
Chord Pairing For Bass

Part 1



Learn how to play 'outside' the tonality of a chord

Unlock the secrets of Bebop improvisation

How to use Chord Pairing techniques to improve your bass solos.

*Aimed specifically at **bass players**, this book contains exercises and techniques incorporating the theory based around **chord triad pairing***

Introduction

Aimed specifically at bass players, this book is designed to open up the world of Jazz and bebop solo techniques and ideas to the improvising bassist. There seems to be numerous material out there for piano players, guitarists and horn players, but not so much for the improvising bass player.

Suitable for both electric and upright bass, this book is designed to give you the harmonic tools to be able to not only create interesting solos and bass lines, but to also get a thorough understanding of what the musicians around you are playing, and why.

Playing through the systematic exercises included will enable your ear to become accustomed to hearing extended chords and ultimately to be able to communicate further with other Jazz musicians.

The biggest advantage to using this system is in the way that the brain identifies and interprets. For example if a musician sees a Cmaj7 chord, their improvisation ideas will be based around this given knowledge, that the chord intended contains C, E, G and B, and a C major scale or a C Ionian mode can be used (there are many more modal options to explore in the key of C major, but we'll keep it simple and stick to the Ionian for now!). However, if they see that a D major triad works harmonically as well as the given C major triad, this opens up the world of the D major scale and the associated modes and ideas.

On the subject on Modes, Modes relate to scales by simply reorganising the pitches of a scale so that the focal point of the scale changes. In a similar way, triad pairs change the focal point of a chord, allowing new improvisational ideas to be explored.

As a bass player who wishes to improve their improvisation knowledge, it is very important to have a good knowledge of the piano keyboard. Why? Well, because the piano is a very visual instrument, you can see the shapes of chords, and visualise concepts and ideas. With the bass, we tend to learn in a series of shapes, which makes it easier on one hand to improvise in any key (we just move the shape up or down a a semitone or fret) but more difficult to understand and play 'outside' the scale shapes. The aim of this book is to give another perspective-ie how a piano player approaches improvisation. Hopefully, Improvisation can be taken beyond the limits of traditional walking bass lines and scale shapes.

1. What is a chord pair?

A chord pair is basically two triads (3 note chords) played together to create extended harmony chords.

It is a common technique used by piano players as they have two hands available. Not so easy or obvious for us bass players, which is where this book comes in useful!

I will use the terminology 'Left hand' and 'Right hand' so that we know how these chord pairings are constructed in relation to the piano keyboard. This is very important, as these chords will only work harmonically in this way. The harmony will become compromised if we add any other extensions. Left hand essentially means 'bottom chord', and right hand the 'top chord'.

For example, if we play a **C major** triad with the left hand (C, E, G) and a **B minor** with the right (B, D, F#) we create the essential tones of a **C Major #11** chord.

This would be an elemental way of writing C Major #11 chord:



So, we have the following notes at our disposal:



We can merge these two triads into one to create an interesting walking bass line:



Now, this is just a C major scale with a raised 4th (F#). So next time you see a C major #11, you know you can play a C Major scale with an F# instead of an F natural. Easy!

Using these new found tones, we can also create a flowing improvisation line:



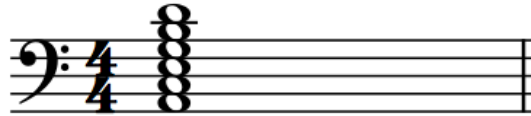
We are not just limited to the C major chord here. In fact Chord pairing can be used for every single type of extended chord out there!

Lets use C Major as the root chord, and create a typical I VI II V7 chord progression consisting of C Major (I) Am7 (VI) Dm7 (II) and G7 (V).

The tune 'Blue Moon' (Rodgers and Hart, 1937) is a good example. An example of how this progression sounds can be found here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21scyhrP_IU

For **Am** (the second chord in our progression), we can pair this with a **Gmaj**. So, an **Am triad** with the left hand (A, C, E) and a **Gmaj** with the right (G, B, D,) giving us a rather more interesting **Am11**:



We can use the A Minor Melodic scale with a flatted 7th-G (or the Dorian mode in G Major)



Have you noticed that the above scale is just a G major but starting on the second degree of the scale (A)?

Remember if you see a minor chord, you can always use the major chord one tone down.

So next time you see an Am chord, you can use the G major scale as well as the the A Minor Melodic.

We can create an interesting sounding walking line:



Or an accomplished sounding solo:

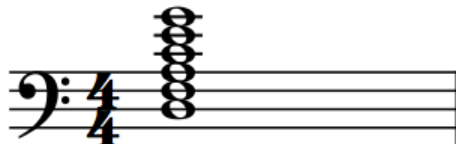


Now, let's try and spice up the boring old Dm7 chord. So a standard way of playing a Dm7 chord would be:



However, we can create a much more interesting and hip sounding Dm11, simply by pairing a **Dm triad in the left hand (D, F, A)** with a **C Major in the right (C, E, G)**.

Exactly the same principle as we have just used with our Am:



We could use a D Melodic Minor scale with a flattened 7th which would be a C Natural (or the Dorian mode in C Major):



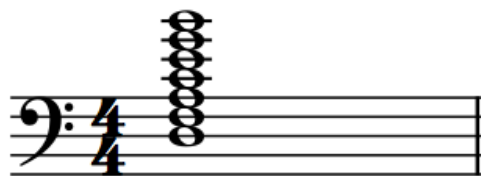
Again, we can use the same principle as with Am:

If you see a minor chord, you can always use the major chord a tone down.

So here we can use a C major scale or of course, the Dm Melodic.

Now, lets add some spice..

We can also pair an **E Minor** in the right hand with the **Dm7** in the left, giving us Dm13 (minor 11th note-E with a major 13th-B) We also have the C in there (m7) so alternatively we could think of it as a **Dm triad** in the left hand with a **Cmaj7** chord in the right.



Again, we can combine these two separate chords to create an interesting walking line:

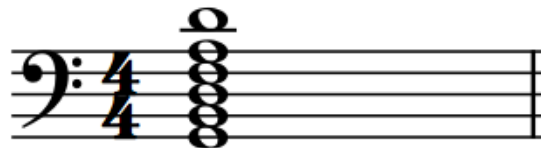


Or more enhanced harmonic solo ideas:



For the last chord in our progression (**G7**) We can use a few different chord pairs.

We'll start with a **G Major triad in the left hand (G, B, D)**, paired with an **F6 triad in the right (F, A, D)** This gives us a 9th extension, making the chord a **G9**.



Essentially, a standard G major scale with a flattened 7th-F (Or a Mixolydian mode) can be played over this chord, no examples necessary as I'm sure a walking bass line over a Dominant 7th chord is a well tried and tested scenario!

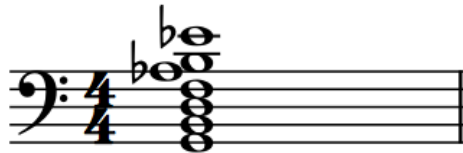
Instead, let's add some of that spice...

A well known and used extension of a Dominant 7th chord is the b9, b13.

A **G7b9b13** contains the following notes: a G major triad, 7th (F) b9 (Ab) and a b13 (Eb).

We can turn these complex and largely unrelated intervals into a simple equation:

A **G7** chord in the left hand (G, B, D, F) and an **Abm** triad with the right (Ab, B, Eb):



If you wanted to take the bass for a walk, you could play this:



Or for an improvised line:



Don't feel bad about mixing the sharp and flats, remember it's all about what patterns your brain associates with which chords. If your brain can disassociate an Ab note (b9 of G7b9) and instead think of it in terms of a G#, then great, the world of improvisation is opening up to you!

As this is fairly advanced harmony, we can feel confident in breaking some rules...

Alter, don't falter!

With Altered Dominant 7th chords there are many options.

There is no golden rule as which one to use in any given situation, it is largely down to the ear of the performer.

The same goes for using suspensions to create tension-it's kind of up to the improviser, however be wary when using 4ths. Many jazz improvisation books advise to avoid the 4th degree of the scale when improvising, as it can create an unwanted harmonic tension.

Just bear in mind that the tension should be resolved down a semitone to the 3rd degree of the scale.

Dominant sevenths are often unaltered when they have tonic function, i.e., the first chord in a blues.

SUMMARY

What is a chord pair?

In this Chapter, we have looked at the basics of chord pairing, and how we can use the theory behind it to construct harmonically rich walking bass lines and great sounding solos.

We have also looked at constructing a I, VI, II, V chord progression in the key of C major.

We have learned that we can improvise over a maj7 chord using the #11, and over a minor 7 chord using an 11.

Practice Goals:

- Practice improvising over the first chord pairing that we looked in this chapter. The Cmaj7#11.

A backing track can be found here:



- Try playing a 4 to the bar walking bass line over a I VI II V progression in C major, using the above examples as a basis. Listen to the tonality of the extensions in relation to the root. Knowing that these extensions are a fundamental part of of harmony and not just wrong notes is key to becoming an active listener and successful improviser.

A practice backing track can be found here:



- Practice improvising in the upper register (ie an octave or 2 two higher up the neck). Try to avoid using the same ideas from your walking lines. Create some new ones!

2. Different Keys

Let's now explore the same progression but in the key of Bb:

- Chord I = **Bbmaj7** (*Bb, D, F, A*)
- VI= **Gm7** (*G, Bb, D, F*)
- II= **Cm7** (*C, Eb, G, Bb*)
- V7= **F7** (*F, A, C, Eb*)

We can use exactly the same principles as in the first chapter.

So if our **left hand is playing a Bb triad**, our **right hand is playing an Am triad**.
A minor triad one semitone down from the root chord. As a Bm triad is one semitone down from C, if we are in Bb, one semitone down is Am. Make sense?

Bbmaj7#11:



Our second chord is Gm7. Using the same principles from Chapter one, we can play a **Gm triad in the left hand**, and an **Fmaj triad with the right**.

So a minor triad a tone down from the root (with the right hand):

Gm11:



Chord II in the key of Bb is Cm. We can create a Cm13 using the same principles as the Gm13-a minor triad a tone down from the root (*with the right hand*)

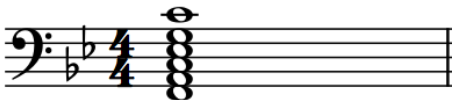
Cm triad with the left hand and a Bbmaj triad with the right:



Cm11:

Our final chord in our Bb I VI II V progression will be an F7, which we will extend to an F9.

We will play an **F triad with the left hand** and an **Eb6 with the right**.

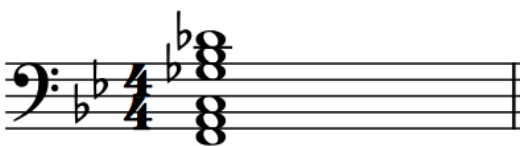


Alternatively, the spicy one...

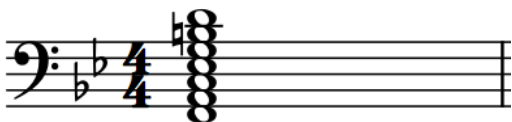
F7 (b9,b13)

Again, exactly the same as the G7 example, just a tone down.

So an **F major triad with the left hand**, and a **Gb minor triad with the right**:



For the F7#11, an **F7 with the left hand**, and a **G major triad with the right**:



And for the **F13(b9)**, an **F7** chord with the left hand and a **D** major triad with the right:



SUMMARY

Different Keys

In this Chapter, we have taken the theory from chapter one and applied the same principles to the key of Bb.

We have learned to identify the chords used in a I VI II V progression in Bb, and some of the extensions that can be used.

Practice Goals:

- Try applying the same principles in both chapters to the Keys of Ab major and E major, using the I VI II V progression.
- Practice the four different types of dominant 7th chords, and get used to the different tonal qualities of each.
- Practice playing the triad arpeggios within the same octave
- Actively listen to *A Love Supreme* by John Coltrane, and try to identify which type of Dominant 7th chords are used, and how he applies each one to the chord that follows.

A link to the album:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ll3CMgiUPuU>

3. SCALES. Just for bass.

Below are the scales talked about in this book, specifically constructed for the 4-string bass. We'll start at the lowest note (not always the root) and incorporate both left and right hand chord pairs into the same register.

In C major:

Bm/Cmaj7
Cmaj9(#11)

A musical staff in bass clef showing a scale. The notes are: C2, C#2, D2, E2, F2, G2, A2, B2, C3, C#3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, C#4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, C#5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6, C#6, D6, E6, F6, G6, A6, B6, C7, C#7, D7, E7, F7, G7, A7, B7, C8, C#8, D8, E8, F8, G8, A8, B8, C9, C#9, D9, E9, F9, G9, A9, B9, C10, C#10, D10, E10, F10, G10, A10, B10, C11, C#11, D11, E11, F11, G11, A11, B11, C12, C#12, D12, E12, F12, G12, A12, B12, C13, C#13, D13, E13, F13, G13, A13, B13, C14, C#14, D14, E14, F14, G14, A14, B14, C15, C#15, D15, E15, F15, G15, A15, B15, C16, C#16, D16, E16, F16, G16, A16, B16, C17, C#17, D17, E17, F17, G17, A17, B17, C18, C#18, D18, E18, F18, G18, A18, B18, C19, C#19, D19, E19, F19, G19, A19, B19, C20, C#20, D20, E20, F20, G20, A20, B20, C21, C#21, D21, E21, F21, G21, A21, B21, C22, C#22, D22, E22, F22, G22, A22, B22, C23, C#23, D23, E23, F23, G23, A23, B23, C24, C#24, D24, E24, F24, G24, A24, B24, C25, C#25, D25, E25, F25, G25, A25, B25, C26, C#26, D26, E26, F26, G26, A26, B26, C27, C#27, D27, E27, 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A/G7
G7(#11)



G13(b9)



In Bb major:

Bb(#11)



Gm11



Cm11



F9



F7(b13)



F7(#11)



F13(b9)



Practice Goals:

- To practice all the above scales with the aim of committing them to memory.
- Transpose the above scales into the Keys of Ab major and E major.
- Have a go at transcribing your own lines. Transcribing is a fantastic way of training your ear to hear the scales we can use Relative Minors: We can also use the relative minor triads: For example C=Am and D=Bm. so we can pair Am in the left hand (A, C, E) and Bm in the right (B, D, F#) This gives us the same tones but in a different order, again opening up for further improvisation investigation!

Further Study:

- Relative Minors: We can also use the relative minor triads: For example C=Am and D=Bm. so we can pair Am in the left hand (A, C, E) and Bm in the right (B, D, F#) This gives us the same tones but in a different order, again opening up for further improvisation investigation!

SUMMARY

I hope that you have found this book a useful guide in beginning to understand Chord Pairs and how they work. The key is to be able to pre-determine which notes and scales we can use before the chord is played.

Hopefully this guide will help you to memorise the extended notes used in each chord in a systematic and structured way and give you the building blocks to start your jazz improvisation journey.

Happy Practicing!