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## Preface

The most important phase of learning a new instrument is the beginning. If you have a room full of one thousand adult people and ask everyone to stand, who at one time took piano lessons or guitar lessons, the vast majority will stand up. Ask those who still play the instrument today to stay standing, and the others to sit down. The number of people who remain standing becomes quite small. If you ask further questions of those people sitting, who no longer play their musical instrument, you will find that most folks never got past the beginner stage.

Many music students are attracted to the bass guitar and initially have success learning to play songs. Playing a simple bass line to a one, two, or three chord song is relatively easy for anyone who listens to music and has a little musical talent. For some players, this is what they aspire to, and they reach that goal quickly. Most of these music students do not continue to learn and grow over time, and their passion for music fades. The bass guitar ends up in the closet.

A lack of learning how to practice good, solid technique on the instrument is a huge deterrent to continued growth as a bass player. When I ask the question, "Why did you stop playing?" the most common reply is, "I got good enough to groove on a few songs I learned, but couldn't go any further."

My goal when writing *Fundamental Technique Electric Bass* was to provide models to copy and a visual approach for learning good technique that could become the foundation on which to build. Because playing the bass is a physical activity, I have found that a picture truly is worth a thousand words. If I can see how it looks, I can copy it.

As a young aspiring bass student, when I could watch another more advanced player, I would go home and emulate his physical postures and motions. When I hit on a sound I had heard produced by the good player, I played my note, or lick over and over, so many times that the physical process became muscle memory. I learned by rote memory. When I heard bass lines that my ear could not grasp and I could not play, I understood that I needed more control over my bass. This led me to begin technique study. I learned that I could never play beyond my technique. Oh yeah, I could just noodle around and pretend it sounded good, but I could feel that I really needed to develop my chops to be able to execute the music I wanted to copy.

As a teacher, I found that preparing students with basic technique before they learned songs would give them a much better chance of jumping the hurdles to come.

## Chapter One - Posture

Our physical approach to the instrument is important. Using good posture in all parts of your body will help you to learn to play, pain free. At first, almost everything is uncomfortable. This is normal.

Holding the bass is the first step. The pictures below show a common placement of the bass. As with all the pictures in this book, try to imitate the posture. As you get used to the feel of your instrument, you will make adjustments that fit your body.

Most players use a strap that traps the majority of the instrument. It is a good idea to wear the bass so that it is at the same position in relationship to your body while standing or sitting. You will see endless pictures of guys on stage wearing their basses very low just to “look cool.” Hey, the show must go on! However, for practicing it is a good idea to have easy access to the entire fingerboard without a dramatic bend in the left wrist.

### Example 1 - Standing



**Example 9 - Posture From The Back**



**Example 10 - Posture From The Back**



**Example 12 - Left Hand, One Finger Per Fret****Example 13 - Left Hand, Fretless Bass, One Finger Per Fret**

Notice how Tom's fingers are placed right on the fret lines, or right behind the lines. With good left hand posture, playing the fretless bass in tune is a piece o' cake.

**Example 17 - Left Hand, Palm Spacing, Side**



**Example 18 - Left Hand, Palm Spacing, Back**



**Example 22** - Left Hand, Fingers Curved

In example 22, you can see how the hand is spread out. The fingers are nicely curved and in perfect position to play the four notes. While the photograph is of a fretted bass, this is the exact position used to play the fretless bass in tune. Good fretless intonation demands perfect posture.

I know, you don't have to play an electric bass using one finger per fret, but why not learn to do so? I have played the double bass all of my life and I only recently used double bass fingering on the electric bass. (see examples 14 & 15) But when I practice the electric bass, I work with one finger per fret shapes.

Most folks, when they first start playing bass, complain that their "fingers are not long enough," and "it's too hard to spread them out and play one finger per fret." With consistent practice this complaint quickly goes away.

There are many techniques that players use with their right hand. This is a basic movement used by most players.

**Example 27** - Right Hand, Second Finger ready to pluck D string.



# STINNETT

# MUSIC

**Example 28** - Right Hand Second Finger after plucking D string resting on A string.





**Example 33 - Right Hand, Curved Fingers**

# MUSIC

Curved fingers in the right hand are also our goal. Avoid playing with straight fingers that are essentially locked at the knuckles. Also, don't let your fingers so curve that they do not fall to rest on the lower string.

Like with the left hand, a smooth curve in your fingers will offer maximum economy of motion and allow you to build good speed when alternating fingers.

## Chapter Four - Scales & Arpeggios

Let's practice some fundamental technique. I like to start by learning to play the major scale. The reason I start here is that we all know the sound of a major scale and can easily hear if we make mistakes. We will use standard music notation. If you can read music, great. If you cannot read music, it's now time to learn.

### C Major Scale

Fingers: 1 2 3 4

1  
C D E F G A B C

**Example 37 - C Major Scale,** Use fingering as indicated in the diagram, one finger per fret.

1

5

9

13

An arpeggio is a chord played one note at a time. Let's learn the seventh chord arpeggios for the major, minor, and dominant scales. The seventh chords consist of scale degrees 1 3 5 7.

## C Major Scale

## C Major 7 Arpeggio

1 3 5 7 1 1 3 5 7 1 7 5 3 1

## Example 49 - C Major 7 Arpeggio

## Example 50 - C Major 7 Arpeggio

The minor and dominant arpeggios are built using the same process as with the major arpeggio. The C minor 7 arpeggio consists of scale degrees 1 3 5 7 of the C minor scale. The C7 arpeggio consists of scale degrees 1 3 5 7 of the C dominant scale.

Work with the audio play-along tracks. We want the ear involved in all of our technique practice.

**Example 60 - Cycle of Fourths, Roots with Rhythm**

1

5

9

**STINNETT**

**Example 61 - Cycle of Fourths, Roots and Fifths**

1

5

9

**MUSIC**