

# Walk with me

In the fifth and final part of our series on walking bass, **Mauro Battisti** discusses rhythmic embellishments, slash chords and tritone substitution

**I**N WALKING BASS, RHYTHMIC EMBELLISHMENTS ARE GENERALLY BASED ON TRIPLETS. TRIPLETS ADD INTERESTING VARIATIONS TO THE regular rhythm of the  $\text{♩}$ s, while also emphasising the inner pulse of the line. They push towards the target chordal note and connect to it through directional intervals, according to the concepts explained throughout this series. Here are two examples of broken triplets (  $\text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩} = \text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩}$  ) with chordal movement:

Charlie Haden



Milt Hinton

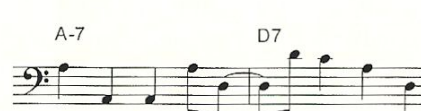


Jimmy Blanton uses a broken triplet with chromatic movement, while Hinton's line features broken triplets with anticipation:

Jimmy Blanton



Milt Hinton



In the next two examples, Ray Drummond uses a triplet with chordal movement and Ray Brown with chromatic movement:

Ray Drummond

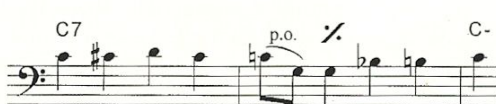


Ray Brown



Three other commonly used embellishments are the pull off (p.o.), the hammer on (h.o.) and the slide (sl.). For the pull off, the tied note is played by the left hand pulling the string; the hammer on is a technique in which the tied note is played by 'hammering' with the left hand; and when the tied note is played by sliding the finger from one note to the other, it is called a 'slide':

Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen



Rufus Reid

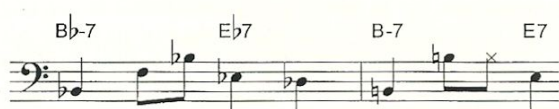


Scott La Faro



Rhythmic embellishments are also made up of ghost notes – muffled notes whose value is mostly percussive, and which are often extraneous to the actual chord (non-chordal ghost notes). Ghost notes, notated with a cross or sometimes in brackets, are produced by the left-hand muting technique, where the left hand pushes down slightly on the string without producing a distinct pitch:

Buster Williams



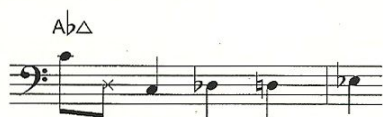
Ghost notes are frequently played on open strings. In this case the left hand also lightly stops the vibration of the string, which produces more of a percussive effect than a distinct sound:

Wilbur Ware



In ghost-note open-string technique you can obtain subtle differences by using either the same string for the ghost note as the target note, or the string above or below the target note. Note also the use of double open strings:

Ray Brown



Ray Drummond



Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen



The following extract from a line by Sam Jones is a more extensive example of chordal and non-chordal ghost notes. All ghost notes are played with open strings:



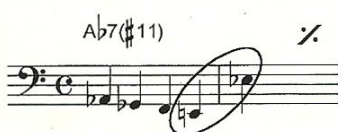
Rhythmic embellishment have to be developed with care and should be used in moderation, as an exaggerated use of embellishments can easily make the line unclear and unstable.

Rufus Reid's walking bass on the song *Come Rain or Come Shine* (see p.24) features some of the various rhythmic embellishments discussed so far. Try to analyse and play it, taking care to produce a good sound and pitch, and a regular pulse. Make sure you play the rhythmic embellishments correctly.

Throughout this series I have emphasised the importance of using open strings in walking bass. Open strings make some melodic movements more efficient and easier for the left hand to play. On top of that, they actually sound good on the double bass.

Open strings are particularly useful for the octave-change technique. Here, the bass line leaps an octave higher or lower within a melodic movement that proceeds in 'directional' intervals, such as half step (semi-tone), whole step (tone) or up a fourth (down a fifth). Although the direction of the line suddenly changes, the ear makes the connection between the two distant notes:

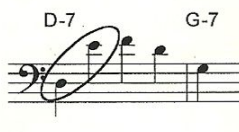
Ray Brown



Ray Drummond



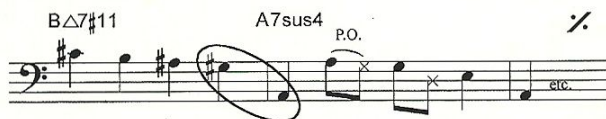
Rufus Reid



Wilbur Ware



In the next example, Eddie Gomez plays an octave change, followed by a pull off and broken triplet with ghost notes:



Let's now turn to slash chords, examples of which have already appeared in previous parts of this series. The slash symbol (/) usually indicates an inversion of the chord, so that the note at the base of the chord is not the root. This kind of slash chord is often used in chord progressions, such as: C-, C-/B, C-/Bb, C-/A; or C, CΔ/B, C7/Bb. (See also Sam Jones' line above.)

Slash chords in modern compositions are also used to indicate a triad over a bass note that corresponds to a specific chord (see also chord box in Part 2, *Double Bassist no.19, Winter 2001*). In this case, the bass note does not imply an inversion. These are some examples: D<sub>b</sub>/C → C7sus<sub>9</sub>; D/C → CΔ<sup>#</sup>11; E/C → CΔ<sup>#</sup>5; G<sub>b</sub>/C → C7<sub>b</sub>5/9; G/C → CΔ9; A/C → C13<sub>9</sub>; B<sub>b</sub>/C → C7sus; B/C → Cdim.

Less frequently, slash chords indicate true polychords, meaning two chords played together, for example: D-7/C-7.




(ARLEN)

RUFUS REID

FORM AB

$\text{J} = 104$

The first measure of the song is written on a five-line staff. It contains a single note, a half note, on the second line from the bottom. The note has a solid black oval head and a vertical stem. Below the staff, the number '33' is written on the left, and the number '4' is written below the note's stem.

The curved line before the note  indicates a short, ascending glissando, which should be played by slightly sliding onto the note from below.

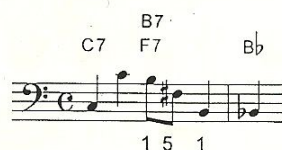


Finally, I'd like to turn to one of the most common techniques of chord substitution: tritone substitution. The tritone, or flat (diminished) fifth substitution, is used frequently in the jazz vocabulary. It involves substituting a dominant-seventh chord with another dominant-seventh chord a flat (or diminished) fifth apart. The substitution is based on both chords sharing the notes of their respective third and the seventh, the important tritone intervals of the dominant-seventh chord:

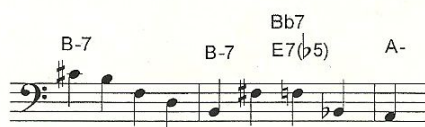


Following are some examples of how bass players apply this kind of technique to their walking-bass line. Above the basic change I have written the implied substitute chord. The tritone substitution in Wilbur Ware's II-V-I progression implies a descending chromatic movement of the roots (C7-F7-B $\flat$  → C7-B7-B $\flat$ ). Charlie Haden's progression shows the same type of substitution that creates a chromatic roots movement. Often, the substitution extends to the use of the II-7 associated with the dominant chord, as in Ron Carter's example.

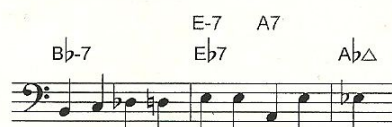
Wilbur Ware



Charlie Haden



Ron Carter



Chord substitution – which is related to harmonic variation – is a common practice in jazz, and tritone substitution is one of the simplest examples of how a walking-bass line can highlight alternative chords other than those indicated by the harmonic structure.

As we conclude this small guide, remember that walking bass is a form of improvisation that cannot simply be learned from the rules explained throughout this series. Mastering the art of walking bass requires a lot of practice, and above all it needs to be developed in a band. Only by playing with other musicians you can really learn how to listen, react to the musical context and create your own line. **DB**

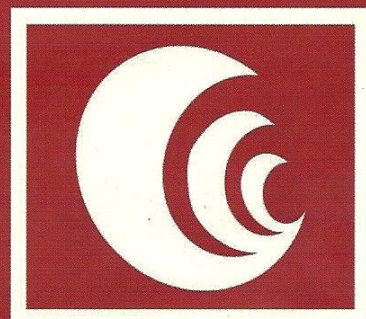


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