

Victor Wooten

Groove Workshop

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PART 2

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About the Disc

There are video files available that are indicated with this icon



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the icon and a video play box will appear and play the corresponding video.

Anthony Wellington

Anthony Wellington is a rare music educator. He is an alchemist of consistent bass study and musicianship. His individualized approach to teaching has made him one of the most in demand bass educators worldwide. His students experience a master educator who creates a unique strategy to fortify and sensitively provoke them to become their highest and best. Anthony is a full-time bass teacher with lessons available at his private teaching studio, Bassology, via Skype, and at camps and clinics. He continues to grow followers through his performances across various genres of music. While he has endorsements from a number of exceptional manufacturers of bass gear, the greatest endorsements come from his students who credit their knowledge and growth as musicians to their mentor and instructor, Anthony Wellington. Serious students can contact Anthony via email antwellington1@aol.com for information on lessons.

PART 1

CHAPTER 1

GROOVE FIRST





In a classroom experiment with six bass students, Anthony Wellington and I provided a bass line and chordal backdrop, cycling through a II-V progression, and I directed each of the bass players to take a solo. At the conclusion, I asked them to tell me the first thing that went through their minds when I signaled them to play. The unanimous response was they were trying to find the key, the pitches, and/or the chord progression. Basically they were looking for the “right” notes that we’re all supposed to play. There’s nothing wrong there, other than to caution that the audience and your fellow musicians don’t always want to wait for you to find the right notes.

Now consider this concept: People who know nothing about music often have an advantage over us musicians. If I asked you to dance to what Anthony and I played, what questions would you have to ask yourself? None. The music tells you everything. You know what the tempo is, you know what the feel is, and your body moves. Yet, if I ask you to play, you can’t until you find the key. Everything you need to know about the song to start playing, except the key, is available to you, you’re just not utilizing it. You know it’s in 4/4, you know it’s a danceable groove, you know the tempo, and you can surmise that it’s essentially two chords going back and forth.

The point I want to make is, if you have to search for the root, groove while you’re doing it. To prove this, I had Anthony play a repeating II-V progression in one key. The first thing I thought was, “What is the groove?” And I allowed my body to feel the groove. Even though I didn’t recognize the key, when I played my first note, whatever note it was, I knew it would be in time with his groove. By using my ear and descending a half-step, in time with the music, I found the key. That first note I played told me where I needed to go, but in the meantime, no one listening or dancing to the music would have felt anything wrong because the groove never faltered. I didn’t stutter-step my way through until I found the right note, I grooved until I found it.


Here’s another way to look at it: Ask yourself, as a bass player, are we groove players or note players? Which one do you think should come first, the groove or the note? If you said the groove then I have to agree with you. The groove comes first, especially in the rhythm section. How many times has someone come up to you after a gig and said, “Man, you play great notes.” That’s not the compliment you want to get. You’d rather hear, “Man, you’ve got a great feel,” or, “You were really grooving.” That’s when you know you’ve done your job as a bass player. As Anthony Wellington points out, if someone is noticing your notes more than they’re noticing the singer, you probably overstepped your musical boundary. To sum up, find and think about the groove first and I guarantee, the first note you play—right or wrong—is going to feel good.



CHAPTER 2

NOTES & THE GROOVE





Let's return to the topic of notes because in my opinion notes are ninety-nine percent of what we think about when it's time to play. Notes as a topic is also a large percentage of what gets taught; it's in the books, the instructional videos, and music school courses. Notes are the dominant topic in music theory. Yet, if we think of music as a whole, there's more to it than just notes. To help illustrate my point, in our classroom experiment I asked our six bassists to divide music up into ten equal parts. We could have divided it into as many parts as we wanted, but we chose ten, with notes starting off our list. The most important consideration was that each part was equal. Here's what the students came up with:

- 1. Notes**
- 2. Articulation**
- 3. Technique**
- 4. Emotion/Feel**
- 5. Dynamics**
- 6. Tone**
- 7. Rhythm/Tempo**
- 8. Phrasing**
- 9. Space**
- 10. Listening**

A look at our list of ten elements, as I'll call them, shows there's a whole lot more going on in music than just notes. To further prove this I played a bunch of random notes for the class, which was received with blank faces. But when I moved to the second element on the list and added articulation by accenting every fourth note there was a noticeable reaction. Suddenly, the beginnings of a groove was born. I then incorporated the remaining elements to point out that Numbers 2-10 make up a groove.

Groove, in my opinion, is not found in Number 1. In Chapter 1, we decided as a class that the groove comes first and that we are groove players first, not note players. Therefore, numbers 2-10 also need to be taught and studied because that's what's going to make you a good bass player. There are only twelve notes, but there's an infinite amount of articulations, durations, techniques, emotions and feelings, dynamics, tones, rhythms, phrasings, and uses of space and listening.

Anthony Wellington offered another interesting observation regarding our list. If you think about different genres and styles of music, what they have in common are the notes. A Cmaj7 chord is the same in jazz, country, and rock. So it's not the notes that give us our different genres, it's the numbers 2-10. If you think of your favorite and least favorite bass player, what they have in common is the notes; what makes them different is 2-10. The best bass player in the world isn't good enough that he or she can add a 13th note.

To demonstrate the importance of 2-10, I asked Anthony to help me with a playing example. I had him play a groove in G Minor. Before we started, the students helped me write all of the pitches from the G Minor scale on a white board. I then proceeded to solo with the 5 pitches that *weren't* on the board. By playing all of the “wrong” notes but utilizing elements 2-10, I was able to construct a solo that we all decided was better than a solo of the “right” notes that did not have any of these other elements. Ultimately, whether the notes sounded right or wrong depended on my phrasing, dynamics, feel, articulation, and so on.

My closing thought is we spend ninety-five percent of our time chasing notes, scales and modes, and that's great. You need to become a master of notes. But you also need to become a master of Numbers 2-10. And you *definitely* need to master Number 10, Listening. Once you do, you'll be like Miles Davis and you'll realize, “I don't need so many notes.” THAT is a master musician.

