THE 10 MINUTE Bass Virtuoso

An Insider’s Guide to Transforming Your Bass Playing in Ten Minutes a Day

DAVID MOTTO
Coauthor of the bestseller Musician’s Practice Planner
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To my wife, Stephanie, for her unfailing support, creative ideas, and commitment to using music education to help students have more opportunities in life.

To every bass player who has wondered if there was a better way to learn to play bass—without all the struggle—there is, and the secrets in this book will show you how.
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Introduction

Imagine if you could improve your bass playing skills to the point where you could play any song you wanted. Yes, it's actually possible. There is a path that will take you to this level, and the steps on this path are in *The Ten Minute Bass Virtuoso*.

These steps are not obvious, and they’re clearly different than the usual picture bass players have of practicing, which looks something like this:

You lock yourself in a room—alone—for a couple hours a day. While you’re in this room, you tell yourself everything you’re doing wrong and wonder out loud why it all seems so difficult. Then, you suddenly come to a realization: You have to repeat this every day for the next ten years.

This is the way most musicians learn their instruments. Unfortunately, it’s the way I learned to play bass! It wasn’t until I was an established professional—performing, doing session work, giving private lessons, and teaching in a university—that I realized that almost no one knew the best way to learn a musical instrument. Teachers, students, amateurs, and professionals were all just doing what everyone else was doing whether it was successful or not.

I decided to do something about this. I started reading everything I could get my hands on regarding practicing, learning, and performing music. I went through books, journal articles, and websites. I attended lectures, presentations, and master classes. I even studied areas outside of music like business efficiency, athletic conditioning, and the psychology of success.

Two results came from all this research. First, I created the *Musician’s Practice Planner*, a specialized notebook that helps musicians organize their practicing into manageable parts and clearly define their goals. The *Musician’s Practice Planner* has gone on to sell tens of thousands of copies worldwide.

The other result was that I accumulated a huge body of information on what works and what doesn’t work to master a musical instrument. Over time I’ve turned this raw information into specific strategies that save bass players hundreds of hours and transform their playing.

These strategies make up the 101 secrets in *The Ten Minute Bass Virtuoso*. And, they must be secrets. If the strategies were well known, every bass player would already be using them! But, that’s just not the case. Musicians constantly tell me they have no idea what to do to get better.

So, here is the information in an accessible, easy-to-read format. The secrets in *The Ten Minute Bass Virtuoso* will help you make real improvements in your bass playing skills, and you’ll soon be playing songs you never thought you’d be able to play.
How to Use This Book

The Ten Minute Bass Virtuoso is designed to help you improve your bass playing immediately. It isn’t intended to be read from cover to cover. Open it up wherever you’d like, and you’ll find something useful. You’ll benefit most and make the best use of your valuable time by reading just one or two secrets and applying them today.

The main idea behind this book is simple, and it’s highlighted in Secret 1: You’ll progress most quickly by playing your bass a small amount every day. This is a better plan than trying to catch up by practicing a whole bunch one day a week. Start with the first secret and then explore the rest of the book.

Though the book is not sequential, it is organized. The Ten Minute Bass Virtuoso is broken into four parts, each dealing with an important topic to help you become a better musician:

PART I: Secrets to Achieving Your Goals—In a Fraction of the Time
PART II: Secrets to Mastering Any Song—No Matter How Difficult
PART III: Secrets to Inspire and Motivate You—Every Time You Play
PART IV: Secrets to Getting Ready for the Stage—And Feeling Comfortable There

You can use this structure to get exactly the guidance you need right away. Part I will help you increase how quickly and efficiently you learn. Part II gives you the nitty-gritty details of exactly what to do in the practice room. Part III is loaded with strategies to help you get in your ten minutes of bass time today. Part IV will show you how to be prepared for any performance.

Each part of The Ten Minute Bass Virtuoso contains many great pieces of advice, and it can be challenging to know exactly what you should read. So, here are several fast track reading sequences to help you:

❖ Are you brand new to playing the bass?
   Read and apply these secrets, in this exact order: 6, 1, 16, 26, 2, 31, 48, 55, 63, 22, 25.

❖ Been playing for a while and feel you’re not improving?
   Try this sequence of secrets: 3, 7, 21, 1, 55, 12, 9, 36, 34, 32, 37, 85, 25.

❖ Can’t seem to get motivated to play your bass every day?
   Use these secrets immediately: 63, 57, 71, 67, 68, 56, 62, 54, 64, 3.

If you don’t see your specific situation listed here, many more fast track reading sequences are available at www.moltomusic.com/ten-minute-virtuoso/fast-track-bass.

You have many options for getting the most out of this book. The main thing is to get started now. The sooner you start reading, the sooner you’ll benefit.

No matter how you use The Ten Minute Bass Virtuoso, it’s my sincere wish that this book will improve your playing and let you enjoy making music.
Part I

Secrets to Achieving Your Musical Goals
In a Fraction of the Time

You don’t have time to waste when you’re playing the bass. The tricks and tips in Part I give you the secrets of accelerated learning and efficient use of your time. These strategies make the entire process of learning the bass guitar easier and faster than ever before. You’ll accomplish more—every time you play.
Secret 3

Have Specific Goals

*Know what you are trying to do before you do it*

Do you ever find yourself starting a practice session feeling unclear on what exactly you’re trying to accomplish? You know you need to make your song sound better, and you’re sure there’s a technical exercise to help you master it. But, you don’t know where to start.

The trick is to have extremely focused, specific goals every time you walk into your practice space. Decide what part of the song should be your focus, and know what you’re trying to master.

Create these specific goals each day before you start practicing. You’ll get much more done when you have a specific result you’re shooting for, and creating your plan will save you enormous amounts of time.

Here are three ways to make your goals more specific:

1. **Choose a Specific Tempo**: If the performance tempo is 120, your goal for today may be 60.

2. **Focus on a Specific Section**: Instead of learning an entire song, just learn one section of the song. Make sure that your goal is to play the section accurately without stopping or re-starting.

3. **Fix a Specific Problem**: Tackle the exact notes that are difficult for you. Every musical problem has a technical solution that you can figure out.

Creating specific goals will completely change your focus in the practice room. Instead of having a vague notion that your playing needs to be better, you’ll have specific targets to hit quickly today.

Imagine what you’ll accomplish with this goal: “I’ll play the last two measures of the A section and all of the B section at half-speed, with accurate rhythms and dynamics.” That’s so much better than saying, “This song needs some work.”

If you want real results fast, don’t be vague. Ambiguous goals lead to ambiguous results.
Secret 7

Narrow Your Focus

**Fixing one detail at a time**

Intense focus is the key to making big progress in the practice room. With focus, bass players make great leaps forward in their abilities. Without focus, many bassists flounder.

Try these two important focusing techniques:

1. **Zero in on the exact issue that is making a specific set of notes difficult to learn.** For example, the move from one note to another may be the problem. Or, maybe it’s the rhythmic placement of just a couple of notes that’s causing the damage. Don’t play the entire section over and over, hoping that the problem will fix itself. Instead, slowly play just the specific area that needs the work. This focusing technique will make an enormous difference in your ability to play accurately. Your intense focus will fix the problem and create a successful muscle memory.

2. **Think about only one aspect of your music at a time.** You can work on a rhythm without paying attention to pitch. Or, you can learn pitches without thinking about rhythm. Tone production and dynamics can each be isolated and worked on individually. The same idea can be used with your technique. Focus only on your left hand or your right hand as you play. Concentrate exclusively on a single technical issue: your posture, knuckles, picking pattern, fingerings, shifting, balance, or muscle tension.

Sometimes you will need to think globally, paying attention to all aspects of a song. But, acting locally by intensely concentrating on a single aspect of your playing—while not worrying about anything else—is a tremendous way to fix subtle musical issues and propel your bass playing forward.

What’s great about fixing only one thing at a time is how good it feels to finally conquer that small area of your music that’s really been bothering you. You’ll feel proud of yourself, and you can make the fix in just a few minutes.
Part II

Secrets to Mastering Any Song
No Matter How Difficult

In Part II you'll get the practicing secrets of the world’s most successful musicians. These secrets reveal exactly what to do to be as effective as possible while you’re playing bass. Use these strategies during your practice sessions to master new techniques and quickly learn songs.
Make Your Exercises Interesting

How smart warm-ups help you

You can end up playing exactly the same warm-up exercises day after day if you're not careful. Not only will this be boring, but you'll be missing an opportunity to maximize your use of time. When you always play the same warm-ups, you eventually stop paying attention. Bad habits and sloppy technique may even develop.

If you're going to play bass for just a few minutes a day, make each precious minute count. Listen carefully to every detail of your sound from the very first note you play during warm-ups. To learn as much as possible in the limited time available, your warm-up routines need to be interesting and varied. Spice up your exercises with these techniques:

- **Vary Your Articulations:** Play separate and connected as well as long and short notes.
- **Change Your Dynamics:** Play every exercise quiet, medium, and loud—without changing any volume controls!
- **Incorporate Rhythms:** Take a tricky rhythm from your song and slowly play a scale using this rhythm on each note of the scale.
- **Alter Tempos:** Go through an exercise slowly, at a medium tempo, and at a fast speed.
- **Experiment with Your Tone:** From dark to bright, heavy to light, add tonal contrast to your exercises.
- **Use Keys Wisely:** (1) Run every exercise in all 12 keys. (2) Play scales or arpeggios in the same key as the song you're working on.
- **Conquer Difficult Licks:** Play the most difficult lick from your song at an extremely slow speed as a warm-up. You'll simultaneously be warming up and learning the very music you most want to avoid.

Each of these variations makes your exercises more interesting so they hold your attention, increase your concentration, and make the best use of your time. As an added bonus, incorporating all the music basics into your warm-ups can make even your exercises sound like a real song!
Work on Speed Last

Controlling the notes is more important than going fast

Here’s a rule every bassist should take to heart: If you can’t play something slowly, there’s no way you can play it quickly.

Trying to play music up to speed before you have control of it wastes enormous amounts of your time. This frustrating way of learning music is the main reason many bassists have to practice for an hour to achieve the same results they could have gotten in ten minutes by practicing correctly.

Immediately playing music at the performance tempo is usually impossible. There’s just too much going on to be able to execute everything well at full speed. When you eliminate speed as a goal in learning new music, you will be much more relaxed. Once you’ve worked out your fingerings and learned the music at a slow tempo, you’ll focus on increasing speed as the very last step in mastering the song.

From the beginning of the learning process, you want to play correct pitches, accurate rhythms, controlled tone, meaningful phrases, clean articulations, and varied dynamics. To master all these elements of your song, slow down to a snail’s pace.

Not worrying about your speed will help you learn faster and make you feel more confident. You’ll find yourself playing accurate pitches and rhythms from the beginning and putting in your phrasing and dynamics, lick by lick, section by section. It’s better to play slowly in control than to flail through a song at full tempo, making mistakes, pausing, and cleaning up your errors.

If you play too fast too soon, you’ll think, “Wow. I made it. It wasn’t all perfect but I got through the song!” Well…You only got through something very much like the song. When a bunch of notes and rhythms were wrong, did you really play the song?

Don’t try to play at full speed if you haven’t learned the music yet. Instead, master the notes first and work on speed last.
Part III

Secrets to Inspire and Motivate You Every Time You Play

The more motivated you are to play bass, the more you’ll learn in a short amount of time. PART III reveals the most effective strategies for bass players who don’t always feel they have enough time for their music. Use these secrets to stay inspired, stick to your plan, and build a success mindset.
Secret 55

Understand the Learning Curve

It’s normal not to see constant improvement

You may find it difficult to believe that you’ve forgotten how to play something that was completely playable just a couple days ago. Not seeing day-to-day progress can be frustrating.

This frustration comes from misunderstanding the learning curve. Bass players expect the learning curve to work like this: Once a section of a song is learned, it will only get better, easier, and faster. Every day will be an improvement on the day before, and progress will always move in a positive direction.

Unfortunately, here’s how the learning curve actually works: You learn some music. But, when you return to this same music another day, you might have to figure it all out again. You don’t make any progress at all for days on end. Then, one day you have a breakthrough, and you can play it twice as fast. The day after that, your tempo drops a bit.

This constant rise and fall in your progress is completely normal. Even if you’re seeing no change in your abilities for many days in a row, you are getting better. Stay with the program because you will have another breakthrough. Then what will happen? You will slip back from that plateau and your learning may be flat again. This will continue over and over, day by day, year after year.

Human beings do not make constant progress. The nature of the learning curve is one of the primary reasons you need to practice the bass every day. You’ll never see the next breakthrough in your playing if you’re only practicing once a week.

The learning curve is a lot like a roller coaster. It’s a crazy ride with many ups and downs. As long as you know and expect this, you can stay calm during the times you don’t feel you’re getting any better. The improvement is coming! Just keep working.
Get Rid of Practice Barriers
Eliminating roadblocks in your life

So many bassists place barriers between themselves and playing their instruments that they never get around to practicing. Others only squeeze in one practice session every week or two. Imagine how much more fun you would have if you played bass regularly. You'd improve faster and never feel guilty about not playing.

Make it easy to start practicing. Don't let physical or mental barriers get in your way. These are the most common roadblocks musicians create:

- Not having practicing on your calendar. Put bass on your calendar like any other important activity.
- Keeping your bass in a closet or under your bed so it takes forever to set up. Make your instrument accessible at all times.
- Not having a special place where you practice. Choose a specific spot, even if it's just a corner in the basement.
- Thinking it's okay to skip today and telling yourself you'll get back to the bass tomorrow. No you won't. Play for ten minutes right now!
- Not having a plan. Start by choosing one song you want to learn.
- Having a goal that is impossible to reach so you're always frustrated. You need a short-term goal that you can achieve this week. Little goals eventually build into your big goal.
- Not being able to make noise in your house or apartment. Do whatever it takes so you can play. Practice without an amp, wear headphones, or soundproof a room.
- Thinking that all conditions must be perfect—the house to yourself, an afternoon totally free, feeling excited to play—before you can start. Just start. Life is never perfect.

How many of these barriers do you have in your life? It’s time to make some changes so you can easily and comfortably play the bass every day.
Part IV

Secrets to Getting Ready for the Stage
And Feeling Comfortable There

At a certain point in your practicing, you need to switch gears to prepare for a performance. Included in PART IV are the insider secrets that move you from the practice room to the stage. By following these strategies, you will know you’re ready to play in front of an audience.
Secret 79

Push Beyond Your Target Tempo

Making performing easier than practicing

Every song has a performance tempo—a target you want to hit. After days or weeks of work, you will finally reach it. At that point, you’ll need a new goal: the ability to control the music at your target tempo consistently under any circumstances.

It’s one thing to work up to this tempo in your practice room. But, it’s quite another to have the poise needed to play at this speed during a performance.

If you’ve been diligently practicing and have just barely gotten your music up to speed, you are not yet ready to perform. You never want your performance to be at the very peak of your abilities, a level of bass playing that you only sometimes achieve. You need to be in your comfort zone onstage, fully in control of your music and ready to give your all.

To have that control, and to guarantee that you can successfully play at your target tempo onstage, make sure you can play all of your music 10% to 20% faster than your performance tempo. For instance, if your performance speed is 120 beats per minute, work your way up to 132 or 144 beats per minute. Gaining this extra speed is a great use of your practice time, and this method works best when tackled a few minutes every day.

This technique is called “over-practicing,” and it yields amazing results. By over-practicing, you’ll have the confidence to succeed on stage. You’ll be able to handle the slightly faster concert tempos that often occur when the adrenaline is flowing.

Knowing that your practice room training was more rigorous than the performance itself, you can approach the stage feeling inspired and ready to play. The stage environment might even seem downright comfortable. Imagine how great that will feel.
**Make Yourself Uncomfortable**

*Knowing that you can perform no matter what*

One aspect of the music world that doesn’t get talked about often is how uncomfortable the performance environment can be. From freezing cold dressing rooms to hot lights on stage, concert conditions can have a damaging effect on you and your bass. Extreme temperatures, humidity, dryness, and bad lighting are all part of the realities of playing in public. Musicians have almost no control over these conditions.

So, in your practice room you need to prepare yourself for the discomforts of being on stage. Try playing under these circumstances for one practice session each this week:

- Blast your air conditioning. Or, if it’s winter, don’t turn on your heat. Cold temperatures make it difficult to move your fingers, and your instrument’s frets and strings will feel cold to the touch. If it’s very cold, your strings will tighten up, causing your bass to go sharp.

- Turn your heat up until the room is uncomfortably warm. Hot temperatures cause a completely different set of problems. Bassists deal with sweat dripping in their eyes, slippery fingers, and even fatigue or dehydration. Extreme heat will loosen your strings, making your bass go flat.

- Aim a light at your face. On many stages, you’ll deal with poorly placed overhead lights that shine in your eyes—not to mention spotlights that momentarily blind you and make you think you’re staring at the sun.

- Put a bright light behind you, aimed at your back. You won’t be able to see your fretboard or left hand, and the shadow cast on your music stand will make it nearly impossible to read sheet music.

Each of these conditions will force you to develop a plan of action to overcome the physical discomfort and still be able to play bass successfully. Your strategies will prepare you to perform in the worst of circumstances.
Conclusion

Getting the Most from This Book

Now that you’ve got your game face on, you can stay calm during any practicing, rehearsal, or performance situation. The secrets in The Ten Minute Bass Virtuoso have given you motivational tools, efficiency ideas, practice room strategies, and performance tricks that allow you to learn any song, master your instrument, and be the bassist you want to be.

To get the most out of this book and to give yourself the greatest advantage when practicing the bass, use several of the strategies simultaneously. Imagine how effective you’ll be when you combine the secrets.

For instance, playing a loop (SECRET 43) very slowly (SECRET 26) with a metronome (SECRET 32) while you record yourself (SECRET 82) is an extraordinary use of your time. If, before you do those steps, you first do a quick warm-up (SECRET 27) and then pause for 30 seconds to visualize yourself playing the loop perfectly (SECRET 78), you’ve just improved your efficiency and mastery by a huge factor!

Next Steps

Make sure you keep acquiring musical knowledge. First, keep this book as a handy reference and reminder of the best ways to master the bass. Return to the motivational secrets in Part III anytime you need some inspiration, and keep trying out all the strategies.

Second, take advantage of the amazing wealth of books, articles, websites, and blogs written for musicians. There’s a list of recommended reading for you on the Molto Music website at: www.moltomusic.com/ten-minute-virtuoso/recommended-reading.

Finally, to thank you for reading The Ten Minute Bass Virtuoso and for making it all the way to the conclusion, I want to give you a gift—actually, several gifts. These gifts are free guidebooks that answer many questions musicians commonly face. You can download these guidebooks at www.moltomusic.com/ten-minute-virtuoso/guides.

The information in The Ten Minute Bass Virtuoso and on the Molto Music website will help you learn the bass efficiently and help you have as much fun as possible playing music. That’s an effective combination, and I wish you all the best with playing your bass.

To Your Musical Success!
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About the Author

David Motto is a bass player, writer, and expert on the best way to learn musical instruments. He is in demand throughout the United States as a speaker and teacher. He has taught bass lessons for over 25 years.

David is the coauthor of the best-selling *Musician's Practice Planner*, author of the three-volume *Essential Sightreading Studies for Electric Bass*, and a member of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, which gives him the privilege of voting for the Grammy Awards. He lives with his wife in the San Francisco Bay Area.

For more information or to contact David Motto, please visit www.moltomusic.com and www.davidmotto.com.