

## *Learning is a Process*

A couple of months ago I asked my students to list ten questions they had about playing the bass. I thought that the majority of questions would overlap and I could make a simple top ten list. But guess what? Nobody asked exactly the same question.

What I learned from this random sample of bass players of all ages, levels and styles is that, like snowflakes, no two musicians playing the bass are alike - each one is unique!

Here are a few of their questions:

- Why is there a nut?
- How do I make a solo sound interesting?
- How do I tune by ear?
- What are some common blues turnarounds?
- What does modulation mean?
- What is a triad and how many are there?
- Which bass is easier to play, electric or acoustic?
- What are inversions?
- What is alternate tuning?
- Why are there two dots on fret 12?
- Is learning to read music important?
- How much should I practice each day?
- How do I know what key I'm in?
- How do I overcome nervousness when performing?
- What is a power chord?
- What does enharmonic mean?
- What is a moderately slow shuffle?
- What are flat wound strings?

Now, here's my favorite. How can you play lots of songs on the bass, if there are only four strings? This question reminds us that there are no stupid questions - only stupid answers!

Even though these students didn't ask the same questions, the questions they did ask fell into three broad categories which are sometimes hard to separate. 1) music symbols and signs, 2) the bass, and 3) you the musician. Think of these three categories as: music theory, bass theory, and technique.

Simply stated, **theory** means "to think" and **technique** means "to play." In other words, you play what you think and you think what you've learned.

If playing is the result of learning (from any source, be it a book or a teacher), and learning is the result of questions answered, then how do we learn? The easy answer is: at the "tempo of thought," slowly and carefully transforming understanding into knowledge so that you may begin to practice.

**Practice** is simply the repetition of what you have learned so that you can play at the “tempo of performance.” Said another way, practice makes you faster.

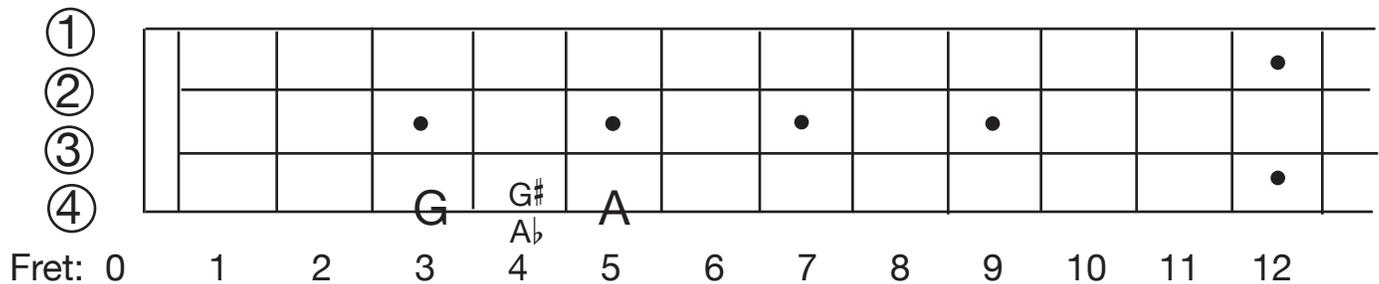
So, what are you going to learn? Basically, you learn three important concepts:

1. What to play: scales, arpeggios and chords, and how to apply them,
2. When to play: rhythm is time, and
3. How to play: techniques, such as slide, hammer-on and slap.

Future lessons will go into much greater detail about the “what, when and how” of music and the bass, but for now let’s answer one of the students questions: What does enharmonic mean?

**Enharmonic** means the same pitch but *not* the same letter or tone number (scale degree). For example, G# sounds the same as Ab, however, in the key of C major, G# is #5, whereas Ab is b6.

Let’s illustrate G#/Ab on string four, the thickest string:



Remember, the letter and scale degree tone number of any pitch is determined by the key you’re in - but this raises other questions and leads to other lessons.

Til next time, I invite all of you to send me your questions - or answers - which in turn will generate even more questions and answers. This is our dialogue. This is the process of learning.

Remember, all frets are created equal - so have some fun beyond the 3rd fret...

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