

Bass Fundamentals

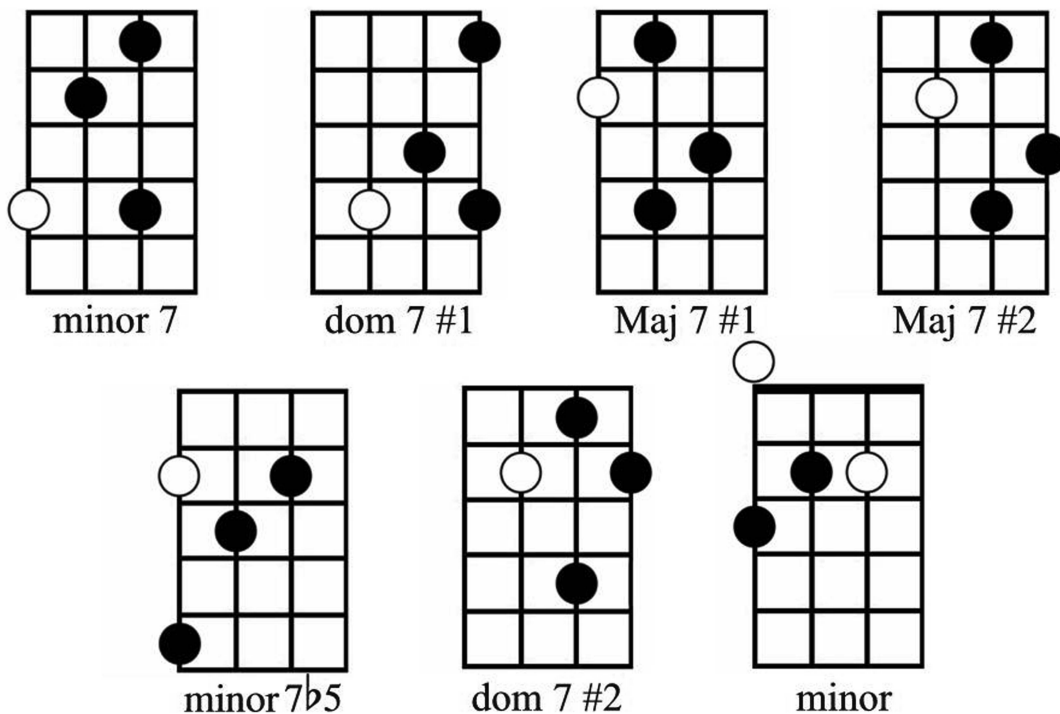
Column #1 – A Little Jazz

Welcome to this edition of Bass Fundamentals. This column is intended for the advancing beginner and early intermediate Bass player. However, more advanced players may benefit from some of the information contained here, if only to confirm correct technique and/or understanding of what they already know.

For this installment, we're going to break down the basic elements of chord usage with the opening bars of **Autumn Leaves** as the example. What you will be exposed to are the foundational chord shapes and patterns every bass player should know.

Autumn Leaves is an old school pop tune, what we now call a Jazz "standard". Standards are included in the repertoire of songs every working musician needs to know. While many of these songs were not considered "Jazz" when they were written, because of their style of composition, they now - by today's definitions - fall into that category.

The first diagram shows you the basic chord forms you need to become familiar with in order to do the second part of this exercise. These forms are played in the most logical common sense fashion, beginning with the first, second or fourth finger at the root (open circles) and following an ascending order in playing the subsequent tones. Fingerings will be basically "one finger - one fret" in approach. Which ever finger you begin with, all the others will play the notes that they tend to hover over. Here they are:



Yes, you're learning **arpeggios**. This is the bass player's staple - more than guitar players. You will need to understand chords as well as or better than guitar players (sadly, not unusual). Practice each chord type individually, moving it up the fret board in all twelve keys. Then move to the next chord and do the exact same thing. This way, you'll be more attuned to each shape and the movement. You can use the metronome at a comfortable tempo of around 72 - 84 bpm, playing each note as quarter notes, one note per beat. If that's too fast, slow it down to where you can play the patterns without too much difficulty. Remember, the open circles are the root tones of each chord type.

What you're dealing with here are chords that all use the **1, 3, 5 and 7** tones, except for the minor chord at the end, which has no **7** tone. And you'll **play each chord using that exact order**, too. For the Major based chords, all tones are perfect. For the minor based chords, the **3** and **7** are flatted. Then on the minor 7 flat 5 chord the **5** tone is also flatted.

Now let's put them into practical use with the A section from **Autumn Leaves**. This is a pretty typical progression, and part of the reason we chose to use this one as our example. Play the chords in the exact order as shown above, one measure per chord (except the **Em**, which plays for two measures). All you need do now is play them with the corresponding root tone as the first note of each chord (repeating the **Em** pattern for the second bar at the end).

Am7 D7 Gmaj7 Cmaj7

5 F#m7b5 B7 Em

Don't worry if this takes longer than you expect. Most things do, right? Just take it nice and slow. You'll get there.

Once you are comfortable playing the progression smooth and even, you can begin to modify the way you play each chord by introducing the idea of **inversions**. An inversion is simply playing a chord with a different note than the root as the first note you play. The first part of this following exercise still uses the root as your first note. It is the second part and beyond where inversions come into play.

Take a look at the following note order exercises. It will seem overwhelming. But remember this: you're not changing anything as far as the shape of the chord types you'll be playing, only the order the notes occur.

#1: 1 – 3 – 5 – 7

#2: 1 – 3 – 7 – 5

#3: 1 – 5 – 7 – 3

#4: 1 – 5 – 3 – 7

#5: 1 – 7 – 5 – 3

#6: 1 – 7 – 3 – 5

#7: 3 – 1 – 5 – 7

#8: 3 – 1 – 7 – 5

#9: 3 – 5 – 1 – 7

#10: 3 – 5 – 7 – 1

#11: 3 – 7 – 1 – 5

#12: 3 – 7 – 5 – 1

You can certainly take this beyond here, to making the **5** and **7** tones the lead off note for each chord. And you should do this because you will find yourself needing this knowledge one day. Better to be well armed than to be stymied by inadequate understanding.

Now, what you want to do, and this will take time, is move from #1, which you've already done, and apply approach #2 to the above progression of **Autumn Leaves**; then #3, and so on, until you're able to play them easily. Then comes the fun part, mix it up. Play the progression and find a nice sounding blend of the different inversions to create a nice flowing part.

You can then go beyond the above list and start to look for other patterns, other ways to play these chords. A better knowledge of your fret board, and the notes all up and down the neck, will go a long way to helping you excel in your progress to learn and become an in demand musician.

You may be tempted to skip the deeper aspects of this lesson, but that would be a mistake. If you really want to be a better bass player, I cannot emphasize enough that the more you know and understand about chords, the better off you'll be. And if you are writing bass parts, this knowledge will help you craft better and more melodic parts that bring something unique to the song. It sure beats the heck out of vamping on root tones all the time!

Just remember that good things take time and good bass players are worth their weight in gold. Great bass players will always have a gig!