

# **Extended Right-Hand Technique for Electric Bass**

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This book is designed to instruct players of medium to advanced ability in extended right-hand technique for the electric bass. The lessons focus on right-hand technique *only* and do not provide instruction in the fundamentals of bass playing. The lessons also require the student to have a moderate ability to read music. For these reasons, beginning students are likely to struggle with the book without the assistance of a qualified instructor. However, beginning students should be able to glean useful information with a qualified instructor's assistance.

For the most part, the techniques discussed only can be applied to the electric bass. This fact is not due to a preference of the author for the electric bass over the double bass but simply due to the differences in the physical construction of the two instruments. For example, the curved bridge of the double bass makes the tremolo technique extremely difficult, whereas the flat bridge of the electric bass lends itself quite naturally to the technique. This is not to say that a creative and innovative player could not adapt some of the techniques discussed in this book to the double bass. The author simply does not wish to mislead the student into assuming that all of the techniques discussed apply to all string bass instruments. Of course, an acoustic bass "guitar," with a construction similar to an electric bass, could easily implement the techniques discussed.

The exercises included in each chapter are designed to serve as tools, not ends in and of themselves, for developing the various right-hand fingers and for increasing the student's level of comfort with the various techniques. As a result, the exercises should be practiced repeatedly as needed, not played once or "to mastery" and cast aside. Consequently, they should serve as useful warm-up exercises.

The author hopes the student will find this book useful and enjoyable and wishes the student the best in her or his study of this great instrument.



# Chapter 2

## Thumb

### 2.1 Discussion

The thumb (or *pulgar*) is the right-hand finger intuitively used by many beginning electric bass players. The use of the thumb for plucking the strings seems natural to many beginning students, perhaps, because, when holding the electric bass in the conventional position, the thumb resides in a convenient location for striking the strings and/or because this finger is strong enough to strike the large, cumbersome strings of the instrument with relative ease.

After students learn the more standard technique of using the index (or *indice*) and middle (or *medio*) fingers for striking the strings, they often come to neglect the thumb, usually using it only as an anchor for right hand. However, rediscovering the thumb as an actual plucking tool can be very rewarding for advanced players, and the use of this finger can offer many opportunities that might not be afforded by other techniques.

Even though playing with the thumb should seem fairly natural to most students, the following guidance as to hand position might be useful.

When striking the strings, the thumb should be kept fairly straight, but not rigid, and should be positioned at approximately a 45° angle to the strings. The thumb should strike the strings in a downward motion, moving only from the lower joint at the base of the thumb, not from the wrist or the upper joint. When striking the 4th and 3rd strings of the instrument, the index and middle fingers can rest on the 2nd and 1st strings (in a prone playing position) to help anchor the right hand. The following picture illustrates this hand position:

#### **Insert picture**

When the thumb is used to strike the 2nd and 1st strings, the index and middle fingers can come to rest on the body of the instrument.

After striking the string, the thumb will usually glide over the adjacent string in what is called a *freestroke*, discussed in more detail the next chapter. However, the thumb can also come to rest on the adjacent string in what is called a *reststroke*, also discussed in the next chapter. The latter is used if more power or enunciation of the note is desired. Though the former is more common with the thumb, both techniques can be explored.

## 2.2 Exercises

The following exercises make use of only the open strings both for simplicity and because, in practice, the thumb is often used to strike the open strings for a “pedal tone” (sustained, repeated bass note) effect.

When practicing these exercises, you may notice the notes “running together” and, as a result, “sounding muddy.” Try not to let this bother you for now. The goal of these exercises is to train the thumb.

The *p* notation below the notes stands for *pulgar* and indicates that the notes are to be played with the thumb. Such finger notations will appear in later exercises too.

Exercise 2.1



Exercise 2.2



Exercise 2.3



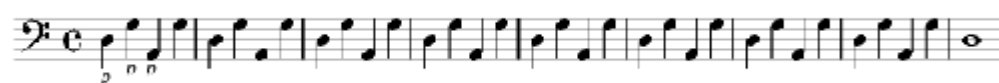




Exercise 2.12



Exercise 2.13



Exercise 2.14



## Chapter 3

# Thumb and Index

### 3.1 Discussion

The use of the index (or *indice*) for striking the strings will be very comfortable for most players. However, sophisticated coordination of the thumb and index finger will most likely not be. In actual practice, the use of the thumb and index finger *only* is rare, but the two fingers are isolated here for instructional purposes.

**Rest Stroke and Free Stroke** Most players will be familiar with the rest stroke (or *apoyando* or *hammer stroke*), as this is the right-hand stroke most commonly used on the electric bass. During the rest stroke, a player's finger strikes the string and continues in motion until it comes to rest on the adjacent string. The two pictures below show the placement of the finger before and after the rest stroke.

**Insert photos**

Many players will not be familiar with the free stroke (or *tirando*) because it is not commonly used on the electric bass. During the free stroke, a player's finger strikes the string and continues in motion, clearing the adjacent string, and following through towards the center of the hand. The two pictures below show the placement of the finger before and after the rest stroke.

**Insert photos**

Using both types of strokes can greatly expand a player's technique. As a general rule, the rest stroke should be used when notes need more "power," emphasis, or enunciation, for example, in a melody line that needs to be clearly pronounced or a rhythm line that needs to be "driving." The free stroke, on the other hand, should be used when notes need to be softer or when notes need to "run together" or be played legato, for example, when playing "arpeggios" (chords where the notes are played in succession rather than simultaneously).

### 3.2 Exercises

As with the exercises in Chapter 2, don't worry if the notes "run together" or "sound muddy." Focus, instead, on the coordination of the thumb and middle finger.

The *p* notation was used in Chapter 2 to indicate that notes were to be played with the thumb. Similarly, the *i* notation below some of the notes stands for *indice* and indicates that the notes are to be played with the index finger.

Practice the first six exercises employing freestroke only. Then practice them using freestroke with the thumb and reststroke with the index finger.

Exercise 3.1



Exercise 3.4



Exercise 3.6

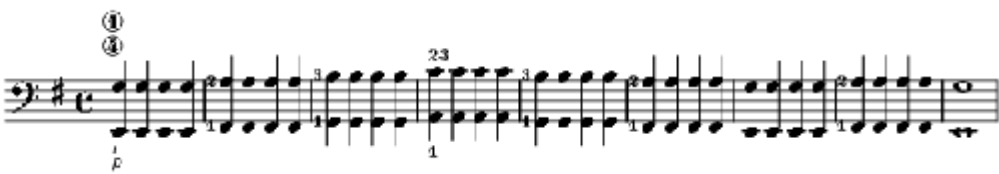


Exercise 3.6



On the remaining exercises, the index finger should use the rest stroke. If desired, the thumb can also use the rest stroke by bringing it to rest on the adjacent string at the end of each down stroke. The number notations are suggested fingerings for the left hand. The circled number indicates the string on which the notes are to be played.

Exercise 3.7



Exercise 3.8





## Chapter 4

# Thumb, Index, and Middle

### 4.1 Discussion

As with the index finger, the use of the middle finger (or *medio*) will be very comfortable for most players. Furthermore, the coordination of the index and middle fingers also will be comfortable. However, coordinating the index and middle fingers with the thumb likely will be new for even the most advanced players. As a result, the coordination of these fingers should be practiced extensively.

### 4.2 Exercises

All the exercises in this chapter should be freestroke. While it is possible to conceive of situations where the combination of the thumb, index, and middle fingers might be used restroke, freestroke is focused on here, as it is far more common with this finger combination.

The exercises in this chapter are significantly longer and more complicated because the core concepts of extended right-hand technique have been introduced and the combination of thumb, index, and middle is, perhaps, the most important finger combination in extended right-hand technique. As a result, the focus of these exercises is on extensive and varied application.

Similar to the *p* and *i* notations used in the previous chapters, the *m* notation below some of the notes stands for *medio* and indicates that the notes are to be played with the middle finger.

Exercise 4.1

①  
②  
③  
m  
i



A single staff of music in bass clef, common time, and one sharp (F#). The piece begins with a piano (p) dynamic. It consists of a sequence of chords, each with a downward-pointing stem and a flag, indicating a sixteenth-note rhythm. The chords are organized into measures, with some measures containing two chords. The exercise ends with a double bar line and a fermata over the final chord.

Exercise 4.2

①  
②  
③  
7



Two staves of music in bass clef, common time, and one sharp (F#). The first staff begins with a piano (p) dynamic. The notation consists of chords with downward-pointing stems and flags, indicating a sixteenth-note rhythm. The exercise is divided into two systems, with a measure rest (7) at the start of the second system. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a fermata over the final chord.

Exercise 4.3

①  
②  
③  
m  
i



Two staves of music in bass clef, common time, and one sharp (F#). The first staff begins with a piano (p) dynamic. The notation consists of chords with downward-pointing stems and flags, indicating a sixteenth-note rhythm. The exercise is divided into two systems, with a measure rest (9) at the start of the second system. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a fermata over the final chord.



Exercise 4.4

Exercise 4.4 consists of two staves of music in bass clef, with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a common time signature. The music features eighth-note patterns with slurs and fingerings (1, 2, 3) indicated above the notes. The first staff has a 'p' dynamic marking. The second staff has a '5' marking at the beginning.

Exercise 4.5

Exercise 4.5 consists of four staves of music in bass clef, with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a common time signature. The music features eighth-note patterns with slurs and fingerings (1, 2, 3) indicated above the notes. The first staff has a 'p' dynamic marking. The second staff has a '5' marking at the beginning. The third staff has a '9' marking at the beginning. The fourth staff has a '13' marking at the beginning.

Exercise 4.6

The musical score for Exercise 4.6 is written in bass clef, 6/8 time, and the key of D major (indicated by two sharps). The exercise consists of five staves of music, each containing six measures. The first measure of each staff begins with a *tr* (trill) marking. The notes are: D2 (first line), E2 (first space), F#2 (second line), G2 (second space), A2 (third line), and B2 (third space). The piece concludes with a final chord of D2, F#2, and A2. Fingerings are indicated by circled numbers 1, 2, and 3. The first staff has a circled 2 above the first measure and circled 1 and 2 above the second measure. The second staff has circled 2 and 1 above the fourth measure. The third staff has circled 2 and 1 above the first and fourth measures. The fourth staff has circled 2 and 1 above the second and fifth measures. The fifth staff has circled 2 and 1 above the fourth measure.

Exercise 4.7

The musical score for Exercise 4.7 is written in bass clef, 6/8 time, and the key of D major (one sharp). The piece consists of five staves of music. The first staff begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes the markings *f*, *i*, *m*, *i*, *m*, *i*. The notation features eighth-note patterns with slurs and various fingering instructions: a '2' above the first measure, and circled '2' and '1' above the second and fifth measures. The second staff starts at measure 7 and includes circled '3' and '1' above the third measure. The third staff starts at measure 13 and includes circled '2' and '1' above the first and fifth measures. The fourth staff starts at measure 20 and includes circled '2' and '1' above the second and sixth measures. The fifth staff starts at measure 27 and includes circled '3' and '1' above the third measure. The exercise concludes with a final chord consisting of a D major triad (D, F#, A) over a bass note of D.

Exercise 4.8

Exercise 4.8 is a bass clef piece in 6/8 time, key of D major. The score consists of seven staves of music. The first staff begins with a measure marked 'mi p' and includes fingering numbers 1 and 2. The second staff has a measure marked 'mi p' with fingering numbers 1, 2, and 3. The third staff, starting at measure 13, has a measure marked 'mi p' with fingering numbers 1, 2, and 3. The fourth staff, starting at measure 19, has a measure marked 'mi p' with fingering numbers 1, 2, and 3. The fifth staff, starting at measure 25, has a measure marked 'mi p' with fingering numbers 1, 2, and 3. The sixth staff, starting at measure 32, has a measure marked 'mi p' with fingering numbers 1 and 2. The seventh staff, starting at measure 39, has a measure marked 'mi p' with fingering numbers 1 and 2. The piece concludes with a final measure containing a whole note chord.

Exercise 4.9

Exercise 4.9 is a bass clef piece in 6/8 time, key of D major. The score consists of seven staves of music. The first staff begins with a *p* dynamic marking. The piece features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. Fingering is indicated by circled numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4. Some notes are marked with a *tr* (trill) or a *stacc* (staccato) marking. The piece concludes with a final chord on the seventh staff.



## Chapter 5

# Thumb, Index, Middle, and Annular

### 5.1 Discussion

The ring finger (or *annular*) is a finger not commonly used in bass playing. Incorporating this finger into one's playing can add a whole new dimension to a player's style and virtuosity. However, the ring finger usually requires a great deal of development, as it is almost always weaker and less coordinated than the index and middle fingers. When a student begins development of the annular, the student should practice the annular at least *twice* as much as the other fingers.

### 5.2 Exercises: arpeggios and chords

Similar to the *p*, *i*, and *m* notations, the *a* notation below some of the notes stands for *annular* and indicates that the notes are to be played with the ring finger.





# Chapter 6

## Tremolo

### 6.1 Discussion

*Tremolo* is one of the most difficult right-hand techniques. As a result, mastering the technique requires a great deal of commitment. The reward, though, is that the tremolo is incredibly beautiful and very impressive to listeners. Furthermore, the technique will create possibilities in the student's playing style that, before mastery, the student would not have imagined.

In brief, traditional tremolo consists of playing four notes using *p*, *a*, *m*, and *i* in rapid succession. *p* is used to play a bass note, and *a*, *m*, and *i* are used to play a higher note (all the same note) in succession, as follows:

1. First, the bass note is plucked with *p*
2. Next, the higher note is free stroked with *a*
3. Then, the higher note is free stroked again with *m*
4. Finally, the higher note is free stroked with *i*

**[Insert discussion of hand position and photo of hand position]** Tremolo should be practiced using a metronome. Once the student is comfortable with the concept of the technique and the hand position, the student should begin practicing the technique with the metronome at as slow a tempo as necessary, working to make the notes as even as possible. When comfortable at this slow tempo, the student should try a slightly faster tempo. The student should keep increasing the tempo gradually as mastery of the technique improves. The student should *be patient*. The development of the tremolo technique takes time, but the reward is worth it.

### 6.2 Exercises

pmi then pami



# Chapter 7

## Pseudo-Picking

### 7.1 Discussion

As most electric bass players will know, there is a great deal of controversy in the electric bass playing community as to which right-hand technique is “superior”: striking the strings with the the fingers of the right hand (or playing *pizzicato*) or striking the strings with a pick (or *plectrum*). Advocates of the pizzicato technique will note that pizzicato is commonly used on the double bass and is, therefore, a more “traditional” and “acceptable” technique. Advocates of the plectrum technique will note that the electric bass is more similar to the electric guitar or steel-string guitar than the double bass, and, therefore, the use of the plectrum is appropriate.

The author has no delusions that he can solve this debate. However, the author personally prefers the pizzicato technique because he believes it allows for more versatility in playing, if this fact isn’t blatantly obvious since this book focuses entirely on pizzicato technique. At the same time, the author believes that a useful tool is lost if the use of the plectrum is ignored. As a result, the author advocates the “pseudo-picking” technique as an effective compromise.

### 7.2 Exercises

[Include double picking with *p*]



Please note that the symbol **[fix graphic]** symbolizes “downbowing” in traditional bass playing. If you are using your fingers, instead of a bow, you may interpret these symbols as “down plucking” or “down picking,” as is customarily done in guitar. Please also note that the symbol **[insert upbow symbol]** symbolizes “upbowing” in traditional bass playing and can be interpreted as “up plucking” or “up picking.”

**thumb = pulgar index = indice middle = medio ring = annular**

**OBC**