



BASS

In the Thick of It

by Tom Pieper

I am truly immersed in this school year schedule after 25 years of teaching and my own experiences in school as a student for 22 years. Concerts require extra attention, seasonal gigs return, and school also has its repetitive cycles. Looking back I love the time of deep winter to dig into new music, refine and review technique, and be open to making changes for the better. I hope to share some things I am noticing in my practice and routine for you to consider. I know the bow is important in your string playing and you must continue to work on this and your time will never be misspent. That being said, other aspects of playing the bass will help you expand your understanding of music so I have included a table of master jazz players who have taken pizzicato and arco playing to the highest level.

As a jazz musician, I understand pizzicato as having no barrier between your fingers and the string as you pull the sound from your instrument. Arco playing requires you to use the bow to draw the sound from the instrument. All of us have had fingers longer than bows and because of this, the bow may be less comfortable. Over time you will master the bow and I think pizzicato can also help you build familiarity and strength to use the bow efficiently. The history of jazz music has produced so many different bassists who excelled and developed right hand pizzicato skills used for walking, accompanying, and soloing. Many of these players also played arco on recordings, playing live, and in many other musical settings. I made a table of some

foundational bassists in the history of jazz. Use this table as you would a family tree, follow a bass player you connect with and I guarantee you will find many additional recordings. This is not by any means an exhaustive list, but a list of some players that I have found to be compelling musicians, members of seminal bands, and interesting and remarkable human beings. Keep being curious and listen to lots of music.

Mahler 1 Solo: MNO principal bassist Kristen Bruya

https://www.instagram.com/reel/DG3Wn-OJjSk/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet

This is one of the most recognizable bass solos and it comes often for lessons but less often to hear live. The third movement of Mahler's *Symphony #1* places a solo bass in the spotlight. I have been able to hear the Minnesota Orchestra play live over the last 30 years and I try to go whenever this comes up on the schedule. Over the years bassists have come up with different bowing and fingering options but this quick video that came up on Instagram is one of the best I have seen. I was able to hear this live at Orchestra Hall a few days after the video was posted and as soon as the tympani begins this becomes a sublime and notable event in the symphony.

Here are the bowings and fingerings from the solo. In former times, the Oscar Zimmerman books of complete double bass parts had this marked with a down bow and one bow per measure. In the third and fourth measures the bowing is split but still

starting with a down bow through measure 8. Everyone, especially me, struggled with this bowing and the keeping the shifting unobtrusive. Other bassists on both German and French bows have used an up bow to start and Kristen's presentation creates a beautiful line. Her choice to go on the D string in measure 5 also makes for seamless shifts. In the 6th bar she plays the F with her third finger and the E with her second finger setting up a smooth return to the first finger on D before shifting down to 4th position. Many bassist play with the harmonic high A to avoid a shift. Here she fearlessly goes back to thumb position for the high A and returns to 4th position allowing for the bow to cross back to the G string. Always her bowing displays great poise and balance—not for amateurs!

Yes or No: Wayne Shorter

Every gig and session would be a valuable time to spend exploring and learning more about Wayne Shorter and his compositions. Here are two versions of *Yes or No*:

- *Yes or No* (Rudy Van Gelder 24 Bit Mastering/1999 Digital Remaster)
- *Yes and No*

The title is somewhat confusing as Wayne Shorter and Ira Gitler call it *Yes or No*, and *The Real Book* (never known for accuracy in melody or chord changes) refers to it as *Yes and No*. I will go with Wayne's title. However, whatever you call this tune, the song is incredibly fun to play. The tune starts with a melody that hangs through a 4 bar Dsus chord and then shifts to a D Major 7th chord for another 4 bars. The harmonic movement accelerates in the 9th bar and cadences in B^b Major before shifting back for the second A section. At the bridge, the melody becomes a model of chromatic voice leading and for progression following the cycle of 4ths. Something else to note about this tune is the A section is 14 measures long and the bridge is 16 measures which comes out to 58 measures. Looking at the phrasing, it is 8 + 6 repeated for the A section and 8 + 8 for the bridge. Uneven phrase lengths were less common in jazz,

Mahler 1, third movement

1 2 4 2-1
4 - 1 2
2 T 2
D

3 1 1
G D G

3 1 1
G D G

Players in Jazz	Walking	Soloing	Watch these links	Bowing	Compose
Jimmy Blanton	√	√	Body and Soul (take 1) - Duke Ellington / Jimmy Blanton	√	
Slam Stewart	√	√	Slam Stewart - Slam Bam (1971)	√	√
George Duvivier	√	√	George Duvivier - Blues for Harry Carney (1984)	√	√
Paul Chambers	√	√	Paul Chambers - Moment's Notice Transcription (Bass)	√	√
Ray Brown	√	√	Mondscheinsonate Round about Midnight (Original)	√	√
Doug Watkins	√	√	Ugetsu		√
Sam Jones	√	√	Barry Harris at The Jazz Workshop		√
Percy Heath	√	√	Modern Jazz Quartet - Django (HQ)	√	√
Charles Mingus	√	√	Boogie Stop Shuffle		√
Art Davis	√	√	Art Davis - Driftin'		√
Jimmy Garrison	√	√	John Coltrane - Russian Lullaby		√
Ron Carter	√	√	Blue Monk with Herbie Hancock & Ron Carter (1986)		
Scott LaFaro	√	√	Scott LaFaro with the Bill Evans Trio at the Village Vanguard - My Man's Gone Now Scott LaFaro Live Performance Video 1958 - 2 Songs, Best Quality Sound		
Richard Davis	√	√	Richard Davis / Elvin Jones - Summertime	√	
Dave Holland	√	√	Dave Holland - Solar (Live in 1985)		√
Charlie Haden	√	√	Charlie Haden: Lonely Woman		√
Gary Peacock	√	√	Keith Jarrett Trio - When You Wish Upon a Star In Memory of Gary Peacock		√
Eddie Gomez	√	√	Bill Evans Trio, Copenhagen, Denmark, December 15th, 1970 (colorized)		√
Miroslav Vitous	√	√	Freedom Jazz Dance		√
George Mraz	√	√	Blues For Sarka	√	√
Marc Johnson	√	√	The Bill Evans Trio w Marc Johnson & Joe LaBarbera, Jazz at the Maintenance Shop (1979)		√

but not uncommon for Wayne. For the bridge starting at the A minor 7 b_5 , the melody fits over each chord and resolves chromatically to the next chord starting with the 7th and then the 3rd and b_9 th to the 7th and 5th.

For this transcription I have changed the octaves to make it more useful to read and more playable for you as a bassist. I suggest trying it in multiple ways. When you do have the option to play a melody in unison with a horn player it really adds a lot of depth to the ensemble sound and it is also good to champion melodies we can play in the higher reaches of the bass. When practicing, this is a tune you can play slower and in different meters to get used to the harmony and form. I especially like to try the form in $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{5}{4}$ and $\frac{7}{4}$ to experience “odd time signatures.” You could just think of them as less common instead of odd.

The Plan

- Listen to and discover that bowing and pizzicato are a vital part of the jazz tradition
- Use all your resources to watch and learn from masters, past and present, and see them play in person when you can
- Take a tune like *Yes or No* and see how many ways you can play to learn some fun repertoire.
- Keep practicing those excerpts, scales, and arpeggios

I really hope the return of spring is

Yes or No **Wayne Shorter**

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the bass part of 'Yes or No' by Wayne Shorter. The score is written on ten staves. The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The second staff has a bass clef and a key signature of one sharp. The score includes various chords such as D7sus, D7, A-7, D7, GΔ7, F7, BbΔ7, E-7, A-7 b5, G-7, F-7, Bb7, E bΔ7, A-7, and A-7/D. There are also time signature changes to 3/4, 5/4, and 7/4. The score is annotated with 'Svt' and 'last X'.

treating you well and please get out and enjoy some time outside, but try not to neglect your daily bass practice—keep learning, keep listening, and keep finding performance opportunities.

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