

Jazz Bass Lines

The Two Feel

By Cliff Engel

1 F7 Bb7 F7 F7

The two-feel is a common style of accompaniment most often utilized by bassists during the melody or "head" of jazz compositions. Sometimes referred to as the "two-beat", the "broken two-feel", or the "skip two-feel", this concept can also be frequently heard within the "A" sections of 32-bar AABA song forms where the B section is played in a straight-ahead walking four style. Unlike a walking four line comprised of a steady stream of quarter notes, the two-feel places the emphasis on the half note. In its most fundamental form, the two-feel or two-beat consists of only two half notes per measure, generally with the root of the chord played on the first beat followed by the fifth on the third beat. The harmonic tension of the line may be heightened by placing a chromatic approach note on beat three. By integrating rhythmic embellishments such as skips, ghost skips, and triplets, bassists can create a broken two-feel or skip two-feel. Although rhythmic embellishments can be placed anywhere within the measure, they are most frequently placed before points of harmonic shift and within turnarounds. With the broken two-feel, the underlying sense of rhythmic tension and release is intensified, thus enhancing the forward flow of the line. Be careful not to over embellish the half notes because the line may become too busy and defeat the purpose of the two-feel.

In this lesson, you will find three choruses of the 12-bar blues, the most common set of chord changes played in jazz and generally the first song form that jazz musicians learn to improvise over. Within these changes, I have composed a number of walking bass lines in the style of the two-feel. In the first chorus, the notated bass line consists of half notes comprised of root notes and fifths in the most basic two-feel style. During the second chorus, you will notice the addition of quarter notes, eighth notes, and chromatic approach notes which will increase the underlying sense of tension and release. In the final chorus, rhythmic embellishments including ghost skips, triplets, and syncopated rhythms are added to demonstrate the broken two-feel.