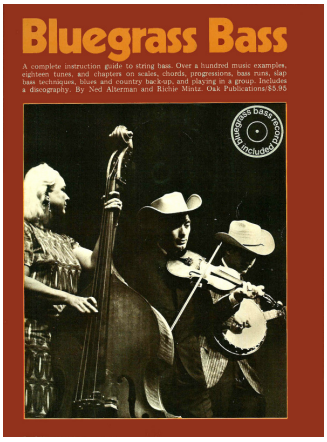
This folio consists of pages from different sections of the book presented together as a sampler for illustrative purposes. Full book is 92 pages with play along disk

It Was A Magic Moment.



For a brief instant, the earth stood still and I saw it all clearly. I am a bass player. Everybody is a bass player. Are you a bass player? I bet you are. Never played music before? Welcome, you are in the right place.

In my Boulder days, I taught lessons and repaired instruments in a music store. The fun of being in the music business was that great musicians and famous performers walked into the store all the time. One day, we found ourselves face to face with Bill Monroe, the Father of Bluegrass Music. Mr. Big Mon hisself asked us to help him put together the first Bill Monroe Colorado Rocky Mountain Bluegrass Festival. It was there at that festival, in August of 1975, at high noon on a Friday, that I had the vision.

The festival had barely begun but as soon as I stepped out of my car, I heard a tight band ripping over the main stage speakers. It was *Country Gazette* with Roger Bush clicking and ticking and slapping away as he straddled his bass, literally riding it. Two of my bluegrass heroes were up there onstage tearing it up: Byron Berline on fiddle and Alan Munde on banjo. But I couldn't take my eyes off Roger Bush playing upright bass. I noticed that it was actually the rock-solid bass that was driving the music, and how sparingly and tastefully Roger used the slap to kick the whole band into turbo drive.

I sat there astounded and transported, zeroed in on Roger. I looked and I watched and I looked some more. As I watched what Roger was doing, time slowed down to a crawl. In a flash, twenty years of playing guitar, banjo and mandolin suddenly collided with everything I had learned about music theory and chord construction. Then that train collided with what Roger was doing on the bass.

In a mystical moment of slow motion clarity, I saw it all. I understood how the bass player lays the rhythmic foundation by playing the roots and fifths of the chords. I saw how bass runs connect the chord changes. I saw how the slap fills the time between the beats and creates an offbeat like the high hat of a drum set. I realized in that moment that the bass is the perfect gateway instrument to playing bluegrass, and that bluegrass is the perfect gateway music to all other kinds of music. And very best of all, I saw how it could all be taught in a logical and understandable manner that anyone could learn. It was in the reverie of that Magic Moment that this book **Bluegrass Bass** came into my mind.

Next week, a neat and tidy bass came into the music store. I bought it on the spot to see if my vision was real and, sure enough, it was. I was instantly a bass player and have been one ever since. Right after that, I sat down and wrote **Bluegrass Bass**, which continues to teach generations of bass players.

In 2006, I discovered that **Bluegrass Bass** had become a searched-for and sought-after Ebay sensation, selling for up to $45 (it was $5.95 new). Imagine my surprise to learn, all these decades later, that the book which came from that magic moment is still widely considered to be the best bass fiddle instruction guide ever! That was when I knew that I had to bring it back.

I regained the copyright and re-wrote **Bluegrass Bass**. I retained all of the musical method that made **Bluegrass Bass** the blockbuster instruction guide that it is. Then I added all new photos and exciting interviews with the world's top bluegrass bassists. The book you hold in your hands is a modern edition of the **Bluegrass Bass** that was published in 1977, complete with all of the magnificent musical instruction plus a digitally re-mastered play along stereo disk of the original floppy sound sheet.

I am honored to bring back **Bluegrass Bass** to reveal the bass player in everyone.
I hope it will inspire you to create many musical Magic Moments of your own!

~ Ritchie

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How to learn bass using the *Bluegrass Bass* Floppy (now digital CD)

The play-along disk that comes with **Bluegrass Bass** is an important ingredient of why this book is such an effective learning system. The original **Bluegrass Bass** came with a floppy plastic play-along stereo record of the songs in the book. We recorded that at a studio in Boulder in 1976, with a few of our good friends. The digital CD that comes with this book is a re-master of the old floppy record. Thanks to Flash at Flashpoint Recording in Austin (www.flashpointrecording.com).

The idea is that you first learn the bass lines of the songs in this book by reading and playing from the music and TAB. Then when you have an idea what you are playing, tune your stereo to the right channel. The bass-only track is in the right channel. Play along with the bass-only with your player set to 'repeat' mode *until you get it*. Then you can set the balance to both right and left to play along with the band and yet still hear the bass in the right channel. When you get that, you can tune out the right channel and play along with the **Bluegrass Bass Boys**. Now you're in the band! (Yes, that is Tim O'Brien singing and playing mandolin and fiddle. Thank you, Tim.) And many thanks to you at home for sitting in!

Bluegrass Bass CD band

Ritchie Mintz, bass & 5-string banjo
Tim O'Brien, fiddle, mandolin & vocals
Zeke Little, mandolin
Ned Alterman, guitar & vocals
Keely Brunner, guitar & vocals

Special Thanks

Ned Alterman, Michael Erwin, Eastside Flash, Susanne Gross, and our interview artists:
Marshall Wilborn, Wayne Taylor, Missy Raines, Randy Davis, Byron House, Kip Martin,
Jere Cherryholmes, Roger Bush, Ruth McLain, Tom Gray, Jack Cooke, and Mark Fain

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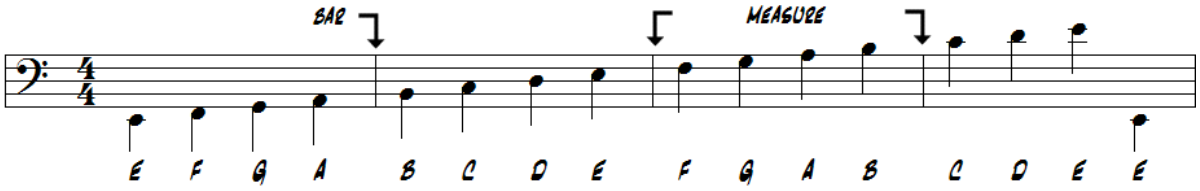
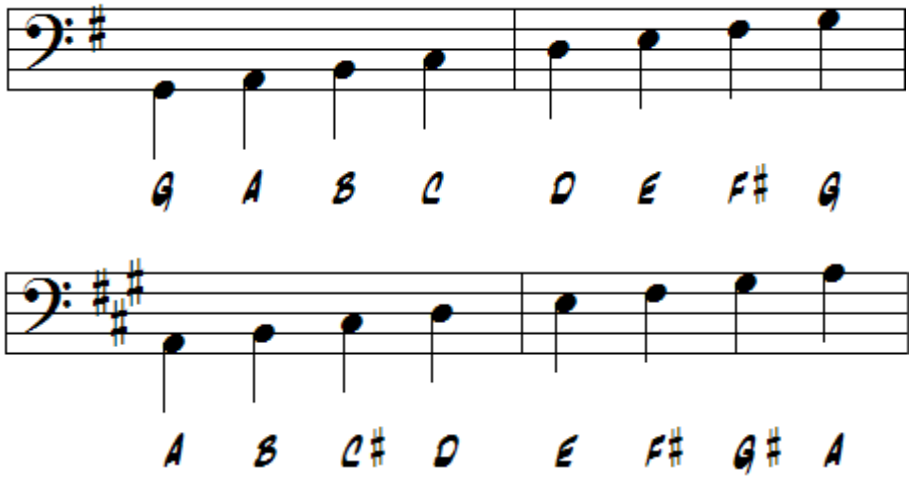
How To Read Bass Clef Music Notation

The arrangement of the five parallel lines is called the *staff*. Each line and space corresponds to a note which can be found on the bass fiddle. The two dots in the bass *clef* sign fall on either side of the *F* line. The staff may be continued higher or lower by the addition of extra lines, called *ledger lines*.

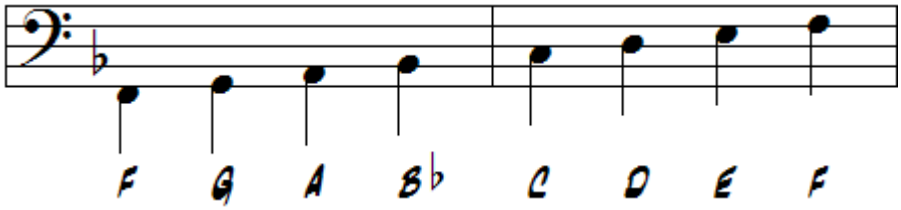


The staff above shows the notes from low E, the lowest tone on the bass fiddle, through the mid-range E, and on up to the high E note. *Bar-Lines* divide the music into groups of beats, called *measures*. The notes shown are *quarter notes*; there are often four of them per measure. (We'll learn more about rhythm in a moment.)

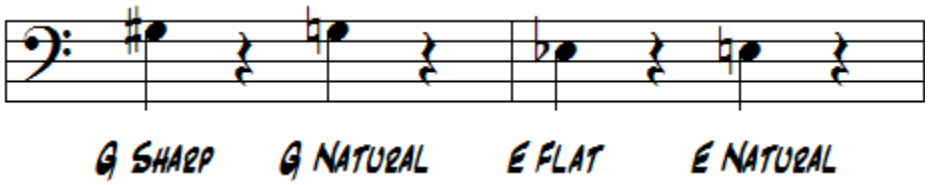
The "in-between" notes are called *sharps* when ascending the scale, and *flats* when descending. The sign for a sharp is #, and the sign for a flat is *b*. Whenever a sharp appears on a space or a line at the beginning of a staff, it means that the player is supposed to sharp (raise by one half-step) the note that is normally indicated on the line or space. For example, the staff below has a sharp sign on the F line, at the beginning of the staff. This means all the F notes in the music that follows should be played as F#'s. The A scale appears next, and it has three sharps: C#, F# and *G#*. These sharps are indicated once at the beginning of the line, so the player has to remember that every time a note appears on the C space, F line or the G space, it is actually to be played one half-step higher.



Flats work the same way. If a flat sign appears on a line or a space, it means that the player should play the note one half-step lower than is normally indicated.



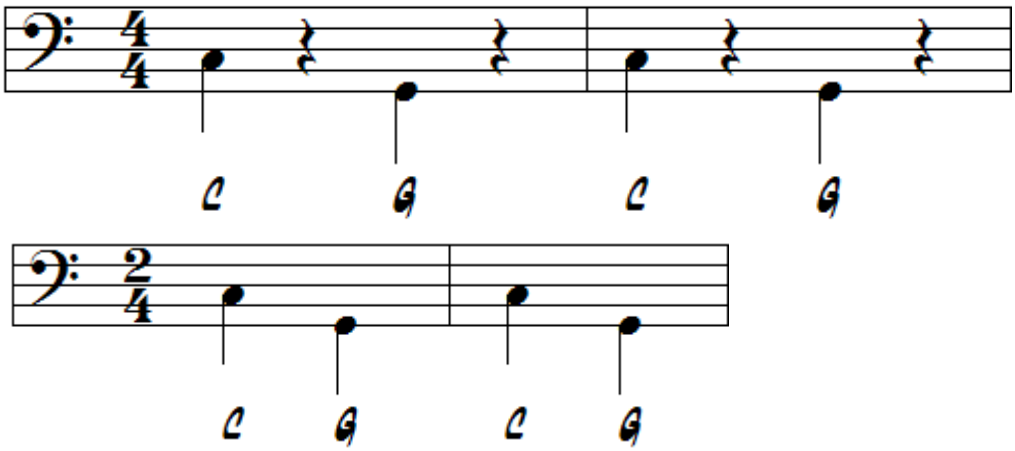
If the key signature at the beginning of the staff calls for a certain sharp or flat, but the player is supposed to play the regular or natural form of the note (say F rather than F#), a natural sign is used. If a natural note is called for, but the player is directed to play a sharped or flatted form of the note, the sign for sharp or flat will appear right before the note in question.

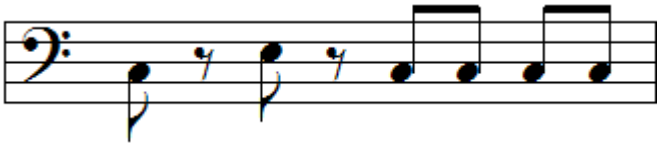
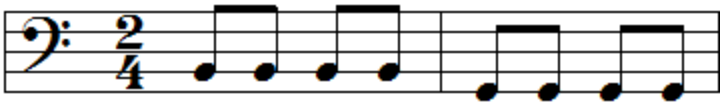


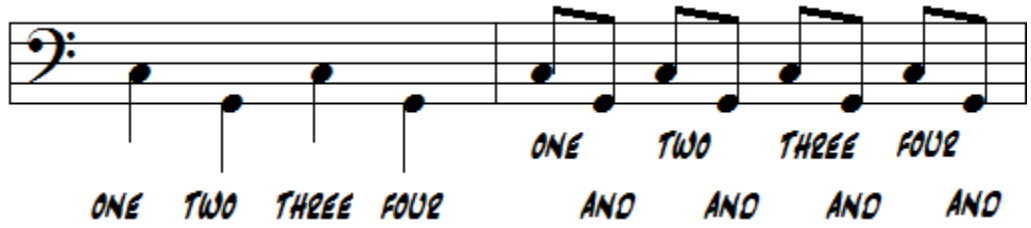
Rhythm

The two numbers, one right over the other at the beginning of a staff, indicate the *meter*. The bottom number indicates which type of note gets one beat. If it's a 4, it means that the quarter note gets one beat. The top number indicates how many beats are to be played in each measure. Hence, 4/4 time means that there are four beats per measure with each quarter note getting one beat. Most bluegrass and folk tunes are based on counts of four. In bluegrass, the bass usually plays only two out of the four beats: the "on" beats, which fall on counts one and three (the "off" beats are on counts two and four). This is one reason why the bass might be considered easier to play than the other instruments in the band. The banjo or mandolin might be hitting eight or even sixteen notes in the time it takes the bass to play two.

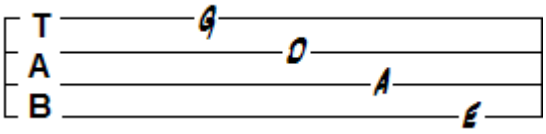
If the bass is to play only the two "on" beats of a four-count measure, it will be shown in the bass clef notation as a measure of two quarter notes with two quarter-note rests, making the measure total four beats.
If the tune is in 2/4 time, there will be two quarter notes in each measure and no rests.



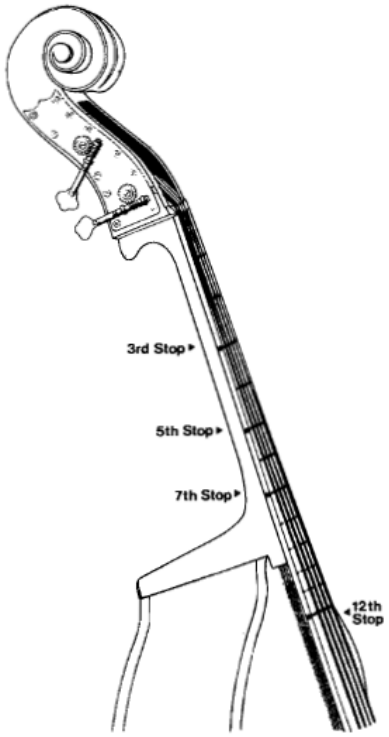
Sometimes, though, the bass player is called upon to play quick runs from one note or chord to another, and these notes (exactly twice as fast as the quarter notes) are called *eighth notes*. Single eighth notes have small flags attached, while several eighth notes are connected by a bar. Eighth notes and eighth note rests look like this:

The example below shows two measures of eighth notes in 2/4 time. Notice that each measure adds up to two total beats, indicating 2/4 time.

Count quarter and eighth notes beats like this:



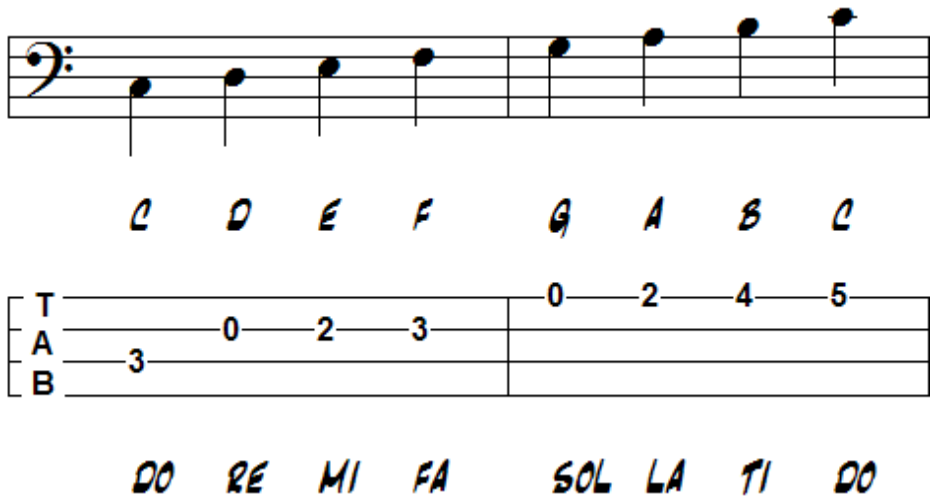
How To Read Bass Fiddle Tablature (TAB)



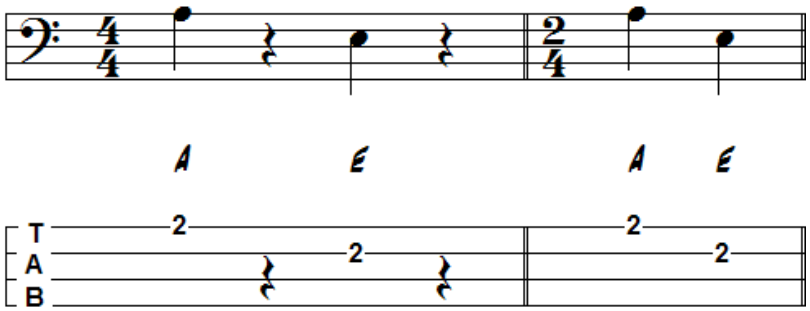
Bass fiddle TAB is easy to read. Read only the lines. Each line represents one of the bass's four strings. The top line represents the highest string, G, while the lowest line represents the lowest bass string, E. The numbers on the lines represent the imaginary frets indicated in the picture below. But since the frets are imaginary, let's use the term *stops.* A number 6 on the third line, for example, means sixth stop, A string. A number 3 on the highest line means third stop, G string.

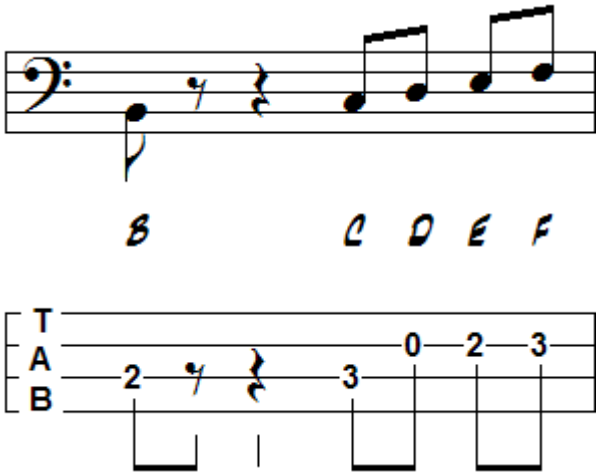


Try a few notes:

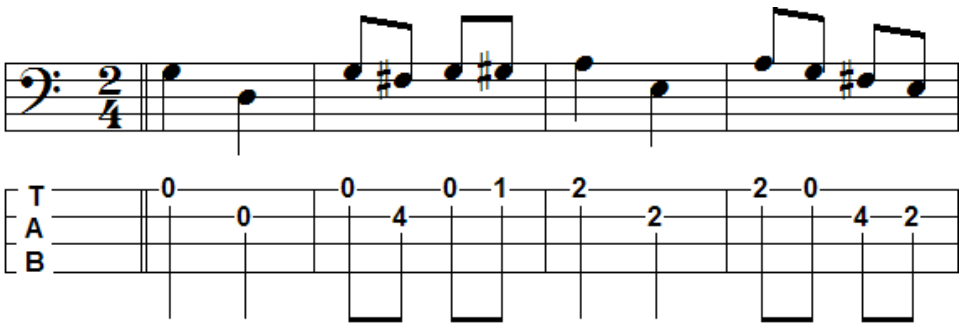


TAB and Rhythm

The tunes in this book are all based on counts of two or four, except *All the Good Times* and *Amazing Grace,* which are in waltz time, based on a count of three. A bass TAB measure is almost always played to a count of two, thus emphasizing the on beats. This holds true for 2/4 as well as 4/4 time:

In standard music notation, to indicate eighth notes, we add little flags to the note stems. In TAB, we do the same thing. When two or more eighth notes are to be played in a row, the notes are usually connected via a beam or line, as shown in the following examples.



Although the bass generally hits the first and third beats of each measure, bass players often play nice eighth note runs between the beats, and that makes for measures that look like this:



The Right Hand

The picture below illustrates good right-hand position for pizzicato (plucking) style. Your right hand position will probably be somewhat different. Good tone depends not only a good sounding bass, but also on a good setup and good strings. But there is much more to good playing than that. We can't adequately instruct you about hand and body positions because our hands and bodies are all different, and what works for one bass player won't always work for another. What we can do is give you some good advice, and that is to seek out bassists whose playing you admire and take some lessons from them. Just a few lessons can make a huge difference.

Behold the right hand of a master player, jazz bassist Paul Spikes. There is much to learn from studying this picture, so take your time. Look closely. Note the gentle angle from the forearm through the wrist to the hand. This picture is filled with the energy of relaxed strength. Can you sense it? You can see it in the hand and the way the fingers touch the strings. Although you can't actually see the palm side of Paul's hand, try to imagine what it might look like. Focus your attention on Paul's fingers, especially the index and middle fingers. Notice how much of each finger comes in contact with the strings. There's a long callus line on the underside of each finger right where the string is. If you could see those calluses, they would tell you a lot about how Paul plays. What do those calluses have to teach you? Try and see them in your imagination. How many songs do you think this hand has played? How many notes?

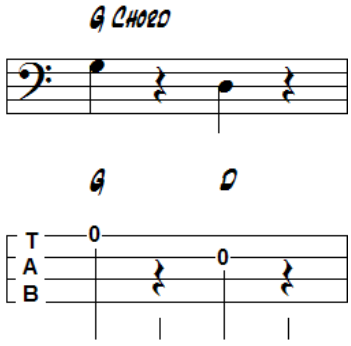
Beginning To Play

With the bass in tune to standard pitch, we can begin by playing a song or two straight off. We'll start with *Little Birdie*, a traditional American folk song. The job of the bass is to keep time by striking the strings in a steady rhythm. On the recording, the bass is heard through the right channel only, so you can tune it in or out as you wish.

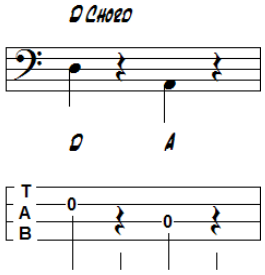
To play bass for *Little Birdie*, you'll need two chords, G and D, and for each chord you'll rock back and forth between two notes.

There is no need to employ the left hand for this tune. Just pluck the open strings with the index finger of the right hand.

G chord – Strike open G, then D



D chord – Strike open D, then A



The First Rung On The Ladder

Our next song is *Will The Circle Be Unbroken*. If you understand how we played *Little Birdie* by rocking back and forth on two adjacent open strings through two chord changes, this next song works just the same…just a little bit different. The difference is that we will be in a different key; we will be in D, not G. *You could consider this very simple way of playing only on open strings to be the first rung on the bass-playing ladder.*