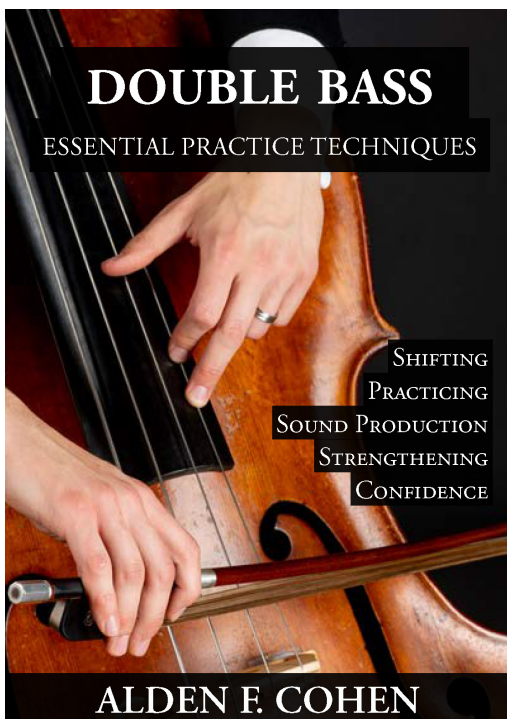


CMEA BAY SECTION CONFERENCE



A San Francisco native, **Alden F. Cohen** is a professional San Francisco Bay Area double bassist. A graduate of the Peabody Institute (B.M. 2002) and San Francisco Conservatory of Music (M.M. 2003). In 2018, Mr. Cohen won the Oakland Symphony Assistant Principal bass audition. Mr. Cohen won a substitute spot with the San Francisco Symphony in 2004. Students of Mr. Cohen develop daily routines, organizational, goal-oriented, ergonomic practice techniques, and critical thinking skills on top of becoming accomplished artists.



<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0D5RHCX46>

WELCOME

A deep dive lecture into the double bass fundamentals, repertoire, and practice techniques. Bow holds from a beginner to an intermediate player. Left-Hand posture, shifting, and reference points on the double bass to improve intonation. Resources for inspiring bassists who want to learn more repertoire beyond their school music. General string instrument practice techniques that focus on learning new repertoire and playing music at a faster tempo.

CURVED KNUCKLES = STRONG FINGERTIPS

Curved knuckles allow your fingertips to strongly hold down the strings. There is more clarity in pitch and sound production when we use our fingertips to hold down the string. Sliding up and down the string is easier with fingertips that are formed by curved knuckles.



SPACE AND CLUMP

We need to have a “half step” between 1st and 2nd finger that is equal to the distance from our 2nd and 4th finger. There needs to be an extra finger width of space between 1st and 2nd finger and fingers 2 thru 4 are clumped together for any position within the “1st Octave” of the bass.

Practice holding a wine cork in between your 1st and 2nd finger and a rubber band or hair tie around your 2nd, 3rd and 4th finger to physically feel the “space” and “clump” while playing the bass.

HOLDING THE FINGERBOARD LIKE A WATER BOTTLE

Pick up a water bottle or any circular shaped object you have with your left hand. Notice how all of your knuckles are curved and your thumb is usually placed behind your index or middle finger. Bring the object you're holding next to the fingerboard, then mirror that same grip and hand position holding down the strings on the fingerboard.

LEFT HAND PERPENDICULAR TO THE FINGERBOARD

When combining **Steps 1 & 2**, we also need to keep our hand position perpendicular to the fingerboard. This allows the weight of our hand to be evenly across all four fingers, creating easier shifts going down or up the string.

Practice hovering about one centimeter above the D-string with your curved fingers. Slide up and down the back of the neck while holding your fingers in position and ready to play any note.

ARM WEIGHT

Some common mistakes beginners make are to press down the strings and squeeze your fingers together to hold down a note on the fingerboard. It's important to feel the weight of your arm as you hold down the strings with your fingertips. Our arm is a lot heavier than we think. Alexander Technique is a great way to understand how heavy our arm weight is when we aren't subconsciously holding it up.

Practice pulling your elbow and upper-back back while you're holding down the D-string with all four fingers and letting go of your thumb. It should feel like you're tugging your fingers against the fingerboard and using the weight of your arm to pull down the string. Gradually place your thumb back behind the neck while still feeling the arm weight holding down the string.

THE THUMB ANGLE

Keeping our thumb at a 45 degrees angle with the "opening" pointing towards the ground, enables our left hand to easily slide up and down the fingerboard. Compare your shifting with your thumb fully connected to the back of the neck and at a 45 degree angle to feel the difference.

CRAB WALKING

This technique allows you to increase your finger agility. The goal is to feel the entire bow in your hand and to allow a strong connection with every finger as you draw the bow across the string.

STEPS:

1. Hold the bow out with your arm bent (beginner).
2. Extending your arm fully out (advance).
3. Start at the *frog*.
4. Use only the fingertips to hold the bow.
5. Crawl up the bow using all five fingertips and work your way up to the *tip*.
6. The hardest part is coming back down.
7. Leverage your pinkie to hold the bow and then shift your thumb downward.
8. Shift your pinkie and other fingers downward
9. Repeat 7 & 8 (fingers and then your thumb) until you feel a small burn in your forearms or your muscles are fatigued.

Use both hands to do this exercise individually. Your left hand will practice keeping your fingers curved and using only your fingertips which is key to being able to hold down the strings. This exercise can be done almost anywhere.

TWO REFERENCE POINTS

The **Heel of the Neck** and **Nut** are two **distinct** reference points that you can use to **accurately** find notes within three positions on the bass.

HEEL OF THE NECK (D-NECK BASSES)

FINDING “D” WITH 1ST FINGER

- With your thumb placed at the back of the neck, slide down to the Heel of the neck.
- Hold down on the G-string with your index or 1st finger directly above your thumb to play the note “D” (Check the intonation with the open “D”).

FINDING “D” WITH 4TH FINGER

- Take the palm of your hand and place it flat against the back of the neck.
- Slide your hand down the back of the neck until you hit the flat part of the neck block.
- Curl your fingers around towards the G-string.
- Hold down all four fingers to play “D” with your 4th finger.

THE NUT REFERENCE POINT

- Place your first finger at the nut.
- On the G-string, keep your finger in between the nut and fingerboard.
- Remember that 1st finger to 4th finger is a whole step.
- The sound of an open G-string is from the nut to the bridge.
- Play the open A-string - listen to the pitch.
- Quickly slide your 1st finger a whole step down from the nut to the note “A” on the G-string.

This concept will help you gain more confidence and accuracy when shifting a whole-step.

THE BASS TORTOISE WINS THE RACE (BREAKING DOWN THE TASKS)

Almost every challenge we face on the bass is the transition between two notes. We must dissect the challenge into every step that each hand has to accomplish the transition from one note to the next. Recreate all of the “broken-down” steps in chronological order. Multiple steps, which include our mind, L.H., R.H., and eyes, are involved to create various types of sounds on the double bass. We must break down these steps into smaller steps in order to refine any issues that occur.

During these sequential steps, be mindful of which steps are more challenging (bumps in the road) for your body to react to your mind’s command. These “bumps in the road” are the steps you want to prioritize your focus. Spend more time waiting and slowing the process down for your body to respond to the action from your mind.

It’s important to understand that every problem is usually between two notes. There can be multiple steps that involve taking action from either the left or right-hand or both to move from the end of the first note to the next note. Use the “rests” between notes to help identify each individual step in your mind before you engage your body. Our mind must tell our body what to do throughout this entire practice method.

STEPWISE PLAN OF ACTION

S² P² (START STOP PLAN PLAY)

Tell yourself these words above in your **mind** before you engage in each step.



- Place the bow at the *frog* on the open D-string.
- My bow hair is connected to the open D-string.
- Let the weight of my arm sink into the D-string.
- Lead the down-bow with the right side of my forearm.
- Wrist and fingers follow the forearm motion.
- The bow hairs drags slowly across and into the string.
- Feel the vibration of the bow in my fingers.
- Stop the bow two inches from the *tip*.
- My arm is pushing out towards the bridge to shift my bow from the D-string (2nd gear) to the G-string (1st gear).
- My bow hair is connected to the open G-string at the upper-half.
- Let the weight of my arm sink into the G-string.
- Lead the up-bow with the left side of my forearm.
- Wrist and fingers follow the forearm motion.
- The bow hairs drag slowly across and into the string.
- Feel the vibration of the bow in my fingers.
- Stop the bow at the *frog*.

COMPRESSED STEPS

- Start on the D-string at the *frog*.
- Lean into the down-bow.
- At the last second of the down-bow about to STOP, move into “1st Gear” and stopping on the G-string.

- Lean into the up-bow on the G-string at the *tip*.
- Stop the bow at the *frog*.

FINGERED NOTES

Important: All steps require a rest immediately after.

- Start with the bow on the string and finger.
- Move the bow to sustain a sound.
- Stop the bow suddenly at either the middle or *tip* of the bow.
- Prepare the next note with right and left hands.
- The bow is kept on the string the entire time.
- Be confident in your mind about what the next finger is and which string you need to be on before you ignite the bow.
- Only do up to four measures at a time.
- Then go back and see if you can play what's written.

SHORTENED VERSION

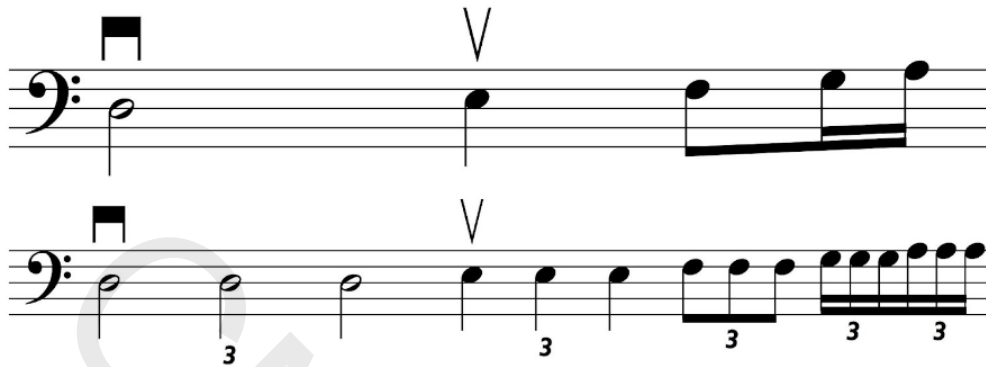
Answer these questions during the rests and before you play the next note:

1. What's the string your bow needs to be on?
2. What's the name of the note?
3. What's the finger?

RECAP

Start with the right mindset and stepwise plan of action. Once you complete this stepwise process with your body following the command from your mind, move on to a compressed stepwise plan. Final step is to play what's written. Focus on one or two steps that challenge you to flawlessly complete the transition between two notes. Write down which step(s) helped you succeed in this particular challenge for the next practice session.

TRIPLE-SIZE EVERY NOTE



Every note is played three times. This method allows you to focus on:

- **Rhythm** - holding the note the same duration.
- **Notes** - more time to prepare for the next note and learn the fingerings.
- **Bowing** - each note change falls on the correct bowing.

KEY CONCEPTS

- As you play every note three times, by the third repeated note you should have the right fingering and intonation.
- Move your eyes forward to see multiple notes ahead of you the second you play the first triplet note.
- Always keep your mind and eyes in the “future.”

SEAGULLS

(SEA-GLISSANDO)

Left hand (L.H.) posture is the backbone of being able to play the bass at a professional level. This method trains your L.H. to stay in a rock-solid formation (like an elevator) while you use your arm to move your L.H. up and down the neck of the bass.

- Start at the “heel of the neck” with your thumb in the “crevice / groove.”
- Keep all fingers nicely curved and slightly spaced apart except for fingers one and two must pretend there’s an extra finger in between them. The thumb should be right behind your index finger to form a “C” shape.
- All of your fingers are softly touching the G-string.
- Slowly slide your L.H. back towards the scroll of the bass while keeping your fingers curved and same space apart.
- Holding your finger lightly on the string, slide your hand up and down the string.

3+1 OR 1+3



This method focuses on learning the fingering in the left-hand and coordination between the R.H. and L.H.

KEY IDEAS

- Agility and rhythmic accuracy of the left hand are the primary focus.
- The bow is the metronome that keeps your left hand in check.
- If the passage is slurred, keep the slurred bowing but play each note as staccato.

KEY CONCEPTS

- Move your eyes forward to see *multiple* notes ahead of you the second you play the first triplet note.
- Always keep your mind and eyes in the “future.”



Mastering Double Bass Shifting

How to Make
Shifting Easy!

ALDEN F. COHEN

INTRODUCTION

The five exercises in this book are designed to gradually build your shifting skills, helping you identify the shift distance and slowly ingrain the fundamental steps to achieving confidence in shifting. Each exercise is a step forward in your journey towards mastering shifting techniques.

- Whole (W) Step Shifting
- Whole + Half (WH) Step Shifting
- New-Note Finger Shifting
- End-Note Finger Shifting
- Houdini Finger Shifting



WHOLE (W) STEP SHIFTING

In this exercise, we work on controlling and understanding the fundamentals of how our left hand and arm shift one whole step. We start by using our ears to help center the correct pitch. Note: Always tune your bass before practicing. Each step is broken down to analyze and reconstruct how we approach shifting. Say in your mind or out loud “Whole step,” before you shift. This technique will ingrain the habit of being in control of your fingers with your mind. Your eyes will focus on what’s on the page rather than how far your fingers have to shift on the fingerboard. Remember to feel relaxed in your body but extremely focused in your mind. Curved fingers and a 45-degree-angle thumb will also help with mastering the whole step shift. All shifts require your fingers to hold the string down while shifting. Repeating each segment at least three times is recommended. Repetition is key to mastering any skill, and in the case of shifting, it helps your muscles remember the movements and improves your muscle memory.

WHOLE + HALF (WH) STEP SHIFTING

We take a closer look at the whole + half-step shift. The “pre-shift” note, is introduced to establish where the new finger is starting from before it shifts. This note serves as a reference point for your finger’s position and helps you prepare for the shift. We learn how our left arm can shift the same distance with different fingerings. A preparation technique (Letter ‘H’) is also used to make sure the “pre-shift” finger is down, and we say or think of the distance of the shift before we shift.

NEW-NOTE FINGER SHIFTING

“New-note” finger shifting helps identify from where the “new” finger will shift after the previous note is played. This information allows us to understand how far the shift will be to the next note. During the pre-shift pizzicatos, we use our ears to help guide our left-hand from the “pre-shift” note to the next note of the scale.

END-NOTE FINGER SHIFTING

The “end-note” finger shifting is more advanced and helps transition into Houdini Finger Shifting. This involves shifting the same ending fingered note to the next position of the following note before changing to the “new-note” finger. String crossing with double-stop fingering is introduced to develop more preparation for establishing the fingering weight needed for the crossing string. I would like to give a special thanks to Robert Ashley, Lecturer in Music at UC Santa Cruz and colleague, for sharing his shifting techniques that inspired me to create this method. Each of the 24 scales in the “new” and “end-note” methods displays finger-shifting patterns ranging from half steps to two whole steps.

HOUDINI FINGER SHIFTING

Integrating the “new-note” and “end-note” shifting techniques within each shift will make a clean and almost undetected “Houdini” shift. This term refers to a shift that is so smooth and seamless that it’s almost impossible to detect when listening to the music. The order of these two techniques begins with the “end-note” finger, followed by the “new-note” finger. Nine examples of different types of finger shifting are in a step-by-step analysis of how to approximately calculate transitioning from the “end-note” to a “new-note” shift.

SHIFTING TECHNIQUES

7 TECHNIQUES TO HELP YOU DEVELOP YOUR SHIFTING MASTERY

1. Left-hand fingers are curved.
2. Harness the power of your upper left back muscle to draw your fingers into the fingerboard. This will enable you to leverage your entire arm weight, enhancing your control while shifting.
3. The thumb is at a 45-degree angle, keeping only a portion connected to the back of the bass neck.
4. Move your fingers, thumb, and elbow all together.
5. Before your fingers make the shift, mentally or audibly articulate the distance. This mental practice is a crucial step in your shifting journey.
6. If you miss the shift (while keeping your fingers down on the fingerboard), slide your fingers up or down to adjust the intonation until in tune. Analyze how far or short your shift missed the correct note. Try again, shifting further or shorter the next time.
7. Practice with a tuner and/or pitch drone for pitch reference.

WHOLE (W) STEP SHIFTING

Whole Step UP:

- 1) Play the Open "D" String to establish a sense of correct pitch.
- 2) Place your 4th Finger down for the Octave "D".
NOTE: All Four Fingers (1, 2, 3 & 4) should be down.
- 3) Play the Note "D", if needed adjust by holding the "G" String down, while slightly sliding around to find the correct pitch.
- 4) Lift your 2nd, 3rd & 4th Fingers off the "G" String to have only your 1st Finger down on "C."
- 5) Pizzicato and shift (slide) your 1st Finger to the Note "D."
- 6) Rearticulate the "D" with your bow.
- 7) Match the High "D" with the Open "D" String.

Whole Step DOWN:

- 1) Play the Open "E" String to establish a sense of correct pitch.
- 2) Play the Note "E", if needed adjust the pitch by holding the "G" String down, while slightly sliding around to find the correct pitch.
NOTE: All Four Fingers (1, 2, 3 & 4) should be down.
- 3) Play the open "D" while holding the "E" down and let the sound ring into the next bar.
- 4) Pizzicato the "E" and slide your whole hand, using your left arm, a "whole-step" (W) back to "D." (Keep fingers and thumb perpendicular to the "G" string.)
- 5) Rearticulate the "D" with your bow on the "2nd" beat.
- 6) Match the High "D" with the Open "D" String.

WHOLE + HALF (WH) STEP SHIFTING

On the 3rd half-note, hold down the "B" while playing the open "D".

Before you pizzicato the "B", say or think in your mind, "Whole + half step (WH)" then shift.

The string must be held down to hear the "B to D" glissando pizzicato.

A

Letter B - Keep the 4th Finger down and immediately slide to the octave "D" while playing the open "D".

Letter D - Think about shifting to the "D" with 4th Finger, but play 2nd Finger instead at that same position.

B **C** **D**

Letter E-G - Keep the weight on your 3rd & 4th Fingers when shifting down a WH.

E **F** **G**

Place your Left-Hand [4] down at the half-rests before you shift a WH.

H

Same passage as **Letter H** without the rests.

I

"NEW-NOTE" FINGER SHIFTING

- 1) The "rests" help prepare for pre-shift note pizzicatos or string crossings.
- 2) All **pre-shifts** (quarter notes) start with the "new-note" finger.
- 3) Identify the distance of the shift.
- 4) **Pizzicato** the pre-shift while **sliding** as fast as possible to the adjacent note.
- 5) **Arco** the following notes until the next pre-shift notes.

C MAJOR

2 0 1 2 0 1 4 1 - 1 4 2 - 2 4 1 - 1 3 2 - 2 3
A D G

3 2 3 - 3 1 4 - 4 2 4 - 4 1 4 - 4 1 0 2 1 0 2
G D A

2 0 1 2 0 1 4 1 4 2 4 1 3 2 3 2 3 1 4 2 4 1 4 1 0 2 1 0 2
A D G D A

A HARMONIC MINOR

0 2 4 0 2 4 1 2 1 - 1 2 4 - 4 2 - 2 4 2 - 2 3
A D G

3 2 4 - 4 2 4 - 4 2 - 2 1 2 - 2 1 4 2 0 4 2 0
G D A

0 2 4 0 2 4 1 2 1 2 4 2 4 2 3 2 4 2 4 2 1 2 1 4 2 0 4 2 0
A D G D A

"END-NOTE" FINGER SHIFTING

Special thanks to Robert Ashley

- 1) All shifts start with the "end-note" finger and slide to the next position of the "new-note" finger.
- 2) Use the **quarter-rests** to prepare for pre-shift note pizzicatos or string crossings.
- 3) **Pizzicato** the pre-shift (slurred 8th-notes) while sliding as fast as possible to the adjacent note.
- 4) **Arco** the following notes until the next "pre-shift" notes.
- 5) Hold the [arriving-finger] (◦) down while pizzicing the other note of the **double-stop**.

C MAJOR

pizz. arco pizz. arco sim.

2 2 4 [1]4 1 2 2 1 4 [1]4 1 2 2 1

A _____ D _____ G _____

4 4 1 3 3 1 2 3 3 2 1 1 3 1 1 4

G _____

1 1 2 1 [1]4 4 1 1 2 1 [1]4 4 4 2

G _____ D _____ A _____

2 4 1 2 1 4 1 2 1 4 1 3 1 2 3 2 1 3 1 4 1 2 1 4 1 2 1 4 2

A _____ D _____ G _____ D _____ A _____

HOUDINI FINGER SHIFTING

To make a clean and almost undetected shift, we must integrate the “new-note” and “end-note” shifting techniques within each shift. The order starts with the “end-note” finger shifting into the “new-note” finger. The exact notes of where to alternate during “Houdini” shifting is approximate.

Use the “new-note” or “end-note” techniques to understand the distance the left-hand will travel. Use the “houdini” shifting to minimize unnecessary glissandos during a shift. It’s also good to experiment shorter or longer lengths of “end-note” to “new-note” shifts.

EXAMPLE 1: "NEW-NOTE" SHIFTING

Alternate from "1" up to "4"



1 4
G



1 4 4
G

"END-NOTE" SHIFTING



1 1 4
G

"HOUDINI" SHIFTING: Example 1

0 1 1 [4] 4 4 0 4
A G B C D D G

- A** - Use the open "A" string to hear the octave "A".
- B** - Pizzicato the "A" and slide up a half-step to "B \flat " and place your "4" down at the rest.
- C** - Pizzicato the "C" and slide up a whole step to "D".
- D** - Arco the "D" and check the pitch with the open "D" string.

RESOURCES



DOUBLE BASS HQ



ABOUT DBHQ

We unite the double bass community by elevating events, fostering discussion, sharing knowledge, and supporting double bass creators.

Browse our collection of digital sheet music for double bass, and check out our library of free resources.

<https://doublebasshq.com/>

Almost any smartphone today has an app that can replace any physical electronic devices needed for a student or professional musician. We don't have to keep changing our 9V batteries or find an outlet to plug in our Dr. Beat or [Petersons' Strobe Tuner](#).

The Musician Apps I Use & Recommend

- **iStroboSoft: Pro Tuning**
- **Genius Scan: Scan Music**
- **forScore: Sheet Music Reader**
- **Modacity: Pro Music Practice**
- **Pro Metronome : Tempo, Beat, Subdivision, & Polyrhythm**
- **insTuner Free - Chromatic Tuner / Drone**
- **TonalEnergy Tuner & Metronome**

iStroboSoft: Pro Chromatic Tuning



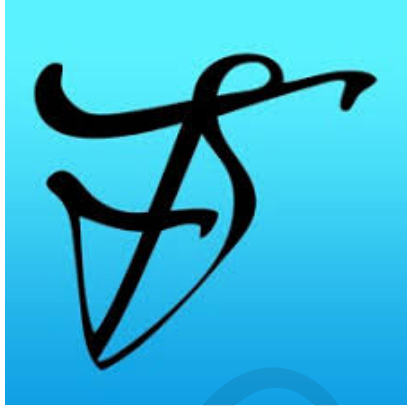
One of the best and precise tuning apps is the iStroboSoft by Peterson. I highly recommend this to anyone playing at a professional level. It's \$9.99 to own the app.

Genius Scan - PDF Scanner



I use Scannable for any sheet music or documents that need to be converted to PDF or JPEG. It's very efficient in scanning only the document or music you have and any cropping can be made within the app.

forScore: Digital Sheet Music Reader



Shelve those 3-ring binders. Get organized. Download and play something new in seconds. With forScore, your sheet music has never been better—it's everything you can do with paper, and so much more.
- forScore

With Scannable & forScore you can have all of your music ready to play with a touch of a button.

It has helped me organize all of my teaching music and easily able to switch from an etude to a solo piece or whatever else we are working on.

Modacity: Pro Music Practice



This app allows me to keep track of different repertoire I'm working on. Other features are: record and listen back and save recordings made within the app, suggest methods to obtain certain goals, check out which pieces I haven't practice as much, and set time limits to a list of pieces you want to work within a certain time frame.

Within this app there's a drone and metronome you can use while you practice or have it playing while you're recording yourself playing.

Click the "[logo](https://www.modacity.co/music/cohen/)" for a special offer. <https://www.modacity.co/music/cohen/>

Pro Metronome



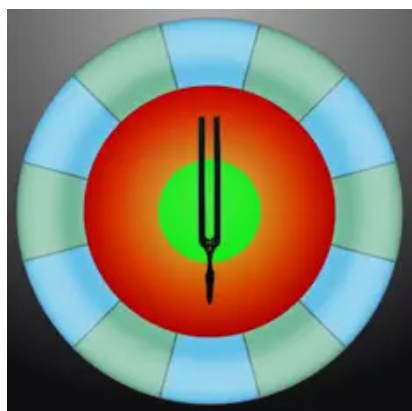
This app allows you to set different tempos and time signatures. If you upgrade to the paid version for \$2.99 you get more options with their "rhythm trainer" which allows you to randomly or precisely set when to turn on and off the click. It's a great way to test your rhythm stability.

insTuner Free: Chromatic Tuner, Drone



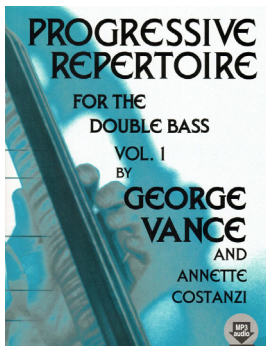
When we practice, it's allows great to have a reference pitch to help us develop a solid sense of pitch. This app allows you to create a drone of any pitch. It's great to use this app with scales and method books, which helps your ears become more aware of what's in-tune or not.

TonalEnergy Tuner & Metronome

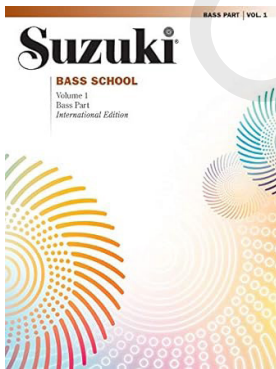


For musicians from pros to beginners, whether you sing, play a brass, woodwind or stringed instrument or any type of guitar, this app provides a set of feature-rich practice tools that gives fun and rewarding feedback. It's much more than just a tuner! \$4.99

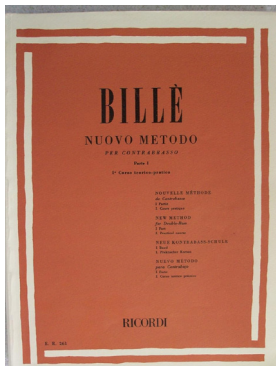
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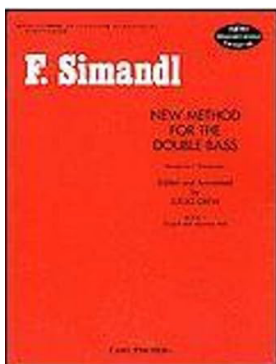
Progressive Repertoire for the Double Bass - Volume 1
Bass Book w/ Online Audio Access - by George Vance



Suzuki Bass School: Bass Part, Vol.1
(Suzuki Method Core Materials)



New Method for Double Bass, First Part: I.
Practical Course



New Method for the Double Bass - Book 1
- Simandl (English and Japanese Edition)