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for
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300 bass guitar exercises

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phrasing, and dynamics

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to playing a groove

Patrick Pfeiffer

Professional bassist, composer,
and bass coach



Bass Guitar Exercises

by **Patrick Pfeiffer**
Foreword by Mark Egan

**for
dummies**
A Wiley Brand

Bass Guitar Exercises For Dummies®

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Bass Guitar Exercises For Dummies®

To view this book's Cheat Sheet, simply go to www.dummies.com and search for “Bass Guitar Exercises For Dummies Cheat Sheet” in the Search box.

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Foreword

Patrick Pfeiffer has done it again, and this time he has created a comprehensive and complete bass studies book for all levels of bassists.

Bass Guitar Exercises For Dummies is a masterwork that presents not only what to practice but how to practice and includes an extensive amount of audio examples that you can play along with.

You'll be able to practice scales, arpeggios, progressions, and grooves, all of which are the building blocks of a great bassist.

This book shows you how to incorporate these techniques and exercises into your own playing, and as a result, you'll make better music.

Bass Guitar Exercises For Dummies is an invaluable resource for all bassists and should be in every bassist's library regardless of their level of ability. I wish I had this book 40 years ago!

Thank you, Patrick, for the fine work.

—Mark Egan

Introduction

Lay down the groove with tight, focused notes and an irresistible feel. Flawlessly navigate the turbulent sea of rhythm and harmony. Ride the deep, articulate, sonorous sound waves of your bass guitar — and do it all with confidence, skill, grace, and joy.

What if a book comes along that makes you a better bass player — no matter your present level — and streamlines your practice routine with efficient and effective exercises that cover all musical aspects of bass playing, including a multitude of techniques in all styles of music?

This is that book. *Bass Guitar Exercises For Dummies* bridges knowing and doing, or, in the case of musicians, theory and playing. Sure, it's important to memorize certain rules, like which scales to use with which chords, but it won't do you any good unless you have the scales firmly embedded in your *muscle memory*, with your hands trained to reach automatically for the proper move.

It's also important to develop muscle memory to play arpeggios, rhythms, grooves, and melodies, and to establish the wherewithal to apply them to different styles. You find exercises in this book to help you smooth your shifts, your string crossings, your attack, and your dynamics — exercises that don't sound like exercises at all because they're written as musical pieces. After all, you want to play *music*.

About This Book

The exercises in *Bass Guitar Exercises For Dummies* go far beyond the conventional practicing of scales,

arpeggios, and other etudes. These exercises are *bass-specific*. Playing scales straight up and down may be great for other instruments, but for bass players it doesn't suffice. As a bassist you're also responsible for rhythm and groove; thus, the scales in *Bass Guitar Exercises For Dummies* resolve *harmonically* as well as *rhythmically*. In fact, many of the scale exercises in this book segue straight into grooves that you can use in real songs.

All the exercises are tried and true, truly the best stuff on earth. You can improve your playing literally within days just by doing the exercises. Of course, I don't expect you to play all 227 or so etudes in one day! I group the exercises so that several address each issue, but in slightly different ways. For example, you get to work all four fingers of your fretting hand whether you're practicing permutations or shifting.

Some exercises are short — only a measure or two — and some are quite lengthy, sometimes two pages. I encourage you to transpose each exercise into all keys, even if the exercise is presented in only one. The bass is symmetrical; therefore, your fingering doesn't change, which makes transposing the music an easy task.

At the end of this book you find a list of techniques, including the order in which to practice them. This is definitely not a book you need to read from front to back, in chronological order. In fact, after you read this introduction, I recommend that you skip to the last chapter to see why it's worth practicing the exercises in *Bass Guitar Exercises For Dummies*. There you find examples of exercises applied to famous bass-heavy music, and I assure you, you'll recognize at least some of these songs.

I don't delve into theory very deeply. If you want to know more about a certain scale, groove, or musical style, you may want to look into *Bass Guitar For Dummies*, 2nd Edition (also written by yours truly and published by Wiley). Remember, *Bass Guitar Exercises For Dummies* is an *exercise* book. You get down and dirty and physical. You can listen to each exercise on the accompanying website at www.dummies.com/go/bassguitarexercisesfd (they sound quite cool) as you look at the notation, the tablature, and in some cases the grid. Many of the fingerings and shifts (if applicable) are also indicated. Dive right in — I've got your back.

Conventions Used in This Book

I use a few *For Dummies* conventions in *Bass Guitar Exercises For Dummies* for consistency and to make it easy to follow. To start with, when I refer to the *right hand* I mean your striking hand, and when I refer to the *left hand* I mean your fretting hand. My apologies to southpaws everywhere. Left-handers should translate *right hand* as *left hand* and vice versa (Paul McCartney, are you reading this?).

The fingering numbers are as follows: *1* for the index finger, *2* for the middle finger, *3* for the ring finger, and *4* for the pinkie. The fingering is indicated *above* the notes of the music notation. If you have to move your fretting hand out of position, I indicate this with the word *shift* between the fingering numbers.

Higher and *lower* refer to the pitch, not the physical move. You move from high to low by moving your fretting hand on the neck *away* from the body of the bass and toward the tuning heads. For the striking hand, going

from high to low means going from a thin string to a thicker string. It's all about the pitch (did someone yell "strike"?).

In the exercises, the music is printed with the standard music notation on top and the tablature below. If chords are present (for the songs), they're indicated between the notation and the tab. Sometimes you also find a grid nearby to help you visualize the pattern for your fretting hand.

What You're Not to Read

If you'd like to know *why* you're doing what you're doing in an exercise, then by all means read the accompanying text. If you're familiar with a concept, go straight to the notation. I keep the text to a minimum (even though it's a great outlet for my strange sense of humor). I guess you can say it's on a "need-to-know basses."

Foolish Assumptions

I assume you play bass and are somewhat familiar with the concept of scales and chords. You don't have to be an expert yet — this book is supposed to help you become that — but if you need help with the bass-ics, like tuning your bass or buying one, check out *Bass Guitar For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, which is also a great reference source, in case you have any questions about theory. I also assume you're ready to try some fun new material that'll help you fine-tune your bass-playing skills and make you an all-around better, more fluid bass player.

I don't assume you like every style of music that's represented in this book, but I do assume that your favorite is among them. The exercises are aimed at the

physical aspect of bass playing, so you can gain the proficiency necessary to play in any style.

How This Book Is Organized

I organize the bulk of the book into four distinct aspects of bass playing: scales (modes), arpeggios (chords), rhythm, and groove genres. Most important, this book shows you how to combine all these aspects into your own playing and to use them to make music.

Part 1: Preparing to Practice

This part is all about getting ready to make the most of your precious practice time, from stretching to posture. You also find a little refresher course on the use of bass notation and tablature, as well as exercises to get the juices in your hands flowing for the workout to come.

Part 2: Scales (Modes) and Chords

Part 2 revels in the exciting world of scales and chords — from playing scales straight up and down to combining them with chord arpeggios and even with grooves. You can find some real ear candy in this part.

Part 3: Rhythm and the Groove

This part lays out all the different elements of a bass groove: the groove skeleton, groove apex, and groove tail. I address each element separately and include musical exercises using real grooves. You also find the so-called *master-maker* etudes here — serious exercises that combine triplets with eighth and sixteenth notes.

Part 4: Turning Exercises into Music

In this part you get to turn the exercises into real-life bass grooves. This part is all about using the right rhythm for the right style — from country to metal, from funk to reggae. You can accumulate a good basic

repertoire of genre-specific grooves so that you sound like an expert at your next session.

Part 5: The Part of Tens

This wouldn't be a *For Dummies* book without the Part of Tens. This part gives you the ten essential elements of a complete practice session (along with your very own practice sheet), and you get to see how the exercises in this book are applied in real (and famous) songs. I did tell you that the goal of this book is to get you ready for the big leagues, right?

Part 6: Appendixes

[Appendix A](#) gives an overview of the audio tracks you'll find on the website at

www.dummies.com/go/bassguitarexercisesfd. [Appendix B](#) offers some information for those of you who play extended-range basses, and it gives you a handy worksheet that you can use to keep track of your practices.

The Website

The audio tracks that come with *Bass Guitar Exercises For Dummies* are tracks of me, your author, playing many of the exercises that appear in the book, including some pure performance pieces. Listen to the tracks for examples of how certain exercises should sound. Don't forget that there's room for improvising!

Icons Used in This Book

I don't use many of the typical Dummies icons in this book, but when I do, it's best to pay attention.



TIP

This icon points out expert advice to help you become a better bass player.



REMEMBER

Certain techniques are worth remembering. You may use this information again and again (within and without this book).



TECHNICAL
STUFF

This icon alerts you to technical information that you may have missed or forgotten since you first started practicing bass guitar playing.

Where to Go from Here

Go straight to the last chapter ([Chapter 15](#)), where you can discover how these exercises can be applied to great music. That should give you an incentive to work through some of the other chapters. If I were you, I'd also check out [Chapter 14](#) to explore the different elements of a great practice session.

Other than that, just dip into each chapter to your heart's content. You certainly don't have to read (or play) through this book in a linear progression. If you're working on getting comfortable with scales, go to [Chapter 3](#). If you want to practice your arpeggios as music, check out [Chapter 6](#). If you can't wait to get your hands on some authentic grooves, jump to [Chapter 11](#). And if you're simply in a rough-and-tough workout mood

and want to build up some strength and coordination in your fingers, get it on with [Chapter 2](#).

Whatever you're looking for in a practice routine, I've got you covered. I truly hope that this book enhances your life as a bass player and that you find countless hours of playing pleasure because of it. And when that big gig comes your way, please tell me all about it at my Web site: www.sourkrautmusic.com.

Part 1

Preparing to Practice

IN THIS PART ...

Before you start treating practicing as a chore, check out this part to discover how to make it fun, and above all, rewarding. You may never want to leave home again without having had a thorough practice session. You also get a review of some bass-ic fundamentals and a great selection of preparatory stretches and exercises that will have you blazing up and down the fingerboard in no time.

Chapter 1

Reviewing Practice Fundamentals

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » **Planning your practice routine**
 - » **Positioning your body and your hands**
 - » **Reading notation, tab, and grids**
-

I know you're just as eager to get started as I am to get you going, but before letting you off the leash, I'd like to make sure you get the most out of your practice time — in terms of skill as well as enjoyment.

In this chapter you find tips on how to structure (and *un*-structure) your bass guitar practice sessions. Some material you're probably familiar with, and other material may be brand-new, but all is very useful to your bass-ic well-being.

How to Approach Practicing Your Bass

Imagine it's the beginning of a perfect day. You're well rested and eager to play, and the only thing on your agenda is to practice bass. Alas, a perfect day indeed. You get comfortable in your bass space, tune your bass guitar, and then ... and then you wonder how you should be spending your precious practice time.

A primary reason for writing this book is to give you an arsenal of really useful exercises that are fun to play, sound musical, and above all make you a better bass player, so you never again have to wonder what to practice on one of those perfect days when your bass guitar is calling you.

Dividing your practice time

Organizing the time wisely in your practice sessions is one of the most crucial steps you can take to ensure a consistent, effective, and efficient practice routine. First, you need to choose how much time to allot yourself on any given day, and also how much time you can dedicate on a regular basis (it takes more than one session to create a master). Instead of spending the entire practice session slogging through technical exercises — bass gymnastics if you will — keep in mind that music is *fun*. Make sure you assign a good chunk of time for playing songs or just “noodling”; it’s important.



TIP My suggestion is to divide your practice time into thirds. Dedicate the first third to the physical warm-ups; the second to scales, arpeggios, and other theoretical stuff; and the last third to consolidating the physical and theoretical workout into grooves and songs — or just noodling.

If you’re able to practice for 30 minutes, start by warming up for 10 minutes with string crossing and finger exercises, then run scales and arpeggios for the next 10, and then play some fun stuff to fill out the final 10. If it’s a 15-minute session, your increments are 5 minutes each. If you have exactly 23 minutes, then you

may want to break out a calculator, or just wing it; don't take this suggested schedule *too* seriously.

The importance of noodling

How important is it to do some noodling on your instrument after you practice all those scales and arpeggios? Very. It's like playtime after your puppy's obedience training. You gotta have fun. Besides, you often find that you have the best musical ideas when you're just playing. *Noodling* — playing without any preconceived plan or goal — lets you get in touch with your creativity, a very important asset in a musician.

Simply let your fingers roam and see where they lead you. Don't worry about any of it making theoretical sense. Just discover what certain note combinations sound like, compose your very own groove, copy another groove you enjoy listening to, or even invent a whole new technique for playing bass.

Making a fool of yourself

When you practice, you want to be able to sound bad without passing harsh judgment on yourself. After all, you're practicing to get better; therefore, you practice things you still need to work on, right? So be kind to yourself, keep your mood light and your frustrations at bay, and get ready to play some really foolish stuff. It's fun. How do I know? Take a wild guess.

When you take music too seriously, you can really crimp your joy of playing. It's not that music shouldn't be taken seriously — of course it should, but not all the time. Keep a playful element in your playing.

Exercises for a lifetime

Playing bass is an art that takes constant practice. It's not as if you can quit playing a finger exercise after you

finally master it. Your fingers would get rusty again pretty quickly. Don't you have to keep exercising your body in order to stay fit? That goes for your fingers, too.

Certain exercises in this book are sure to be in your personal practice routine for your entire bass-playing career. Others are exercises that you can revisit on a regular basis but that may not be part of your daily routine. Still others are useful for the occasional deviation from what you usually do, when you're just in the mood to play something different.



REMEMBER None of the exercises in this book is a waste of practice time, but the “lifers” deserve your special attention. When I recommend that you play an exercise regularly, it may be a good idea for you to add it to your permanent practice routine.

Getting into Position

Having a nice, comfortable space to practice in — and even more important, *being* comfortable in that space — needs to be on top of your “bass-desires.” Whether you sit or stand while practicing, you want to position your bass for your ease and comfort, so that your hands have complete access to the notes.

Your posture



TIP

I suggest always wearing a strap with your bass, regardless of whether you're standing or sitting. This ensures that your bass guitar is always in the same position, and you get used to finding your way on it in a consistent manner. You need to be able to reach all the strings with your striking hand (the hand that you strike the strings with, usually the right) and all the frets with your fretting hand (the hand you fret the notes with, usually the left).

Be very careful not to stare at the front of your fingerboard (the part of your bass's neck that holds the frets); your neck and wrists would be strained beyond comfort. Instead, look at the edge of the neck.

Keep your back straight, your shoulders wide, and your arms loose. Don't forget to breathe every once in a while. Whether you sit or stand, your bass should hang from your shoulders and rest firmly against your belly. If you'd like to review proper position and posture in detail, take a look at *Bass Guitar For Dummies*, 2nd Edition (Wiley).

Positioning your hands

Position your striking hand so that you can strike any string with minimal movement of your hand. In fact, I prefer to rest my thumb on a thumb rest or on the pickup. It gives me a great vantage point from which to measure the distance of each string by feel rather than having to look at it. This position is best for fingerstyle technique, which this book focuses on. Of course, if you're really comfortable with pick playing or with slapping, you may want to use that technique to get yourself through these exercises. For more details on

alternate right-hand techniques, you can refer to *Bass Guitar For Dummies*, 2nd Edition.

You want to position your fretting hand to cover one fret per finger without causing any undue stress. By using one finger per fret, you set up your hand to execute by far the most musical figures with minimal (if any) shifting. In case you do have to shift, it's usually by one or two frets in either direction. This four-finger method gives your hand the consistency to play all patterns by feel rather than by vision.

Tackling Notation

Your bass guitar is the perfect instrument — perfectly symmetrical, gentle but authoritative in tone, expertly combining rhythm and harmony, and beautifully stating grooves as well as melodies.

An interesting peculiarity presents itself on bass (and other stringed instruments). Each note written for piano can be played in only one spot. Not so on your bass guitar. The same written note can be played in three or four different spots on your fingerboard. This is why positioning your hand correctly is so important in playing the exercises in this book.

Note names on the neck

Any scale and any arpeggio that you play on bass follows a precise pattern. The pattern never changes (except when using open strings). Only the starting point changes, dictated by the key. For instance, the C major scale feels exactly like the G major scale — both patterns are identical. The only difference is that you start the C major scale on C (at the 3rd fret on the A string) and the G major scale on G (at the 3rd fret on the E string). The following figure gives you a rundown of the names of the

notes on your fingerboard. Note that they repeat at the 12th fret (the double-dot).

