

Jeff Berlin

Jeff Berlin is a name that carries a certain element of controversy in the bass world. Whilst many of you may not know of him, those that do, most likely have a polarised view of the man. Why is this? Berlin likes to talk about how Jaco always spoke about Berlin being a better soloist. He also likes to claim he pioneered slap bass and virtually invented two-handed tapping. According to his own bio he is the greatest bassist on the planet, and everything you do on your bass is probably because of him!

These claims aren't totally unfounded, there's no question the man is an amazing player. His arrogance and outspoken ways have also caused waves in the bass education world as well-often known as the man who hates metronomes, his Player's school of music is said to emphasise music education over popular education techniques. Berlin is known more for his solo playing than anything else, as well as touring with Billy Sheehan and Stu Hamm on the BX3 tour.

Let's look at a few of his tunes.

Ex.1 is not penned by Berlin but by Bach. I've included here though as most people learn it as a result of having heard Berlin play it. I use this piece with my students to learn how to create speed, accuracy and consistency of sound when in one position, as well as how to shift quickly. This is just an excerpt of the piece, but playing through this will help you to grasp these general concepts. Be sure to play on the fingertips and keep the fingers close to the fretboard.

Ex.2 is the opener to the 1998 fingerburner, Joe frazier, from the album Crossroads. The tune is in the key of A, and uses chromatic tones throughout to weave in and out of chord tones, as demonstrated in the first bar. Here, we open with an A major descending arpeggio, however, before hitting the root note, Berlin dances around Bb-B and C#, to create the beautiful sound of weaving chromatic lines that are scattered throughout the piece. Whilst much of the rest of the excerpt here stays in key, the beauty of the piece is in the phrasing, and the shape of the melody, which can be appreciated just by looking at the transcription.

Practice these pieces slowly. With or without a metronome! You too will be touting yourself as the worlds best bassist in no time!

Ex. 1

The first system of musical notation for Ex. 1 consists of a single staff in bass clef with a 4/4 time signature and one flat in the key signature. The notation features a double bass line with slurs and accents. Below the staff, the fingerings for the thumb (T) and bass (B) are indicated by numbers 1-5 and 3 respectively. The sequence of notes is as follows: | G2-A2-B2-C3-D3-E3-F3-G3 | A3-B3-C4-D4-E4-F4-G4 | A4-B4-C5-D5-E5-F5-G5 | A5-B5-C6-D6-E6-F6-G6 | A6-B6-C7-D7-E7-F7-G7 | A7-B7-C8-D8-E8-F8-G8 | A8-B8-C9-D9-E9-F9-G9 | A9-B9-C10-D10-E10-F10-G10 |

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The second system of musical notation for Ex. 1 continues the piece, starting with a measure rest marked with the number 3. The notation features a double bass line with slurs and accents. Below the staff, the fingerings for the thumb (T) and bass (B) are indicated by numbers 1-5 and 3 respectively. The sequence of notes is as follows: | 3 | G2-A2-B2-C3-D3-E3-F3-G3 | A3-B3-C4-D4-E4-F4-G4 | A4-B4-C5-D5-E5-F5-G5 | A5-B5-C6-D6-E6-F6-G6 | A6-B6-C7-D7-E7-F7-G7 | A7-B7-C8-D8-E8-F8-G8 | A8-B8-C9-D9-E9-F9-G9 | A9-B9-C10-D10-E10-F10-G10 |

Ex. 2

The first system of music for Ex. 2 consists of a bass staff and a guitar fretboard diagram. The bass staff is in 4/4 time with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The melody is written in eighth notes with various accidentals. The guitar fretboard diagram shows the fret numbers for the strings: Treble (T) and Bass (B). The fret numbers are: T: 5 4 2 1 2 4 2 1 0 4 2 6 2 0; B: 0 4 2 0 2 4 2 5 2 4 2 2 4 5 2 4 2 0 4 2 2 2 2 0 4 2 0.

The second system of music for Ex. 2 consists of a bass staff and a guitar fretboard diagram. The bass staff continues the melody from the first system. The guitar fretboard diagram shows the fret numbers: T: 2 4 2 0 3 2 5 2 4 7 10 11 7 2; B: 2 2 4 5 5 5 1 4 2 2 2 2 4 2.

The third system of music for Ex. 2 consists of a bass staff and a guitar fretboard diagram. The bass staff continues the melody. The guitar fretboard diagram shows the fret numbers: T: 1 4 7 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 4 2 2 4 9 11 13 9 4 1 6 4 11 11 11; B: 2 2 5 5 5 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 2 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4.