

Lesson 15 – Keeping The Bass Going (DVD 4)

In This Lesson: In this lesson we'll learn how to keep the pulse of the music going with what I call "thump bass."

Playing solo – as in by yourself with no accompaniment – poses some interesting challenges for a guitar player.

If you're playing piano, you've got use of 2 hands – all 10 fingers – so keeping everything going isn't so bad.

But on a guitar, we have to keep time (meaning the bass part,) keep the harmony up (meaning chords,) and keep the melody up (meaning the highest single notes.)

If that's not obvious from me writing it... that's tough to do! It's no wonder so many bluesmen sing as well... that way the melody is covered by the voice.

Many of the original delta blues players used a technique that I call "thump bass." I've never heard it called anything else and it's basically where you keep quarter note time with your thumb.

It looks something like this:

Example 46

Notice that's in 4/4 time... if we write it out in 12/8 time we have to use dotted quarters to indicate a group of 3. Remember, a quarter note= two 1/8th notes always.

Example 47

When you get the feel of just doing the bass, we have to add the top part. This requires reading the rhythms in 2 parts.

Quite literally, the notes with stems going up are 1 *voice*, while the bass notes with the stem going down are a different *voice*.

That means that while you're counting, 2 sets of things can be going on. As you can imagine that can get pretty complicated!

Fortunately, you can just remember that the bass notes hit on the downbeats and forget about counting them any more than that. That makes it much easier

Example 48

Example 48 shows a 12/8 time signature. The top staff contains a series of chords with stems pointing up, and the bottom staff contains a bass line with stems pointing down. The bass line consists of a sequence of notes: 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1.

Let's now add in a little more rhythm to the top part...

Example 49

Example 49 shows a 12/8 time signature. The top staff contains a series of chords with stems pointing up, and the bottom staff contains a bass line with stems pointing down. The bass line consists of a sequence of notes: 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1.

And also take a look at what this would look like written in 4/4 time. It actually reads a little easier this way... but if more triplets were added in it could get ugly pretty fast.

Musical notation for a blues guitar exercise in 4/4 time. It features a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth-note triplets. Below the staff are three guitar staves labeled T, A, and B, with fret numbers 0 and 1 indicated for the first two strings.

It's common to use all 3 parts of the triplet groups. Here is what that would look like in 12/8, followed by a 4/4 representation as well.

Example 50

Musical notation for Example 50 in 12/8 time. It features a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 12/8 time signature. The melody consists of eighth-note triplets. Below the staff are three guitar staves labeled T, A, and B, with fret numbers 0 and 1 indicated for the first two strings.

In 4/4

Musical notation for Example 50 in 4/4 time. It features a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth-note triplets, each marked with a '3' above it. Below the staff are three guitar staves labeled T, A, and B, with fret numbers 0 and 1 indicated for the first two strings.