



# BASS

## Grounding

by Tom Pieper

Welcome to the bassment (sic) practice room again during this late winter 2021/2022 pandemic season. 2021 has been especially helpful for remembering and renewing my passion for playing, writing and learning more about music. The bass is starting to come out of the corner more often, and when this happens it is easier to build consistency and channel the creative juices. I finished a gig this morning and selected several tunes written in 2018 to play with a trio of piano, tenor sax and bass. This setting is more common than playing with drums lately, and with the right musicians it is very satisfying. I'm taking note to schedule more composition time into my daily practice routine. I like to write melodies suggesting harmonic progressions that are suited for improvisation. An evolution has certainly occurred in my process and choices but I often need to return to find inspiration in music from past experiences. I was hesitant to start writing at first because I felt I did not know enough; but a friend suggested I should start and over the years I found this to be useful and satisfying.

Some of my tunes have made it on my recordings, and sometimes I have received remuneration to present the music in a concert, or royalties to buy a few lattes! Here is one tune from the morning gig entitled *WINAY?* (I have a regular yoga practice with meditation and I was thinking what else could Isaac Newton be doing (musing about ) when the apple dropped. Even though his story is not literal, this tune's title just popped into my head.)

**WINAY?\***  
Tom Pieper 11/23/18

\* Was Isaac Newton a Yogi?

### Playing and Getting Noticed

Two bassists among others who I look to, noted for their playing and composing, are Ron Carter and George Mraz. Ron Carter often negotiated/suggested/required his compositions to be included on recordings where he was a sideman. Ron most notably brought his music to Miles Davis' group in the '60s—not a bad way to get noticed. He has the record for most recording sessions numbering 2221 to date. George Mraz was another bass player who brought his compositions along when hired to play on recordings. This model gives you control of your creative content and creates another revenue stream for your music. The modern-day jazz musician is now required to make use of as many avenues of the music industry as possible. Start writing your tunes down and bring them to your rehearsals.

In 2021 it seems common for ensembles to have original compositions from bassists. Other trailblazing bassists/composers included Charles Mingus, Scott LaFaro, Charlie Hayden, Dave Holland, Steve Swallow, Gary Peacock, etc. Composing and jazz improvisation are linked as bass players seem to bring distinctive voices and refreshing sounds to the existing jazz canon. Perhaps bass players understand the need for space, what sounds unique in a chord, and how to be selective with phrasing. These two quotes from Miles Davis are good to remember when beginning to write your own music or when searching for music to play.

“In music, silence is more important than sound.”

“Don't worry about playing a lot of notes. Just find one pretty one.”

### Steps for 2022

- Listen to everything
- Hang out with players you want to play with
- Practice and perform often
- Take every chance offered
- Write your music down

Never before has there been such a catalog of musicians and high-quality performances available to be explored without leaving your chair. Also, as we return to a familiar life, we begin to see more live performances we can check out. Combining the immediacy and vastness online with seeing music in person is a winning combination. Music played for an audience can elevate your performance. Years ago I had heard people expressing the view that if you have a perfect recording, why would we need more live performances? They were suggesting that a perfect recording could replace the need to buy new or see any live performance of say a Beethoven Symphony, or any other well-known work. Once perfection was achieved, you could not hear anything better, so why bother to make another recording. The greatest music gives us an understanding not only of the composition, but of the culture and time of its production. Some music is transformative and proliferation

of content shows us music is never perfect, but continues to have value and subtlety, coming from courageous intent and split second changes that are intangible.

I remember buying a Charlie Parker record and noting each song had 3 or 4 takes of each tune. Remember the released tune may not be the perfect version, just one that made it to print. With John Coltrane's latest, *A Love Supreme: Live in Seattle*, we start to appreciate a different version of the classic recording we have heard for years and hear what might have been a definitive version. The recording we are used to could easily have been something else. Try to immerse yourself into as many different recordings of classical, jazz and popular music and analyze what you are experiencing. As music continues to evolve exponentially, you are invited to join the party!

### This Piece Keeps Coming Up

I believe it is always good to revisit music learned earlier and bring new insights to mark how you have grown over time. For this example, I chose Fauré's *Après un Rêve* composed in the 1870s. Originally a piece for medium, low and high voice, this piece showcases a lyrical and sustained sound. This may be a perfect piece to play when you want a simple, beautiful and lyrical selection for your repertoire or concert program. The short work has been adapted for many instruments and is especially suited for the double bass. I pulled out my 1950 arrangement by New York bassist Fred Zimmerman in the key of A minor. Like arrangements for cello and violin, this version begins with the melody in the lower octave and moves to the higher octave for the second statement of the theme till the end of the piece. Zimmerman uses tenor clef for the second half to relieve us of some of the ledger lines. Because of the lyrical quality and tempo, the tenor clef is easy to manage with the song's close intervals and few large leaps.

[https://youtu.be/\\_xMpxly9z7c](https://youtu.be/_xMpxly9z7c) I needed to hear more so I searched and came upon a recording by violinist Janine Jansen in C minor. I am always impressed by hearing a piece on different instruments, and then using that familiarity to inform what I need to bring to the bass. Jansen has an impressive and sustained sound, stretches the phrasing with pianist Golan catching every nuance, and dynamics necessary to deliver a compelling and memorable performance.

<https://youtu.be/XAPgC-C8tkw> This recording by cellist Gautier Capuçon is

another great performance with an orchestral accompaniment. Here the two-octave split continues and surely the emphasis is on the video production. That is part of the revenue stream mentioned earlier. Personally, I favor seeing the performer from one or two camera angles so I can see how the technique is helping the music be realized but part of the basement concert hopping is to find what you notice and are curious about. If you have this kind of budget for your performances, I suggest you go for the limit and create all that you can conceive.

[https://youtu.be/\\_CwEAAAzEf8](https://youtu.be/_CwEAAAzEf8) Bassist Adrian Eriksson brings us back to the key of A minor for this recording. This is more like a concert video in the sense of one camera showing the music as is—no production or anything fancy here. This video highlights what I was musing about earlier, Adrian arranged the music for strings, presents the

music to the audience, has a link attached for purchasing the music as a PDF, and even includes a family member on the piano. With this combination of talents, he becomes a modern musician in the best sense of the word. The music is beautiful and his savvy marketing is also noteworthy. Adrian plays with the German bow, and it is also refreshing in 2021 to see how the sound can be drawn from the bass regardless of the choice of German/French bow.

<https://youtu.be/PTkqK2qsVs> An unlikely plug for Barbra Streisand's vocal version, part of CBS Masterworks in an arrangement and production by Claus Ogerman. The vocal version helps me to imagine my bowing choices, and hearing it in French helps bring out the lyricism and musical line without the words occupying my attention. Would I have searched for this on my own? No, probably not, but there are so

**APRÈS UN RÊVE**  
(After A Dream)

BASS

Transcribed by F. ZIMMERMANN

printed bowings are  
Zimmermann  
Top pencilled bowings are  
Lorraine Campet high version  
Bottom pencilled bowings are  
Lorraine Campet low version

GABRIEL FAURÉ

Andantino

1740 Copyright 1950 by International Music Company, New York City Printed in U.S.A.

many choices to aid in your understanding online that I took a chance on this one.

## Two French Additions

[https://youtu.be/2\\_RfePpCU6A](https://youtu.be/2_RfePpCU6A), <https://youtu.be/9IFjJz2kK8>

For a deeper dive I settled on recordings by French bassist Lorraine Campet, the first is all played in the lower octave, and the second is all played in the upper octave. Both versions are played in C minor. I found this a refreshing change from splitting the piece in two by switching to the higher octave for the second half. This feels more a nod to the vocal version by showcasing the melodic line. Lorraine's use of the lower octave drew me into her musical performance and the deep rich sound of her very fine bass. There is no doubt about her artistic talent as she plays both versions in a compelling manner. I was especially struck by her command of the bow and ability to illuminate the dynamics regardless of different bow choices. In the second version she breaks up some slurs, and changes direction by letting the bowings serve the phrasing in only the most impassioned way. Some of her bowings are:

- Measure 3 slurring in groups of 3 and 3 instead of breaking up the triplet on beat 2
- Measure 5 breaking the slur for beat 1
- Measure 7 all with a down bow and ending the phrase up
- Measure 13 adding the slur during string crossing to play both down to help crescendo and repeat groupings from measure 3

She seems comfortable with her playing in all parts of the bow, usually has beat 3 being an upbow, and also adds notes in the high version for measures 28 and 29. I am impressed with her flexibility as she changes up the bowing in each version without any effort, yet effectively showcasing Fauré's line and phrasing while always maintaining the artistry of her performance.

## Your Job in 2022

Now that you have a good amount of exposure to the piece, you can practice. I have included the Fred Zimmerman bowings, and the bowings of Lorraine Campet. First play it in the written key of A minor and learn the first phrase. Next try the bowings Lorraine plays. Now transpose, by ear up a minor third to the key of C minor. Repeat with either bowings and play in other keys as well. Now, learn the second half and redo the same process of moving from the written to a transposed key. When trying this also return to the original key for clarity, and then transpose to the new key. I found B minor, B flat minor, and D minor to be good keys as well.

You can decide if you want to play one half low, and the other half high and I don't think you can make a bad decision. It may just depend on your equipment, and how your bass responds. I always try to remember that I can play in the same range as other instruments, but they cannot play as low as me! I like that about the bass.

## George Mraz 1944-2021

A farewell for George Mraz who set the stage for all of this with *Blues for Sarka*. I first heard this recording in a music library in Wisconsin in 1981 on *Ballads and Blues*—a duo recording with pianist Tommy Flannagan. After coming to this country during the Prague Spring in 1968 he became a very active working jazz musician. If you look at this page you can see an amazing number of recordings.

<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/george-mraz-mn0000946026/biography>

Along with this extensive discography, he would tour regularly and I was lucky to see him play live in St. Paul at Suzette's on Selby and the Dakota in Energy Park. Every time I hear him he embodies all facets of what a great bassist/musician can be—an accompanist and ensemble member of the highest order, fluent soloist who exploits all ranges, tempos, techniques, and whose understanding of melody and harmony is unparalleled. <https://youtu.be/qOyDv5K9slo>

Now get to work building your skills, writing music, playing with musicians, and searching to keep hearing and learning new things.

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