

CHAPTER ELEVEN: REPERTOIRE

Repertoire is the stock of material which you can use in group, solo and practice situations. I recommend that the bassist has a special folder which is the one book that always appears in his/her practice session. This folder contains the work currently of priority, along with some manuscript paper and note paper for the spontaneous note-taking of ideas. This folder may include a daily log of material practiced, along with notes on problems experienced, overcome, and the strategies developed to improve weaknesses. Of course, “Bass Riyaz” and a host of other texts should also come out of the bookshelf! All other music can be referred to generically as “repertoire”. You should use repertoire to apply the concepts presented in this book.

The categories of repertoire that I find useful include the following:

- Band music. The tunes you are currently rehearsing with others in groups. These may include original compositions of your own.
- Classical music. Any music from the Western classical tradition, written for various instruments in treble or bass clefs. You can use this material as sight-reading practice, and also for the extension of technique on your bass. For example, guitar pieces can challenge you with their chordal work, violin pieces can be challenging because they are often melodically agile, etc. I personally use a lot of music by Bach, and also have found pieces by such composers as Messiaen, Telemann, Kreutzer, and Carcassi very stimulating.
- Sight reading. New repertoire that is solely for reading. Try bass and treble clefs, in various keys, tempi, styles and metres. Buy sheet music from used music stores, research the web and swap with friends.
- Lead sheets. A “Real Book” or similar collection of standard jazz or contemporary tunes will expand your general repertoire and provide most of the chord and melody-line practice you’ll need in a practice session. Lead sheets are also good material to learn and use in paid performance opportunities. Most bassists use lead sheets to practice rendering bass lines from chord progressions, but don’t forget to also use them for learning melodies.

Though all of the above repertoire is written down, try memorizing portions of it during your practice, and seeing if you can remember it later. New repertoire can be developed through non-written means. A tape recorder is handy for recording ideas. I personally prefer to formalize aural ideas at some point with pen and paper, even it is just to sketch the form of memorized sections of material.

It is important to consider the impermanence of notated music, also. That is, just because something is written down doesn’t mean it is “set in stone” and can’t be changed or interpreted! Even when I am learning strict classical pieces for concert performance, the role of spontaneity and interpretation doesn’t leave me. Difficult passages, for example, can be extracted and expanded upon in order to drill a particular technique or musical idea. This can be a springboard into a whole new piece of repertoire, which is your own creation! (This approach is common in the study of strict classical *tabla* compositions.)

As a bass player with plenty of friends and social engagements (!) you will no doubt one day be asked to play spontaneously in an unaccompanied situation. You’ll turn up to a dinner party with your bass on your back from your rehearsal or gig, and some drunken uncle will say “play something for us”, and the rest of the congregation will chime in “Yes, play us a soong!”. Much of our practice regimen involves work with a metronome, drum machine, play-a-long records, or us imagining our part fitting with drums and other instruments. However, the bass can perform as a beautiful stand-alone instrument too. You should have a couple of ideas prepared that will enable you to perform something spontaneously that doesn’t sound like it needs any accompaniment!

