

U-Bass Workshop for Absolute Beginners

Oli Hinton

1. What is a U-Bass and why is it different from a bass guitar or double bass?
 - a. Physically smaller, so fits in better with a uke group
 - b. Much shorter fret with fat and loose strings
 - c. Sounds more like a double bass than bass guitar
 - d. String damping is more important
 - e. You can get one with frets or without
 - f. In a uke group you often have to read from lyrics with chord symbols (as opposed to tabs or dots)
2. How to hold the U-Bass:
 - a. Strap
 - b. Resting right thumb on top
 - c. Pluck sideways, and very gently
3. Amplifier
 - a. Battery powered is great
 - b. Wireless leads are great
 - c. Headphone practice plug-in plus Bose is a great portable option
4. Tuning:
 - a. E A D G
 - b. First few fret notes
5. Plucking
 - a. With index and 3rd fingers only
 - b. Perfectionists say it should be strictly alternating, but I find that awkward so you might like to use whichever finger seems most natural
 - c. Very important: as the rhythm driver, keep plucking in time even if it's the occasional wrong note!
6. Damping (stopping a string from sounding into the next note):
 - a. With the left hand – both on and off approach
 - b. With the right hand
7. Simple accompaniments to a tune:
 - a. Root note only
 - b. Reminder about chords: root, 3rd, and 5th
 - c. Root and 5th below – demonstrate with C, F and G
 - d. Simple riffs for 3/4 and 4/4
8. Singing while playing bass
 - a. This is notoriously difficult, even for experienced bass players! It's something to do with the rhythm and riffs.
 - b. If you want to sing at the same time, keep the bass accompaniment **really simple!** And it still sounds great!

9. Typical chords in uke groups: (example songs to illustrate –, ,)

a. **Folsom Prison Blues in C:**

- i. C (1st note - root), F (4th note), G (5th note).
- ii. This a typical 1/4/5 patterns of chords that appear in loads of tunes for ukes – including blues.
- iii. **Note the Outro:** C G7 C – on the bass play C B C cos B is the 3rd note in G7 and it sounds great!
- iv. Moving from C to C, and C to F – although a bit cheesy you can add a short run, or a passing note to ‘predict’ the next chord

b. **Freight Train in C:** Has 1,4,5 plus E (3rd note of C scale)

c. **Jolene:** Only 4 chords and fun to play around with bass rhythms

10. It’s also fun to have a couple of tunes where you focus entirely on a more complex bass line.

- a. To get the ‘feel’ of a tune through the bass line, listen to the original recording!
- b. Write reminder notes on your lyrics sheet. I’ve shown chords, dots and tabs below, but often I just write a couple of notes (e.g. C_EG for Hound Dog) or even a couple of words to capture the rhythm (e.g. 3/2 – my shorthand for the Hound Dog riff).
- c. Example tunes with fun bass lines:

i. **Stand By Me (in G)**

The image shows the musical notation for the bass line of 'Stand By Me' in G major. It consists of two systems of three staves each. The first system covers measures 1-4, and the second system covers measures 5-8. Each system includes a bass staff with notes and rests, a guitar tab staff with fret numbers, and a treble staff with notes and rests. Chords G and Em are indicated above the first two systems. The second system includes chords C, D, and G. The notation is in 4/4 time and G major.

ii. Just Can't Get Enough (in G)

6

iii. Hound Dog (in C)

5

11. Blues and walking bass – this and lots more in Dave Rackham's workshop!

12. Useful resources:

- a. Take a look at these free online workshops:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qEsx5CvJSGY> – and listen to the lovely Welsh accent too
- b. Book for purchase: <https://www.ukulelecentral.com.au/u-bass/ubasics/>
- c. Scotts Bass Lessons:
 - i. <https://scottsbasslessons.com/courses> - whole courses on bass playing
 - ii. <https://youtu.be/i80YSXFFZyY> - intro to U-Bass

13. Fever in Am

Freight Train

Elizabeth Cotten

[C]Freight train, freight train, [G7] run so fast,
Freight train, freight train, [C] run so fast
[E7] Please don't tell what [F] train I'm on,
So they [C] won't know what [G7] route I'm [C] gone
[E7] [F] [C] [G7] [C]

[C]When I'm dead and [G7] in my grave,
No more good times [C] here I crave
[E7] Place the stones at my [F] head and feet
Tell em [C] all that I've [G7] gone to [C] sleep
[E7] [F] [C] [G7] [C]

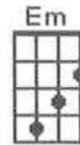
[C] When I die Lord, [G7] bury me deep,
Way down on old [C] Chestnut Street
So [E7] I can hear old [F] Number Nine,
As [C] she comes [G7] rollin' [C] by
[E7] [F] [C] [G7] [C]

[C] When I die Lord, [G7] bury me deep,
Way down on old [C] Chestnut Street
[E7] Place the stones at my [F] head and feet
Tell em [C] all that I've [G7] gone to [C] sleep
[E7] [F] [C] [G7] [C]

Repeat verse 1

54. **JOLENE (E)**

Dolly Parton



CHORUS:

Am C G Am (x 2)
 Jolene, Jolene, Jolene, Jolene
 G Em Am (x 4)
 I'm begging of you please don't take my man
 Am C G Am (x 2)
 Jolene, Jolene, Jolene, Jolene
 G Em Am (x 4)
 Please don't take him just because you can

Am C
 Your beauty is beyond compare
 G Am
 With flaming locks of auburn hair
 G Em Am (x 4)
 With ivory skin and eyes of emerald green
 Am C
 Your smile is like a breath of spring
 G Am
 Your voice is soft like summer rain
 G Em Am (x 4)
 And I cannot compete with you, Jolene

Am C
 He talks about you in his sleep
 G Am
 There's nothing I can do to keep
 G Em Am (x 4)
 From crying when he calls your name, Jolene
 Am C
 And I can easily understand
 G Am
 How you could easily take my man
 G Em Am (x 4)
 But you don't know what he means to me, Jolene

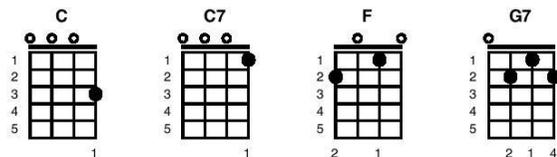
CHORUS

Am C
 You could have your choice of men
 G Am
 But I could never love again
 G Em Am (x 4)
 He's the only one for me, Jolene
 Am C
 I had to have this talk with you
 G Am
 My happiness depends on you
 G Em Am (x 4)
 Whatever you decide to do, Jolene

CHORUS

Folsom Prison Blues

Johnny Cash



(strum pattern, think of a train rhythm)
(1 2 & 3 & 4 &)

INTRO:

C | C | C | C

C

I hear the train a coming,
it's rolling around the bend
And I ain't seen the sunshine,

since I don't know when

I'm stuck in Folsom Prison,

and time keeps dragging on

But that train keeps a-rolling,

on down to San Antone

C

When I was just a baby, my Mama told me, "Hun"
"Always be a good girl,

don't ever play with guns"

But I shot a man in Reno,

just to watch him die

When I hear that whistle blowing,

I hang my head and cry

C

I bet there's rich folks eating,
in a fancy dining car
They're probably drinking coffee

and smoking big cigars

But I know I had it coming,

I know I can't be free

But those people keep a-moving,

and that's what tortures me

C

Well, if they freed me from this prison,
if that railroad train was mine

I bet I'd move it on a little farther down the line

Far from Folsom Prison,

that's where I want to stay

And I'd let that lonesome whistle

blow my blues away

And I'd let that lonesome whistle

blow my blues away

And I'd let that lonesome whistle

blow my blues away

OUTRO:

| F /// | G7 /// | C G7 C ||