

Understanding and Creating Caribbean Bass Lines

This lesson will give you some basic guidelines to create your own Caribbean style bass lines. We will discuss some techniques to feel more confident when composing and playing. The most important thing to remember is “**Grooving Above All**”.

When it comes to understanding Caribbean bass line construction there are 2 things to keep in mind.

- The **first thing** is that the Caribbean syncopation is based on an **emphasis on Beats 1 & 3**. This is different than Black Music native to the United States that emphasizes beats 2 & 4. This does not mean that you always play beats 1 & 3, but that those are the beats that the grooves “land” on. Believe it or not, in Caribbean music clapping on 1 & 3 is correct!

The following groove exercise is to help you internalize this emphasis (you’ll find grooves 1-4 on the following page):

1. Set your metronome to 82 BPM. Each click represents a quarter note of 4/4 time.
2. Tap your foot on beats 1 & 3 and play the exercises below on 1 single note of your choice.
3. After playing all exercises with 1 single note, play through again alternating that note with the 5th above, then the 5th below.
4. 4 lines, 4 bars each

The **second thing** to keep in mind when creating Caribbean bass lines, is to **prioritize playing repetitive rhythms to maintain a consistent groove**. In other words, it’s better to play a line with a single note or 2 notes than to play a “hard” line. You can play the same rhythm for multiple chord changes by transposing your composed line to the various keys. That way you can concentrate on a consistent rhythm throughout the song. Remember “**Grooving above all**”.

The following exercises help to emphasize this point (**you’ll find exercises I, II and III on the following page and their description below**). Pay close attention as each progression has its own set of rules and guidelines. For each exercise, play through the entire chord progression with the given note before moving on to the next note choice options. Once you’ve worked through each exercise and are comfortable, you can interchange the note choices with chord progressions.

Exercise I. BPM= 133.

Note Choices: root, root 5th, triad (8 measures)

Exercise II. BPM= 145

Note Choices: root-5th, root-5th-7th (8 measures)

Exercise III. BPM= 100

Note Choices: octave, root-6th, 3rd-root-5th (8 measures)

