

# ALL ABOUT THAT (DOUBLE) BASS

Clinic for teachers looking to add double bass to the ensemble.

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- WHY are we switching electric to upright? (or from cello to bass?) Why do we need bass in our ensembles? You need to be able to sell the switch to your students!
  - Acoustic ensemble
  - Depth of sound / possibilities of sound
  - Challenge/Ear training
  - It's cool

## The gear to own for your players:

Double Bass	Bow (German or French)	Rosin	Stool
- 3/4 sized bass for most players - 1/2 sized for very small players	(One size higher than the bass) 4/4 bow 3/4 bow	'Pops' Rosin Re-apply every 3-4 hrs of <u>playing</u> or as needed	I highly recommend standing when playing. If using a stool to play, use a high stool and attempt to be as close to standing as possible.

## The bow:

GERMAN BOW (underhand grip)	FRENCH BOW (overhand grip)
More comfortable More powerful More articulate Less complicated  <u>"Tripod grip"</u> <b>Middle finger</b> - under the bow keeping the tip parallel to the bridge (round finger, not flat) <b>Thumb</b> - on top of bow pushing the bow into the string <b>Pinky</b> - controlling angle of the bow (round finger, not flat)  Think of a golf ball in your palm keeping space between bow and the hand	Easier to cross strings Resembles cello and violin bow holds Allows shorter players to play closer to the bridge More complex arm motions  <u>"The Flop"</u> Imagine picking something up - Thumb is opposite the middle finger. Other fingers are naturally spaces (not spread or reaching)  *In both bow holds, tension is the enemy. It is essential to the function and to the sound that the hand is relaxed.

 = Down Bow. (begin at or near the FROG and pull)  
 = Up Bow. (begin at or near the tip and push)

(exact placement depends on dynamic, length of note and what comes after it.)

\*\*\*More weight on the bow (use thumb for German/index finger for French) will focus the sound and create more volume.

- **Posture**

- End pin pulled out so that height is correct - Nut at Eyebrows
- Stand bass up so that it is weightless. It should stand straight and rest slightly into where your hip meets the left thigh. \*Do not go behind the bass.  
\*Make sure the player is standing straight and not leaning towards the bass
- Place bow half way between the end of the fingerboard and the bridge and have parallel to the bridge (or perpendicular to the strings). This will lock the bass in position

- **Left hand/arm**

- Left arm should be round (C shaped) and naturally shaped to the neck of the bass. Avoid lifted shoulder as it will create tension
- Use rosin to demonstrate spacing of a semitone. 1-2 stretch, 2-4 relaxed. (we don't use third finger)

Half position (the most likely position for flat keys). Listen for a semitone above the open string. Don't be afraid to make a tape marking like a fret. Each situation is different, but putting some pinstriping tape (Canadian Tire) to mark some notes is effective for beginners. Do not tape every note (it gets confusing)

**Bb Major Scale** (1/2 pos.) : A string 1, 4 D string 0, 1, 4 G string 2, 4

**Pizzicato (pizz. or plucked) Techniques (without the bow in the hand):**

Anchor the thumb against the fingerboard near the end of the fingerboard (brighter sound), then take the index and middle fingers together and grab as much of the string as possible by angling the finger along the string and pull hard.

**(with the bow in the hand):** drop the bow into the hand (pointed down for German bow and pointed up for French bow). Put fleshy tips of the middle finger on string and "throw pixie dust".

**Assigning parts to the bass player?**

Bass sounds an octave lower than written. A bass will not be as loud as a brass instrument. They can colour the sound. You need a section of bass players to create the volume of a tuba.

- Considering that the lowest note on a bass is E (not Eb), Tuba parts will need to often be transposed up an octave to be playable. You will have to teach that... Convertible bass lines/ Trombone / Euphonium / Bassoon or Cello parts may be the best choice.

**Common issues:**

Pizza hand – wrist has collapsed. The fingers will not reach where they need to.

Thumbs up – thumb needs to be on the back of the neck so the player can squeeze the note and reach.

Elbow sag – Elbow up in natural C shape giving strength to the hand.

Hand not open – Intonation issues are often solved with an open hand. Remember the rosin trick.

Fingers not actually closing the string – "You must grip the bass" (said in a Russian accent)

Bow arm stiff – "Robot Chicken Wing". Right arm is stiff and pulling the bow up instead of straight.

Ask yourself: Is it natural? Is there tension? Is round (hands and arms)? This will help you locate the source of the issue.

Remember, you are a great musical educator. Use your instincts and philosophies from other instruments and voice to inform you for double bass technique.

Most importantly, I am most happy to assist in any way I can. Shoot me an email or text. I can answer questions, help out with your unique situation or come to you and work with your students.

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**Storage:**

On its side when laying it down.

Always protect bridge when storing in a corner.