

The Art of Improvising over a Bass Line

sunita@sunitaharp.com

Descending bass lines add an interesting harmonic progression while using very few notes. Many songs fit naturally with a descending bass for at least 5 notes. Use a descending bass pattern to add variety to your arrangements. Improvising over a slow descending bass is a perfect way to create a soothing blanket of sound for therapeutic and meditative improvisations.

Basics

- **Play a slow descending scale with your LH 2nd finger starting with the root. (If you are in the key of G, start with a G string.)**
- **Play a long note on the first beat of the measure.**
- **With your RH, improvise short phrases in response to each note in the LH.**
- **Create a conversation between your Left and Right hands.**
- **The RH should stay around the root chord and noodle adding the 9th.**
- **In the key of G major, you can play just the white strings in the RH.**

Tips for a smooth improvisation

Play short phrases in the RH. Less is more.

It is important to create smooth phrases.

Think of the RH as speaking in short phrases of no more than 6 notes.

Open your hand to a shape and use strings that are easy to reach.

Don't jump around—play adjacent strings.

Use different rhythms, as if you are speaking or singing.

Let some notes be stronger than others, just like speech.

Don't respond to the LH bass note immediately.

Allow a 1-3 second delay and lead into the next LH note.

You don't have to play a response to every descending bass note.

Don't use the same rhythmic pattern but be unpredictable and free.

Try adding more notes to your left hand by adding the 5th and octave to the root. The first 5th and octave remain the same and only the lowest note descends.

For example, if your first notes are G, D G.

Your next notes will be F#,D, G, and then E, D, G, etc.

Ascending bass line

- 1. While your left hand bass line goes up the scale, use your right hand to add energy and rhythm.**
- 2. Put your right hand in the shape of a chord or use the same added 9 shape as with the descending bass line.**
- 3. Play much faster and more rhythmically to create excitement.**
- 4. Freely use accents and either a random rhythm or a groove.**

5. Imagine your right hand is speaking in an animated way and even make up words to help you create a natural flow.

6. Another option is to play almost the same notes in the RH, but build both the volume and tempo.

7. Focus on the inhale for ascending and the exhale for descending.

8. Be daring, but don't make large jumps. It can sound disjointed if we leap octaves. We don't sing or speak in large intervals.

9. Be confident. Almost anything you play over a descending or ascending bass line works. It is almost foolproof. Enjoy!!!

Descending Bass Lines

Sunita Staneslow

LH bass line, RH white strings

Musical notation for measures 1-6. The piece is in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bass line (left hand) consists of a descending sequence of whole notes: F#4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3. The right hand (white strings) features a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, including rests and slurs.

Musical notation for measures 7-12. The bass line continues with whole notes: G3, F#3, E3, D3, C3, B2. The right hand continues with melodic patterns, including slurs and rests.

Musical notation for measures 13-19. The bass line continues with whole notes: A2, G2, F#2, E2, D2, C2. The right hand continues with melodic patterns, including slurs and rests.

Musical notation for measures 20-26. The bass line continues with whole notes: B1, A1, G1, F#1, E1, D1. The right hand continues with melodic patterns, including slurs and rests.

Musical notation for measures 27-32. The bass line continues with whole notes: C1, B0, A0, G0, F#0, E0. The right hand continues with melodic patterns, including slurs and rests. The piece concludes with a double bar line.