

Rufus Reid

Jazz
Bass

Fundamentals



DOUBLE BASS



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About the Course

In this course, Rufus Reid takes us through the fundamentals of what he does as a jazz bassist. He covers the essential skills that give us a great sound, a groove, a walking bass line, and grabbing your audience's attention using dynamics.

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Thank you!

The jazz technique is totally different from playing in an orchestra. The most obvious difference is that the bassist is alone in a jazz ensemble, so we must project a sound that bonds the whole ensemble together.



Open Strings

Using just the first finger of the right hand:

- Place it on the A-string.
- Feel the weight of the arm traveling through the finger and into the string.
- If we pluck using only the finger, we lose out on all the natural projection and volume that the weight of the right arm adds to the equation.
- Next, raise the elbow, then use the lowering motion of the elbow to pull the string (using the finger) from left to right, fully pulling the sound out of the string.
- Try this across all four strings, allowing the first finger to rest on the next string down.
- On the lowest string (E), let the finger fall into the thumb, like a “pinching” motion.
- Now experiment with making this motion larger and smaller to control the dynamic range.
- Keep in mind the placement of Rufus’ right hand; It is very close to the end of the fingerboard, neither higher towards the nut nor too low and close to the bridge.

Left Hand

If the right hand is the sound producer, the left hand is the sound. **To place the left hand:**

- Keep the fingers curving inwards, never hyperextended in the joints.
- The fingers should be arched inwards, like the natural shape of the hand, while resting at your side.
- Keep the fingers close to the string.
- Maintain this structure despite what string you are playing on, whether the top (thinnest) string or the lowest (thickest) string.
- This requires allowing the thumb to adjust across the back of the neck.

Now, try playing a scale:

- F-major, two octaves, is a good scale to start with.
- Don't release the finger from closing the string until you're ready to play the following note.
- Between G and the open A string (second and third notes of the scale), do not lift your left hand off the string until you play the open A string, allowing the note to sustain and the hand to build musculature.

Rufus makes a beautiful comparison of jazz bass lines to the cello suites of J.S. Bach. These suites include very few chords, double stops, or triple stops, yet we hear harmony everywhere. We do that as jazz bassists, outlining the harmony of the structure of the songs that we're playing.



*Bach's Cello Suite No. 5 in C minor (BWV 1011): Sarabande
from the Anna Magdalena manuscript*

Once we understand that structure, we can create our bass lines. Rufus suggests writing down bass lines that flow in this manner, adding rhythm and texture. Most of the time, Rufus outlines this basic harmonic structure to ground the band.

Getting familiar with the piano and understanding how chords are built using a keyboard instrument will help you become a better musician and bassist. Watch Rufus' lesson, "Being Friendly with the Piano," for more info.

F-Blues and the Claw

Rufus plays most of this blues progression in "half position," which is possible to do with barely any shifts. However, it's essential to understand where all the notes on the bass are. A good way to find all your notes is to play a chromatic scale up and down each string of the bass, at least two octaves (turning around near the end of your fingerboard) and be aware of all the notes you are playing.



- Without playing any notes, it's a good idea to try sliding the hand all up and down the fingerboard, so that you can be confident you can reach all over the fingerboard.
- This uses "the claw" shape that Rufus demonstrates by leaning his body weight into his hands against a wall.
- The idea is always to maintain that fundamental strength and inward-curve of the hand joints.
- With all the members of a band, and the bass player usually expected to provide rhythm and harmony throughout the numerous solos they play, we have a daunting task of playing the same progression over and over again.
- Developing the sound so we have a variety of dynamics, articulations, and colors can help maintain interest throughout the repetitions, so that the audience and players remain engaged.
- To develop left-hand strength, Rufus suggests an exercise, hammering the string to the fingerboard using the fingers and hand.

- If you don't have a good sound coming from the right and left hands, the sound coming out of your amplifier is just going to be a bad sound amplified.
- You can do this exercise all over the bass.
- Remember, we don't play like this, but we need this claw shape and strength to help produce a great sound on the bass.

Sound Concept and Bowing

- The bow is an extension of your arm; don't press!
- The bow won't lie to you, and if used correctly, the bass will tell you "when it's happy."
- Use your ears to inform you: Does it sound good? Does it sound open? Does it sound choked and rough?
- The most important rule is "does it sound good?"

***"Once you get this all working, you're on your way.
And of course, the only way is to play every day."***

- Jazz musicians are always thinking how to create.
- On the blues, we could play an hour, without any music at all.

"The blues is a sound. The chord changes is a key to get you in the door."