

Walk with me

In the fourth part of our series, **Mauro Battisti** turns to the last of the three main movements of walking bass: chromatic movement

CHROMATIC MOVEMENT PROCEEDS BY HALF-STEPS USING NOTES THAT DON'T BELONG TO THE CHORD, OR NON-CHORDAL NOTES. Consonant or chordal notes provide the central pivot of the walking-bass line, establish the melodic and harmonic direction and give support to the soloists, while non-chordal notes create a strong tension in your walking-bass line and therefore have to be handled with care. However, the non-chordal, chromatic movement enriches the line and provides colour, as well as that particular and fascinating 'jazz sound'.

In chromatic movement, non-chordal notes are generally used as passing notes (tension on the weak beat) or as appoggiatura (tension on the strong beat). They move towards the consonant 'target' note and give the line a strong sense of direction (remember that forward motion is important).

Chromatic movement is generally mixed with scalar movement [see *Double Bassist no.20, Spring 2002*]. Non-chordal notes are introduced within scalar fragments, creating a natural alternation between tension and release. The following are some examples of chromaticisms used as passing notes (pn) or appoggiatura (a) within scalar movement:

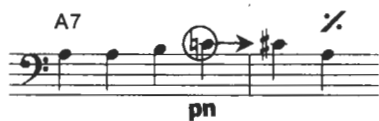
Oscar Pettiford



Ray Drummond

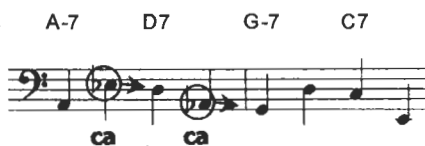


Rufus Reid



Note that the appoggiaturas Ray Drummond uses place emphasis on the weak beats, which shifts the accents of the line. In walking bass it is important not to lose the pulse of the music, so you should use appoggiatura with care.

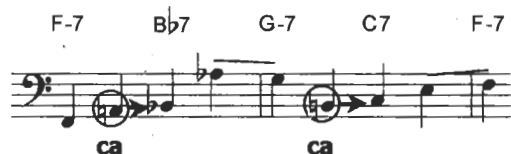
Non-chordal notes are also commonly used for chromatic approaches (ca). Unlike passing notes, which connect one chordal note with the next in a step-wise progression, chromatic approaches jump to a non-chordal note. They are one of the most characteristic and peculiar walking-bass building techniques.¹ Observe how in this extract of a line by Wilbur Ware the tension on the weak beat pushes towards the following consonant note:



¹ It is interesting to see that Beethoven used this chromatic solution in the double bass section of his Egmont overture:



In the next example, Sam Jones connects the roots of each chord by half-step intervals (one of the three main directional intervals) through chordal and non-chordal notes. A natural and B natural are non-chordal notes used as chromatic approaches:



Paul Chambers uses a mixture of passing notes and chromatic approach:



Buster Williams employs a solution called double-chromatic approach, in which two dissonances lead to the target consonant note. The first note (Bb) is the seventh of the chord on the strong beat (appoggiatura) and the second note (B natural) is a non-chordal passing note:



Again, Williams plays a passage with non-chordal passing notes and a double-chromatic approach towards the fifth note of the chord:



Another type of double-chromatic approach with *two* non-chordal notes as upper and lower neighbour tones is shown here:

Ron Carter



The following examples use typical chromatic movement which goes up or down before returning to the starting consonant note:

Sam Jones



Charlie Haden



Let's pause for a few words on the concept of dissonance. Our concept of dissonance and consonance has changed throughout the evolution of music. Despite this, our perception of dissonance in music is still influenced by three primary aspects:

Their position within the measure

A non-chordal note on a weak beat assumes the characteristics of a passing note and can be considered a 'weak dissonance'. The same non-chordal note on a strong beat assumes the characteristics of an appoggiatura (see earlier examples by Drummond and Williams) and can be considered a 'strong dissonance'.

The tempo of the piece

Dissonances occurring in slow pieces tend to be more noticeable because they last longer. In fast pieces, dissonances are less obvious because they occur more fleetingly. Be careful!

The musical context

Generally dissonances are accepted by our ear more naturally in a modern, sophisticated musical context as opposed to a classical, linear one. Creating the right balance between tension and release in different musical contexts requires the ability to listen to the musical dialogue taking place with the other instruments in the ensemble. It also depends on the flow of the music and your own taste. Remember that jazz is instantaneous collective composition, and at its heart is the art of variation. The unpredictability of rhythmic, melodic and harmonic solutions realised simultaneously requires quick thinking and the ability to change the musical path without losing direction.

The transcription of a bass line by Ron Carter on Gershwin's popular composition *But Not for Me* (see p.23), is a good example of a composition which uses all the chromatic movements explained above.

The following is a simple bass line on a B $\flat$ blues structure built with the three main movements explained so far in the series: chordal, scalar and chromatic. Compare it with the examples of triadic, chordal and chordal/scalar techniques that were illustrated in the previous articles and sample the different 'flavours'. The asterisks indicate non-chordal notes. Where the line goes beyond the first position, I have suggested a fingering (under the staff).

B $\flat$ BLUES

Experiment and try to build your own bass line in the same way, taking care to introduce the tensions (non-chordal notes) without losing the rhythmic and melodic direction. Practise as much as you can, preferably with piano accompaniment, and remember: in order to achieve absolute freedom of expression in improvisation, the ear must be well trained. **DB**

BUT NOT FOR ME

(G. GERSHWIN)

WALKING BASS BY

RON CARTER

32 BARS

FORM AB

♩ = 104

F7

Bb7(sus4) Bb7

Eba7

G-7

C7

[A]



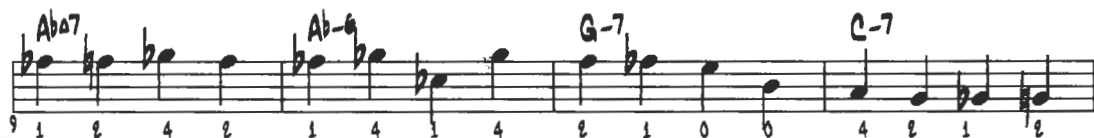
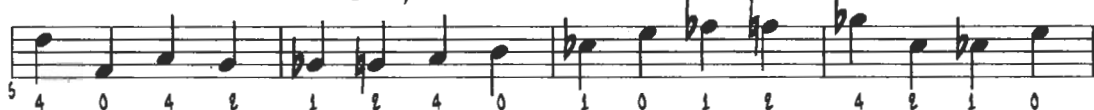
F7

Bb7(sus4) Bb7

Eba7

Bb-7

Eb7



F7

%

F-7

Bb7

Bb



F7

Bb7(sus4) Bb7

Eba7

G-7

C7

[B]



F7

Bb7(sus4) Bb7

Eba7

Bb-7

Eb7



Ab6

Ab-6

Eba7

C7



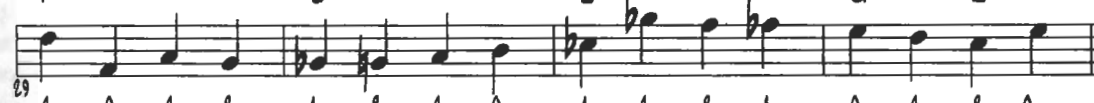
F7

Bb7

Eba7

G-7

C7



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TRANSCRIPTED FROM RED GARLAND'S ALBUM: "CROSSINGS" - GALAXY