

THE IMPROVISOR'S BASS METHOD

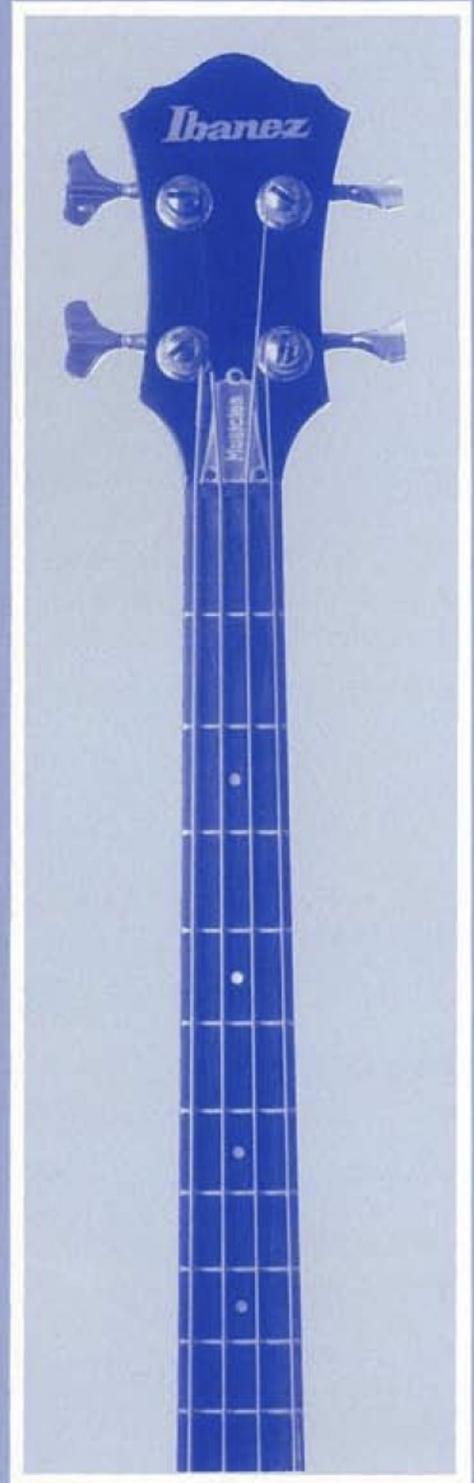
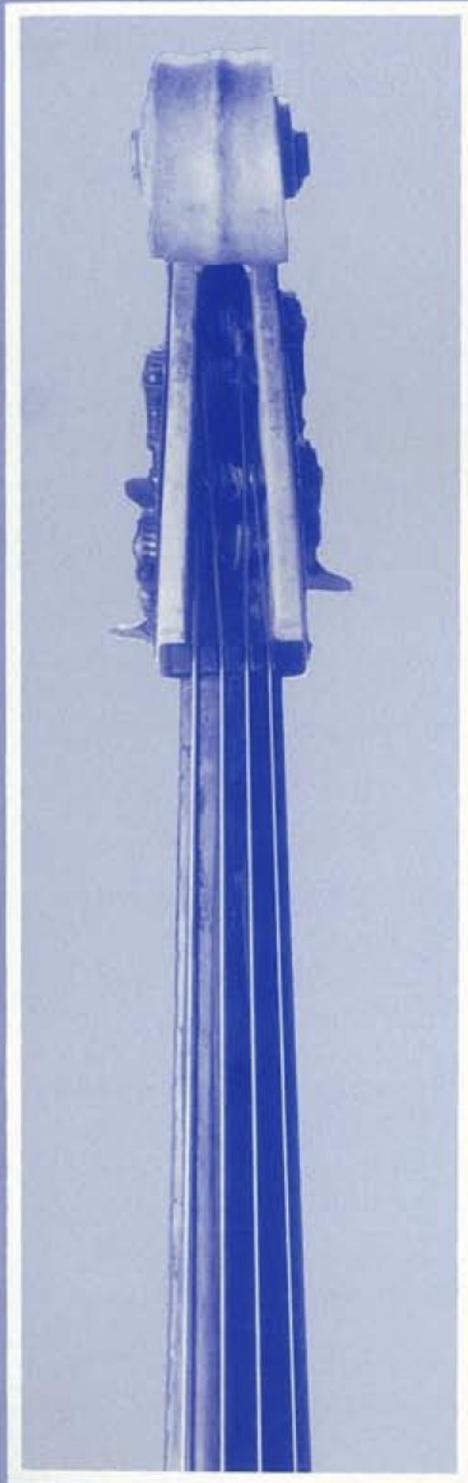
by
CHUCK SHER

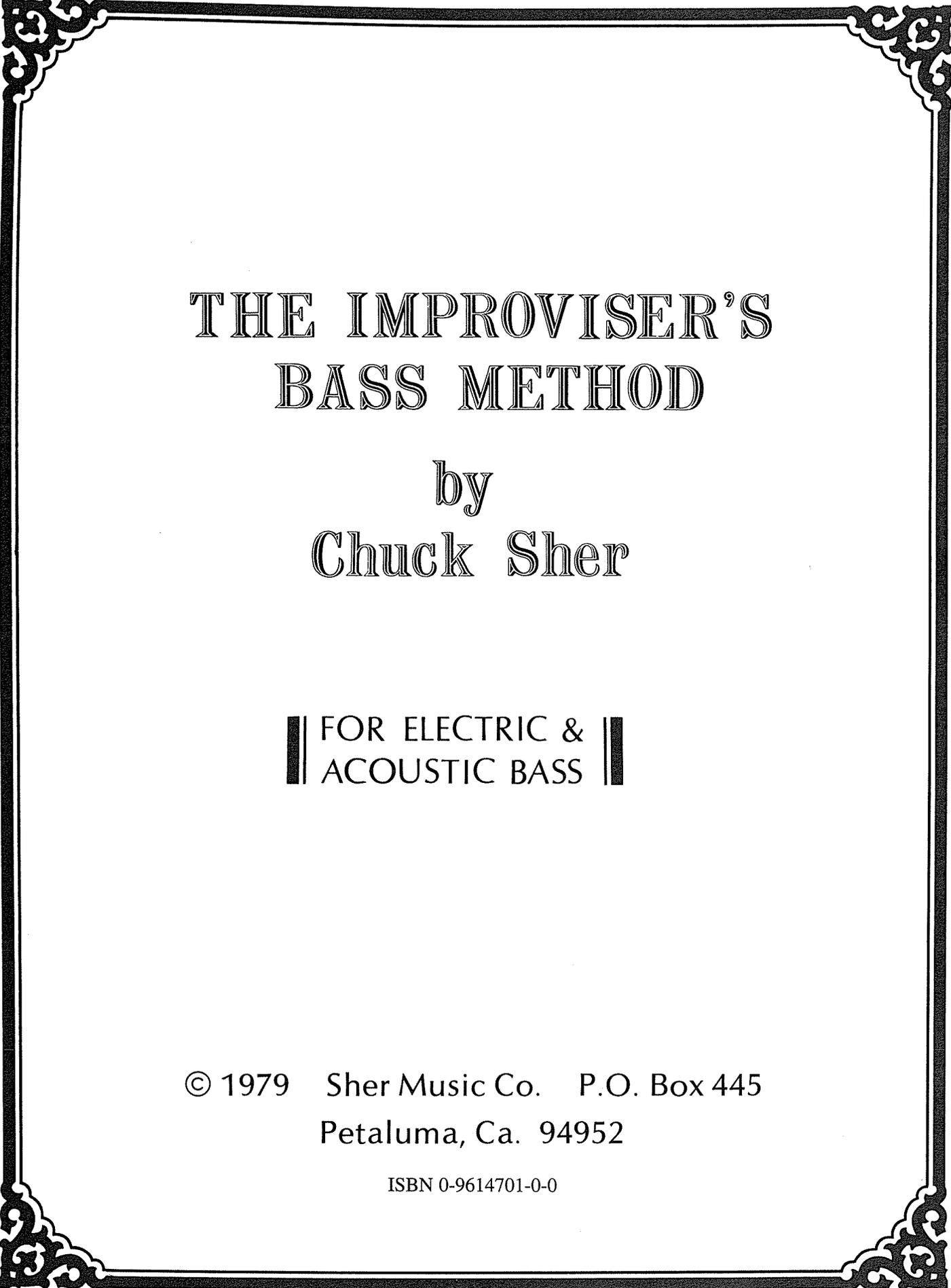
ENDORSED BY:

**EDDIE GOMEZ
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**INCLUDING
TRANSCRIBED
BASS LINES
AND SOLOS BY:**

Charles Mingus
Jaco Pastorius
Eddie Gomez
James Jamerson
Scott LaFaro
Jimmy Garrison
Ron Carter
Ray Brown
Paul Jackson
Paul Chambers
Alphonso Johnson
Richard Davis
"Pops" Popwell
George Mraz
And Others





THE IMPROVISER'S
BASS METHOD

by
Chuck Sher

|| FOR ELECTRIC & ||
|| ACOUSTIC BASS ||

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Petaluma, Ca. 94952

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About The Author

Chuck Sher has been playing bass since 1967. He has been on the road several times with Jon Hendricks (of Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross) and has played in Hendricks' "Evolution of the Blues." He has also worked with many San Francisco musicians over the years including Eddie Sears (pianist with Woody Herman and Tony Williams), Jules Broussard, and recording artists Vince Wallace, Ed Kelly, Jessica Williams, Smiley Winters, and Pee Wee Ellis. He has taught privately and at several Bay Area music schools and has studied briefly with Gary Peacock, Steve Swallow, and Eddie Gomez.

Acknowledgements

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to Barry Commoner and the Citizens' Party. Barry Commoner is a world-renowned environmentalist, author, energy expert, and political activist. The Citizens' Party is a newly-formed, truly democratic alternative to the military-big business-political status quo which is leading us towards unparalleled global disaster. Do yourself and the rest of us on the planet a favor and check them out, while there is still time.

Foreword — HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

EVERYONE:

All the exercises and ideas in this book are designed to improvise on. The longer you spend varying each exercise, the more useful it will become to you, so try to develop each one, whenever possible, in the following ways:

1. Extend the exercise both higher and lower on the bass than the written musical example, so that each idea can be played all over your instrument, ascending and descending.
2. Play each exercise in several keys until transposing it becomes comfortable.
3. Keep the same notes as the musical example (more or less), but change the rhythms used to play them. Try repeating or leaving out notes, as well. By doing this, these exercises will become relevant to different styles of bass playing.
4. Use little pieces of the exercise as the basic theme for improvising some music of your own - either in one key or on the changes of a tune. Try playing along with records and referring back to pieces of the exercise as often as possible. In this way, each exercise will generate licks that you can use immediately.
5. Forget the written musical example and make up lines of your own based on the idea being discussed.

LESS ADVANCED PLAYERS

This book is organized so that each section of each chapter takes one subject and goes from elementary to advanced exercises on it. Less experienced players should use the following procedure instead of reading straight through the book:

1. Go through chapters 1 and 2 as written. If some of the written musical examples (here or anywhere) are too hard, skip them until later, but practice the exercise anyway, using lines of your own.
2. Do only the first exercise or two in each section of chapters 3 through 9. These will give you an overview of the rudiments of bass playing. Look briefly at chapter 12, too.
3. After these have been digested, go back and do another exercise or two in each section of chapters 3-9. Repeat this process until you finish each chapter.
4. Find a qualified bass teacher to help you assimilate the information in this book, since it is presented here in concentrated form. It might also be helpful to use this book in conjunction with more elementary books, in order to give you more practice reading easier musical examples. Acoustic bassists should go through one or more of the traditional bass methods, such as Simandl's, paying special attention to the fingerings.

HAVE FUN

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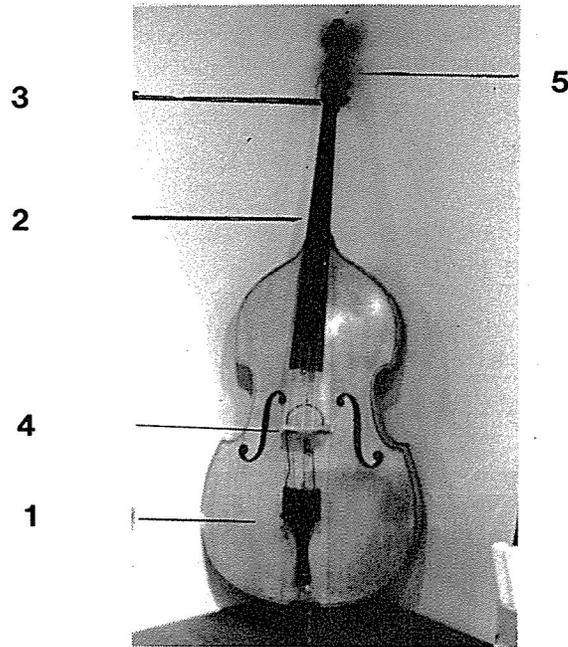
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Chapter 1 – THE PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF PLAYING

THE BASS

The bass itself consists of its body (1), the fingerboard (2), the nut (3), the bridge (4), the tuning mechanism (5), and the four strings which are tuned E A D G from the lowest sounding to the highest.



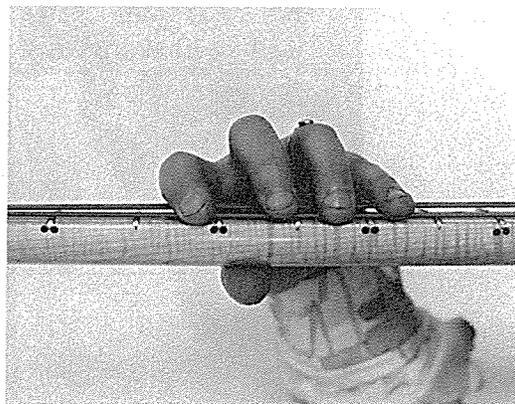
THE STANCE (Acoustic Bass)

The body of the player should be behind the bass enough to bow the E string comfortably. The left armpit should not touch the body of the bass. The left elbow should be up and forward so that the whole arm rotates as you play different strings.

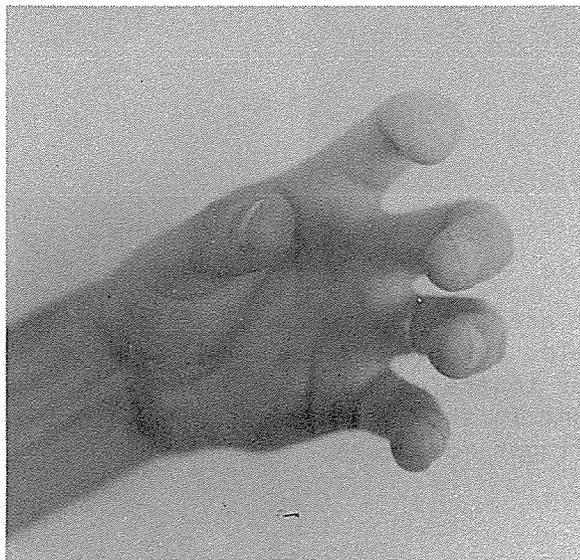


THE LEFT HAND

The left hand's basic posture is a relaxed kind of claw in which the fingers are spread apart from each other and arched so that the fleshy part of the fingertips press the strings down. This arch is much more pronounced on the acoustic bass than on the electric bass. On acoustic bass, this arch is the continuation of an unbroken arch of energy from the spine to the arm, to the palm (where a baseball glove kind of pocket is created), and finally to the fingers. In this way, the strength of all of these muscles contribute to holding the strings down. For beginning players it will take time for this claw to feel natural. As you practice, however, just periodically remind yourself to approximate this position of the hand.



On acoustic bass, the thumb joint should remain unbroken. Most electric players bend the thumb backwards. The thumb should be across from the 2nd finger when playing acoustic bass, and across from the 1st finger when playing electric bass. This position should be maintained as the left hand glides from position to position.



On acoustic bass, after E or Eb is reached on the G string, the thumb starts to come around to the side of the neck as you go up the string. Finally, at approximately the 12th "fret" up from the nut, the thumb comes on top of the fingerboard and its right side at the joint is used to hold the strings down, in addition to the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd fingers. This is called the thumb position. Once in the thumb position, it is useful to extend it lower than the 12th fret, so that unnecessary shifts between the thumb position and the lower positions are avoided.

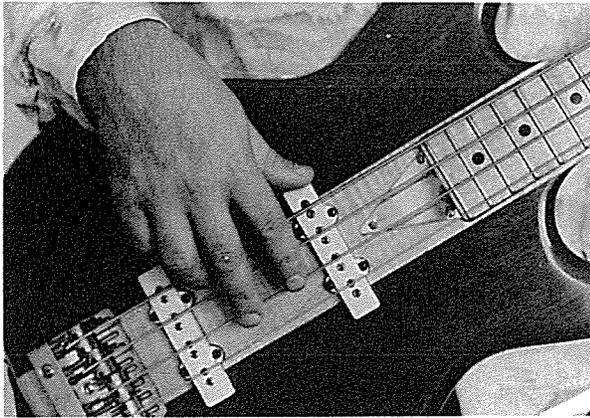
The thumb position should be learned along with the lower positions. It isn't any harder than the others.



In the lower positions, the fingers that are not in use should be kept relaxed and as close to the strings as possible. The pinky should remain above the string so that the fingers are perpendicular to the strings, not angled off. In general, try to eliminate all excess movement in the left hand - its function is only to serve as a platform to support finger movements.

THE RIGHT HAND

The right hand in pizzicato playing on the acoustic bass can be used in one of two ways. The first way alternates the tip of the 1st and 3rd or the 1st and 2nd fingers. The hand is held perpendicular to the strings. The 2nd way has the hand at a 45° angle to the strings and the side of the 1st and 2nd fingers are used. Electric bassists use the perpendicular approach or else use a pick. In any case the direction of force used is half towards you and half down into the fingerboard.



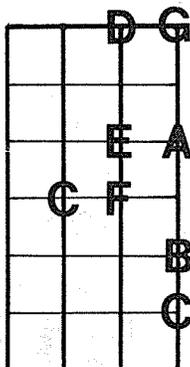
On acoustic bass, the thumb will rest on the side of the fingerboard, near the bottom. Electric basses often have thumb rests, or the E string is used for that purpose. Moving the thumb closer to the bridge gives you more power, while moving it further away gives you more speed and sensitivity. On electric bass, when plucking the strings with the thumb, it should be placed right at the bottom of the fingerboard. Try hitting a string both on the downstroke and the upstroke of the thumb, in addition to using the fingers to give you more rhythmic versatility. On acoustic bass, when using the bow, make sure that it remains perpendicular to the strings at all times and that the right elbow does not bend very much, the right shoulder and wrist being the main sources of motion.

Chapter 2 – BASIC THEORY

PLAYING THE MAJOR SCALE

When two notes are played on a musical instrument, the difference in pitch (higher or lower) is called an interval. In Western music, the smallest interval is the half step, i.e. up or down one fret on a guitar, or each succeeding note (black and white) on a piano. If you go up 12 half steps, you will find a note that sounds the same as the starting note but higher. These two notes are an octave apart and have the same letter name (A,B,C,etc.). The string that the higher note is played on will be vibrating at exactly twice the rate of the lower string. The 12 notes between a starting note and its counterpart up an octave make up the chromatic scale. Out of these 12 notes, 7 are used to create the major scale. Here is a fingerboard chart of one octave of the C major scale on the bass:

Exercise 1 - Play these notes slowly, both up and down the scale.



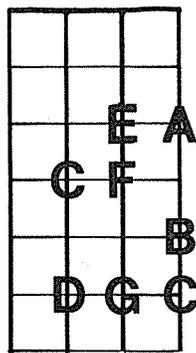
Exercise 2 - Play the scale and sing along with it as you play.

Exercise 3

Here is the C major scale again, only without using the open strings this time. The fingerings given here are from lower to higher notes.

Acoustic Bass Fingerings

C - 1st finger
 D - 4th finger
 E - 1st finger
 F - 1st finger
 G - 4th finger
 A - 1st finger
 B - 2nd finger
 C - 4th finger



Electric Bass Fingerings

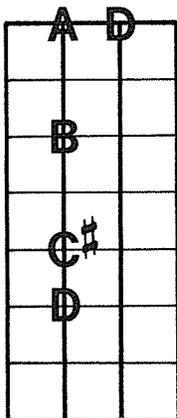
C - 2nd finger
 D - 4th finger
 E - 1st finger
 F - 2nd finger
 G - 4th finger
 A - 1st finger
 B - 3rd finger
 C - 4th finger

(CONT.)

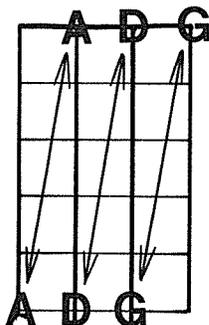
TUNING THE BASS

In order to make sure that your bass is in tune, first tune your open A string to a piano or pitch pipe. Many people find it easier to locate this A if they loosen the string a little, hit the piano note, and then tighten the string right up to match that pitch.

Next, tune your other strings to your open A string in the following way: Find the D on the A string by playing the first 4 notes of the A major scale. The open D string should sound the same as the fourth note of the scale.



By doing this for each pair of strings, they will become tuned to each other.



An even more accurate method of tuning is to compare the harmonics above the note D on the G string and above G on the D string. They should sound the same and this relationship will apply to each pair of adjacent strings.

