

BEYOND CHOPS

JEFF BERLIN



Wake-Up Call

have an idea I don't believe anyone's ever presented before. I suggest to everyone in the bass world that you dedicate one year of your life to learning as much new and different music as possible. I mean, *really* get into it—big time. Pros, amateurs, beginners, advanced players: Grab your basses and practice hard for 12 months. (See below.)

On the whole, we BP columnists are doing you a disservice because we often don't give good advice. Columns on tapping and fretless techniques need to go, because they will never benefit your playing or your career. An article on how to play a fretless

bass is like a booklet on how to steer your car. Trust me—if you steer your car long enough, you'll be able to do it without thinking about it.

It's time for a musical wake-up call. This era in music education is a near disaster. And when I state what are generally functionally correct analyses of the present educational situation, some players react to these statements as if they were personal attacks. Why?

I invite everyone to start thinking clearly—without emotion—to see if what you stand for has validity beyond just your feelings about it. Get into your instruments big time. Read and

listen to new music. Practice. Jam. Study. Research your art form. Relate to the music on the paper in front of you—not just to the bass resting on your thigh. The instrument will do what it's supposed to do once you learn what to tell it.

Regard with great suspicion any school that says it will prepare you for the professional music scene. If this is in its mission statement, then believe me—music is the curriculum's secondary goal. You can't teach music for career reasons, because music isn't industrial in nature.

Okay—so you're taking my advice about seriously practicing hard for one year. What to practice, then? Here's my contribution: a chord-tone exercise I've been using for quite some time. Ex. 1 through Ex. 6 show six chord-tone lines; the first three ascend the neck, starting on the lowest root note on your bass, and the other three descend, starting on the highest note. If you have a 5-string bass, fret that low C and ascend the neck until you reach the highest possible note in the line. If you have a 6-string, go higher before descending.

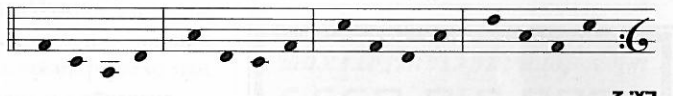
These exercises should be played in 12 keys and with all the chord types listed in Ex. 7. With 12 keys times six lines times 12 chord types, this page gives you 864 ascending and descending chord-tone lines to practice.

Will these exercises make you a much better player? Probably not. One lesson doth not a great player make. One lesson will, however, move you closer to the bull's eye. This is how practicing musicians get better: by small degrees over time. Musicians practically never improve in huge leaps of musical awareness. They grow steadily, the way everything in nature does. Musicians who believe they will improve quickly are setting themselves up for a really big letdown. Practice for the love of it and you will get a reward from this. Just not this weekend.

Jeff Berlin, who was featured in January '98, recently released *Taking Notes on Demon/Savoy*. His e-mail address is playersk@ctnet.com; the Web site for the Players School is at www.playerschool.com.



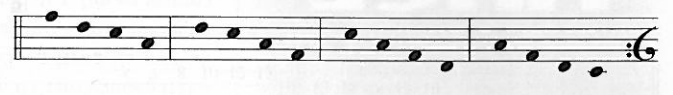
Ex. 1



Ex. 2



Ex. 3



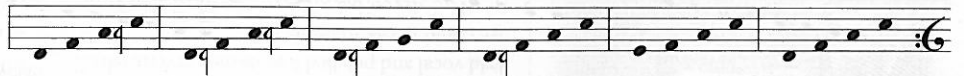
Ex. 4



Ex. 5



Ex. 6



Ex. 7



Ex. 8