4 beat with a bass line, we can use a downward movement of the scale:

downward movement of the C major scale



Of course we can also connect the two chords together in an upward movement of the scale, however, in order to accomplish this we must repeat one note. In the following example the root is played twice:

upward movement of the C major scale



If we want to go from C major (I. degree) to G major (V. degree) with our bass line, an upward or downward movement could look like this:

upward movement of the C major scale



downward movement of the C major scale



We will practice the illustrated bass movements with the examples 14a–15d with combined upward and downward movements.

Midnight Special



Music: Traditional
Arr.: Michael Gundlach

24

♩ = 126

G G/B C Cm G/D D7

G C G

G D7 G

G7 C G

Backwater Blues

Lead Sheet

Music: Traditional
Arr.: Michael Gundlach



Lead Sheet for "Backwater Blues" (12-bar form):

Chord Progression:

- I. C7
- IV. F7
- I. C7
- IV. F7
- I. C7
- (V.) (G7)

Bar numbers: 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12.

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"Backwater Blues" is a typical dominant blues with a 12-bar form. As you can imagine from the term "dominant blues" it is composed only of dominant seventh chords. You could also say that a dominant blues is composed of the three major chords from the I., IV. and V. degree of the ordinary major scale. The I. and IV. degree are changed into dominants by adding the minor seventh, while the V. degree is already from its nature, a dominant.

In a blues-song the use of the notes of the major triad with the added minor third makes a very good walking bass. In the piano version we see that this four-note-sequence is used many times. Here is an overview:

C

piano version, bars 1, 3, 7, 13, 15, 25, 27, 37, 39

F

piano version, bars 2, 4, 10, 14, 29, 38, 42

G

piano version, bars 9, 21, 41

We have also used the notes of the major triad embellished with the minor seventh (bars 6, 42) or with the sixth (bars 17, 31, 33, 47). Also we have used chromatic passing notes again and again in the bass line of the piano version. In the following chapter this topic will be fully explained.

Backwater Blues

Music: Traditional
Arr.: Michael Gundlach



♩ = 92

Chords: C7 F7 C7

Measure 1: Treble clef has a quarter note G4 (finger 2) and a quarter note A4 (finger 5). Bass clef has a whole note C3 (finger 5).

Measure 2: Treble clef has a quarter note Bb4 (finger 2), a quarter note A4 (finger 1), and a quarter note G4 (finger 5). Bass clef has a whole note C3 (finger 5).

Measure 3: Treble clef has a quarter note A4 (finger 1), a quarter note G4 (finger 5), and a quarter note F#4 (finger 3). Bass clef has a whole note C3 (finger 5).

Measure 4: Treble clef has a quarter rest and a quarter note G4 (finger 1). Bass clef has a whole note C3 (finger 5).

Chords: F7 C7

Measure 5: Treble clef has a quarter note G4 (finger 5), a quarter note A4 (finger 5), and a quarter note Bb4 (finger 3). Bass clef has a whole note C3 (finger 5).

Measure 6: Treble clef has a quarter note A4 (finger 1), a quarter note Bb4 (finger 2), and a quarter note C5 (finger 1). Bass clef has a whole note C3 (finger 5).

Measure 7: Treble clef has a quarter note Bb4 (finger 2), a quarter note A4 (finger 1), and a quarter note G4 (finger 5). Bass clef has a whole note C3 (finger 5).

Measure 8: Treble clef has a quarter rest and a quarter note G4 (finger 2). Bass clef has a whole note C3 (finger 5).

Chords: G7 F7 C7 G7

Measure 9: Treble clef has a quarter note F#4 (finger 4), a quarter note G4 (finger 3), and a quarter note A4 (finger 2). Bass clef has a whole note C3 (finger 5).

Measure 10: Treble clef has a quarter note G4 (finger 1), a quarter note A4 (finger 5), and a quarter note Bb4 (finger 3). Bass clef has a whole note C3 (finger 5).

Measure 11: Treble clef has a quarter note A4 (finger 5), a quarter note Bb4 (finger 2), and a quarter note C5 (finger 1). Bass clef has a whole note C3 (finger 5).

Measure 12: Treble clef has a quarter note Bb4 (finger 4), a quarter note A4 (finger 4), and a quarter note G4 (finger 1). Bass clef has a whole note C3 (finger 5).

Chords: C7 F7 C7

Measure 13: Treble clef has a quarter note G4 (finger 1) and a quarter rest. Bass clef has a whole note C3 (finger 5).

Measure 14: Treble clef has a quarter note A4 (finger 4), a quarter note Bb4 (finger 4), and a quarter note C5 (finger 1). Bass clef has a whole note C3 (finger 5).

Measure 15: Treble clef has a quarter note Bb4 (finger 1), a quarter note A4 (finger 2), and a quarter note G4 (finger 5). Bass clef has a whole note C3 (finger 5).

Measure 16: Treble clef has a quarter note G4 (finger 5), a quarter note A4 (finger 2), and a quarter note Bb4 (finger 1). Bass clef has a whole note C3 (finger 5).

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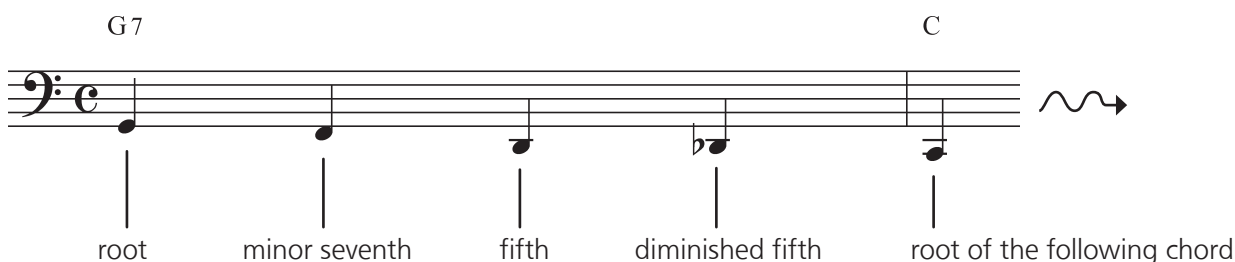
Chapter 7

Typical Bass Lines with Chromatic Passing Notes

If we analyse the walking bass lines from a good bassist in a band, we quickly come to realise that there are bass lines that appear over and over, because they sound so good and have proved themselves successful. It is obvious that we should have a command of these bass lines like a musical vocabulary, so to speak. In chapter 6 we have already learned several possibilities of how we can use chromatic passing notes in a bass line. In this chapter we want to look at more typical bass lines with chromatic passing notes.

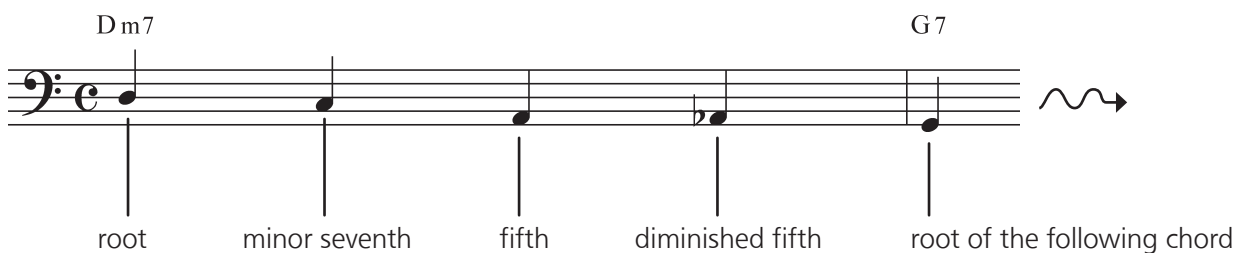
Bass Line 1

The first bass line that we want to learn, has a downward movement and is composed of the root, the minor seventh, the fifth and the diminished fifth of the underlying chords. Let us suppose that we want to play the dominant G7 (V. degree) of the key of C major, then the bass line would look like this:

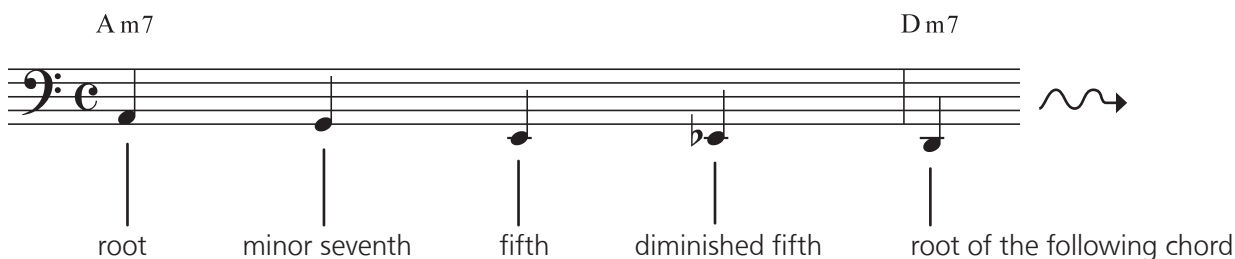


As the illustration shows, the diminished fifth (note "Db") is the chromatic passing note to the root of the following chord (C major). We can play a chord combination from V. and I. degree for bass line 1. We have already made use of this combination in the song "Walking Train" (page 87, bar 24).

Instead of the dominant, we can also play a minor7 chord in bass line 1 with a chord combination from II. and V. degree, then we would have a bass line like this:



And a chord combination from VI. and II. degree in bass line 1 would look like this:



Chapter 9

Walking Bass in Octaves

The individual notes of the bass lines in this method can be played doubled and also in octaves. Let's take, for example, the notes of the major triad with the added sixth:

C major triad with the sixth



If we play each note twice, and then place the second note an octave higher, we get the following bass lines:

notes from C6 repeated



the repeated notes played an octave higher



As you can see from the illustration, instead of the usual quarter-note bass line, we now have an eighth-note bass line. The repeated note is played an octave higher.

This style of playing, with octaves in the bass line, is very popular, but is not easy to play. Therefore we want practice this new style with the help of repeated exercises.

Examples 50a–d correspond to exercises 8a–c from pages 22–23, except that this time the left hand plays a bass line with eight notes and octaves.

In example 51a–d we see the five note sequence of the dominant from chapter 5 (page 59), whereas in example 52a–d we have used chromatic passing notes in the bass line.

All twelve dominants are found in example 53 and can be practiced in a single exercise. The left hand plays one measure with a chromatic passing note and then a bar with a descending scale pattern.



C7

51a

F7

51b

G7

51c

D7

51d