

BY PETER MURRAY

MOVING AROUND THE NECK

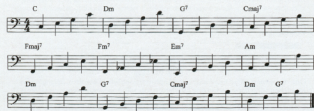
One of the most important aims of technique for bass players is moving around the neck efficiently. Players who haven't developed their technique will find that moving from position to position on the fretboard is tiring and awkward and adversely affects the quality and consistency of their tone. More advanced players make playing look effortless, largely because they move around with efficiency and grace. This is accomplished generally by keeping movement to a minimum and spreading necessary movement out over time. Unfortunately, it's not as simple as it sounds.

To identify the key techniques involved in making position shifts efficient, I've written out an arpeggio exercise that involves different kinds of shifts. As a walking bass line, it's pretty predictable and uninteresting, but as an exercise it will suit our purposes perfectly.

For this exercise, play all the arpeggios across three strings; in other words, play the root on one string, the third and fifth on one string and the seventh or octave on one string.

Start major and dominant arpeggios with your left hand middle finger, and minor arpeggios with your index. Assign one finger to each fret to reduce finger movement within hand positions.

We want to change positions as little as possible, but when we have to, we want to do so in a way that's "transparent". In other words, it shouldn't be noticeable to the ear that we've changed positions. If your technique isn't efficient, you'll notice that the last note of each arpeggio is "clipped" or staccato because you're uncomfortable about the move that follows it. If your shifts are efficient, every note will have the same duration and tone quality. You'll also be able to play faster and for longer periods of time, because you won't be wasting energy on unnecessary movement. So as you work on this exercise, you should notice improvement on three levels: audibly, your tone should be clear and consistent. Feel-wise, you should be relaxed and not over-exerted, and visually, your hand movements should appear graceful.



For the exercise to make sense, play the C and D arpeggios starting on the A string and all others starting on the E string. Here are several ways you can achieve fluidity of movement across the neck:

1) Anticipate shifts of position (Cmaj > Dmin)

When movement is necessary, spread it out evenly over time. In other words, don't move suddenly. In this shift, the index (which played the major 3rd) can begin moving towards the root note of the Dmin arpeggio while the pinky finger plays the fifth and octave.

2) Shift fast when necessary (D min > G7)

Sometimes a complete shift of the hand is necessary and no anticipating is really possible. In situations like this, you simply have to make sure you give the last note before the shift its full value, then move your hand smoothly and quickly directly to the next position. If you spread the movement out evenly over the little time you have, the consistency of tone and note duration shouldn't suffer.

3) Barre where applicable (G7 > Cmaj7)

In cases where the transition is up or down a perfect fourth, barring is essential to preserve fluidity. In this case, play the minor seventh of G (F) further down on the middle finger so that you can then play the next root (C) with the finger tip, without having to lift the finger into a new position.

4) Use open strings where possible (Emin7 > Amin)

Playing an open string buys the left hand time to change positions. The minor 7th of E is D, which can be played as an open string. While this note is being played, the hand can move into A minor position, with the index playing A at the fifth fret.

5) Keep amount of shifts to a minimum (Dm/G7)

Where possible, keep as much in one position as you can. In this bar, we have two beats of D minor and two of G7, for which we're playing the root and third of each chord. If we were playing a whole D minor arpeggio, we would likely play the 3rd on the same string as the root. But here, to stay in one



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position, we can play the root D with the ring finger, D's minor 3rd (F) on the D string's third fret with the index, and G and its 3rd in the same hand position.

6) "Inchworm" where possible (Fmaj7 > Fmin7)

"Inchworming" is a technique which involves propelling the hand across the neck using the index and pinky fingers (see my book *Essential Bass Technique* for a more thorough explanation). This can be used if we play these two arpeggios an octave higher than written, at the 8th fret of the A string. The Fmaj7 arp is played in regular position starting with the middle finger, but then while the ring finger is on the 7th, the index shifts over to play F as the root of Fmin7.

Good luck developing fluid movement — it will immeasurably benefit your tone, chops and endurance.

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