

Double Bass Basics for the Band (or Orchestra) Director

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I have supplied links at the end of each topic to short, professionally produced videos related to each of the topics. These videos (of me and my teaching) were produced by D'Addario, the string manufacturer, and can be viewed on their website, www.thelessonroom.com and on Youtube.

Training Bassists for Band

EQUIPMENT ISSUES

Double Bass Set-up

String height-

At the nut: a piece of paper high off the fingerboard

At the end of the fingerboard: 6, 7, 8, and 9 mm (G, D, A, E)

At the G harmonic: 1-2 mm

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lf4W76Smehk&feature=player_embedded#!

Sizing the Double Bass

The most important aspect of sizing the bass and setting endpin height is where the bow meets the string.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O89LAFSwW1Q&feature=related>

Rosin

Bass rosin is different from all other rosins. Pops Rosin is effective and cheap, Other rosins are perhaps more refined, but also more expensive. Bassists also apply rosin differently – with more friction and weight. The rosin actually melts onto the string, and once one has rosined, it is clear that product has been removed from the cake each time.

Strings

Professional bassists change strings every 3-6 months. Strings on school instruments can last longer, but I would recommend changing strings every two

years, if possible. D'Addario offers some inexpensive strings that offer a lot of bang for the buck – D'Addario Helicore Orchestra mediums would be my top recommendation. They possess a quick response, are easy on the hands, and have a nice warm sound that blends well with any instruments. Pirastro Passiones and Thomastik Bel Cantos also make some excellent professional quality strings, that may have some advantages over the Helicores, though they are usually about twice the price.

BASS STANCE, BALANCE, AND COMFORT

Standing with the Double Bass

Two simple methods for learning to stand with the double bass

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLBcRA0Rpss&feature=player_embedded

Standing vs. Sitting

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2lRxVxigKw&feature=related>

Getting Comfortable with the Bass

Some tricks to get the bass balanced and comfortable

String polishing, ski jumps, walk-ups, creaky door, etc.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRe3mDwfw4s&feature=related>

LEFT HAND SHAPE

Left Hand Shape and Position

Some basic exercises to get the left in the proper position and shape: bass player salute, left hand plucking, pinging, etc.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wS2TYMOTGLg&feature=related>

RIGHT HAND SHAPE

French Bow Hold

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lLPLqKso3Zs&feature=related>

German Bow Hold

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBwBnBm3ckQ&feature=related>

How to Shift

How to keep the bass balanced, and use the weight of the bass to your advantage in shifts.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVOzLfj5NH8&feature=related>

TECHNIQUE

Scales

Major – using open strings, and universal fingerings

Using Open Strings (basic) : <http://db.tt/Xcs7Q0W>

Using No Open Strings: <http://db.tt/F56ctFj>

Minor – universal fingerings: <http://db.tt/OC0wIpSO>

Chromatic – fingerings based on E, F, Gb dim 7th chords: <http://db.tt/4xwbqirX>

Orchestral Pizzicato vs. Jazz Pizzicato

A jazz pizzicato emphasizes percussive impact, power, and sustain. An orchestral pizzicato emphasizes roundness, purity of tone, and blend. A jazz pizzicato is generally achieved by a strong lateral motion across the string, ending in the next lower string. An orchestra pizzicato, emphasize more of a pluck that ends in the air, unless playing fast passagework.

Vibrato

On the bass, the vibrato is produced by a whole forearm motion; not from the wrist or hand. It is similar to shaking a carbonated beverage to produce the most “fizz,” or scrubbing a sticky spot off of a string. It is best not to think of rotating the arm to produce it, but of moving the forearm up and down.

RECOMMENDED SOLO REPERTOIRE/METHOD BOOKS

Suzuki Bass Method, Bks. 1-6 (and more are coming), published by Alfred

A more traditional approach to bass pedagogy, coupled with an excellent body of literature. Highly recommended.

George Vance, *Progressive Repertoire for Double Bass*, volumes 1-3, published by Carl Fischer

A newer approach to bass pedagogy, based on the teaching of Francois Rabbath. The first book takes the student through all six Rabbath positions – from the lowest positions, to the end of the fingerboard. I use this book all of the time with older students I encounter who have had too traditional approach to the instrument. Excellent tunes.


Franz Simandl, *New Method for Double Bass*, Bk. 1, published by Carl Fischer or International

Methodical to a fault (the exercises often have no melodic value), but thorough in its approach to learning all of the notes in a given position, then moving up a half step and learning all of those notes, and repeating the process until you reach thumb position. Excellent for the right person (mathematical, logical), and potentially discouraging for the wrong person (artsy, creative)


Major Scale Fingerings

in two octaves with open strings

C Major 2 0 1 2 0 1 2 4 1 4 1 3 1 2 3 2 1 3 1 4 1 4 2 1 0 2 1 0 2



D Major 0 1 4 0 1 4 1 2 1 3 1 3 1 2 3 2 1 3 1 3 1 2 1 4 1 0 4 1 0



E Major 0 1 4 0 1 4 1 1 4 1 2 1 4 2 4 2 4 1 2 1 4 1 1 4 1 0 4 1 0




F Major 1 4 0 1 4 0 2 4 0 2 4 1 4 2 4 2 4 1 4 2 0 4 2 0 4 1 0 4 1




G Major 2 0 1 2 0 1 4 0 1 2 4 1 4 2 3 2 4 1 4 2 1 0 4 1 0 2 1 0 2




A Major 0 1 4 0 1 4 1 2 1 4 1 4 1 2 3 2 1 4 1 4 1 2 1 4 1 0 4 1 0




B Major 1 4 1 2 -4 1 4 1 4 1 2 1 3 1 2 1 3 1 2 1 4 1 4 1 4 -2 1 4 1



G flat Major 1 4 -1 2 -4 -1 -2 4 -1 1 2 1 4 2 3 2 4 1 2 1 1 -4 2 -1 -4 -2 -1 4 1



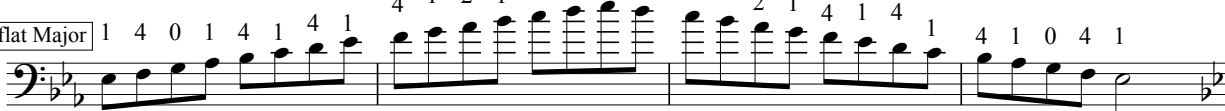
D flat Major 4 -1 -2 4 -1 4 1 2 1 4 1 3 1 2 3 2 1 3 1 4 1 2 1 4 1 -4 2 -1 -4




A flat Major 4 -1 -2 4 -1 4 0 1 4 1 2 1 4 1 2 1 4 1 2 1 4 1 0 4 1 -4 2 -1 -4



E flat Major 1 4 0 1 4 1 4 1 4 1 2 1 3 1 2 1 3 1 2 1 4 1 4 1 4 1 0 4 1



B flat Major 1 4 0 1 4 0 2 4 1 4 1 4 1 2 3 2 1 4 1 4 1 4 2 0 4 1 0 4 1



Major Scale Fingerings that Avoid Open Strings 2 and 3 Octave Scales

Starting on the A string

This scale fingering works great for B, C, D flat, D, E flat

Starting on the E String

This scale fingering works great for G flat, G, A flat, A, B flat

E and F Major

E Major

F Major

I call the fingerings for E and F Major "Four Up" fingerings because you use four fingers up each string before moving to the next higher string until you get to the G string. Because the goal of my fingering system is that all fingerings must be memorized and automatic (after some practice) this is a helpful tool for remembering the fingering for these two scales.

Fingering for the 3rd octave for all 12 major scales

Natural Minor Scales (Universal Fingering)

Paul Sharpe

First octave

1 2 4 1 2 4 1 4

E _____ A _____ D _____
 A _____ D _____ G _____

Second and Third octave

1 2 1 4 + 1 3

G _____

F Natural Minor

The F natural minor scale fingering is the same for the first octave, but by necessity must vary the 2nd 8ve a bit. The third octave fingering is the same for all scales

1 2 4 1 2 4 1 4 2 4 1 2 4 1 4

E _____ A _____ D _____ G _____

E Natural Minor

The E natural minor scale fingering is different for the first two octaves. The third octave fingering is the same for all scales.

0 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 4

Chromatic Scales in Two Octaves

E, G, Bb, Db - no shift
F, Ab, B, D - 1-1 shift
F#, A, C, D# - 2-1 shift

Using Open Strings

E Chromatic

0 1 1 2 4 0 1 1 2 4 0 1 1 2 4 0 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4

F Chromatic

1 1 2 4 0 1 1 2 4 0 1 1 2 4 0 1 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4

F# Chromatic

1 2 4 0 1 1 2 4 0 1 1 2 4 0 1 2 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4

G Chromatic

2 4 0 1 1 2 4 0 1 1 2 4 0 1 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 3

Ab Chromatic

4 0 1 1 2 4 0 1 1 2 4 0 1 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 3

A Chromatic

0 1 1 2 4 0 1 1 2 4 0 1 2 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 3 1 2 3

Bb Chromatic

1 1 2 4 0 1 1 2 4 0 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 3 1 2 3

B Chromatic

1 2 4 0 1 1 2 4 0 1 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 3 1 2 3

C Chromatic

2 4 0 1 1 2 4 0 1 2 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 3 1 2 3

Db Chromatic

4 0 1 1 2 4 0 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 3 1 2 3

D Chromatic

0 1 1 2 4 0 1 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3

D# Chromatic

1 1 2 4 0 1 2 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3

PROCEDURE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE VIBRATO MOTION

Inspired by the multi-sensory teaching technique of

Phyllis Young

Cf., *Playing The String Game*, p. 92 et seq.

Adapted for double bass
by the late George Vance

MATERIALS: A box of Tic-Tacs and a rubber band.

SET-UP: The box of Tic-Tacs is attached to the back of the hand longitudinally with the rubber band.

STEP 1: Slide the hand on an imaginary fingerboard, listening to the even rattle of the Tic-Tacs.

STEP 2: In playing position, bow on string, slide on the fingerboard in the area of 2nd Position, balancing the hand on the middle fingers.

STEP 3: Make the same sound with 1st finger located on the fingerboard.

Make the same sound with 2nd finger located on the fingerboard.

Alternate 1st and 2nd fingers.

ALWAYS RETURN TO THE PREVIOUS STEP AT THE FIRST UNEVENNESS IN THE SOUND OF THE TIC-TACS. DO THE PREVIOUS STEP SUCCESSFULLY AND THEN SKIP TO STEP 7.

STEP 4: Do Step 3 with the bow playing down-up-down-up, 4 oscillations per bow.

STEP 5: Find a metronome setting that corresponds with the speed of the oscillation, e.g., two oscillations per beat at M.M. 96-120. Repeat Step 3 with the metronome.

STEP 6: Change the metronome setting in small increments to alter the speed of the oscillation.

STEP 7: Take a Tic-Tac out of the box and throw it away (or eat it).

Go through the steps in order each day (always stopping at any step that is uneven and returning to the previous step) until the box is empty.