



CHAPTER THREE: WORKING WITH A METRONOME

Much debate occurs over the utility of a metronome. My recommendation is that since the electric bass is an instrument of both harmonic and timing reference for the rest of the ensemble, it is a requirement to have metronomic ability. This ability can be improved by working with a metronome or drum machine. I prefer drum machines most of the time as they are far more flexible in their provision of tempos, cyclical forms, various metres and subdivisions. (For programming drum machines, check out the rhythm table at the end of the Glossary).

The important thing to remember is not to use any kind of machine as a crutch: the device's purpose is to help build your "internal clock" and to assist in mastery of techniques in the absence of a perfectly metronomic human practice partner! Get to know the device and then keep changing its role in a creative manner. In this way, it will become creatively integrated into your practice, and there is no fear of over-reliance. This chapter aims to provide "food for thought" in this respect.

For example, begin by practicing a walking bass line with the metronome clicking every beat (see Exercise 3-1). Then try changing the metronome to half the tempo, and define those beats as 2 and 4. (These are notated as crossed note-heads.) Then try defining those beats as 1 and 3. (These are notated as regular note-heads.) Then try halving it again and defining the click as the downbeat (beat 1) of each bar. Redefine it as beat 2 of each bar. Then try halving it again and defining it as the downbeat of every **second** bar. Then keep the metronome at this slowest tempo and play only with the notes that coincide with the click; then twice per click; four times, eight times; etc. You are building the texture up again. Imagine the notes that you are **not** playing. The strategy here is to practice systematically "weaning" yourself off the metronome, so that you have to rely on your internal clock. Even this simple exercise can take quite some time to perfect.

In summary, the concept here is to use a metronome to click on the whole rhythmic spectrum - from individual subdivisions/pulses through to downbeats of multiple-bar phrases.

This previous exercise illustrates the need to be flexible in your ability to "define" what the click is articulating. We all know how lost we can feel when we listen to music and don't know where beat "1" is, or we think we do and then are told that it's actually elsewhere! To bridge to the new perspective takes flexibility and strength - we have to be able to leave our initial definition and grasp the new one. Players skilled in this area are able to play with syncopation in such a way that the form of a piece can become completely ambiguous and yet they know "where it is".

Exercise 3-2 is a redefinition exercise to further illustrate this point. It starts with a 2/4 click and a 4-bar cycle with a latin feel. Begin at 60 b.p.m. (beats per minute). Then define the same click not as the beat but as quarter notes starting on the *second* sixteenth-note. This means that you have to start your



Walking bass line - Parker Blues in Bb EXERCISE 3-1

$\text{♩} = 120+$ B^bΔ⁷ A-⁷b⁵ D⁷b⁹ G-⁷ C⁷ F-⁷ B^b7

E^b7 E^b.⁷ A^b7 D.⁷ G⁷ D^b.⁷ G^b7

C.⁷ F⁷ B^bΔ⁷ G-⁷ C.⁷ F⁷

first phrase one sixteenth-note prior to each click you hear. (Note that bars 2 and 4 will start with this displaced click.) Then redefine the beat again - the click now shifts to the off-beats (one eighth note after each beat). Then again - the click now shifts to the last sixteenth-note of each beat. One more redefinition causes you to return to your starting point, thus completing a 4-part phase. When practicing such an exercise, subdivide in your head, aim for even note-lengths and try to *segue* from one phrase to the next without having to stop and think.

What you should start experiencing is a sense that each displaced version of the original has its own unique sound, but yet of course is also clearly derived from the original.

EXERCISE 3-2

Redefining the click - 4 phases