

HOW TO PLAY BASS FOR BILLIE JEAN AND BAD by MICHAEL JACKSON

Learning songs is something we all need to do as bass players. Done correctly you can skyrocket your ability levels simply by tackling a list of sequentially more complex tunes....however that's a story for another day.

In this report I want to look at the bass lines to two Michael Jackson tunes - Billie Jean and Bad. These bass lines are geared more towards Beginners - and although they are not particularly difficult bass lines there are some great lessons to be gained by learning these tunes.

Both of the bass lines to these tunes are really distinctive. If you play these lines in a live band context there is little scope for varying the lines. You have to learn the lines and deliver them with accuracy and attitude.

Being able to learn a line and then deliver it accurately and authentically is a lesson some bass players never get. As bass players we have to think beyond the bass line to the needs of the song, and what the listener is expecting.

Being able to quickly identify when you need to play a tune authentically versus when you have more freedom to vary it around is a crucial skill to develop.

Playing along with the original recordings is a good lesson in feel and rhythm - so don't just play along with a metronome or a drum groove.

Here's a tip for preparing either of these for a live performance - but especially Billie Jean. If you've got a Tascam Bass Trainer or some kind of software on your computer that allows you to varispeed the track without altering the pitch, then when you're practicing them in preparation for your gig or rehearsal **MAKE SURE YOU CAN COMFORTABLY PLAY BOTH TUNES FASTER THAN THE ORIGINAL.**

When you get into a live playing situation you'll commonly find that most 'cover' songs are played at a faster tempo than the original. So prepare for that by being comfortable at a faster tempo.

You can find detailed video tutorials on both of these songs on my website. Go to the songs tab and look down the list and you'll find them.

Let's start with Billie Jean. The music is below. The first four sections are notated out:

Section A: Intro

Section B: Verse 1

Section C: Verse 2

Section D: Pre-Chorus

The rest of the tune simply reuses material from these sections. Use your ears to work out where!

A

TAB: 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4

TAB: 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4

TAB: 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4

B

TAB: 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4

TAB: 2 4 2 4 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4

C

TAB: 2 4 2 4 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4

TAB: 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 4

D

The first system of the D chord exercise consists of two staves. The top staff is a bass clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). It contains four measures of music: the first two measures feature a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes (D, E, F#, G, A, B, A, G, F#, E, D) with a dotted quarter note on the first note of each measure; the last two measures feature a melodic line with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note (D, E, F#, G, A, B, A, G, F#, E, D).

The bottom staff shows the corresponding guitar fretboard for the D chord. The top line is labeled 'T' and the bottom line 'B'. The fret numbers are: 2, 4, 2, 4, 2, 4, 2, 4, 2, 4, 4, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 2, 3, 4, 4, 2, 2, 5.

The second system of the D chord exercise consists of two staves. The top staff continues the musical notation from the first system, with four measures of music following the same rhythmic and melodic patterns.

The bottom staff shows the corresponding guitar fretboard. The fret numbers are: 5, 5, 5, 5, 2, 3, 4, 4, 2, 2, 5, 5, 5, 5, 2, 3, 4, 4, 2, 2, 5.

The third system of the D chord exercise consists of two staves. The top staff continues the musical notation, with four measures of music, including a final measure with a double bar line.

The bottom staff shows the corresponding guitar fretboard. The fret numbers are: 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Paul Wolfe has been playing since he was 15...which is wayyyyy too long.

He is based in London in the UK where he runs one of the most sought after cover bands for weddings, corporate parties, charity balls and events.

Paul also runs a how to play bass website focusing on beginners. Paul's teaching philosophy is song based rather than scale based - as most private teachers seem to be. Paul is the author of Bass Hannon, Deliberate Practice and the upcoming How To Practice In Your Dead Time. More details on all of these can be found at his website.