

**IGOR SARDI**

# **PROFESSION: BASS PLAYER**

**EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW  
TO MAKE MUSIC YOUR JOB**



**STUDYING METHOD**

**INSTRUMENTATION**

**HOW TO PREPARE A LIVE**

**THE REPERTOIRE**

**RECORDING**

**THEORY: WHAT YOU REALLY NEED TO KNOW**

**TIMING AND TECHNIQUE**

**COMPOSITION AND READING**

**.. AND MUCH MORE**

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## Chapter 1: Instrumentation

Tough topic to tackle, I will make "enemies" here!!! Joking aside, as premised, I try to tell you what, in my opinion, is essential to have, care for, and know, this in no way means that you have to do the same.

I have never been a "fanatic" about experimenting with ten thousand kinds of basses, amplifiers, and pedals, but like everyone else I have made my mistakes, bad choices, and purchases that. thinking about it now, really didn't make any sense!!!

### The bass:

From experience I can tell you for a fact, that if you show up at any recording studio with a Precision and a Jazz, 99% of the time the producers (or whoever called you to record anyway) will be satisfied. Of course, it is also vitally important that the bass, or basses, are set well, in tune, with no strange "noises." I want to make it clear that I am not saying that other brands or other types of bass are not good, absolutely, but, again, my experience has made me aware of this. If you think about it, how many records (of any genre) have been recorded with Precision or Jazz, and how many with other brands? There is a reason for this, these two types of basses are an absolute certainty, in any situation, while others are unknowns, and often not suitable for certain contexts. They have two different timbres and many different nuances, but one key thing in common, just plug them into a mixer, and without any need for effects, equalization or compressors, they already have a sound that 99% will "come out" of the overall mix. That is to say, the bass sound will not be "annihilated" by the other instruments, but will be well present and defined. That's why, as I said before, a producer who sees you coming into the studio with a good Fender will almost certainly be happy with it (I know more than one, without mentioning names!!).

On personal taste there is little you can do, so if you hate the Fender sound, it is absolutely logical and sensible that you find "your" kind of bass that makes you happy while playing. I've been lucky on this one, I've tried several (not so many) basses over the years, but my love for Fender has always been crazy, so I've owned (besides the two basses given to me as a kid), only a couple of Cort's (highly recommended), a Yamaha 5-string (BB5 model), a Warwick 5-string, and to my recollection, that's it.

### Amps:

If I had not yet made "enemies," I will definitely make some with this paragraph! I do not (almost never) use amplifiers, either in live or in the studio. Again, I have made my (few) tests, my most apt choices, and others totally wrong. I have always loved amplifiers that do not "distort" the sound of the instrument, in my opinion if you connect a Precision to a certain amp, and then connect an Ibanez to it, two different timbres must come out. Unfortunately, instead so many models give the opposite effect, so whether you have a Musicman of 2000 euros, or a bass of 50, it changes little!

## Chapter 4: Study method and daily program

Self-taught, music school, private teacher? Well, even here it is not easy to give advice; it is too subjective. I know some completely self-taught musicians who really play (or sing) like crazy, without ever having taken half a lesson. Don't ask me how they do it because I don't know.

The first few years I tried it too, with very bad results! The teacher follows you, gives you a program, corrects you right away for flaws (especially postural ones, which is absolutely not to be underestimated), motivates you, and points out things that you will never be able to notice on your own.

Yes, I know, today you just have to go to the Internet and you will find thousands of online, free video tutorials. But it will never be the same as having a professional there with you, who (as I said before), follows you, helps you, answers your doubts, etc. I by the way, again from personal experience, always recommend a good music school. The advantages are many, especially in those schools (I mention the Lizard music institute because that's the one I attended) that are really serious, where everything is organized perfectly, and, moreover, where you also have various goals to achieve (certificates, masters, and, even, diplomas).

If, for various reasons, or if, at certain times, you are not being followed by anyone, the super advice I give you, is not to study randomly, but to make a nice little program of your own, and avoid confusing your mind with a thousand teaching methods, and a thousand different online didactics. Make a selection based on what you want to improve, and choose one, maximum two online personalities to follow (Scott Devine though, I force you to follow him!), and buy one teaching method at a time.

Another question I get asked very often: how do you organize the time you have to study? Logically to a person who works all day, and has 40 minutes in the evening to study, you cannot give the same advice as someone who, like me, does this for a living and therefore has many hours a day free. In the first case I recommend dividing the days into "topics," let me explain. Let's pretend that I have about 60 minutes a day to study.

First, in those 60 minutes (if you can) turn off your phones, unplug social media, lock yourself in a locked room, and don't distract yourself from anything. One idea might be the following (in random order)

- Monday: Technique (exercises right hand, left hand, coordination, etc.)
- Tuesday: Applied harmony (triads, arpeggios, scales, all over the fretboard, in all tonalities)
- Wednesday: Timing (study with metronome, record and replay, etc.)
- Thursday: Reading (rhythmic solfeggios, spoken, sung, sight reading, etc.)
- Friday: Song study (more on my approach to this later)
- Saturday: Improvisation
- Sunday: Well, on Sunday we indulge in fun, put on full focus the music you like and play on it!!!

Obviously it's a "table" thrown in a bit haphazardly, but just to give you an idea of my thinking. I think it is quite useless, wanting to cover 3 or 4 topics together in 60 minutes. You can, however, in a sense, "study" even when you don't have the bass

## Chapter 8: The Live

If you want to make music your profession (or almost), live performance is definitely, nowadays, the most rewarding part, and perhaps the most rewarding. My "career," if we can call it that, I could quantify it as 90% live activity, remaining 10% teaching, studio activity, etc. I have been fortunate to be part of a few bands, and orchestras, with which, altogether, I have exceeded a thousand concerts. I have adapted, especially in the "gavetta era," and played in all kinds of contexts and types of evenings, from pubs, to the theater, to cruise ships, to discos, to squares. The biggest advice I can give you is to always act professional, even when things are not going well, even when you don't like where or what you are playing, and even when you have other thoughts in your head. It took me years to learn this, and now it's kind of a law for me. Remember these things:

- People who come to listen to you are not the least bit interested in the fact that you have problems of any kind (maybe you don't feel well in the spy, or you had a fight with your wife, or whatever), but they are there to enjoy a few hours, so as much smile as possible, and always try to convey your passion for music. If they see you happy and in tune with your instrument, as well as the other musicians, they will overlook any mistakes or out-of-tune. If, on the other hand, you stand on stage without conveying anything, you can play even better than Marcus Miller, you probably won't even get a round of applause!
- Take care of the outfit at least as much as the music part! Every setting and every context requires appropriate clothing. I hate shirts, but on 90% of the gigs I do, I wear those! In work we have to compromise, if you need to be stylish, even if you hate it, put on the best outfit you have and go, I repeat, it's work.
- I have come to realize, now more than ever, that in almost all musical settings, the "stage" side matters more than the musical side, this at least for the vast majority of the audience, but also for managers and impresarios (alas). Get over it, so in addition to the musical side, take care of the show you offer. This, of course, is done together with the other musicians you play with, but you, meanwhile, need to organize your station as best you can. Generally speaking, the less stuff you have the better: I used to have a music stand, now I have (when I have to read parts), an iPad. I had a microphone stand, now I use a headband microphone (certainly a questionable choice). Between pedals, amplifiers, speakers and whatnot, I had an unbelievable amount of cables, if you can't do without them, put them as best you can, try to hide them as much as possible.
- Practicality will be vital to you, especially when you start playing every night, as I do in the summer, for example. Try to organize everything perfectly: if you arrive already aware of how and what to assemble, with all the connections already studied beforehand (I used to carry a drawing with the diagram), a small bag with spare stuff (cables, but also screwdrivers, etc.), and everything arranged in suitcases or bags as comfortable as possible, you will save hours (to be used instead for resting) and unnecessary wasting of time that will also make you lose precious energy (especially when in summer, to assemble under the sun with 35

## Chapter 10: Theory, what you really need to know

As always, the premise is that I am speaking from my own experience, this book is not the bible, and what applies to me is not necessarily the right thing for everyone! So, I know musicians who play really well, from every genre of music, and they barely know what a minor and major chord is. I've always wondered, "how do they do it?" Answer, instinct, listening, natural gifts, lots of practice "in the field." "And how do they improvise, without knowing harmonic sequences, scales, arpeggios?" Instinct, listening, practice, natural gifts. Talking to musicians who toured in the 1960s, I always asked them the same thing: "But how did you do it at 18 to 20 years old, already playing like that, and already being able to tour the world with music?" Almost all of them answered me identically:

- At that time, there was music everywhere, every day, of all genres, so even as a child, you were constantly there.
- In 80 to 90 percent of the cases, you were a child of the arts (I interpreted it to mean that, those who made the profession, almost always came from families of musicians).
- There were not 7 million teaching methods per instrument, and 45 million teachers online! If you wanted to study you went to take lessons FROM the teacher (who was probably one with balls) or to the conservatory.
- You didn't find sheet music as easily as you do today, but I would spend hours and hours listening to vinyl, and trying to redo what you heard (a great kind of study we have now lost).
- There was a lot more demand for musicians than there is today, both Live, but also in the studio (damn computers), so even without experience, you would jump in, and slowly learn by being around other musicians. You would ask, you would listen, you would play. This was the routine.

And today? Today things have changed, totally. I for example do not come from a family of musicians, to my knowledge no relative has ever played. I started by chance, and I had the great (enormous) good fortune, to be curious in everything, even and especially in music, so my infinite desire to know, to know, always stimulated me to study, and to learn more and more (still now thank god it is so). In spite of that, for me what really made the difference, was, in spite of the fact that I started certainly not in the 60s or 70s, the fact that I did a lot of live performances, where I learned the vast majority of things.

Having made this long premise, however, I must admit that I, if I did not know at least the basics of theory, would never be able to improvise anything, let alone compose, let alone play by reading the score. Here I get to the question asked in the chapter heading, but what do you really need to know?

So, unfortunately today we tend to make a resounding mish-mash of notions, and then not know how to practice (or not even have an idea of how to practice) the basic ones (triads, major scale, etc.). I wonder, and I ask you: What good is it to know the augmented Lydian scale, or superlocria diminished scale? It is useful, in

### Difference between "open" and "closed" chords

	"Open"	"Closed"	"Open"	"Closed"
	B <sup>b</sup> maj7		B <sup>b</sup> m7	
	<i>8<sup>va</sup></i>	<i>8<sup>va</sup></i>	<i>8<sup>va</sup></i>	<i>8<sup>va</sup></i>
Bass				
	7 7 6	14 12 13	6 6 6	13 11 13

### Inversion v.s Voicing

Major triads

First inversion = 3 - 5 - R (R = Root)

Second inversion = 5 - R - 3

B<sup>b</sup>

*8<sup>va</sup>*

Bass			
	10 12 13	15 15 17	19 20 20

Voicing I = 5 - 3 - R

Voicing II = R - 5 - 3

Voicing III = 3 - R - 10

B<sup>b</sup>

*8<sup>va</sup>*

Bass			
	15 12 13	19 15 13	19 20 17

Minor triads

First inversion = 3 - 5 - R

Second inversion = 5 - R - 3

B<sup>b</sup> m

*8<sup>va</sup>*

Bass			
	10 11 13	15 15 16	18 20 20

Voicing I = 5 - 3 - R

Voicing II = R - 5 - 3

Voicing III = 3 - R - 10

B<sup>b</sup>

*8<sup>va</sup>*

Bass			
	15 12 13	19 15 13	19 20 17

Diminished triads (Examples in A)

R - 3 - 5

First inversion = 3 - 5 - R

Second inversion = 5 - R - 3

A dim

*8<sup>va</sup>*

Bass			
	5 6 5	8 10 12	14 13 15

♩ = 70

### Harmonic progression

EX 17

Em7

A7

D

8va

Try not to think about scales, but to create phrases with melodic meaning

Em7

D

Em7

D

Phrasing starting from the root of each chord

Em7

D

## Chapter 11: Timing

Everything, or almost everything I have written so far, can be considered practically and totally useless, if, as a base, you do not have a solid timing, and a very good rhythmic sense. Same point I made about improvisation, again, there are those who are born with the "gift" of incredible rhythmic mastery, and those who, unfortunately, in order to at least get to know how to get in time, have to study for years.

As a premise, it may seem quite cynical, but then again, a musician who does not keep time...Whatever! We understand each other!

Mind you, I generalized deliberately; this statement applies to us bass players, but also to all other instrumentalists, whether they are more or less "rhythmic" instruments.

Having said that, of course, I believe that, with commitment and will, (almost) anyone, can fix it if they really want to. The most important thing (and, believe me, it is not so obvious) is to realize one's shortcomings, take note of them and act accordingly. I know two categories of musicians:

Those who, despite the fact that others try, with the utmost "delicacy," in every way, to point them out, pretend not to understand, and continue to transcribe Charlie Parker's sax solos (perhaps some friends and colleagues will understand what I mean!).

And those who, as in my case, when I finally found someone who also pointed them out to me, lock themselves in for years, trying to improve, with effort, and, though it is often hard, with the certainty that slowly things will get better.

Let me tell you a little anecdote. About ten years ago, when I had already been playing for at least 13 years, I wanted to further my studies on the Walking Bass. I was already attending a music school, and I decided to look for a private teacher, a Jazz double bass player to be precise. I went for my first lesson, and we started talking a bit about my musical "history," and why, precisely, I had turned to him. Obviously we established a draft syllabus together, after which we took the instrument in hand and started playing, or rather, I started playing, I still remember perfectly, on a very simple Blues/Jazz backing track. After about a minute (maybe less), he interrupted me, and asked me if I would kindly let him hear me play a pop song, let's say "simple," that is, he put on Every Breath You Take by the Police, and recorded me. There and then I didn't understand, but inside I said, "Okay, what's the big deal, I know the song, eighths from beginning to end, piece of cake." I played the tune and immediately afterwards the world fell apart on me. Apologizing for his very direct way of saying things, he played back my (isolated) bass track that he had just recorded, and, without much fuss, told me that I needed to work (and a lot) on the rhythm, more than on the Walking Bass or anything else. My reaction was the (I think) right one, that is, I thanked him infinitely for his sincerity and honesty, although, I will not hide from you, that on the way home, the temptation to quit was really strong. In a few minutes I realized that everything, really everything, that I had studied up to then (and I had been studying for years) was useless, because, unfortunately, I lacked the famous bricks that hold up a building, the foundations. At that point I had two possible paths in front of me, I was at a crossroads: quit, or start studying again from scratch, with the knowledge that it

## **Chapter 17: Understanding what modal scales and modal music are, and what they can be used for**

In all honesty, until the very last, I was undecided whether or not to include this chapter. Unfortunately, there is crazy confusion about these topics, and, on the one hand, I am afraid of creating more doubt than certainty. However, the requests for lessons on this subject that have come to me, even after I published my book "Applied Harmony for Bass Players" (in which I talked about it as best I could), are so many, so, again, I will try to be as clear and simple as possible, always considering what my studies have been regarding this side of music as well. First, during a period (a long one, unfortunately) when I could not play because of physical problems, I bought what to me is the best book on modern harmony in existence, namely Jazz Theory, by Mark Levine. The title contains the term jazz, it is true, but if you really want to get an impressive musical culture, it is good no matter what genre you play. With this book I was finally able to understand what is meant by modal music (such a vast world that I could not summarize in a few pages), what modal scales are, and, in part, how to use them. Subsequently, with a little more experience, and above all avoiding like the plague, other books and other "tutorials" on the subject, I came to the conclusion that in order to really understand every single topic, every single scale, every single mode, we have to do some research, and listen to as many examples as possible, of compositions, melodies, solos, constructed and composed precisely using a particular mode or modal scale.

Let's go step by step:

What is the difference between modal and tonal? Often when analyzing jazz standards we distinguish between modal and tonal pieces, the same happens when talking about improvisation: there is modal improvisation and tonal improvisation. Therefore, I will try to explain the difference between modal and tonal music by giving some concrete examples:

The very definition of tonal music comes from the musical system that emerged between the 16th and 17th centuries and is called the tonal system. The tonal system basically consists of choosing a main scale, or key, and constructing a piece of music using mainly the notes of that scale. Playing mainly the notes of one scale does not mean excluding the others. It does mean, however, that the notes of the chosen scale will be the most important, while the remaining notes will be used more rarely and in less important positions.

The concept of tonality is not limited to the choice of individual notes in the melody, but also concerns the choice of chords. In the tonal system, each scale carries with it a distinct set of chords, derived from the scale itself. The chords derived from the chosen scale, will therefore be more important than the chords constructed from notes outside the scale.

Obviously it is an extremely vast concept and difficult to understand, except with a lot of practice and listening. My purpose, however, is to make it clear in the simplest way possible, how, knowledge of modal scales and their particular colors, can give us new ideas for improvisations and, why not, compositions.

In modern music, there is no shortage of examples of songs where, at particular points in the song, modal elements (chord successions, melodies etc.) are used, and I will try to give you as many examples as possible.

# Uptown Funk

Mark Ronson ft. Bruno Mars

Words & Music by Mark Ronson ft. Bruno Mars  
www.igorsardi.com

**DORIAN**

3

Dm7 Im7 G7 IV7 Dm7 Im7 G7 IV7

Don't be- live\_ \_ me? just watch\_ Don't be- live\_ \_ me? just watch\_

Dm7 Im7 G7 IV7 Dm7 Im7 G7 IV7

Don't be- live\_ \_ me? just watch\_ Don't be- live\_ \_ me? just watch\_ Hey\_

**AEOLIAN**

3

Dm7 Im7 Gm IVm Dm7 Im7 Gm IVm

Don't be- live\_ \_ me? just watch\_ Don't be- live\_ \_ me? just watch\_

Dm7 Im7 Gm IVm Dm7 Im7 Gm IVm

Don't be- live\_ \_ me? just watch\_ Don't be- live\_ \_ me? just watch\_ Hey\_

Melody