

# Double-stopping

Getting to grips with double-stops opens up plenty of improvisational possibilities. **John Goldsby** shows how in the first of three tutors on double- and triple-stopping

**S**OMETIMES TWO NOTES ARE BETTER THAN ONE. The term double-stop refers to two notes played simultaneously on the bass. Jazz bassists can augment their single-note lines by judiciously using double-stops to outline harmony and add flavour to the improvised line.

In the lower register of the bass, you can play intervals of thirds, fourths, fifths, sevenths, octaves and even tenths (Example 1). Note that these are not all of the possible double-stops in one position, only the most useful. These examples should be played pizzicato. There are some suggested fingerings, but the most comfortable approach for each bassist will depend on hand size, strength, and the size of the instrument.

## Example 1

Bass

A favourite double-stop among jazz bassists is the interval of a fifth (Example 2). You can use this full, rich sound when a lot of power is required. The perfect-fifth double-stop is good for 'pedal point' sections where the harmony is static or repeated over and over.

## Example 2

F min7                  Eb7                  D7                  C7

Look at standard jazz songs that you already know and see if you can use the perfect-fifth double-stop to enhance your bass line. This might work best in a repeated vamp pattern, or as the tonic chord in a cadence. Make sure that the perfect-fifth interval is in tune. A good way to practise intonation is to play the lowest note and sing the fifth above. Then match the pitch that you are singing with the top note of the double-stop on the bass, using your ear to fine-tune this resonant interval.

The next exercise is in the style of Ray Brown, who popularised the use of double-stops by outlining the thirds and sevenths of chords. In Example 3, the seventh of the Amin7 chord (the note G) and the third of the Amin7 (the note C), resolve to the third of the D7 chord (the note F#) and the seventh of the D7 (the note C). The chord progression in this example and the corresponding double-stops move down in whole-step intervals. Practise this beautiful and useful double-stop pattern in all twelve keys.

## Example 3

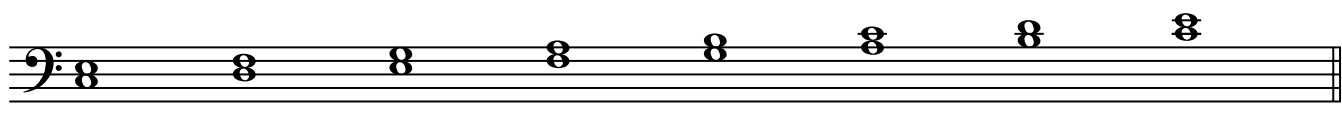
A min7                  D7                  G min7                  C7                  F min7                  B7

In jazz bass playing, double-stops are often played using the following combinations of notes: root-third, root-fifth, root-seventh, third-seventh, fifth-seventh, and root-tenth (the tenth being one octave above the third). Try to outline chord progressions using double-stops when playing through some familiar jazz standards. You don't have to play double-stops through each chord of the entire chord progression, rather look for key spots where a double-stop might add spice to your line. You'll find several that lie nicely under your fingers, and some that are less practical.

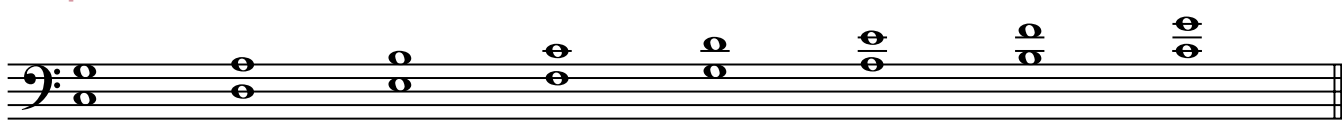
Your goal is to become comfortable grabbing two notes at once. To master double-stop patterns in a musical way, play through scales using a particular interval. Example 4 shows the C major scale in thirds. Example 5 is the C major scale in fifths. Watch out for the  $b5$  interval that sneaks up on you on the seventh scale degree (the notes B and F).

When you practise these double-stop exercises, make sure that both notes are equally loud. You should strike through the two strings with your right-hand finger (probably your index finger) in a fast motion, so that both notes are rhythmically accurate. Using one right-hand finger to play the double-stop only works for double-stops on adjacent strings. For double-stops that are two or three strings apart (the low G and high B in Example 1 for instance), you must either pluck with two right-hand fingers, or right-hand thumb and one finger.

**Example 4**

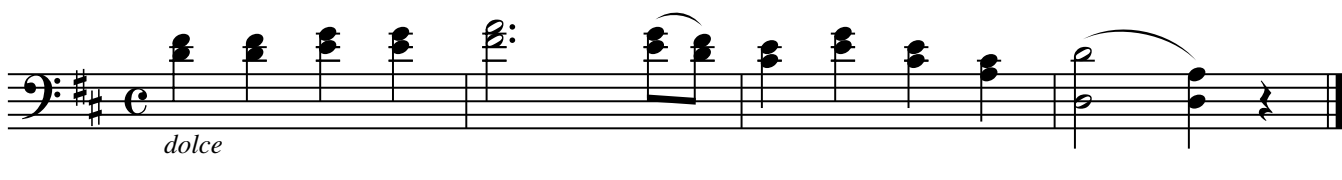


**Example 5**



To understand the development of double-stops in jazz, also look for examples in classical bass literature, like this excerpt from Dragonetti's Concerto in A Major (Example 6). You can find many examples of double- and triple-stops (three notes at once) in works by Bottesini, Sperger, Dittersdorf and others. In the jazz world, players like Oscar Pettiford, Ray Brown, Eddie Gomez, John Patitucci, and Christian McBride often use double-stops.

**Example 6** Concerto in A Major for Bass, Dragonetti, 2nd Movement, Allegro



Next time, we'll spice up a typical blues progression using double-stops. Until then, enjoy experimenting. **DB**