

Walk with me

In the second part of our series on walking bass, **Mauro Battisti** takes a closer look at chordal movement

IN THE PREVIOUS ARTICLE ON WALKING BASS [*DOUBLE BASSIST NO.18, AUTUMN 2001*] WE INTRODUCED THE THREE MAIN movements of the walking-bass line: chordal, scalar and chromatic. To improvise a good line, it is important first of all to know how to move chordally, using the notes of the triad (root, third and fifth) as strong reference points for the line. The 7th, 9th, 11th and 13th should be used with care due to their dissonant quality. The ear has to be trained so as to perceive the tension and release of the bass line; the dissonances should be surrounded by notes of the triad and played mostly as passing notes or appoggiatura towards the consonant notes. (Obviously, this principle needs to be adjusted according to musical context and your own taste.)

Here are some examples of chordal movement as played by renowned bassists, starting with walking-bass lines that use only the notes of the triad:

Red Callender

C#7 F#7 C-7 F7 Bb7 A7 Ab7 DbΔ D° Eb-7 Ab7 G7(b5)

chord degree 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1

Eddie Gomez

B-7 E7(b9) A-7 D7(b9) GΔ

1 1 5 1 1 1 1 5 1

Paul Chambers

E-7 F7 BbΔ Db7 GbΔ A7 DΔ

3b 1 1 3 1 5 1 3 1 1 1 1 1

In the next two examples, the seventh is added as a passing note for connecting chords:

George Mraz

F7 Bb7 Eb7 Ab7 Db7 Gb7 B7

1 7b 3 1 1 7b 3 1 1 7b 3 1 1 5 3 1

Walter Page

D7 G C7

5 3 1 7b 3 5 1 3 1

Now the 9th, 11th and 13th are added. Note that according to the chordal perspective the notes within the octave are also considered extensions (2 equals 9, 4 equals 11, 6 equals 13). The 13th in major or minor chords is always considered as the sixth.

In the following examples, the ninth is used as an appoggiatura to the root:

Percy Heath

FΔ

1 5 9 1

Eddie Gomez

G-

1 5 9 1

In the next examples, the ninth is used as the fifth of the fifth of the chord (remember the strength of directional intervals):

Ray Brown

Ron Carter

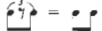
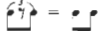
The sixth can also be used as a passing note towards the fifth (Brown); Blanton uses the 13th on the weak beat, surrounded by notes of the triad; and Haden's example shows the typical movement of the dissonant 11th (equals fourth) towards the third:

Ray Brown

Jimmy Blanton

Charlie Haden

Chordal movement that proceeds mostly by skips (vertically) highlights the harmonic function of the walking bass. The choice of extensions (9th, 11th and 13th) varies depending on the chord function, the melodic direction of the line and the musical context.

Let's turn to Charlie Haden's bass line in *For Heaven's Sake* (see p.25). It's a perfect example of a line based almost exclusively on chordal movements. Play through it, possibly with piano accompaniment, concentrating on the pizzicato sound, the regular pulse and the melodic direction. Please note that in this transcription broken triplets are written as , in accordance with common jazz notation: 

Haden maintains the focus on the notes of the triad (in particular root and fifth) by modifying or simplifying the harmonic nuances, even when using altered or extended chords. With simple but effective notes, he supports the soloist and clearly defines the harmonic path.

In Haden's line the chords are connected naturally through the respective roots or through half-step (semitone) and whole-step (tone) intervals. The half-step movement provides the most fluid link between the chords, while the whole-step movement recreates a simple step-by-step scalar movement. Both of these give the walking-bass line a forward drive, as in addition to playing a good solid beat the player has to make the walking bass swing by creating continuous and fluent melodic lines that move forward.

Notes indicated with a cross (for example the third note in the first bar) are ghost notes. These 'muffled' notes, often not essential to the chord, are frequently used in rhythmic embellishments based on triplets that reflect the basic feeling of a swing rhythm:

The rhythmic aspect of the walking bass is unquestionably tied in with the concept of swing. The term 'swing' indicates that particular feeling characteristic of jazz that can to some degree be traced back to a dancing pulse based on triplets:

The way these triplets are perceived determines the rhythmic character and expression of the walking bass. Listening to contrasting jazz styles from different periods will help you develop this feature, as well as a lot of practice.

In the previous article, we started off building a purely chordal walking bass on a B \flat blues harmonic structure using only notes of the triad. The following example shows how to enrich this basic line by adding the other notes of the harmonic pyramid according to

the principles presented so far. The exercise can be played entirely in the first position, except for bar six (see fingering under the staff). **DB**

A quick reference guide to chord symbols and notation

To construct a walking-bass line it is important to have a thorough knowledge of chords and to understand the symbols generally used in jazz. The following chart shows the most important chords and their related symbols. They are organised into five groups or families: major, minor, dominant seventh, half-diminished and diminished.

As there is no universally recognised chord notation, you may come across different symbols for the same type of chord. Here is a quick guide to which symbols equal which: '#' = '+' (for example C7#9 = C7+9); 'b' = '-' (for example C7b5 = C7-5); '-' (in minor chords) = 'min' or 'm' (for example C-6 = Cm6 = Cmin6); '#5' = 'aug' (augmented) = '+' (for example C7#5 = Caug7 = C7+); 'maj' (major) = 'M' = 'Δ' (for example Cmaj7 = CM7 = CΔ7 or simply CΔ); 'dim' (diminished) = 'o' (for example Cdim = C°); half diminished chords are frequently notated with 'ø' (C-7b5 = Cø).

Chords with specific characteristics that fall outside the standard symbol groupings are indicated with 'add', 'no' or 'omit'. For example, 'C add9' indicates a chord formed by a major triad and an added ninth (C E G D). 'C9 omit 3rd' or 'C9 no 3rd' implies a dominant-seventh chord with the ninth, but without the third (C G Bb D). Sometimes note changes appear in brackets: C7(♭9). [Slash chords (for example C-/Bb, B/C, Bb/C), functional harmony and how chords are related to scales will be discussed in the upcoming parts of the series.]

MAJOR CHORDS

	chord degrees	chord in C
C (or C triad)	1 3 5	C E G
C6	1 3 5 6	C E G A
C6/9	1 3 5 6 9	C E G A D
Cmaj7	1 3 5 7	C E G B
Cmaj9	1 3 5 7 9	C E G B D
Cmaj7#11	1 3 5 7 #11	C E G B F#
Cmaj7b5	1 3 #5 7	C E G# B

MINOR CHORDS

	chord degrees	chord in C
C-	1 b3 5	C Eb G
C-6	1 b3 5 6	C Eb G A
C-6/9	1 b3 5 6 9	C Eb G A D
C-7	1 b3 5 b7	C Eb G Bb
C-7#5	1 b3 #5 b7	C Eb G# Bb
C-9	1 b3 5 b7 9	C Eb G Bb D
C-7/4	1 b3 5 b7 11	C Eb G Bb F
C-11	1 b3 5 b7 9 11	C Eb G Bb D F
C-13	1 b3 5 b7 9 11 13	C Eb G Bb D F A
C-maj7	1 b3 5 7	C Eb G B

HALF DIMINISHED CHORDS

	chord degrees	chord in C
C-7b5	1 b3 b5 b7	C Eb Gb Bb
C-7b5#2	1 b3 b5 b7 9	C Eb Gb Bb D
C-11b5	1 b3 b5 b7 (9) 11	C Eb Gb Bb (D) F

(the ninth is frequently omitted)

DOMINANT SEVENTH CHORDS

	chord degrees	chord in C
C7	1 3 5 b7	C E G Bb
C7b5	1 3 b5 b7	C E Gb Bb
C7#5	1 3 #5 b7	C E G# Bb
C7#9	1 3 5 b7 #9	C E G Bb D#
C7#9	1 3 5 b7 #9	C E G Bb D#
C7b9	1 3 5 b7 #11	C E G Bb F#
C9	1 3 5 b7 9	C E G Bb D
C11	1 (3) 5 b7 9 11	C (E) G Bb D F
C13	1 3 5 b7 9 (11) 13	C E G Bb D (F) A
C13#11	1 3 5 b7 9 #11 13	C E G Bb D F# A
C7b5#9	1 3 b5 b7 #9	C E Gb Bb D#
C7#5#9	1 3 #5 b7 #9	C E G# Bb D#
C7b5#9	1 3 b5 b7 #9	C E Gb Bb D#
C7#5#9	1 3 #5 b7 #9	C E G# Bb D#
C7alt	any C7 with both fifth and ninth altered (see four chords above)	
C7/4	1 (3) 5 b7 11	C (E) G Bb F
C7sus4	1 4 5 b7	C F G Bb
C7sus9	1 4 5 b7 9	C F G Bb D

DIMINISHED CHORDS

	chord degrees	chord in C
Cdim	1 b3 b5	C Eb Gb
Cdim7 (or simply Cdim)	1 b3 b5 b7	C Eb Gb Bb

FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE (S. SIMONS-G. MARK)

32 BARS

WALKING BASS BY

A A B A FORM

CHARLIE HADEN

$\text{♩} = 92$

A

1 $Bb-7$ $Eb7$ $A-7$ $D7ALT$ $G\flat$ $C7b9$ $F6$

4 4 0 1 1 0 0 0 0 4 4 0 4 4 0 1 1 0 0

$Bb-7$ $Eb7$ $A-7$ $A\flat 0$ $G-7$ $C7$ $F6$

5 1 1 1 1 0 0 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 2 0 4

A

9 $Bb-7$ $Eb7$ $A-7$ $D7ALT$ $G\flat$ $C7b9$ $F6$

4 1 1 4 0 0 4 4 2 4 2 0 4 0 4 4 0

$Bb-7$ $Eb7$ $A-7$ $A\flat 0$ $G-7$ $C7$ $F6$

13 1 4 0 1 1 0 0 0 0 2 4 2 0 1 4 0 4 0

B

17 $Eb-7$ $A\flat 7$ $D\flat 7$ $B\flat 7\sharp 5$ $Eb-7$ $A\flat 7$ $D\flat 7$ $C7ALT$

4 1 1 1 0 4 4 2 2 0 1 1 1 1 4 4 0 1

$F-6$ $F-\sharp 5$ $F-6$ $F-\sharp 5$ $Bb-7$ $A\flat 7$ $G-7$ $C7$

21 1 0 1 4 4 0 1 1 4 1 1 1 1 0 1 1 0 0 4 4 0

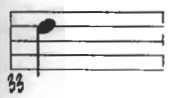
A

25 $Bb-7$ $Eb7$ $A-7$ $D7ALT$ $G\flat$ $C7b9$ $F6$

1 1 1 1 0 0 4 4 2 2 2 2 1 1 0 0

$Bb-7$ $Eb7$ $A-7$ $A\flat 0$ $G-7$ $C7$ $F6$

29 1 1 1 1 0 0 0 2 4 2 0 4 0 4 4 0



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