

THE LINEAR APPROACH

Guitarists and keyboardists are able to learn harmony on their instruments in a vertical fashion. They are uniformly required to play chords (several notes at a time). This approach to harmony on the bass guitar neck takes into account the role of the bass in almost all situations. Bass players are seldom asked to play more than one note at a time. This means that a different horizontal approach to learning harmony is necessary. Instead of playing all the notes of a particular chord at once, a bassist must imply the sound of a chord one note at a time in a horizontal or linear fashion. In almost every style of music you are required at some point to play a line. Sometimes it's in the middle of a groove or a fill, sometimes it's walking through a tune, and when you're soloing, it's almost completely linear. Creating these lines means making an informed decision about which note gets played on which beat. Just settling for the correct scale or arpeggio rarely gets the job done. The end result can sound fairly academic.

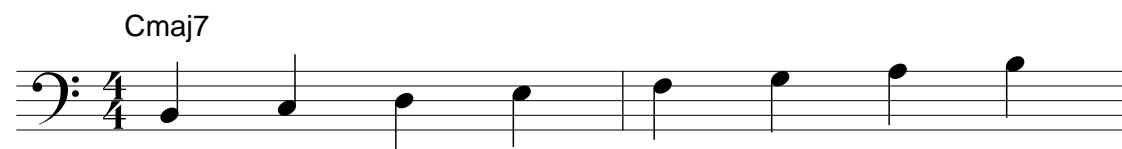
Listen to the MP3 to hear how the C major scale works with Cmaj7.

◀ [AUDIO-lin01.mp3](#)



The next example shows what happens when you don't start with the root of the chord.

◀ [AUDIO-lin02.mp3](#)



Scales work only when you begin with the root and ascend. Arpeggios work a little better, but both approaches result in lines that are neither connected nor very smooth.

The first thing to understand about the construction of lines is there are strong beats and weak beats that the ear considers before it is satisfied that the harmony is successfully being played.

◀ [AUDIO-lin03.mp3](#)

Let's see how the strong beats work. Try playing some random notes along with the CD. Track 7 will have a pair of two-bar Cm7 examples. In the first one you'll hear chord tones of Cm7 (C, Eb, and G) on the strong beats 1 and 3. Play any note you want on the weak beats 2 and 4. In the second two-bar example you'll hear those same chord tones on 2 and 4. Play any note you want on the strong beats 1 and 3. You should notice that no matter what you play in the first two bars you can still get a sense of the Cm7 sound while the second two bars sound much less like Cm7.

The important thing to remember is that with a quarter note pulse the ear needs to hear harmony notes on 1 and 3 and it puts a lot less emphasis on what's played on 2 and 4. The further we get into this process the more we'll effectively learn to use the notes on beats 2 and 4 to reinforce what the ear hears on 1 and 3.

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The kinds of chords we'll initially be studying are seventh chords in a major key. There are four qualities of seventh chords in a major key:

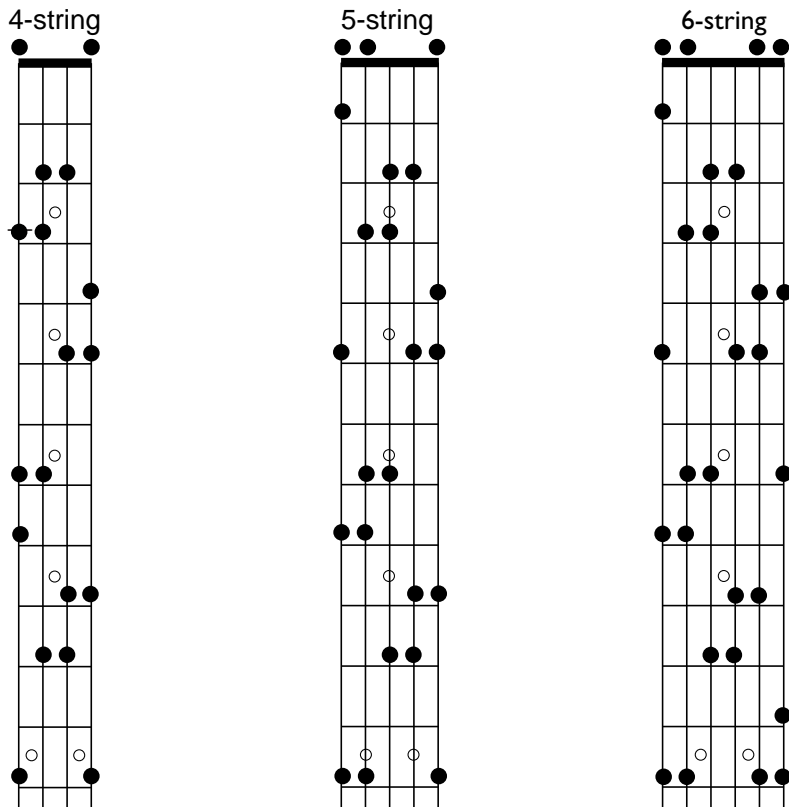
- major seven (maj7)
- minor seven (m7)
- dominant seven (7)
- half-diminished seven ($\flat 7$ or minor seven flat five: m7 $\flat 5$)

To study major diatonic harmony we only need to study the first three (maj7, m7, 7). The half diminished (m7 $\flat 5$) is almost always found a minor key. We'll get to minor keys later on.

In order to organize a line correctly, we need to know the location of these chord tones on the neck. The notes of any chord on the neck are actually quite close together. Since seventh chords are built in thirds, the largest distance from one note of a chord to the next is a major third. Once you get to the seventh, you're only a half step or a whole step from the next root. In fact, the largest distance you can get from any adjacent chord tone is a whole step.

In the fingerboard diagram below, randomly imagine any pitch that comes to mind and its location on the neck (for instance: F#, A string, ninth fret). Check on the diagram for its distance to the nearest chord tone. If it's not already a chord tone, you'll find that it's no greater than a whole step from a chord tone.

Cmaj7 ARPEGGIOS



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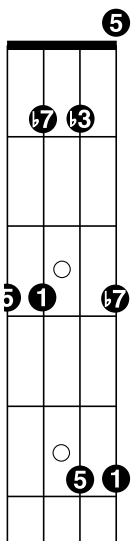
By using chord tones on beats 1 and 3, their proximity on the fingerboard allows us to reinforce the harmony with lines that are made up of only half steps and whole steps. This half-step/whole-step process prevents the common symptom of "jumping around" that creeps into everyone's lines at first and also helps to keep lines from strictly sounding like "scales and arpeggios."

Most of the exercises in this book involve quarter notes and eighth notes. The reason for using quarter and eighth notes is that we're not studying rhythm. The way to avoid studying rhythm is to make the duration of all the notes the same. Once you're comfortable with this process, you'll be able to apply it to anything from half notes to sixteenths.

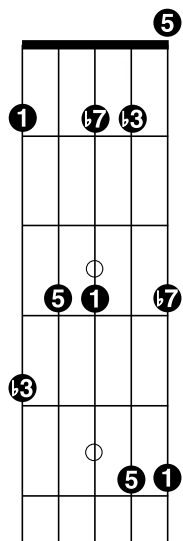
The best way to learn about the available note choices is to isolate each chord in the area of the neck that we're working on. We'll begin the next few exercises by isolating each chord in the first five frets.

Cm7-F7

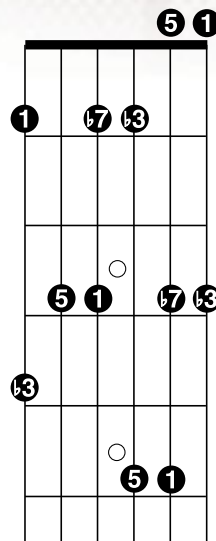
To help you memorize the shape of each chord in this part of the neck, use one of the patterns given here for your 4-, 5-, or 6-string bass.



4-string



5-string



6-string

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4-string

◀ [AUDIO-lin04.mp3](#)

Cm7

5-string

◀ [AUDIO-lin05.mp3](#)

Cm7

6-string

◀ [AUDIO-lin06.mp3](#)

Cm7

Once you're able to play up to the tempo of the audio clip, move on to F7.

F7

4-string

5-string

6-string

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4-string

◀ [AUDIO-lin07.mp3](#)

F7 play 4 times

Musical notation for 4-string bass line, F7 chord, 3/4 time signature, 4 measures. The notes are: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5.

5-string

◀ [AUDIO-lin08.mp3](#)

F7 play 4 times

Musical notation for 5-string bass line, F7 chord, 3/4 time signature, 4 measures. The notes are: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5.

6-string

◀ [AUDIO-lin09.mp3](#)

F7 play 4 times

Musical notation for 6-string bass line, F7 chord, 3/4 time signature, 4 measures. The notes are: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Triplets are indicated over the first and last notes of the first and third measures.

Here's a pattern that combines Cm7 and F7.

4-string

◀ [AUDIO-lin10.mp3](#)

Cm7 F7 play 4 times

Musical notation for 4-string bass line, Cm7 and F7 chords, 3/4 time signature, 4 measures. The notes are: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The first two measures are Cm7 and the last two are F7.

5-string

◀ [AUDIO-lin11.mp3](#)

Cm7 F7 play 4 times

Musical notation for 5-string bass line, Cm7 and F7 chords, 3/4 time signature, 4 measures. The notes are: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The first two measures are Cm7 and the last two are F7.

6-string

◀ [AUDIO-lin12.mp3](#)

Cm7 F7 play 4 times

Musical notation for 6-string bass line, Cm7 and F7 chords, 3/4 time signature, 4 measures. The notes are: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Triplets are indicated over the first and last notes of the first and third measures. The first two measures are Cm7 and the last two are F7.

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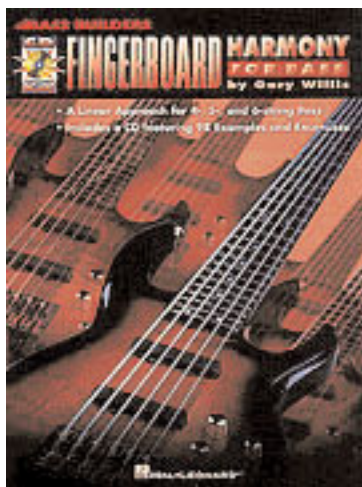
As soon as you're comfortable with these patterns, you're ready for the first exercise. Play four notes of Cm7 then four notes from F7. As soon as the chord changes, play the nearest chord tone of the next chord in the direction you're going. Keep your line moving in the same direction until you run out of room (first five frets). If this exercise gives you trouble refer to the previous patterns. As the chords change, the neck should have a different "look." Listen to the audio clip for a sample of the first four measures.

◀ [AUDIO-lin13.mp3](#)

Cm7 F7 Cm7 F7

..continue Cm7-F7

As you start to get comfortable with this exercise you can see how important it is to be able to visualize all the available chord tones across the neck.



This lesson is from:
Fingerboard Harmony for Bass
by Gary Willis.

A comprehensive source for learning the theory and geometry of the bass fingerboard by one of today's leading players and instructors.

Audio features Gary Willis demonstrating 99 examples and exercises.

Inventory # HL 695043. **Book/CD pack \$17.95 (US).**