The Partitioned Practise Method



"And what impels him to repeat this process at every single lesson, and, with the same remorseless insistence, to make his pupils copy it without the least alteration? He sticks to this traditional custom because he knows from experience that the preparations for working put him simultaneously in the right frame of mind for creating. The meditative repose in which he performs them gives him that vital loosening and equability of all his powers, that collectedness and presence of mind, without which no right work can be done."

- Eugen Herrigel, Zen in the Art of Archery

Practising your instrument should be a kind of ritual.

It should begin with making space, space in your schedule and in your mind, to honour the process unfolding.

For me this moment is cued by the clicking of the metronome, the laying of my strap on my shoulder, and the deepening of my breath.

Practise itself can be undertaken in a number of ways depending on the needs of the musician and where they are on their journey.

For the developing musician, still honing their technique and developing the fundamentals of musical language, I recommend the *partitioned practise method*.

This is an approach I used for over a decade in a daily four-hour practice routine.

What I am presenting here is an example partitioned practise, touching on various examples of what to include, an an explanation of why to include them.

Partitioned Practise

Music is big. Sometimes the task of learning it and embodying it can seem daunting if not impossible.

The *partitioned practise method* addresses this by partitioning music into discrete areas of practice.

My routine was four hours of daily practice, which meant each topic could receive one hour of focussed work.

My chosen topics were:

- 1. TIME & FEEL
- 2. TECHNIQUE
- 3. THEORY
- 4. SIGHT READING/FREE PLAY/REPERTOIRE

Practising Time - Part I: Rhythmic Accuracy

I began every practise session with *time*. I organised this topic so that the tempos gradually increased, meaning that the time segment also served as a technical warmup.

1. 20 BPM

Play chromatically up and down each string saying the note names out loud as you go.

2.40 BPM

Play chromatically up and down each string moving higher up the table of time over 1 (1:1, 2:1, 3:1 etc).

3.60 BPM

Groove along with the click (I often just use a blue in C), as the click represents:

- 1. the pulse
- 2. 2nd sextuplet
- 3. 2nd 16th note
- 4. 3rd sextuplet (2nd triplet)
- 5. 3rd 16th note (the offbeat)
- 6. 5th sextuplet (3rd triplet)
- 7. 4th sixteenth note
- 8. 6th sextuplet (swung 16th note)



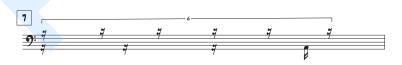














3.80 BPM

This technical exercise is one I have used since high school. Adding accents and modulating the time to triplets really helped me develop my timing.





Practising Time - Part II: Embodied Time

Practise the previous exercise will help you develop rhythmic accuracy, but what sets good bass players apart is their time-feel, which is an expression of their *embodied* time.

Developing *embodied time* involves learning how to *ground the pulse* in your body while you play.

When I play I don't worry so much about whether or not I change tempo (worrying about that won't help), what I prioritise is the "groove" between what I play and my embodied time.

Or to put it another way, I am playing a duet between the sounds I make on the instrument and the drummer that is my body.

1. THE "SMOKE ON THE WATER" TEST

The first thing you need to be able to do is be conscious of the pulse while syncopating. A great way to test this as a bassist is to be able to counting out loud and tap your foot while you play.

This is what I call the "Smoke on the Water Test".

2. PLAY AND LISTEN TO AFRICAN AND AFRO LATIN STYLES

In my mid twenties I did a 6 month contract in the Caribbean.

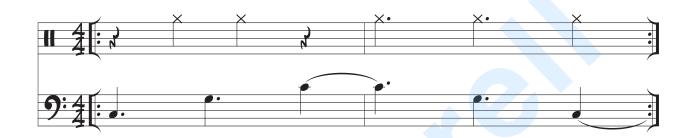
I was surrounded by African music, Afro-latin music and the popular dance music of the Caribbean. Most importantly I was absorbed into the dancing and social life of that music.

It become really obvious that dance is an essential aspect of musical time feel. Something about that knowledge drastically changed my "personality" on the instrument.

As a bass player, African and Afro-Latin this music is very different to other forms because the bass line is often filling the role of an established drum part that interlocks with the other rhythms of the music - as opposed to synchronising with a drum pattern.

For example, salsa music has its roots in Afro-Cuban forms such as Cuban Son, Son Montuno, and Guaracha. The bass pattern is called a *tumbao*. This pattern was originally performed on congas.

Unlike Western popular styles where the bass usually locks in directly with a drum pattern, the tumbao bass line interlocks with the clave.



One of the defining features of Afro-Latin music is a mixture and/or blurring of triplet and duple beat divisions. This is very prominent in Brazilian samba music.

West African music often explores the relationship between three and two using the cross rhythm. For example blending or shifting focus between 3/4 and 6/8 groupings.

Afro pop singer Salif Keita explores this on his track "Waraya".



3. PRACTISE INDIAN "BOLS" RHYTHMS

Developing your embodied time doesn't require that you learn to dance (though I'm sure that would help). A great way to deepen your sense of pulse is to listen to and recite rhythms as you walk.

Rhythm diamonds are a great way to improve your command of rhythmic groupings over a given pulse and you can do them as you walk (maybe do it with your "inside voice" so people don't think you're crazy).

What I call a "rhythm diamond" is a grouping of notes that I modulate metrically over a steady pulse. My favourite is the seven stroke rhythm diamond.

I use an Indian counting method called bols.

This is the seven stroke grouping (grouped as 2+2+3) in *bols*:

Ta ka di mi ta ka ta

These seven strokes can be recited as you walk, with each footstep representing a pulse beat.

Ta di ka mi ta ka ta Ta di Ta ka mi ta ka ta di mi ta ta Ta ka di mi ta ka ta Ta ka di mi ta ka ta Ta ka di mi ta ka ta 5 6 3 Ta ka di mi ta ka ta Taka di mi taka ta

Practising Technique

On one level the *technique* segment consists of exercises that develop the postures and movement patterns specific to a given instrument. In the case of bass guitar this includes things like playing posture, fretting hand posture, finger movement patters, techniques like raking, barring, hammer-ons etc.

But at a more global level the focus of the *technique* segment is to develop a sense of effortless on the instrument, to transcend the propensity to "tense up" with effort.

The *technique* segment is also when you can address the quality of your sound and how movement patterns can improve it.

I tend to with between solely focussing on effortlessness and then broadening my awareness to tend the quality of my sound and articulation.

Cycles

In my technical practice I take every exercise through all twelve keys. In the case of a chromatic exercise the crosses the neck this means moving the exercise up and down twelve frets/positions.

At the end of a cycle I then increase the tempo by 2 BPM and repeat the exercise.

An entire hour of technique practice could consist entirely of one exercise as you repeat this process focussing the whole time on effortless technique.

Practising Theory

Because applied theory is such a long journey you need to focus on mastering one area at a time. What follows is one possible sequence of practise materials.

Once one area has been mastered, move onto the next piece and use that in your *theory* practise.

1. KEY CENTRES - MODES AND CHORDS (12 DAY CYCLE)

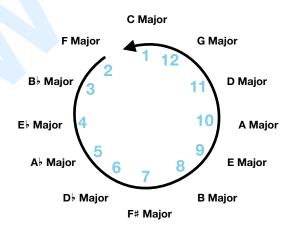
A crucial step in your journey is learning the notes and their locations on the instrument. For this purpose the diatonic modes are indispensable.

As you practise say the note name and its position in the scale out loud.

At this stage, practise the modes in their diatonic position.

For example: C major (ionian), D dorian, E phrygian, F lydian etc

You should focus on one key centre per day, moving around the cycle of fourths:



Because this cycle takes twelve days, a six day per week practice routine is ideal, as you'll finish the cycle every two weeks.

Example: Day One - C Major Modes and Chords

Depending on the instrument, alternate physical patterns should be explored for each.

- 1. Default patterns and fingerings sequential, in 3rds, 4ths, 5ths, 6ths and 7ths
- 2. On stringed instruments, practise the modes up and down the full length of the string
- 3. Seventh chord arpeggios
- 4. On stringed instruments, play diatonic ascending and descending fourths arpeggios moving up the neck. For e.g. on a four string bass guitar practising C major, start with low E A D G (all open strings) then start on second fret A and play A E B F, then move to third fret low G and play G C F B etc
- 5. Finish with a digital pattern that works through the scale.

Example digital pattern:



2. DIATONIC MODES IN FOCUS (7 DAY CYCLE)

Once you have familiarised yourself with the diatonic modes in context of a major "parent scale", it is time to treat each mode as its own key centre.

Focus on one mode type per day:

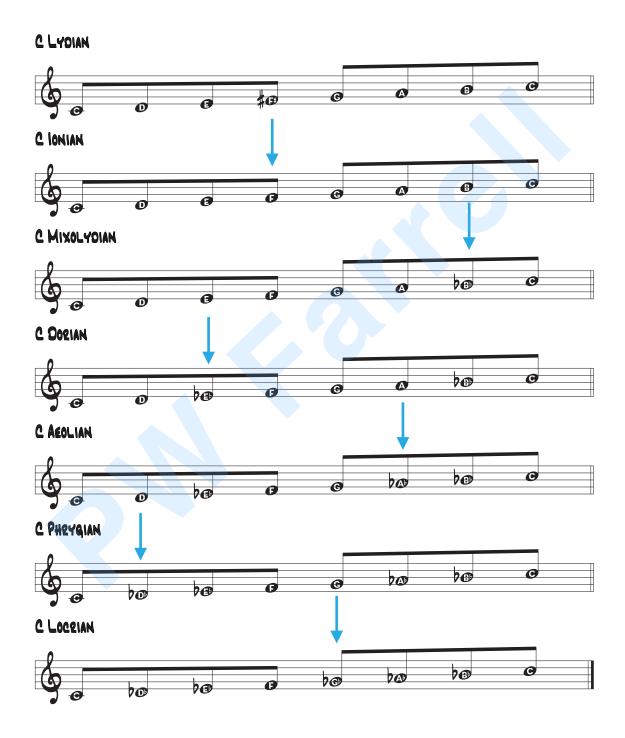
Day 1: Ionian (all 12 keys)
Day 2: Dorian (all 12 keys)
Day 3: Phrygian (all 12 keys)
Day 4: Lydian (all 12 keys)
Day 5: Mixolydian (all 12 keys)
Day 6: Mixolydian (all 12 keys)
Day 7: Locrian (all 12 keys)

Use a selection of the processes outlined earlier but don't spend too long on each key centre - you want to get through all twelve keys. For example on bass guitar a good sequence might be:

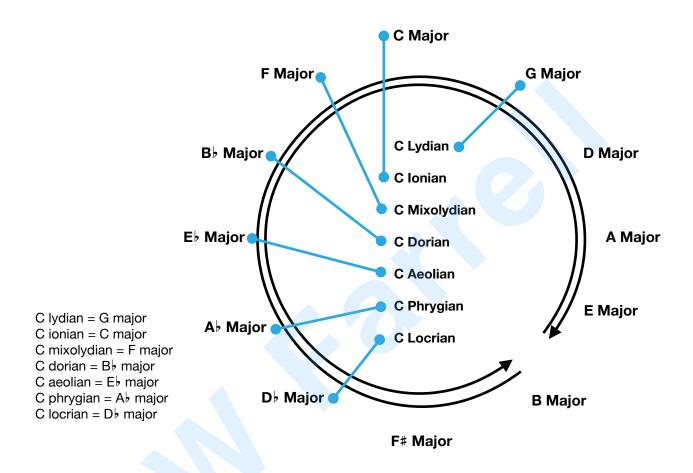
- 1. default position 1 octave, 2 octave, full range in sequence, 3rds, 4ths, 5ths 6ths & 7ths
- 2. stacked fourths

3. MODES FROM LIGHTEST TO DARKEST - MODAL INTERCHANGE/CYCLE OF FOURTHS

The diatonic modes can be arranged so that they morph, one chromatic note change at a time, from lightest to darkest.



This exercise reveals an interesting phenomenon. As you move from lighter modes to darker modes you are actually moving around the circle of fourths:



As we move around key signatures through the circle of 5ths/4ths the interchange of modes only changes by one note.

For example, in G major the "C mode" is C lydian, while in C major the "C mode" is C ionian. This explains why classical music so often modulates to key signatures a fifth away. For example Bach's prelude to the G Major Cello Suite modulates from G major to D major.

Modal interchange is the mechanism that makes a lot of modern non-functional harmony work.

4. MODES AS CHORDS - FROM LIGHTEST TO DARKEST

Chords and scales can be thought of as the same thing. Arpeggiate any scale and you get its chord. This is called the *chord-scale approach*. It came to prominence with the emergence of modal jazz in the 50s. In tunes like Mile's Davis' "So What?" musicians came to think of the harmony in the A section as "dorian harmony" or the "dorian chord".

If you memorise every chord-scale relationship it makes it easy to navigate chord progressions as you solo. You can always return to the *parent key* approach if you want. I often do this, switching between improvisational approaches, during a solo.

The first step to memorising chord-scale relationships is to arpeggiate each chord-scale. You can do this over two octaves, or you can octave shift the upper chord-tones so that the whole process is contained within one octave. \

Important: not all these chord symbols are actually used in the "real world" - they are used here to literally describe the harmonic structure of the modes. I've included "real world" symbols and also more common symbols where appropriate.



5. CHORD-SCALES AS FUNCTIONAL HARMONY

Functional harmony is a massive topic that entire books are written on. But the simplest "take my word for it" explanation is that the diatonic chord-scales break down into three types of harmonic functions:

Tonic	Predominant	Dominant
Ionian (I chord)	Lydian (IV chord)	Mixolydian (V chord)
Lydian (I chord variation) Aeolian (vi chord or	Dorian (ii chord) Phrygian (iii chord*)	
i chord minor key)	Locrian (ii chord in minor keys)	

^{*}Phrygian is a special case - there is much more to it than we can cover here. It is often used as a ii susb9 chord - a special kind of harmony that is used instead of a ii V sequence, a modal i chord and sometimes simply as a iii chord (although there's an argument to be made that most "iii" chords are actually I/iii).

Add to this list Phrygian dominant, the fifth mode of harmonic minor.

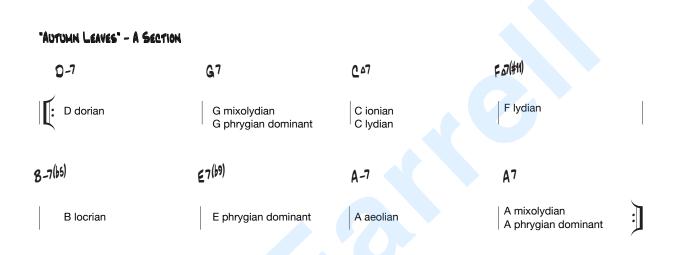


Tonic	Predominant	Dominant
Ionian (I chord)	Lydian (IV chord)	Mixolydian (V chord)
Lydian (I chord variation)	Dorian (ii chord)	Phrygian Dominant (V in minor
Aeolian (vi chord or	Phrygian (iii chord*)	and V chord variation)
i chord minor key)	Locrian (ii chord in minor keys)	

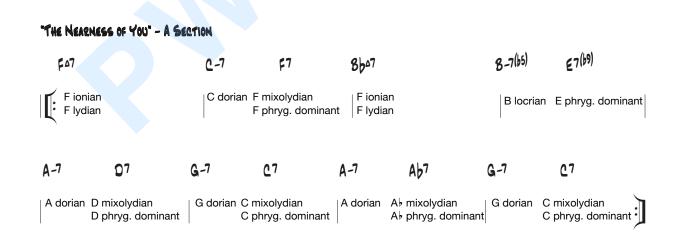
Now apply these chord-scales to simple functional chord sequences.

Experiment with using the variation chord-scales and remember that when you do so you are essentially altering the underlying chord.

The A section of "Autumn Leaves" is a great choice.



The A section of "Nearness of You" is less diatonic, which highlights how useful the chord-scale approach really is.



Use your ears and pay attention to when alternate chord-scales sound too "outside". Is there a way to use them that makes them work? Try changing the harmonic rhythm of your melody (resolve to primary chord-tones on the beat).

6. NON-DIATONIC MODES

Beyond the diatonic chord-scale, modern jazz incorporates various chord-scales from melodic minor modes, harmonic minor, the diminished scale and the whole-tone scale.

These should be practised as outlined earlier.

When you're comfortable with these, "sort" them based on their functional role.

For more on this check out Mark Levine's "The Jazz Theory Book" (1995).

Predominant	Dominant
Lydian (IV)	Mixolydian (V)
Dorian (ii)	Phrygian Dominant (V)
Dorian b2 (ii)	Lydian Dominant (V)***
Phrygian (iii)	Mixolydian ♭13 (V)****
Locrian (ii of minor)	Half-Whole (V)
Locrian 4 2 (ii of minor)	Diminished (viio)
	Lydian (IV) Dorian (ii) Dorian b2 (ii) Phrygian (iii) Locrian (ii of minor)

^{*}Dorian is usually listed as a ii chord but it also can function as a i chord

You might notice that I've only listed two modes from harmonic minor. In my experience the first and the fifth harmonic minor are the only ones I find very useful in my jazz vocabulary. Of course, feel free to explore them all!

^{**} Phrygian and its unusual role was outlined earlier

^{***} Lydian Dominant often appears in non-diatonic progression such as the second chord in "Bernie's Tune"

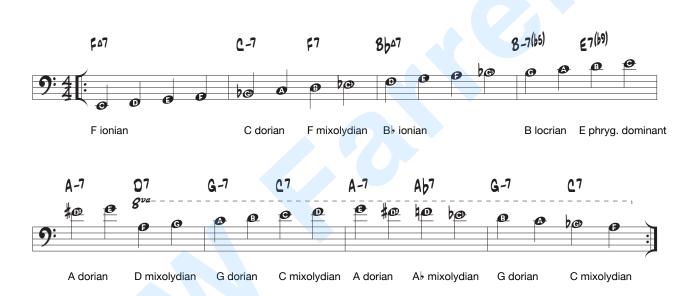
^{****} Mixolydian 13 rarely shows up as the default chord but it does happen - for example as the last chord in the "Spain" solo section

7. THROUGH-CHORD WALKING

When you're comfortable with the chord-scales of a piece of music, try walking quarter notes through each chord-scale without leaping at the transition. Just move to the next available note.

Start at the lowest available note on your instrument and play up and down the full range of the instrument.

For example on a two-octave four-string bass guitar the range is E1 - G4 so one chorus of through-walking "Nearness of You" could resemble this:



When you're comfortable with this exercise experiment with using alternate chord-scale choices.

8. CREATIVITY PRACTICE - CHORD STRUCTURES OVER MAJOR SCALES WITH CHROMATIC PASSING TONES

In this drill we take a major scale, intersperse the diatonic notes with chromatic notes and attempt to preserve the primacy of the underlying scale by using creative harmonic solutions.

An example over C major is given.



You should also explore this drill descending through the scale. Be as creative as you want. The chords shown here are those that present intuitively on a four-string bass guitar and preserve the primacy of the C major scale tones. When you get comfortable you can be more adventurous!

9. FUNCTIONAL HARMONIC EXTRAPOLATIONS

When you feel comfortable extrapolating harmonic functions using chord-scales, try your hand at composing with them.

This is a piece of mine I wrote in 2011 after having a bass lesson in New York City with Matthew Garrison. I basically wrote the piece to help me understand harmonic function and non-diatonic progressions.



9. NON-FUNCTIONAL CHORD-SCALES/MODAL INTERCHANGE

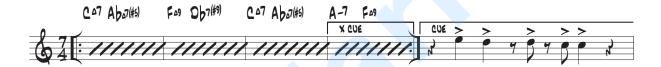
When you feel confident using chord-scale in functional settings, explore their use in non-functional settings.

Non-functional chord progressions often draw their sonority from the amount of common tones between chord-scales, the voice-leading between chords and root movement.

For example the main vamp of my piece "Broken Love" uses the following progression inspired by Herbie Hancock's "Tell My A Bedtime Story" vamp.

BROKEN LOVE

PW FARRELL



In contrast my piece "String Theory" deliberately uses less intuitive chords "strung" around a melody that seems to drive the tonal centre into chromatically adjacent places.



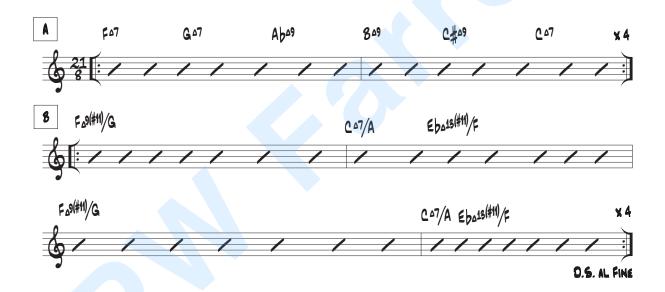
And lastly, my piece "Schema" incorporates non-functional harmony and the "7 grouped in triplets" part of the rhythm diamond we covered at the start.

SCHEMA





SOLOS - CAN EMPHASISE THE 7/8 MORE (OPTIONAL)



FORM EXPLAINED:

TAKE THE INTEO AND HEAD TWICE (THE D.C. SIGN)

AFTER SOLOS TAKE THE D.S. TO FINE

Practising Sight Reading/Free Play/Repertoire

At the end of the day the intangible musical skills that make someone confident in an ensemble can't be atomised and practised in isolation.

These are skills that come from lots and lots of performing.

You have to maintain an awareness of what happening around you, you have to listen intensely and you must give yourself over to the musical moment.

Even a simple jam tune like The Meters' "Cissy Strut" can be a great vehicle for the improviser. John Schofield and Oz Noy have incorporated this New Orlean's funk tune into their jazz fusion repertoire.

During the solos sections can be cued, instead of counting repeats. This is a great way to build ensemble chemistry.

Cissy Strut

The Meters



