

## Linear Bass Line Construction, Part 2

In most straightahead jazz, the bassist primarily provides walking bass lines—quarter-note lines in which the root of each chord is attacked as each chord changes. The remaining notes connect one chord to another in deference to the harmony. However, to construct lines that are more linear—more scalar and chromatic than chordal—contemporary bassists often land on notes other than the root as the chords change. This makes their lines smoother and gives them more forward momentum.

To achieve this and be faithful to the harmony, chromatics may be used as long as the line begins on a chord tone (preferably the root) and lands on any chord tone (root, 3rd, 5th or 7th) of the subsequent chords. The root, however, should be attacked at crucial points in the chorus, such as the first beat of the first bar of each section, anchoring the form.

Chromatic and scalar lines sound especially hip when it appears that a long linear line fits. To see the difference between arpeggio- and scalar/chromatic-type lines, look at the last four bars of the bridge of Horace Silver's AABA "Sister Sadie," in which the chords are C7, B $\flat$ 7, A7 and A $\flat$ 7. The first two examples represent typical up-and-down lines using arpeggios, landing on the root of each chord; while they work fine and get the job done, they're not the most hip.

The following two examples, on the other hand, are all stepwise, using a combination of scalar and chromatic lines. Note how each line continues in the same direction, the first beat of most of the inner measures starts with a chord tone other than the root and the four-bar phrase starts and ends on the root of its respective chords. Also note that in Example 3, the line ascends while the chord progression descends.

Example 4 sounds especially hip up an octave (no problem for electric players). For a really long linear line, continue by going down the G bebop scale on the G7 chord for the first two bars of the last A of "Sister Sadie." Linear lines also sound great on tunes that have numerous measures with two chords per bar, such as "Giant Steps." Example 6 features the first four bars of this tune with a typical arpeggio/scalar type bass line; Example 7 is a chromatic/scalar example.

To find these lines, you should see the closest chord tone of the next chord. Then, using chromatics or scale tones, proceed to that note. If you get there too soon and need another note to make the line work, use an enclosure, which encloses (a half step above and below) the note you're approaching (as in the E $\flat$  to A- in the 3rd to 4th bar in example 7). An alternative would be to keep the chromatic line from the E $\flat$  moving downward until it lands on the G in the 5th measure, as in Example 8. Although you don't land on a chord tone on the A-, the line works, as the chord is not in a crucial section.

Using an enclosure or keeping the line moving chromatically in the same direction works better than repeating a note, which gives the line a "stutter," temporarily losing its forward momentum. For a long chromatic line that fits this twist-and-turn chord progression, play Example 8 up an octave, then continue descending chromatically for the tune's next four bars as displayed in Example 9. This works well after a soloist has climaxed his last chorus and you transition the vibe, preparing for the next soloist, especially at fast tempos.

Example 10 shows the same technique for constructing an ascending line. Note the use of the upper chromatic approach note, which zigzags the line upward. **DB**

### EXAMPLE 1

C7 B $\flat$ 7 A7 A $\flat$ 7 G7  
R 3 5 6 R 5 3 R R 3 5 b7 R 5 3 R R

### EXAMPLE 2

C7 B $\flat$ 7 A7 A $\flat$ 7 G7  
R 5 3 R R 3 5 b7 R 5 3 R R 3 5 b7 R

### EXAMPLE 3

C7 B $\flat$ 7 A7 A $\flat$ 7 G7  
R 2 ch ch 5 ch ch ch R 2 3 4 5 ch ch ch R

### EXAMPLE 4

C7 B $\flat$ 7 A7 A $\flat$ 7 G7  
R ch ch ch b7 ch ch ch 5 ch ch ch 3 ch 2 R R

### EXAMPLE 5

C7 B $\flat$ 7 A7 A $\flat$ 7 G7  
R ch ch ch b7 ch ch ch 5 ch ch ch 3 ch 2 R R ch b7 6 5 4 3 2 R

### EXAMPLE 6

B D7 G B $\flat$ 7 E $\flat$  A- D7 G  
R 2 R 3 R 2 R 3 R 7 6 5 R b3 R 3 R

### EXAMPLE 7

B D7 G B $\flat$ 7 E $\flat$  A- D7 G  
R ch 5 ch R ch 5 ch R ch enc enc b3 2 5 ch R

### EXAMPLE 8

B D7 G B $\flat$ 7 E $\flat$  A- D7 G  
R ch 5 ch R ch 5 ch R ch ch ch ch ch 5 ch R

### EXAMPLE 9

B D7 G B $\flat$ 7 E $\flat$  A- D7 G B $\flat$ 7 E $\flat$  G $\flat$ 7 B F- B $\flat$ 7 E $\flat$   
R ch 5 ch R ch 5 ch R ch ch ch ch 5 ch R ch 5 ch R ch ch ch ch 5 R R

### EXAMPLE 10

B D7 G B $\flat$ 7 E $\flat$  A- D7 G B $\flat$ 7 E $\flat$  G $\flat$ 7 B F- B $\flat$ 7 E $\flat$   
R uc b7 ch 5 6 5 ch 3 4 5 ch b3 ch R b7 3 2 b7 ch 5 6 5 ch 3 4 5 ch b3 ch R uc R

**Key:** Numbers refer to the scale/chord tone of the chord of the moment; R=root of the chord of the moment; ch=chromatic; enc=enclosure; uc=upper chromatic approach note.



Bassist J.B. Dyas is vice president for education and curriculum development at the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz.