



BASS

Listen to and Transcribe Everything and Everyone This is really your only job—listen and discover what you hear

by Tom Pieper

A most important discovery of playing music is finding the music you want to play, learning to listen closely, writing it down to speed your communication, and then being consistent to use what you learn whenever you are playing your instrument. All this leads to a realization that music is an aural practice and you control / choose the sound you create. So obvious to some, however it has taken me many years to fully understand this. This may be true of all the music we make, and all the music that makes it to our ears. Your challenge is to commit every moment of practice, and I mean all practice, to producing your own great sound. In tune, in rhythm, accurate to composition, and able to improvise as needed. Any ensemble requires no less—you respond to the ensemble and strive to play musically for the situation.

The fall in Minnesota always reminds me to get back to the practice room. A vast room this is, covering playing, listening, transcribing, and chipping away at music. As a public-school teacher, I do find the return to this “grindstone” and a habit of living within the calendar year comforting and natural, and just need to accept that summer is gone. With longer nights and shorter days, limited time requires me to be more selective. I will share what has risen to the surface recently to motivate me in the studio. Some of these selections have been on my mind for 50+ years, and some have just arrived. As a bassist, these bass players and the ensembles they are in currently have piqued my interest. You will have your own list to explore!

Keith Jarrett, Jan Garbarek & “Nordic Quartet” Oslo 1974 (NRK TV-studio)

(<https://youtu.be/CVVkdgZVXzY> — Keith Jarrett with Palle Danielsson (bass) and Jon

Christensen (drums). From NRK Studio in Oslo in 1974. Recorded in the days they were recording “Belonging” in Rainbow Studio, Oslo.)

These recordings, and your bass, are my tropical island, or winter cabin companions. First hearing The Nordic Quartet in the late 70s, made me wonder what they were playing and how they could play so well together. The music seemed fresh and joyful and you can see this realization on the faces of the musicians during this video—watch it! I think the feeling they share still holds up well today. They could be the GOAT. The band had studio and live recordings, and now many live shows are available to watch.

Charles Mingus - Mingus Ah Um (1959) (Full Album)

(https://youtu.be/z0A_Ik6TTn0 — John Handy, Shafi Hadi, Dannie Richmond, Horace Parlan, Booker Ervin, Jimmy Knepper, Willie Dennis)

Sixteen years earlier, Charles Mingus and company displayed a similar ease and pure joy on their recording of *Better Get it in Your Soul* on the *Ah Um* recording. Mingus sets up the tune, and as more players enter we get drawn into a swinging and creative pool of sound. Dig both the clarity of each instrument and the blend of the ensemble. If you did isolate each player, you might hear the committed and unique sound of each player recorded here. Add the shouts, claps, and constantly changing backgrounds and you will notice something different every time you listen. Not just trading solos, but really an ensemble tour de force. When you watch videos of Mingus’ bands, notice how he is in the center leading with the bass and his presence. Harmonically predictable and derivative, surprise is still always just

seconds ahead.

These first two examples are driving and imaginative and if you are able to ignore the groove, you may want to check for your pulse. Mingus and the Jarrett both provide compelling and exuberant performances—I would even say they can be compared as apples to apples. TikTok has the Bop or Flop scenario currently and as you listen to Mingus, a founding member of the Bebop sound with Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, you now can truly recognize the origin of a “Bop.”

Steve Gadd, Eddie Gomez, David Matthews a.o.

(<https://youtu.be/HXLcS7yOjhg>) Bassist Eddie Gomez was known as a young virtuoso, going to Julliard, and for joining Bill Evans for an eleven-year stint at 21 years old in 1966. After Scott LaFaro died in 1961, Bill Evans had many of the greatest bass players in his trio, but Bill reached the zenith with Eddie Gomez who recorded with him until 1977, and with Marc Johnson in the last trio until 1980. Eddie was known for continuing the LaFaro tradition of extending the range and the role of the bass in the modern jazz trio. His soloing seems effortless and is as fluid as the tenor and trumpet players. Later, Eddie, was and continues to be active in many groups. Here he is featured playing with the Manhattan Jazz Quintet. The tune, *Mr. PC*, written for bassist Paul Chambers by John Coltrane, lets us hear and see Eddie in a classic quintet setting. This recording is in D minor instead of the usual C minor, with some added interludes arranged for the band. I found it on Eddie’s Facebook page so you know when an artist pushes something out, it is worth some listens and maybe some likes.

Humpty Dumpty

(<https://youtu.be/IrBL09KTEoQ>) Pianist and composer Chick Corea featured Eddie on his Mad Hatter and other recording projects. Here is the melody transcribed for bass, and Eddie plays this on the first chorus of the head at the start and the end of the tune. It has taken me some time to figure out how to negotiate the melody, and later how to solo through the changes and you may have your own solutions. I have also included the solo changes and the coda. My plan was and yours may be:

- Learn melody
 - Find a good fingering and understand the counting
 - Begin to move toward the tempo as you get more confident—the tempo on this recording is c.252/minute.
- Begin to create a guide of harmonic root movement
 - Listen to recording and begin to identify the root progression—lowest note of chord
 - Next determine the chord quality by finding the third of the chord and
- then the seventh
 - Are there other notes in the chord to think about? See how the melody may add important notes to the chord
- After a while you may find a lead sheet or fake book to compare, however remember you may be just as correct so only use it as a reference and respect what you hear.
- Remember to take breaks and notice differences when you return.
- Play with someone else and pool your understanding.

Ex. 1 C. c.

Humpty Dumpty

Humpty Dumpty Solo Changes

Ex. 2

John Coltrane Quartet - Soul Eyes

(<https://youtu.be/GoYAGNLqFwg>) I am including *Soul Eyes*, a Coltrane Quartet tune with the Classic John Coltrane Quartet featuring Jimmy Garrison on bass. I have included this melody because it really lays well on the bass and you can play it with the bow or pizzicato. Note how it is written in the treble clef. This is the time to think about learning that clef too. As a working musician I can count on one hand the times I will be given lead sheets in bass clef; the expectation is you can read treble clef too. By including this here, you can refresh your

clef and also play along with Coltrane on the melody.

As with the previous tune, I would learn the melody with Coltrane before reading it. Write it down as you go, and compare later with other sources. I learned this on an electric bass and as my bass only goes to E \flat , it worked out quite well to play along. Next map out root movement, and then identify chord qualities and any special chord extensions like the #9. When I can't hear the chord progression I always listen to the bass, sing the note, and match it on my instrument or on the piano. I am

usually not disappointed with this process. If still unsure about a chord, really listen to the bass from where it arrived and work back. In this tune when you know it is going to a G \flat major chord, see if the D \flat 7 comes first and check if the roots are D \flat to G \flat . Another great feature of this recording is how the feel doubles up for the solos with quarter notes becoming half notes. Listen to how the drums set this up. Yes, this is easy to expect in 2022, but Jimmy Garrison and Elvin Jones are masters at bringing this feel to life!

Soul Eyes

7 $E\flat\Delta 7$ $B\Delta 7$ $E\flat\Delta 7$

Enterprise — Faith of the Heart

Another example. I was bored the other day while watching *Star Trek: Enterprise*—everything is fair game for practice!

Enterprise (Faith of the Heart)

D B- A G D/# G/D A G
F#- IV 4 G A7 E- G A
D E- G A7 D E- F#- G A
D E- G D/# B- E- G
G A D E- G

THE BACKBONE

WARREN

"The Backbone" Dexter Gordon

(<https://youtu.be/6H63Iy1WLS0>) Finally, Saxophonist Dexter Gordon always had an eye out for young and notable musicians to add to his group. Butch Warren just the bassist and composer who provided compositions and stellar support on this Blue Note session entitled *A Swingin' Affair*. Here, the bass and tenor play the melody together and the composition highlights the era where creating a crossover hit jazz tune was paramount. It also filled the bill of a groove tune that is fun to play and solo on. I also like *Backbone* because tunes featuring the bass need to be acknowledged and presented again for all to hear. Also check out Butch Warren on Dexter Gordon's seminal recording, *Go!*

The image displays a handwritten musical score for the piece "The Backbone" by Butch Warren. The score is written in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. It includes several systems of music, each consisting of a melodic line and a piano accompaniment line. The piano accompaniment includes various chord voicings and some "N.C." (No Chords) markings. The score concludes with a "fine" marking and a double bar line. Below the main score, there is a section labeled "105" which contains two lines of bass line notation with corresponding chord symbols: Dmin, Dmin, G7, D7, G7, F7, E7, E7b5 A7#9, and Dmin.

105

Dmin Dmin G7 D7

G7 F7 E7 E7b5 A7#9 Dmin

D.S. al fine

<https://doublebassblog.org>

One last place I have been searching through is Jason Heath's Bass Blog—great information, ideas and videos to check out and I will spend some time on it in the near future.

Many times the bass is overlooked for solos and in orchestra we have few times where we get to play the melody. This is the nature of the bass so we should do those parts convincingly and with pride and at the same time expand our solo playing. I have been selling this as songs to play for your grandparents.

My use of this material and other books on this blog are to use visual and aural skills to learn songs, and also write down notes,

bowings, and fingerings. You can start with some cello songs and even try playing them in the same range as your friends.

When I watch bass videos I also geek out about fingerings and positions, Rabbath Technique, German or French bow. I think the best takeaway from all of this listening and transcribing is to capture the sound presented to help develop your own full and clear sound. Jason provides great interviews, talks on concepts, practice ideas, and performances of pieces to help guide you into the world of double bass. Listen to these with airpods to get the whole tonal effect.

Always remember to enjoy and do the work on your own. Almost every time I come back to a transcription I find some-

thing slightly different or reaffirming. It does take some time, however if your goal is to get a great sound you could not find a better way than by transcribing and listening to all that is out there!

Tom Pieper currently teaches Orchestra at Central Middle School in Wayzata MN. He is a studio bass instructor at MacPhail Center for Music, and at his home studio. Tom can be heard weekly with a jazz trio at Salem English Lutheran Church in Uptown. He has been Bass Editor of this journal since spring of 2003. Besides music, Tom is an avid cyclist and can be seen traveling through the state if you look quickly. ♪