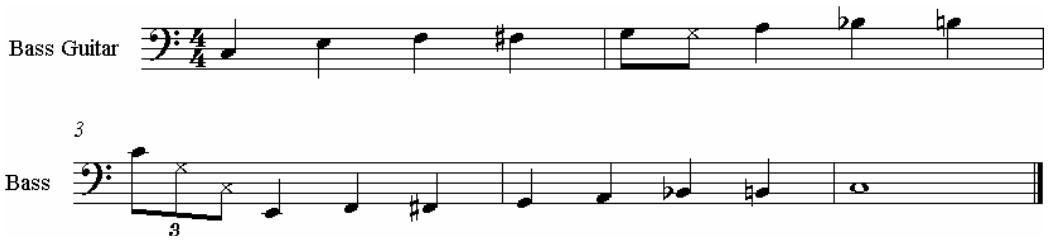
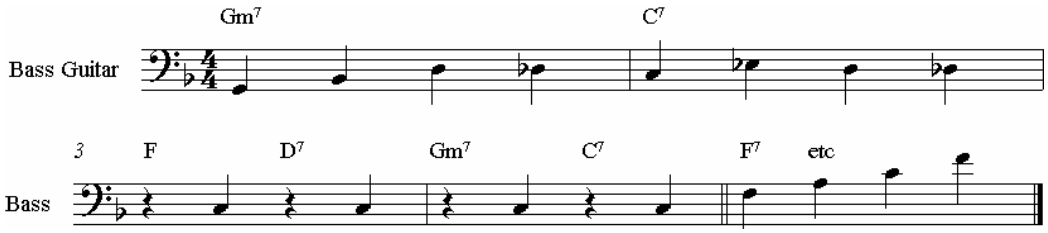
Jazz Walking Bass
Rhythmic Variation

So far we've only looked at using strictly quarter notes in our walking lines. Although this is often perfectly acceptable, and can often be most appropriate and musical approach, it is useful to have some variations in your vocabulary. Many times jazz bassists will use muted eighth notes and triplets to add rhythmic interest. The rhythms are often very similar to the sort of things a drummer might play with brushes on the snare. For instance:



Remember that all these examples are played with a swing feel so the eight notes are actually played as the first and third notes of a triplet. Speaking of triplets, the first beat of Bar 3 may look a bit daunting but all you're doing is playing the high C, for instance at the 5th fret on the G string, and then raking your finger over the muted D and A strings and onto the open E. In some circles this phrase is known as a "bucket o' shit" because the phrase fits the rhythm perfectly.

Another simple but effective technique is playing the fifth of the root chord on beats two and four. This is particularly effective for creating tension during turnarounds. This example shows this concept in the last 4 bars of a blues in F:



By just using these techniques combined with quarter note walking you can create endless lines. Be warned though, these techniques can get pretty wearing for the listener if used too much so please exercise some restraint!

One final example for now, purely because it's fun. The following example should be used with extreme caution as it could easily derail an unexpecting drummer. Basically it involves using quarter note triplets in groupings of four to superimpose a new time on top of the "real" tempo (bars 5 & 6). The example is based on a blues in F. Have fun!

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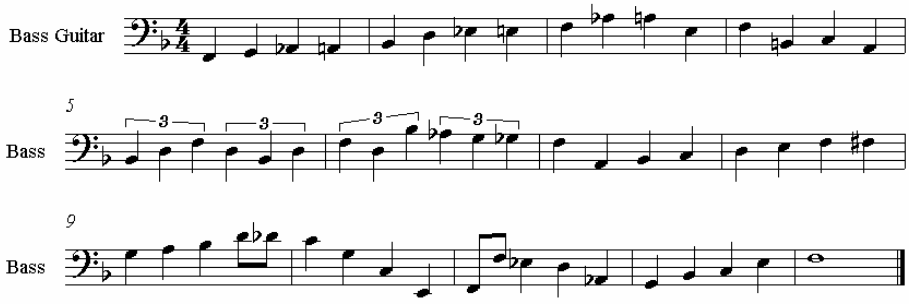

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