

Adapting Orchestra Strings to the NXT5 Bass

Chris Berry 2025-02-03

Orchestra bass strings are expensive so I wanted to try a few old ones on my NXT5 before buying a set made for this bass. Orchestra strings come in many varieties so you may want to adapt a set to the NXT bass. I tried the holes in the backplate for mounting orchestra strings, but something in the plate or afterlengths made a ringing sound, like an acoustic reverb! Below are the details of adapting orchestra length strings to the NXT5 bass. The experiment was successful and I am looking forward to further testing. The bass came with a set of very bright sounding strings. The set I wanted to adapt was Helicore mediums (extended E) plus a Spirocore low C (0.132") I had. A couple notes: 1. Measure everything more than once as the shortening of a string is non-reversible, and 2. This is a job for an experienced craftsman with plenty of tools. The procedure has five steps: 1. Clean the strings thoroughly. 2. Cut the tailpiece end of the string. 3. Mount the crimping loop/clamp. 4. Mount and cut the string at the tuner end. 5. Prepare the end of the string for the tuner.

In case you want to adapt a new set of strings, here are some 5th strings that are available as of this writing: Thomastik Spirocore (med.), D'Addario Helicore Hybrid (light), Helicore Orchestra (med.). Pirastro makes these: Evah Pirazzi (weich, med.), Permanent (med.), Flexocor (soft, med., strong), Original Flexocor (med.), Flat Chromsteel med.), Original Flat-Chrome (med.), and Jazzer (med.). Of course, strings made in your country are going to cost less than imported ones.

Step 1: Clean the strings thoroughly.

I used lacquer thinner on a small rag. Clamp the ball end of the string in a vice for easier handling. If the strings have ball ends with holes in them, try the following: Cut off the head of a nail and mount it in a vice. Use the nail to hold the ball end of one or more strings. It may take a lot of rubbing to get the rosin off old strings. A rosin cleaner such as that made by Kolstein may also be used.

Step 2. Cut the tailpiece end of the string.

On the NXT bass the distance from the ball end to the top of the bridge is 3-3/4". Mark the kink in the old string with a felt marker. Measure 3-3/4" from the kink and mark with a felt marker and a piece of masking tape. Cut at 5-3/4" from the kink. Allow another inch if a loop is desired.

Step 3. Mount the crimping loop/clamp.

The crimping loop is the type used for joining stainless (aircraft) cable. The B, E, and A strings will require an 1/8" clamp, the D and G strings need a 3/32" clamp. Place the clamp on the string so that it touches the mark that is 3-3/4" from the kink. Cut off the last inch of the string and put it in the other side of the clamp. Make sure this second piece does not stick out above the clamp. Use a hammer and anvil (or thick piece of metal) to close the clamp firmly on the two pieces of string. I tried making a loop at the bottom, but this did not work well on the lower, very stiff strings.



3.1 Tools for crimping loop/clamp.



3.2 Crimped string end with loop of string, extra piece of string, old ball end.

Step 4. Mount and cut the string at the tuner end.

Mount the string and cut it 5" beyond the centerline of the tuner. I have used my thumb as a ruler for this for years on my electric basses. If I make a "thumbs up" sign it is 5" from the edge of my hand to the middle thumb joint.

Step 5. Prepare the end of the string for the tuner.

The hole in the stock tuner (Gotoh or similar) is about 0.089". In order to get the larger strings to fit, some windings have to be removed. Unwind at least an inch of the top two windings. Up to three inches can come off if you want the string to wrap the way it does on an electric bass. Secure the remaining outer wrap using 3/16" or 1/8" shrink wrap. I heated this with an 80 watt iron my folx used for making stained glass.



5.1 Tuner and number drill to approximate hole.



5.2 Some windings removed from the string at the tuner end. Heat shrink tubing was installed to protect the outer wrap.



5.3 Bridge end of the bass showing the string ends. The serial number of this bass (an early one?) was well hidden so a white sticker was added. There may still be rosin on the strings when they are on the bass. To clean this off put several layers of paper under the strings. Use a rag and solvent as before. Do not let the solvent touch any part of the instrument (!).

If this sounds like too much effort, and it did take me a while to figure this out, just buy and enjoy the D'Addario strings that are made for the instrument. I have only the greatest respect for this company and the people who run it. Hope to see you on the bandstand someday. Best, RCB