

80-20 Bass

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One of the unexpected by products I found of all the analysis I did to discover the common devices and rhythms and chord progressions that are all taught in the 80-20 Bass System is this:

...you can use 80-20 Bass to model your favourite bass player!

Here's how it works in a nutshell:

1. Take a number of transcriptions of the bass player you want to model. It should be at least 10. More is better. You get extra credit if you do the transcribing yourself...that's not always possible though.
2. Analyze the transcriptions - the How To Analyze Bass Lines Mini Course is a good place to start.
3. When the analysis above is done then re-analyze - this time looking for 80-20 Patterns rather than analyzing how the notes work against the harmony.
4. Other things to look for include: common rhythms used by this bass player and common approaches to certain situations (e.g. how do they approach going from a V7 chord to a I chord? Or how do they approach connecting two chords whose root notes are a tone apart? And so on)
5. Once you've done this for a body of work of a bass player you should start to get a really good handle on the kind of bass playing approaches they take and you can start modelling that using deliberate composition.

So if your band says: we're going to rework a blues standard (e.g. Sweet Home Chicago) but play it in a Stevie Ray Vaughan kind of vibe (so a Tommy Shannon style bass line) and you've studied some Tommy Shannon lines (and not just Pride And Joy, though that's the best place to start for studying Tommy)...well then you'll be able to come up with interesting, idiomatic and authentic lines that your band mates should appreciate. Especially if you can groove as hard as Tommy grooves.

You can go deeper than this though that goes beyond this...because whilst sometimes it's nice to be able to play lines 'in the style of' - sometimes it's just as nice to go beyond a bass player's style and add some stuff in that takes it up another notch. And yep this even includes really good players like Tommy Shannon who use a relatively small 80-20 Vocabulary.

The way you do that is to take what you can from the study of a specific bass player. And model it. And THEN layer in devices and ideas taken from another bass player, ideally from a completely different genre!

That way you're starting to put together combinations of ideas that sound idiomatic and authentic - but yet are also fresh and original sounding at the same time. (And believe me, when you do this - and it's not at the rocket science level of difficulty - your band mates really appreciate it!)

Now there's a 'micro' way of doing this as well (micro as in macro and macro...all the preceding was the macro way). What you can do is rather than spend time analyzing a single player's style - and it does take time - instead what you can do is take one or two things from a single transcription and add it to your vocabulary.

Here's how this works:

(i) you hear a song - on the radio, at a gig, wherever - and in that song something catches your ear.

(ii) you take that song to your practice space and focus on JUST the section that captures your attention.

(iii) you transcribe JUST section and work out what's going on. If you need band mates to help by verifying the harmony in that section, don't be afraid to reach out and ask. (If you're stuck, there are professionals who you could send a portion of the song too and they'd analyze the chords and send that back to you...and it's pretty cheap these days!)

(iv) once you've worked out what's going on in the section that caught

your ear then you model exercises to assimilate that into what you currently do.

(v) it doesn't stop there - or it shouldn't. THEN you should work out ways of expanding whatever device caught your attention and extrapolating it, seeing what other devices or modifying devices it works with and you work all THESE ideas to the nth degree so that the expansions become part of your vocabulary.

There's a great segment on one of Billy Sheehan's DVDs where he talks about exactly this and how he saw Billy Gibbons (guitarist with ZZ Top) play a note and then 'tap' one of the chord tones above it (I think it was a 5th above it). And Billy talks about how he took that idea and it played a significant contribution in the development of his unique two handed approach to the bass.

One final thought on all this...using 80-20 Devices from one player and combining them with 80-20 rhythms of another player is a great way to come up with new lines and ideas and play them and see what you like the sound of.

Point is....when you know 80-20 Vocabulary it's by no means a prescriptive solution that says play this here, and this here and this here. Instead it's a fluid set of ideas and tools that you can use in multiple ways. One thing to remember...YOU should know what your bass playing goals are and every thing you do in your bass practice space should be leading you towards those goals.

If some of the things I've talked about sound interesting....well there's a good chance they'll be covered in the advanced track of 80-20 Bass!