



WHAT IS A BASS ?!

This guide is to answer 2 questions:

1. What is a bass guitar ?
2. How is a bass guitar different from a 'normal' guitar?

The bass guitar or bass is a member of the string family in music. It is called a bass guitar but is referred to as a bass, whereas guitar implies the 'normal' 6-string guitar. Bass is a bigger instrument than guitar, with generally only 4 strings that are thicker to handle the lower notes. Almost every band needs a bass player to play those low notes. It can be played with a pick like a guitar, or with your fingers. Bass is an electric instrument so you need to plug it into a bass amplifier and speaker.

Sometimes bass and guitar will play the same thing but the bass will be an octave lower so it sounds bigger and fuller than just a guitar on it's own. It also sounds really cool when they play together. Other times the bass will play something completely different. You generally don't play chords on a bass, but you get to be create basslines that move between the chords. Bass is a little easier to start with than guitar, because you are only playing one note at a time.

Because there are 10 guitarists to every 1 bass player there are a lot more opportunities for bass players. Guitarists will often only ever play on their own, but bass players will often be in bands because they are in demand. And playing in a band is a great experience! A bass player is like the glue in the band - they join the rhythm of the drums, and the notes of the other instruments. Bass is needed in almost every style of music and every band. School concert bands and jazz bands will usually have a bass player (or 2 or 3), but not a guitarist. Another example is in modern r&b music which your kids listen to; the bass has a major role whereas sometimes there is no guitar at all.

Some cool things you can do playing bass are - walking bass lines, slap and pop, playing the low notes that no one else can play on their instrument, create your own bass lines over a chord progression, groove with a drummer and become a rhythm section, play fretless bass, control the dynamics of a band, alter the harmony by substituting different bass notes, write your own riffs and songs, and make people dance as they can feel the bass. You also have your own space in the music and do not have to compete with guitarists, keyboard players, trumpets etc who are playing in the middle and higher registers in music.

Bass players are more likely to learn to read notated music (the dots) than guitarists who can quite often only read tab. This is because it is easier, more practical and necessary to read music on bass.

Bass can also refer to double bass, which is a huge stringed instrument like a big cello played standing

up. This can be played with a bow or with your fingers and is used in classical, jazz, and country music and also in orchestras.

A lot of bass players begin as guitarists and then switch over to bass (that is how Andrew started). It is not that hard to change instruments: the left hand technique is basically the same. The 4 strings on a bass are the same as the lowest 4 strings on a guitar, but are an octave lower. E.g. A Bass is tuned E, A, D, G from low to high, whereas a guitar is tuned E, A, D, G, B, E. So a guitarist can easily learn some bass, once they understand the right hand technique and the role of the bass.

Hope this helps you understand the instrument that is the bass guitar!

www.andrewchalloner.com

Professional Bass Player for Recording, Gigs and Tuition

© 2020 Andrew Challoner