In this lesson you will:

- Learn about the features of reggae bass lines
- Compose your own reggae bass line

Bass lines

The bass line is the lowest part in any piece of music. In reggae it is probably the most important part. Sound systems are built to give a huge, thumping bass sound that you can feel as well as hear!

Reggae bass lines are often very melodic, while other guitar parts simple play off beat chords (on the second and forth beat of the bar). They are always played by the electric bass guitar, which usually has four thick strings, ideal for playing low notes.

Reggae bass lines usually have the following common features, making them easy to recognise:
- Lots of repeated notes
- Lots of rests (which allow other parts of the texture to be heard)
- An interval of a fourth or fifth (such as D to G or D to A).

Reading and writing bass lines

The treble clef stave cannot be used for very low notes. It’s fine for notating the lowest note you can sing, but bass guitar notes go a lot lower than this. Where the treble clef ends, the bass clef begins:

Another way of writing bass lines is to write the names of the notes on a grid. This can be seen in an example on the next page.
Listening to ‘Don’t Rock My Boat’

1. Listen to the start of this song and focus on the bass line. Notice the use of:
   • Repeated notes
   • Rests breaking the flow of the lines
   • Intervals of a fourth (E to A and B to E)

2. Now listen to the whole extract. Notice that, to begin with, the bass line is broken up
   (there is a lot of air between the notes). By contrast, there is a section where the bass line
   plays more continuously.
   a. How many times do you hear the first, broken up pattern before it changes to the
      second, more continuous pattern?
   b. On what word does the pattern change?

Performing

3. Look at the example below of a bass line in a reggae style which combines the two
   features from the ‘Don’t Rock My Boat’ bass line. It is provided in both bass clef notation
   and a grid notation. The first two bars have a broken-up pattern while the last two bars are
   more continuous. Practise playing the bass line on your instrument. It might help to
   practise each two bar section separately.

4. 

Composing

5. Compose your own bass line to the two-chord pattern you played in last weeks lesson.
   Work with a friend, taking it in turns at playing the chords while your friend makes up a
   bass line.
   **Stage 1:** make up a pattern using one note for each chord - C for the chord of C, G for the
   chord of G. You can use the same rhythm pattern for both chords and just change the
   note when the chord changes.
   **Stage 2:** to make your bass line more interesting, use other notes from the chord. You
   can still use the same rhythm as before.

   When making up your patterns, use some of the features you have identified in ‘Don’t
   Rock My Boat’:
   - Repeated notes
   - use of rests
   - the interval of a fourth