



# BASS

## Time is on our Side! (Learn / Try something new)

by Tom Pieper

I hope all of you are spending time with family, and using this time to learn and discover as much music as possible. Obviously, life has changed since the COVID pandemic appeared early last year resulting in shutdowns, millions infected, and many devastating deaths. Music can be a useful distraction for both creators of and listeners to. Composers and musicians create music for themselves, and larger audience. In these times we feel isolated, but eventually, we will connect with other musicians and an audience. I like these two quotes from bassist Dave Holland about music and jazz:

“I think music needs to be of its time and speak to that time.”

“Jazz has such great feeling and emotional content it really doesn't require technical understanding.”

I remember a moment last spring when things seemed discouraging for playing music when I saw a post from guitarist John McLaughlin. If you have not heard of him before, he was the leader of the Mahavishnu Orchestra, and was well-known for his guitar playing and the Jazz Fusion Movement. In the middle 2020, he demonstrates how much grace and kindness one can send out to the world as he shares his presence and a new piece of music. Certainly, he plays with great feeling and emotional content to reflect the time we are living in, using music to speak to our losses. Here is one link to watch and listen to, another will come at the end.

### John McLaughlin: *Echoes from Then* (The Stay at Home Sessions)

[https://fb.watch/25r-U\\_LRa9/](https://fb.watch/25r-U_LRa9/)

Who could have predicted all the twists of these last 9 months or how this next year will turn out. J.M is inciteful with his simple comments. Practice; we need you. This, for a musician is perhaps the best use of our time during isolation. Musicians like Charlie Parker, Glenn Gould, John Coltrane and Sonny Rollins among others have always known about practice in isolation. Follow their examples, and if needed, decide to do so. Practice will prepare you to be ready to perform when an opportunity is presented. Practice always takes different forms in a normal year, but during a pandemic—the lid is off the box. Practice can be playing scales, learning about harmony, improvising, composing, actively listening and analyzing, listening for fun, playing with a group, singing solfege, and probably some others you can imagine.

Why do we resist practicing? Yes, many parts of practice are repetitive, mind-numbingly so, and frustrating; however on other days, you might lose all track of time during your practice. Practice on these days may be transformative. Practice itself is a practice—you will learn to improve at it, and find out for yourself what you need/want to work on. I believe practice encourages spontaneity by natural selection by limiting notes that make you cringe. You will find what works, and what you need to let go of. Then you can fuel your creativity as you hone your skill by working through a

problem, reaching a deeper understanding, and learning from that understanding to make better choices in the future.

Take John's tune, *Echoes from Then*. Even the title suggest reflection.

- What do you notice about the music?
- What do you notice about the musician?
- Are there any special sound effects?
- How about the composition, do things repeat?
- Does it have a typical form or intro or ending?

This is practice through actively listening and probing for more understanding of the music and musician.

I told a friend who is an arranger about my habit of misplacing charts that I had created years previously, and then spending too much time searching for them. He offered that misplacing them may have provided me a chance to create a better version the second time around. The first time you learn something need not be the last time. You often find more value when returning to something with new ears. This may be why you are drawn to one activity or a specific piece. We can notice value in common tune choices among generations of musicians, and favorites of audiences. Some pieces just need to be played and heard again and again.

The best tunes we play in jazz have been recorded and performed countless times, and you may never play better than many master recordings, but the value of learning these tunes continues. What makes a jazz tune great could be many things. It might be the chord progression, the melody, the way the bass is integrated into the tune, the harmony, or an endless variety of variables. Here are a few tunes that have been around that you might enjoy uncovering.

### Pat Metheny: *Bright Size Life*

<https://youtu.be/SFNjNhIFTHE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZG8IE14hi8M>

The first tune is *Bright Size Life* by guitarist Pat Metheny featuring Jaco Pastorius and Bob Moses from a live tour in 1974. This tune was found in the original Real Book from the edition 6, and is a song that most guitar players know. The fact that Pat Metheny recorded this in his early twenties and was in Boston helped to get this implanted into the jazz culture. At the time, many guitarists could be found in the city of Boston. When I encounter a new tune, I try to apply the questions from above.

- What do you notice about the music?
  1. A fast tempo
  2. AABA form
  3. Chords are not familiar
- What do you notice about the musician(s)?
  1. Trio: guitar, electric bass, drums
  2. They can play fast, comfortable in all ranges
- Are there any special sound effects?

1. The bass played a glissando
  2. Drums are loud
- How about the composition, do things repeat?
    1. The whole song seems to repeat
    2. They play the melody, solo, and then play the melody again with a slowing down for the ending
    3. The bass played part of the melody to end his solo
  - Does it have a typical form or intro or ending
    1. No intro—just starts
    2. AABA form

After listening through several times, I may have some answers and will be ready to find more.

- The bass part is integrated with the melody with the repetitive pickup—you will hear that throughout the tune
- The form is AABA, a form well represented in the jazz idiom.
- The instrumentation is guitar, electric bass, and drums which is a classic trio setting in jazz
- I have included the melody in bass clef because it is fun to play and is helpful for insight into what you might play while soloing

### Bass Clef *Bright Size Life*

Note fingerings for bridge melody

### *Bright Size Life* — Chords for Bridge

I also like the chords at the bridge. Everyone has different ways to express harmony. Here the slash chords of G/A and F/G translate to A7 sus and G7 sus—You can play the Mixolydian scale of the bottom note or the Lydian scale of the top note. For the chord voicing is two 4ths and a third. (i.e., think of this as A D G B and G C F A) These voicing states the root, 4th, 7th, and the 9th of each chord.

### Chord B $\flat$ Major $\flat$ 5 / A (G melodic minor)

This scale comes from the G melodic minor scale ascending and you can see is closely related to G major—the only note different is the B $\flat$ , or third of the scale and chord. In jazz we use the scale to generate different chord sounds so we fix it on ascending instead of changing the notes with change of direction. This choice of chord is a favorite among jazz musicians to play on because of the variety of chord movements and common tones compared to previous chords. Many of the chords used to create other sounds in jazz are generated from the melodic minor scale ascending.

### Octave Displacement

When you hear the notes in the 1st & 2nd, and 5th & 6th measures of the bridge you will notice movement of a  $\frac{1}{2}$  step displaced by an octave. Practice hearing with the  $\frac{1}{2}$  steps next to each other and then try to play as written. This is a great way to change the melodic contour without altering the pitches.

### Bonus song on live concert from 1974

The second song they play is the standard *There is No Greater Love*. A song recorded by so many jazz greats including Wynton Kelly, Miles Davis, McCoy Tyner, Billie Holiday, and Amy Winehouse. (Just a bonus if you keep listening.) I like to include this to hear how musicians honored the common repertoire and demonstrated how they understood what had been played before.

### Maiden Voyage: Herbie Hancock

A third tune with the harmony, rhythm, and melody drawing countless musicians in is *Maiden Voyage* by Herbie Hancock. This song was a hit for Hancock. Notice how the ostinato continues and is built on for the whole song. Because the chords change every four measures, you will hear players play in longer phrases, and with more melodic invention. The voicing for these chords comes from the *So What* voicings played by Bill Evans on the *Kind of Blue* recording of *So What*. They have become standard voicings for jazz musicians to use in compositions ever since (1959).

<https://youtu.be/hwmRQoPBtXU>  
<https://youtu.be/e-KI4QwtBW0>

**INTRO (MED. EVEN 8THS) MAIDEN VOYAGE - HERBIE HANCOCK**

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AFTER SOLOS, LAST HEAD VAMP INTRO UNTIL END

The form is not complicated, 32 bars and AABA form. Here the

hook is the ostinato played with the bass throughout the tune. Because the ostinato avoids the first beat of the second bar, the phrasing feels open and you may find yourself questioning what beat you are on. The sus chords give you more than enough time to use the mixolydian scale to create your improvisation. Many people play the changes as written, and note some will play D<sup>b</sup> minor 7 in 21-24 bars, accommodating the F<sup>b</sup> in the melody. The voicing in 4ths still applies but start on the D<sup>b</sup> and the 3rd on top will be F<sup>b</sup> (E enharmonically).

Maiden Voyage—Chords and Scales

### More John McLaughlin

Getting back to John McLaughlin and the Mahavishnu Orchestra playing *The Inner Mounting Flame*: [https://youtu.be/5ofh\\_S52Uks](https://youtu.be/5ofh_S52Uks)

Finally, his contribution 49 years later! Watch to the end of this and see some amazing playing! John McLaughlin and The 4th Dimension: *Lockdown Blues*. <https://fb.watch/2999mKQSEu/>

So, use this time to recharge, help someone out, find some new music to listen to, practice, write. Whatever you take from 2020 remember you have a story and have experienced something that not many generations have: a complete cross-generational experience for everyone across the globe.

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