

Josh Fossgreen



Play Da Bass!

Advanced Lesson:
Sweep Arpeggios

Sweep arpeggios are typically done on the guitar by brushing the pick down the strings as you finger an arpeggio straight across the neck with your left hand. This technique can be transferred to the bass very effectively, and can sound really great in a lot of different contexts. A couple things to consider:

- We only have 4 strings, so to get as many notes as a typical guitar sweep will involve some shifting and hammer-ons/pull-offs. To get a smooth, sweeping sound, I don't pluck if I can hammer or pull off instead.
- Most of the sweeping I do (at this point) is triad arpeggios. It's totally possible to apply this technique to 7th chord arpeggios or other patterns, but for now we'll stick with basic triads.

The first pattern we'll look at is in E minor. It starts with the root of the triad and goes up to the tenth and back down.

♩=100-150
Em

The numbers below the top staff are left hand fingerings. I bar the B and the high E to keep it sounding smooth. All the slurs marked are places where my right hand doesn't pluck. Once you work out the pattern, you can get this going up to the suggested ♩=150, or even faster.

♩=100-150

The next thing to do is take triads through all their inversions.

Em Em/G ^{8va}Em/B

You'll notice that all three patterns - root position, 1st inversion and 2nd inversion - all have the same basic skeletal structure: 2 notes on the A string, 1 note on the D string, and 2 different notes on the G string. (You can also move this pattern to the E, A and D strings) This is key, because keeping that same skeleton allows you to use this idea to move through complex chord progressions with smooth voice leading, keeping as many common tones as possible.

Reality Check: So far, this is pretty simple conceptually. However, you can extrapolate these ideas to an immense amount of material: All four types of triads (major, minor, diminished, augmented), and all three inversions. You can do this in any key, and you can play most of the patterns either starting on the A or the E string. You can also start at the top of the arpeggio instead of the bottom. A lot of the fun of this technique is in the infinite possibilities!

Now that you've practiced moving through different inversions in one key, let's try some voice leading. We'll start with a circle of fourths progression, which is typical in many genres, from jazz standards to neoclassical shredfests.

Chords: Dm/A, Am

Plucking instructions: TT H P1 P2 HH T↑ P T↓ H T↑ P TTHPI P2 T↓ H T↑ P T↓ H T↑ P TT H P1 P2 HH T↑ P T↓ H T↑ P TTHPI P2 HH T↑ P T↓ H T↑ P TT H P1 P2 HH T↑ P T↓ H T↑ P

Fret numbers: 12 17 15 14 14 19 19 14 15 15 14 14 14 19 19 14 15 15 14 14 14 17 17 14 14 14 14 17 17 14 14 14 14 17 17 14 14 14 14

Chords: Bø^{b9}, E/B, Am

Plucking instructions: TT H P1 P2 T↓HH T↑ P T↓ H T↑ P TT H P1 P2 T↓HH T↑ P T↓ H T↑ P TT H P1 P2 T↓HH T↑ P T↓ H T↑ P P T T

Fret numbers: 14 14 17 17 14 15 15 14 16 16 21 21 16 18 18 16 14 14 17 17 14 14 14 14 15 14 12 5

Notation legend:

- T,T↓ Thumb downstroke (slap)
- T↑ Thumb upstroke
- P, P1 Index finger pluck
- P2 Middle finger pluck
- H Left hand hammer-on

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