UNLOCKING THE GROOVE!

BASS GUITAR MINI COURSE:

By Joe Hubbard

www.joehubbardbass.com
What exactly is a groove? Succinctly put, the groove is the foundation; it determines the direction, the form and the dynamics of any given song. In the big picture the groove controls everything! While it is important for every musician in a band to be responsible for having a good time feel, it is an absolute given that the bass player and the drummer’s primary objective is to lay down a solid groove; ultimately that’s what you get paid for! Unfortunately, many bass players are so caught up in learning licks, flashy techniques or soloing that they tend to forget – or neglect to even learn - how to sit on a simple idea, build on that simplicity progressively and then make it groove consistently.

One of the basic requirements for “unlocking the groove” is being able to understand the relationship that you - as a bass player - should have with the drummer. You must work together closely with the drummer at all times; teamwork is the essential ingredient here! Sit back for a minute and think of all the great bass and drum rhythm sections:

- Pino Paladino & Steve Jordan
- Anthony Jackson & Steve Gadd
- Nathan East & Harvey Mason
- Me’Shell Ndegeocello & Gene Lake
- Gary Grainger & Dennis Chambers
- Francis Rooco Prestia & Dave Garabaldi
- John Patitucci & Dave Weckl
- Jaco Pastorius & Peter Erskine
- Neal Stubenhaus & John Robinson
- Paul Jackson & Mike Clark
- Jimmy Haslip & Ricky Lawson
- John Paul Jones & John Bonham
- Ron Carter & Tony Williams

Bass and drums form the nucleus of any rhythm section. The communication between the bass player and drummer has got to be tight in order for the groove to be established. This doesn’t necessarily mean that the bass part you come up with has to always lock-in with what the kick drum is playing note-for-note; however, it is important to understand that stylistically there are certain situations that will call for that particular discipline at times. With that said, always just playing what the kick drum is playing is a one dimensional approach and will lock you into playing the same thing over and over again. The problem usually arises when the playing situation you are in calls for you to expand or develop your bass part without forsaking (or completely changing) the groove, time and feel.

The purpose of this Bass Guitar Mini Course will provide YOU with a solution to that problem. The exercises that follow will help you develop your ideas in relation to what the drummer is laying down and essentially “unlock” different possibilities that will allow the music to breath and flow. The ideas presented here will enable you to gain a fresher approach in approaching the most basic, but sometimes one of the most difficult things that you are called upon to do: Unlocking the Groove!
The Section Analysis

In Section 1 I have written out a basic drum groove with various hi-hat and ride options. Make sure that you program these patterns into your computer sequencer or drum machine. The last drum groove that I have written is a displaced pattern, which creates an “interlocking” effect between the bass and drums (advanced concept). Experiment by alternating the various “groove development” bass patterns provided over all of the drum patterns. Make sure that you also practice these exercises with a real drummer.

In Section 2 I have also included some accompaniment ideas for keyboards or guitar to lay down some harmonic support over the bass lines that are written. Again, program these ideas into your music software so that you can isolate certain ideas and repeat those patterns over and over again in the privacy of your own practice room. Be sure to experiment with these different parts by practicing with a small band so that you can start to piecemeal all of the various ideas together.

In Section 3 I have written out ten variations of bass guitar patterns that you can apply over the same drum groove. Carefully follow the progression of how these ideas start by following the kick drum pattern and how they gradually develop into more of a melodic statement. It is of paramount importance to understand why so many bass lines are influenced by the root, octave and fifth of the chord that is being played.

The Chord of Nature

The lowest four notes in the Harmonic Overtone Series are the root, octave, fifth and octave above. Above that is where the third and the seventh lives and further above that houses the upper structure chord tensions. Simply put- you cannot argue with nature:

![Harmonic Overtone Series](image)

The Harmonic Overtone Series is a phenomenon in nature. In fact, the HOS is often referred to as “The Chord of Nature.” Please take note just how powerful an octave bass line is on any given track. Remember to always build your foundation from the bottom-up. If you always start with the most developed idea melodically as a supportive bass line, then you’ll have nowhere to go if the people you are playing with don’t like it. This little detail is often underestimated by many up and coming bass players.

Once you become comfortable with all of the ideas presented, feel free to experiment and expand on these ideas. This is only the tip of the iceberg; it is up to your own creativity to apply these ideas in a variety of musical contexts. There are no limits to how far you can develop your understanding of Unlocking the Groove!

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Performance Notes:

- The first line is the basic kick and snare part. Rhythmically, this is a good place to start when creating your grooves, but as you will see from the bass groove samples that follow, you need to understand how to break free from just accenting what the kick and snare is playing.

- The next four lines are various hi-hat or ride patterns that can be applied over the basic kick and snare groove.

- The last example is using a tactic called “displacement.” Notice how the kick and snare pattern have been “displaced” by a 16th. The snare notes in parentheses are called “ghost notes.” These are played very low in volume compared to the regular snare notes. Remember that playing your bass grooves against this displaced pattern is an advanced concept that should only be tackled once you are comfortable with all of the straight versions.
SECTION 2

Compacting Grooves

Performance Notes:
• The example above consists of two repeated 4-bar patterns. The first pattern is rhythmically accented with long duration chords. The second example is rhythmically accented with short duration attacks.

• In this example, I’ve combined the short accented comping pattern with more “open” and long duration chords for contrast. There are lots of different ways to voice your chords, but notice the difference in the way the chords are voiced in the first line compared to the second line where they are voiced in fourths. The voicing in fourths give an open contemporary fusion sound.
Performance Notes:

- Melodically, this groove is based around a C-7 chord. Notice how I only use the root and octave on the first 3 examples.
- In example 4 I introduce the 3rd and resolve to the 4th, which creates a suspended feel. In the last two beats there is a turnaround using the 7th and the 5th resolving back to the root.
• Study and analyse all the rhythmic variations that build into example 7. By combining several of the approaches we now have a four bar pattern that combines a strong melodic and rhythmic statement.

• Investigate the applications to these concepts by orchestrating these ideas to different sections of a song (i.e. intro, verse, chorus, bridge, solo section, breakdown section, ending, etc.)

• Notice how in example 8 it starts to get rhythmically busy. Often, this is where many bass players start. Let your part breathe and develop. Remember that the space between the notes you play is as important as the notes themselves.

• As you can see in example 10, I’ve only added the busy rhythmic phrase as a 2-bar turnaround at the end of an 8-bar section.
About the Author

Joe Hubbard’s professional background is represented by a collective body of experience that spans over more than three decades as an internationally acclaimed bass guitarist, teacher/clinician and contemporary jazz fusion recording artist.

Aside from recording and touring as a “sideman” backing up stellar and diverse performers including Gary Numan, George Benson, Elkie Brooks, Roger Chapman, Morrissey Mullen, Everything But the Girl and Denny Laine, Joe is also a well-known recording artist where he has written, arranged and co-produced three internationally recognised jazz fusion CDs.

Joe has also been acknowledged by music business insiders as the premier bass guitar teacher in the UK having taught some of the most prestigious bass players in the business including Pino Paladino. He is also a published author having penned one of the best selling bass guitar books ever – Basslines!

As a seasoned veteran with thousands of gigs under his belt, Joe’s mission is to further spread the tentacles of his music – as a bass guitarist, teacher/clinician and recording artist – integrating this legacy with new elements and expressing it creatively into the future!

Here is a sample of the many testimonials Joe has received:

“The Electric Bass virtuoso!” –The Guardian

“Joe Hubbard writes and plays his ass off” –Bass Player Magazine

“Joe Hubbard’s wide knowledge of harmony, composition and improvisational skills plays a vital role in music education in London.” — Jim Mullen

“A fantastic bass player” –Pino Paladino

“One of the jazz scene’s finest bass players” –What’s On in London

“It is the combination of Joe Hubbard’s practical experience as a bass player and teacher that makes his teaching method so highly effective.” –Steve Lewinson (Simply Red)

“Hubbard- the phenomenally adept bassist” –Time Out

“Joe Hubbard provides a quality of teaching that can be trusted implicitly by someone who cares passionately about his instrument and his music.” –Bob Armstrong (Master Class Drum Studios)

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