

Bass-ics and More!

CMEA bay Section Winter Conference - Friday, January 11, 2019

9:30 - 10:50 Student Union Room 2

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Instrument Set Up

Sizing

- The nut should be between the hairline and eyebrows,
- When facing the bass your second knuckle should line up with the bridge
- Wrap your hand around the end of the fingerboard with the endpin in, or short.
- Notes in first position should be easily reached.

<u>Size</u>	<u>Age (approx.)</u>	<u>Additional Notes</u>
1/10	6-8	
1/8	8-10	
1/4	10-12	- 5 feet and under
1/2	12-14	- 5 feet or taller
3/4	15- Adult	- most common size
7/8 - 4/4	Tall Adult	- 4/4 are rare, for very tall adults only

- Too small is better than too big!

What makes a quality bass?

- The height of the strings at the nut should be able to fit a business card
- Average string height at the end of fingerboard:
 - G - 6mm
 - D - 7mm
 - A - 8mm
 - E - 9mm
- Bridge, Adjustable height (wheels) is ideal and should match the curve of the fingerboard
- Stings will sit only halfway in the grooves on the bridge.
- String height and an evenly planed fingerboard will keep the action/string height to a comfortable level. Many school basses may need adjustments.
- Endpin should have cork, should be removable, and have notches, no further than 1 inch apart.

Strings

- Helicore Medium
- Pirastro Flexocor Original

Rosin

- Pops (red container) Most popular
- Carlsson Swedish Bass Rosin
- Kolstein Bass Rosin
- Nyman

Put on too much rosin? - Run an unused toothbrush through the hair a couple times.

Holding the bass

Standing: Pros, more range of motion, versatility in bass positioning, less items to carry.

- Adjust the endpin height: When facing the bass your second knuckle should line up with the bridge the nut should line up with the forehead.
- Weight is distributed evenly between both feet, and knees slightly bent
- Back of upper bout corner should be balanced against the body, bass is should not rest on left thumb or hand

Sitting: Pros, bass is consistently balanced, gravity can be used to your advantage weight of both arms can relax into the strings.

- Both feet should be flat on the floor, or with one foot on the lowest rung of the stool
- Bass is balanced between knees and as parallel to the torso as possible.

Technique

Left Hand

- Curve hand, thumb behind second finger
- There is space between first and second finger
 - Half-steps between finger 1-2 and 2-4, 3rd finger is not used in lower positions
- Bend arm at elbow
- Wrist straight
- Arm and hand are perpendicular to the strings

Vibrato

- Vibrato is wide
- Starts with rocking back and forth from the thumb
- Think about shaking a can

Shifting

- Release weight while shifting
- Exercises like Gary Karr "Vomits"

Thumb Position

- Thumb is placed on the string between the first knuckle and nail
- Elbow remains up, arm does not rest on the shoulder of the bass
- Fingers 1-3 line up under the thumb
- Pinky is not used (except in rare circumstances)
- Finger patterns using whole and half steps should be practiced to help intonation

Right Hand

French Bow - Recommended for beginners in a large heterogeneous class.

- Rest right arm, relax hand next to leg naturally.
- Observe the natural curve of the fingers
- Slightly curve the thumb behind the second finger
- Place bow in hand
- Fingers will naturally drape over the stick near the middle knuckles
- Pinky will fall near the first knuckle
- Second fingers falls and touches the ferrule
- Thumb is curved and rests on it's tip next to the frog

German Bow

- Picture catching or holding a baseball or softball
- Thumb, first and second finger come together as if holding a pencil
- The screw of the bow will rest in the space between the thumb and index finger
- Pinky will rest on the frog, on the ferrule
- Ring Finger might not touch the bow, and should not grab or hook around the bow

Bass in the Music Classroom

Rehearsal techniques

- It is often helpful for the entire ensemble to start teaching a new piece at the "heart" of the selection where all instruments have interesting/ challenging parts rather than at the very beginning. This also helps with teaching all sections the concept of song form and their role throughout the piece and/or how their role changes throughout the piece.
- Rehearse the common melodies together despite where they occur in the piece. For example, violins may start at measure 5, violas at 13, and cello/bass at 29 given they are playing the same basic melody (in harmonic agreement) that is being passed around throughout the song. This also helps provide continuity of style in how those sections are performed.
- In general, don't allow yourself to focus on any one instrument group too long while other sections sit idle. If one section needs a longer period of focus, then a sectional approach to the class may be more productive for all sections. Another approach to focusing on one instrument section is to borrow from our band colleagues and have the other sections mark time on their instruments (like band teachers do with percussionist).

Class configuration

- Don't get caught in the trap of always placing you basses at 3 o'clock (given standard conductor position). Sometimes they can be at 12 or 1 o'clock which may allow them to be a bit closer and more connect to the rest of the ensemble and not along the back corner behind the cellos and violas.
- Again, consider doing sectionals, and sometimes student led!

Jazz & pop considerations

- Don't over rely on pickups/ amplification. The role of the bass in jazz is to "glue" the rhythm to the harmony and over reliance on amplification often results in a lack of the rhythmic feel that the role requires.
- Dory from "Finding Nemo" says, "just keep swimming". Well a jazz bassist job is often to "just keep playing". Of course intonation and correct note choices are not to be disregarded, however the bass provides a feel that cannot be replaced when a jazz bassist makes a mistake and stops. Rhythm is the primary role of a jazz bassist.
- Teach the *blues triangle*. A basic 12 bar blues uses the I, IV, & V chords which create a triangle on the fingerboard. Understanding this navigation allows bassist to experiment with different bass-lines and patterns while having an anchor of where to land.
- Bassist must do their research on songs and not just rely on reading chord charts! Listen to the original version of the song and a variation or two. While you can "get by" by simply reading the changes and adding passing tones, often jazz songs will have a particular phrase that defines the bassline if not the whole piece! This is how jazz purist spot who truly knows a piece versus a novice who's simply reading changes from the "Real Book".

Exercises, books and resources

Exercises

- Finger Twisters
- Shifting (Karr Vomits)

Classical Method Books

- Simandl - New Method for the Double Bass
- Petracchi - Simplified Higher Technique (great for thumb position work!)
- Rabbath New - Technique for Double Bass
- Klaus Trumpf - Bowing Technique for Double Bass Vol 1

Solos

- *Bass Is Best! Vol 1*, Caroline Emery, Rodney Slatford
- *String Festival Solos Vol 1-2* - Applebaum
- *Suzuki Bass School Vol. 1-3*
- *Progressive Repertoire for the Double Bass Vol. 1-3*, George Vance
- *Solos for the Double Bass*, Oscar Zimmerman (Advanced student only)

Online store and Resources

Resources

International Society of Bassist (ISB) - isbworldoffice.com

Talk Bass Forum - TalkBass.com

Jason Heath's Blog - DoublebassBlog.org

Discover Double Bass - DiscoverDoublebass.com

Online Courses from Gary Karr - www.dc-musicschool.com/store/in-the-style-of-gary-karr-vol1/

Stores

Lemur Music - LemurMusic.com

Gollihur Music - GollihurMusic.com

Kolstein's - Kolstein.com

String Emporium - StringEmporium.com

The Vomit Exercise

(The Shifting Drill)

The musical score consists of five staves of music in A major (three sharps: F#, C#, G#) and 4/4 time. The first staff begins with a square symbol above the first note and a 'V' above the second note. The exercise is a shifting drill where each staff contains a sequence of eighth-note pairs, with the starting note of each pair moving up the neck by one half-step from the previous staff. The notes are slurred together. The final note of the fifth staff is a whole note.

Fingering combinations for A major:

1-1	2-1
1-2	2-2
1-4(3)	2-4(3)

For Bb major and above:

1-1	2-1	4-1
1-2	2-2	4-2
1-4(3)	2-4(3)	4-4(3)

Practice this exercise using a tuner or a drone on the tonic note, focusing on intonation and proper shifting technique.

Study one or two fingering patterns per day or practice session. After a week or 2, or once the exercise in this key is comfortable, move up by a half step.

Gary Karr Vomit Exercise - By Lauren Pierce:

<https://discoverdoublebass.com/lesson/the-vomit-exercise-for-double-bass>