

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: SLAP

Slap bass is a sound which some people think is the **only** sound of the electric bass. I believe that it is a technique, but only one of many. My personal style only calls for this sound on occasion.

For those wishing to devote more attention to slap bass as a personal style, there are many good books available. Some are listed in the Bibliography, such as the one by Oppenheim.

Follows are some general considerations:

Type of Bass

Challenges occur if you play slap on 5- or 6-string basses with a narrow string spacing. You may find that a 20mm string spacing is optimal for playing slap. One has to be especially careful with thumb accuracy. It is also challenging for the instrument itself if you play slap style on a fretless bass, as the strings will eat away the fingerboard!

Some basses are made to be versatile, and some are great at some things and poor at others. In terms of slap, I think the Music Man Sting Ray is one common instrument which specializes in producing a slap sound. If you intend to specialize in this style, it may be worth trying an instrument that excels in it.

Type of Amplifier

Note that slap bass will often require a change in amplifier and/or preamplifier settings, as compared to your normal settings. Usually the technique benefits from boosting the bass and treble frequencies, with respect to the mid-range. Active electronics on your bass will achieve this effectively. A cabinet that has a tweeter (horn) will deliver the treble portion of a slap sound well, and a 4x10" cabinet will be more responsive than some other cabinets (such as those with a 12 or 15" driver).

Type of Strings

Slap playing will also require more frequent changes of strings, as the technique sounds best on new round wound strings. The strings will deteriorate faster from slapping. They shouldn't break, however, unless your technique and/or bass's action is bad. Lighter gauge strings sound better than standard gauges (say 95-35 or 100-40 for 4-string basses). Nickel windings will wear your frets less, but the strings themselves will go dull sooner than stainless steel wound strings.

SLAP TECHNIQUES

Slapping is a right-hand technique that features the thumb "slapping" the string, often in alternation with one of the fingers "popping" another higher string. Both operations create a fairly aggressive, percussive sound which is not as full and tonally clear as a regular "walked" stroke. You will notice

fewer mid-range tones but more overall power and treble. This is caused by the large amplitude initiated by this strong technique, and the noise factor created by the impact of the string against the frets. The two main slap techniques are described below:

Thumb Stroke

The "slap" is created by the left underside of the right-hand thumb striking the string in such a way that the string hits the frets in a percussive manner. (Most of the impact is on the fret adjacent to that which is fingered.) This called a *thumb stroke*. It is best to keep the thumb straight or slightly flexed so that it lies roughly along the same path as the string, and does not hit higher strings. This placement also results in the thumb contacting a broader surface area of the string, which minimizes the risk of sounding a specific harmonic, and therefore produces a fuller sound with better bass frequencies. The best place to strike the thumb is near the end of the fingerboard, on or just beyond the 24th fret. To create a normally sustained sound after an individual thumb stroke, the right hand will have rebound and hover over the strings, supported by the lower arm touching the body of the bass. Most often, the thumb stroke is followed by another, or a popped stroke. See Photograph 18-1.



Photograph 18-1: Thumb stroke