

What Is An 80-20 Device?



80-20 Bass

80:20 BASS

MODULE 0 UNIT 2

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Introduction

In the previous PDF I talked about what exactly my conception of 80-20 Bass is all about. And the spine of the concept is built on practicing patterns and ideas that crop up in bass lines in multiple genres. I use the term “device” to describe these patterns and ideas...and in this PDF I want to go explain and illustrate exactly what a device is so that we’re all on the same page.

So What Is An 80-20 Device?

Rather than try to explain a device in an abstract way, I’m going to illustrate it with some real world examples.

First of all, here’s the notation and tab in the style of the first verse of Fortunate Son by Creedence Clearwater Revival (bass by Stu Cook):

♩=138

G F C G

G F C G

And a second example is in the style of the second introduction chorus from Stevie Ray’s up tempo version of Empty Arms (from The Sky Is Crying album, bass by Tommy Shannon of course):

♩=152

C⁷

F⁷ C⁷

G⁷ F⁷ C⁷ G⁷

Now although these two examples are in similar keys it's hard (unless you really know what to look for) to discern any patterns here. If you listened to the two examples you might think: well one song is a straight eighth country rock kind of a tune (the CCR tune) and one is a shuffle 8th note blues rock kind of a tune.

But what we have to do is look at how the notes in the respective bass lines function harmonically. By 'function harmonically' what I mean is to see how the notes relate to the harmonic context (i.e. the chord progression? that the notes are played against).

So what you will see a lot of over the duration of the 80-20 Course is examples presented as above, but with my analysis annotated out.

Here's the Fortunate Son verse with my analysis underneath in italics:

♩=138

G F C G

r r r r r r r r r r r r 3 4 ch r r r r r r r r r r r r r r r r r r

T
A
B
3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 | 1 1 1 1 1 0 1 2 | 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 | 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

G F C G

r r r r r r r r r r r r 3 4 ch r r r r r r r r r r r r r r r r r r

T
A
B
3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 | 1 1 1 1 1 0 1 2 | 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 | 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

For those of you who've not come across my analysis before a quick explanation of some of the terms:

r = root of the chord

3 = major third of the chord (a minor third would have the b3 annotation)

4 = fourth of the chord

5 = fifth of the chord

ch = chromatic note

Now Fortunate Son is pretty much root oriented in the bass line apart from the run on Beats 3 and 4 of the F chord (bars 2 and 6) where we've got the annotation of the notes as R-3-4-Ch.

Let's have a look at the Empty Arms example when it's analysed:

♩=152

C⁷

r r 3 3 4 4 ch 5 r r 3 3 4 4 ch 5 r r 3 3 4 4 ch 5 r r 3 3 4 4 ch 5

3 3 0 0 1 1 2 3 3 3 0 0 1 1 2 3 3 3 0 0 1 1 2 3 3 3 0 0 1 1 2 3

F⁷

C⁷

r r 3 3 4 4 ch 5 r r 3 3 4 4 ch ch r r 3 3 5 5 6 6 r r 3 3 4 4 ch ch

1 1 0 0 1 1 2 3 1 1 0 0 1 1 2 2 3 3 0 0 3 3 0 0 3 3 0 0 1 1 2 2

G⁷

F⁷

G⁷

r r 3 3 4 4 ch 5 r r 3 3 4 4 ch ch r r 3 3 4 4 ch 5 r r lc lc r r 3 3

3 3 2 2 3 3 4 5 1 1 0 0 1 1 2 2 3 3 0 0 1 1 2 3 3 3 2 2 3 3 2 2

Paul's Note: when a bass line goes down from the root note to the third below I often annotate the root note as '8' to denote octave...so also you can clearly see that the pattern is going down from the root to the third. In this example I've left it as 'R' so you can see the patterns more clearly.

Now apart from bar 7 - which is built on a pattern of R-3-5-6 (a common Tommy Shannon pattern or 'device') - and Bar 12 the bass line to this section of Empty Arms is built on two very closely related patterns - R-3-4-Ch and R-3-4-Ch-5.

Now let me show you how closely related these two patterns really are.... let's isolate the second bar of the Fortunate Son example AND the first beat of the third bar:

F

C

r r r r r 3 4 ch r

1 1 1 1 1 0 1 2 3

on playing root notes. Root Notes are also a device -and in fact they will be the first device we look at in the course, even though they are simplistic.

Why Is Identifying These ‘Devices’ So Important?

Identifying the commonly used devices found in 90% plus of bass lines allows us to:

(i) ‘codify’ that device so that when we see/hear it again we can instantly identify it

(ii) isolate the device and practice it in multiple chord settings and key centres so that we become fluent with that device and can use it in our playing. And that playing is either learning someone else’s lines or creating our own lines.

(iii) devices that have been identified and isolated and practiced then become part of our playing vocabulary going forward.

When I first explained this concept to a couple of bass playing friends of mine, they kind of understood it. But one of them said:

If We Are Learning ‘Patterns’ Won’t Our Playing Sound ‘Boring And Predictable?’

The answer to this is an emphatic No.

Here’s why:

Firstly, the devices I’ve identified can be combined in different combinations in literally thousands of different possibilities. Tommy Shannon is a great example of this - he has a relatively small number of devices that he uses over and over - and yet his work with Stevie Ray sounds consistent but not repetitive over the four or so albums he recorded with Stevie Ray.

Second the devices I’ve identified can be varied rhythmically as well -

Open Strings also commonly used in modifying devices. Again we'll talk further about modifying devices as the course unfolds. The main point to realize is that with combining and layering devices, rhythmic variations and modifying devices there is an almost infinite variety of bass lines that you can use without sounding repetitive.

Summary

An 80-20 device is a commonly used bass pattern where the pattern is expressed by the harmonic function of the note. So the main device we used to illustrate the concept of device in this unit was the R-3-4-Ch and R-3-4-Ch-5 pattern.

It may sound like practicing bass line devices leads to predictability - the truth is that once you have mastered a few devices and more importantly how to use them then your playing will only be as predictable as you want it to be.

Two examples of bass players who are never accused of being predictable are Tommy Shannon and Francis Rocco Prestia - and both of these guys use a comparatively small number of devices for the bulk of their bass lines.