

U-BASS: CONNECTING CHORDS IN A PROGRESSION

Connecting chords in a progression adds movement and interest to an arrangement. One duty of the bass player is to serve as a guide to the listener and bandmates and lead them to the next chord in a progression.

In some songs this can be done constantly, other times sporadically. Think of a parent taking a group of kids on a trip. Some kids are fine on their own, while others need constant guidance to keep them on track. How much you do it depends on the song - the arrangement, the style or genre, or the bandleader. Connecting chords with additional notes can fill empty space, but can also clutter it.

A walking bass line is one that is continuously connecting, mainly on the quarter notes to keep the pulse and groove of the song going. This not just in jazz, but also ska, blues, rock, metal, punk, country, and more.

This is a different aspect of bass playing, and can be done live without hearing a song before, with just the chords. Playing a riff or line is different as that is memorization and execution.

DIFFERENT WAYS TO CONNECT CHORDS

HALF STEP APPROACH FOR PASSING NOTES

Wherever your destination note is, hitting one fret above or below right before you hit that destination note. Like waiting in the nearby cell phone lot of an airport, and you come in right as the plane is about to land.

CHROMATIC APPROACH FOR PASSING NOTES

Similar to the last method, but traveling to your target one fret at a time. You can come from either direction, from above or below your target note. Really easy because you aren't worried about skipping over a certain note, just hit every step on the way there.

DIATONIC APPROACH FOR PASSING NOTES

Travel to your target note using scales, or diatonically. There are several diatonic scales, but we will start with the most recognizable one, the major scale.

NOTE! These approaches can be mixed and matched! Use your creativity and your ear to come up with lines.

SKILLS NEEDED

Skill 1: Know where your notes are. You don't need to memorize the entire fretboard to start, but it'll help to be familiar going up to the 5th fret on each of your strings. No shortcuts here, just memorization!

Skill 2: Being able to look ahead in the song. In order to connect you have to know where you are headed next, so you'll have to be able to pry away from focusing on that spot where everyone else is. This is like driving. You have to be able to focus on the road up ahead to spot and plan for what is coming.

Skill 3: Counting in time. Because you are "leaving" for the next chord before the other players, knowing what beat the group is on is essential. You are basically leaving early and meeting everyone at the next chord. This skill takes time! (Another pun intended)

Skill 4: Basic scales. To an extent you should be able to play a major and minor scale so your lines leading to the next chord is more melodic. (Scales have shapes too, so you won't always have to know the notes!)

U-BASS: FRETBOARD AND C MAJOR SCALE NOTES (REFERENCE GUIDE)

This is the whole fretboard up to the 12th fret. Don't fret (pun intended), you don't need to use it all at once!

				●		●		●			● ●	
G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F	F#	G
D	D# / Eb	E	F	F#	G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D
A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F	F#	G	G# / Ab	A
E	F	F#	G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E

C MAJOR SCALE NOTES

				●		●		●			● ●	
G		A		B	C		D		E	F		G
D		E	F		G		A		B	C		D
A		B	C		D		E	F		G		A
E	F		G		A		B	C		D		E

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U-BASS: CONNECTING CHORDS (REFERENCE GUIDE)

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HALF STEP APPROACHES ON A C OR G NOTE

Diagram illustrating half-step approaches on a C or G note across four strings (G, D, A, E) and frets 1 through 12.

Legend: ● indicates a half-step approach (C to B or G to F), ○ indicates a whole-step approach (C to D or G to A).

Fret	G	D	A	E
1			X	X
2			C	G
3	X	X	X	X
4	C	G		
5	X	X		X
6				C
7		X	X	X
8		C	G	
9	X	X	X	X
10				
11	X	X	X	X
12	G			

MAJOR SCALE APPROACHES ON A C OR G NOTE

NOTE: this is just a major scale, there are other diatonic scales

Diagram illustrating major scale approaches on a C or G note across four strings (G, D, A, E) and frets 1 through 12.

Fret	G	D	A	E
1				F
2	A	E	B	G
3	B	F	C	
4	C	G	D	A
5				
6	D	A	E	B
7			F	C
8		B	G	
9	E	C		D
10	F			
11		D	A	E
12	G			

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U-BASS: CONNECTING CHORDS (EXERCISES)

	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4
4/4	C				G			

When do you leave for the next chord? The later you leave, the fewer stops you can make before you meet the band on the next chord.

In life, if you are meeting your friends in two hours somewhere, you have time to make a few stops. If you're meeting them in 15 minutes, you may only have time for one stop.

NOTE: Later on you'll be able to make the call to meet the band on a related note to the chord that everyone is playing, not just the root.

CONNECT USING BEAT 4								
	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4
4/4	C			LEAVE NOW!	G			LEAVE NOW!

CONNECT USING BEAT 3								
	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4
4/4	C		LEAVE NOW!		G		LEAVE NOW!	

CONNECT USING BEAT 3 AND 4								
	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4
4/4	C		LEAVE NOW!	ON THE WAY!	G		LEAVE NOW!	ON THE WAY!

CONNECT A HAWAIIAN VAMP IN THE KEY OF C								
	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4
4/4	D7	LEAVE NOW!	G7	LEAVE NOW!	C			(LEAVE NOW!)

USING THE "AND" BEATS								
	BEAT 1	&	BEAT 2	&	BEAT 3	&	BEAT 4	&
4/4	C							LEAVE NOW!
	G							LEAVE NOW!

CONNECTING A FOUR CHORD PROGRESSION, ONE CHORD PER BAR

	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4
4/4	C		LEAVE NOW!		Am		LEAVE NOW!	
	F		LEAVE NOW!		G		LEAVE NOW!	

CONNECTING A FOUR CHORD PROGRESSION, USING BEAT 4

	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4
4/4	C			LEAVE NOW!	G			LEAVE NOW!
	Am			LEAVE NOW!	F			LEAVE NOW!

CONNECTING A FOUR CHORD PROGRESSION, ONE CHORD PER BAR

	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4
4/4	C		LEAVE NOW!	ON THE WAY!	Am		LEAVE NOW!	ON THE WAY!
	F		LEAVE NOW!	ON THE WAY!	G		LEAVE NOW!	ON THE WAY!

4 CHORD PROGRESSION, 2 CHORDS PER BAR

	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4
4/4	C	LEAVE NOW!	Am	LEAVE NOW!	F	LEAVE NOW!	G	LEAVE NOW!

THE "I-vi-ii-V" PROGRESSION (the jazz cousin of the 50's progression)

	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4	BEAT 1	BEAT 2	BEAT 3	BEAT 4
4/4	C	LEAVE NOW!	Am	LEAVE NOW!	Dm	LEAVE NOW!	G7	LEAVE NOW!

THE "I-V-vi-IV" PROGRESSION (the quintessential pop progression)

	BEAT 1	&	BEAT 2	&	BEAT 3	&	BEAT 4	&
4/4	C				G			
	Am				F			