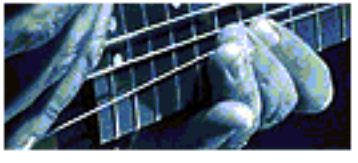

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Xv4rs

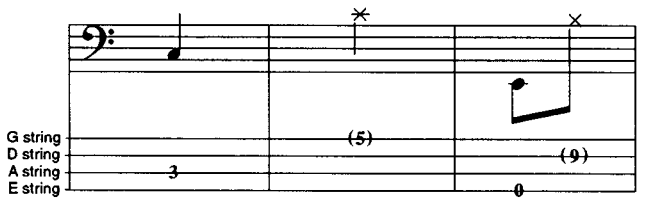
Fingerstyle Funk

with ***Francis Rocco Prestia***

Produced by David Schaub and Alexis Sklarevski

Notation System

TABLATURE: The four-line staff graphically represents the four strings of the bass, with the top line indicating the highest sounding string (G string). A number on a line of tablature designates the fret at which the note is played ("0" indicates an open string).



A string, 3rd fret. "Ghost note" on the G string, dampened at the 5th fret. Open E string, followed by a "ghost note" on the D string, 9th fret.

"Ghost notes" are notated as "X's" in the music staff, and in parentheses in the tablature. These notes have no pitch and could actually be played anywhere on the neck to create the "ghosted" sound. The reason for indicating "pitch" (or position on the neck) is to illustrate where Rocco's fretting hand is when the ghost note is being played.

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After more than 20 years as one of the premier R&B/funk bassists in the world, *Tower of Power's* **Francis Rocco Prestia** finally allows an in-depth look into his amazing style and technique. As one of the main inspirations for a whole generation of bassists, Rocco's soulful "feel" and incredible grooves have single-handedly revolutionized the electric bass, giving him a special place in music history as a true one-of-a-kind stylist.

In a logical step-by-step approach, Rocco clearly demonstrates his distinctive **"ghosting" and "muting" technique, intervals, cross-string picking, raking** and much more. Not only do you get an "up-close" look at how his remarkable sound is produced, you are also invited to a LIVE...T.O.P. concert! Through unique production methods which combine close-up "in-studio" demonstrations with a specially filmed live performance of the band you can see exactly how Rocco's ideas and techniques are applied to a "real" playing situation.

In addition to the video, the detailed booklet allows you to play along with such classics as **"What is Hip," "Only So Much Oil in the Ground," "Soul Vaccination," "You're Still A Young Man"** and many others. Whether you are a professional or a beginner, this tape will both inspire and educate you in the style of one of the greatest bass players ever. Once again, Rocco proves that he is indeed a living legend.

"Our choice for the best video of the year - if not the best ever!"
- Bass Player Magazine

"The production quality is brilliant. The transitions from studio to live shots completely blew me away. Not only is this a great instructional tape, but it's also really entertaining to watch... far and away the best bass video I've seen." *- Will Lee*
Studio Musician, Late Night with David Letterman

Produced & Directed by
David Schaub & Alexis Sklarevski

Program Length: 78 minutes

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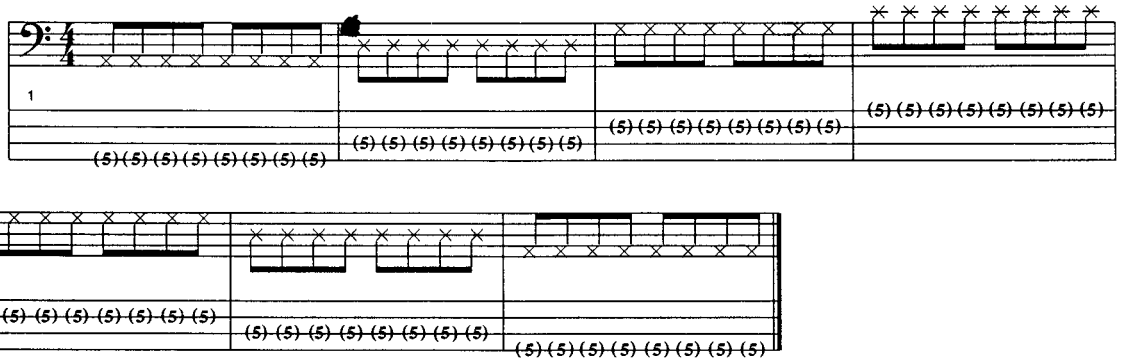
Ghosting, Muting and the 16th Pattern

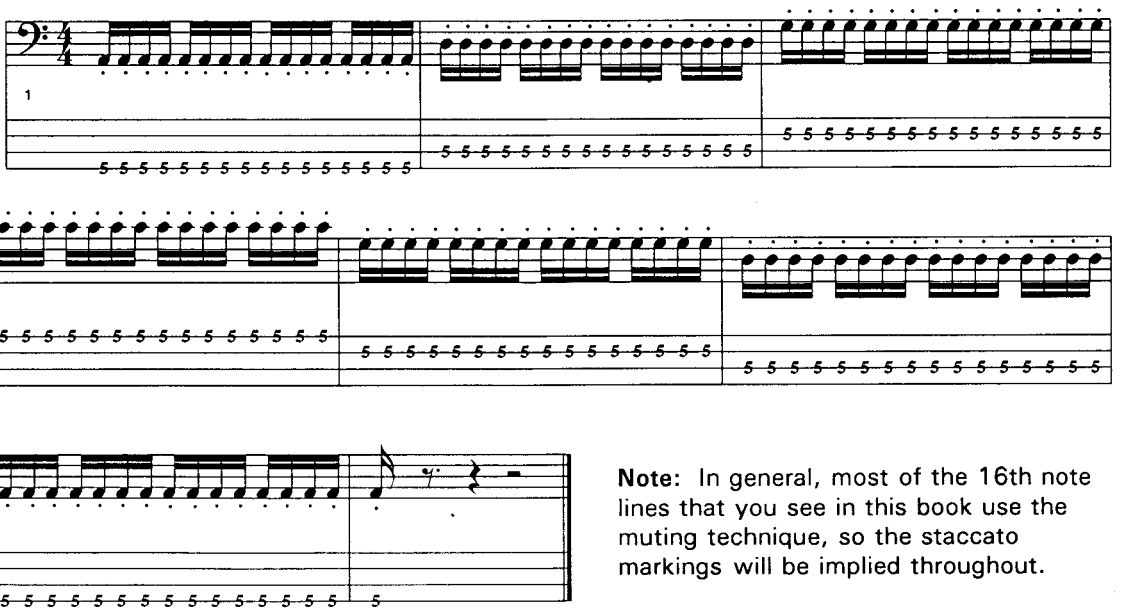
By completely dampening out the strings with the left hand, a percussive attack can be achieved which will be referred to as "ghosting." This is a good starting point to develop right hand consistency without concerning yourself with left-hand technique. In this case the left hand is muting at the 5th fret, but keep in mind that the strings can be dampened anywhere on the neck to create the same effect. Practice this with a metronome and be sure to keep both the timing and the attack even and consistent.

Ex. 1



Now lets try it with some "muted" notes. These staccato notes are very percussive, however you should still be able to hear their tonality. This sound is produced by fretting the note with your 2nd finger and resting the 3rd and 4th fingers on the same string. The 3rd and 4th fingers then act as mutes. The degree of muting can be controlled by varying the pressure applied by the 3rd and 4th fingers.

Ex. 2

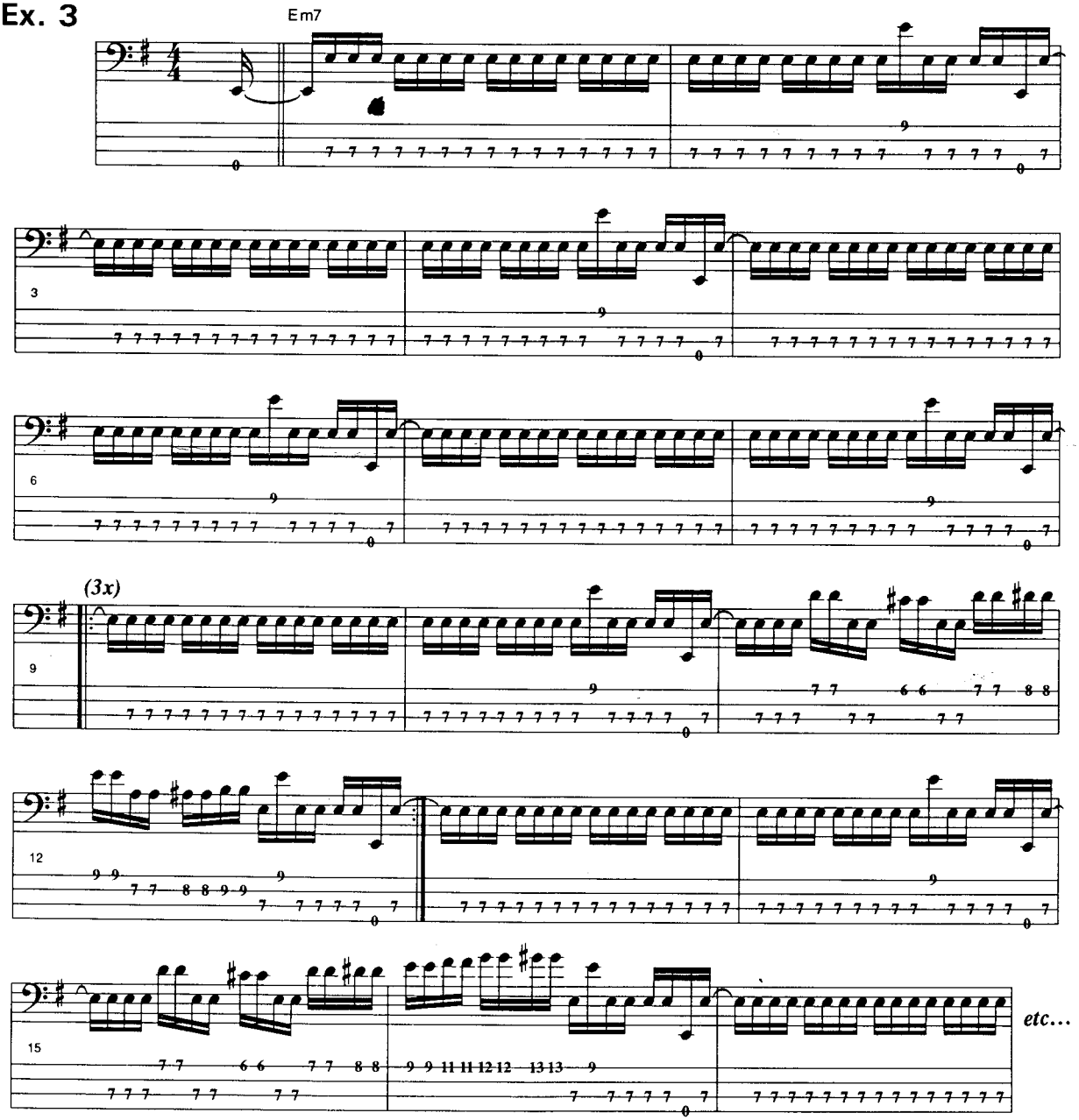


Note: In general, most of the 16th note lines that you see in this book use the muting technique, so the staccato markings will be implied throughout.

What Is Hip

"What is Hip" (*Tower of Power/Live and in Living Color*, Warner Bros.) is a good illustration of the muted 16th note ostinato technique. Be sure to articulate the 16th notes in this tune clean and even. For now if you'd like to play along, pay close attention to the fingerings for the octaves as in bars 2 and 4, and also the intervals in bars 11, 12, 15 and 16. These intervals will be covered in detail later in the video. In this example however, the primary focus is on the use of 16th notes in the picking hand.

Ex. 3



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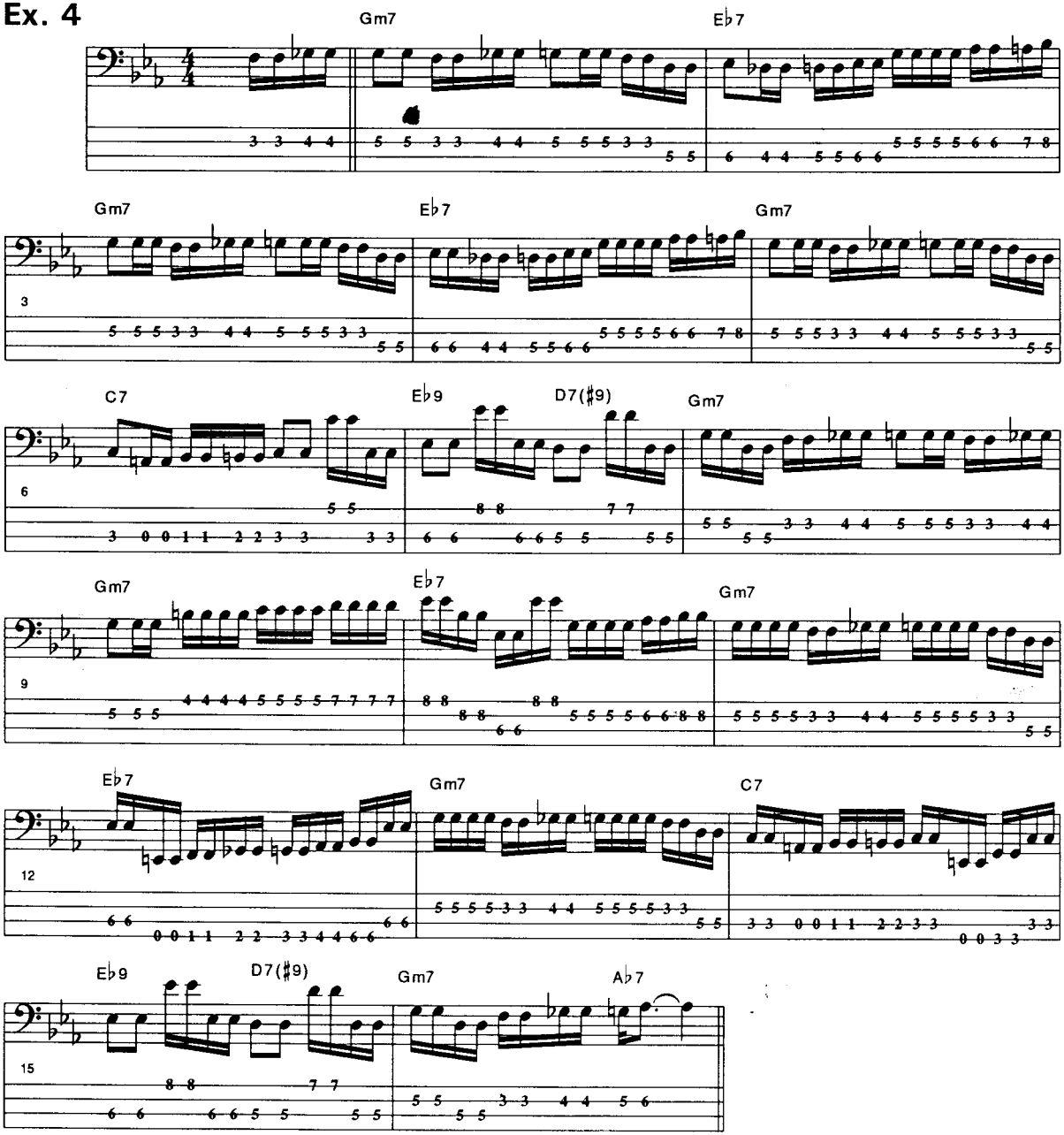
Only So Much Oil In The Ground

"Only So Much Oil In The Ground" (*Urban Renewal,* Warner Bros.) incorporates the same aggressive picking technique as used in "What is Hip." Take your time working out the bass line for this tune. This part incorporates a lot of notes and motion in order to make the bass line fit the chord changes. Again, the objective is to illustrate the use of a continuous 16th note flow in the bass line.

Ex. 4



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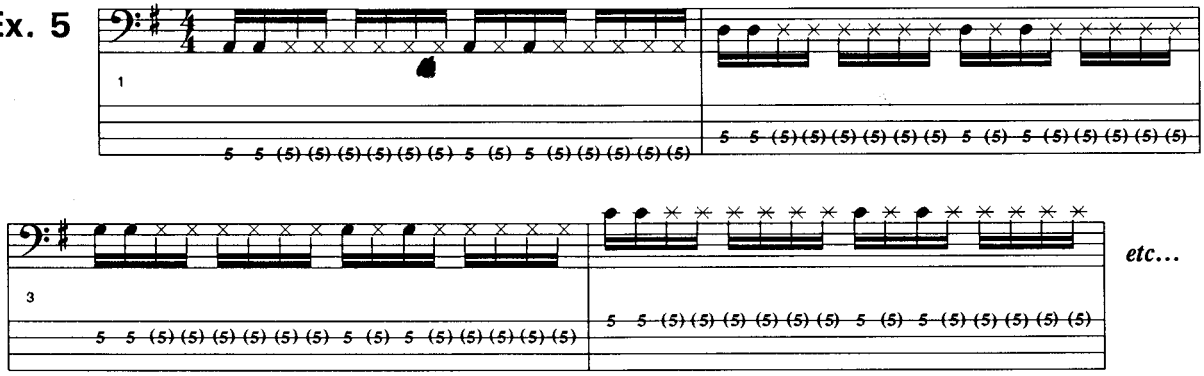
Combining Notes and "Ghost Notes"

In this style of playing, the 16th note is the foundation of life itself! It's important that you "feel" each 16th note in the bar, even in cases where the 16th note is not actually played as a pitch. If the pitch is not played then the ghost notes can be used to help propel the rhythm and outline the feel.

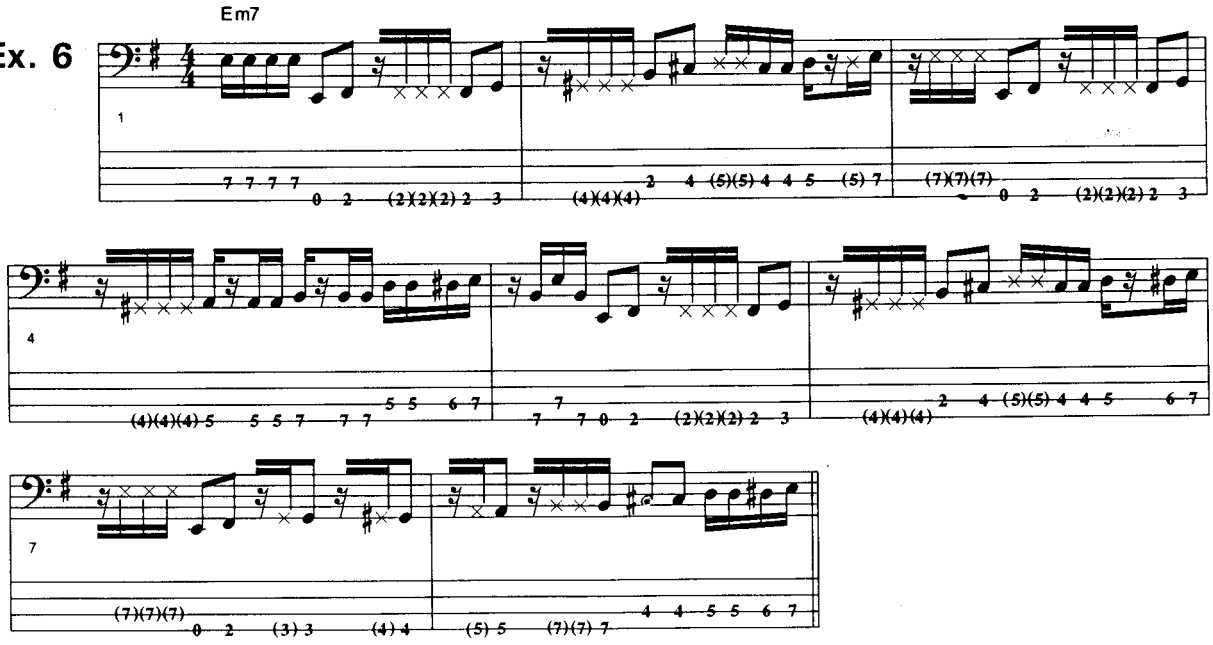
Note: Notes with pitch will be referred to as "notes," ghost notes will be referred to as "ghost notes."

Ex. 5



The ride-out at the end of "What is Hip" is a good example of combining notes with ghost notes. As far as the right-hand is concerned, notes and ghost notes should be played with the same intensity.

Ex. 6



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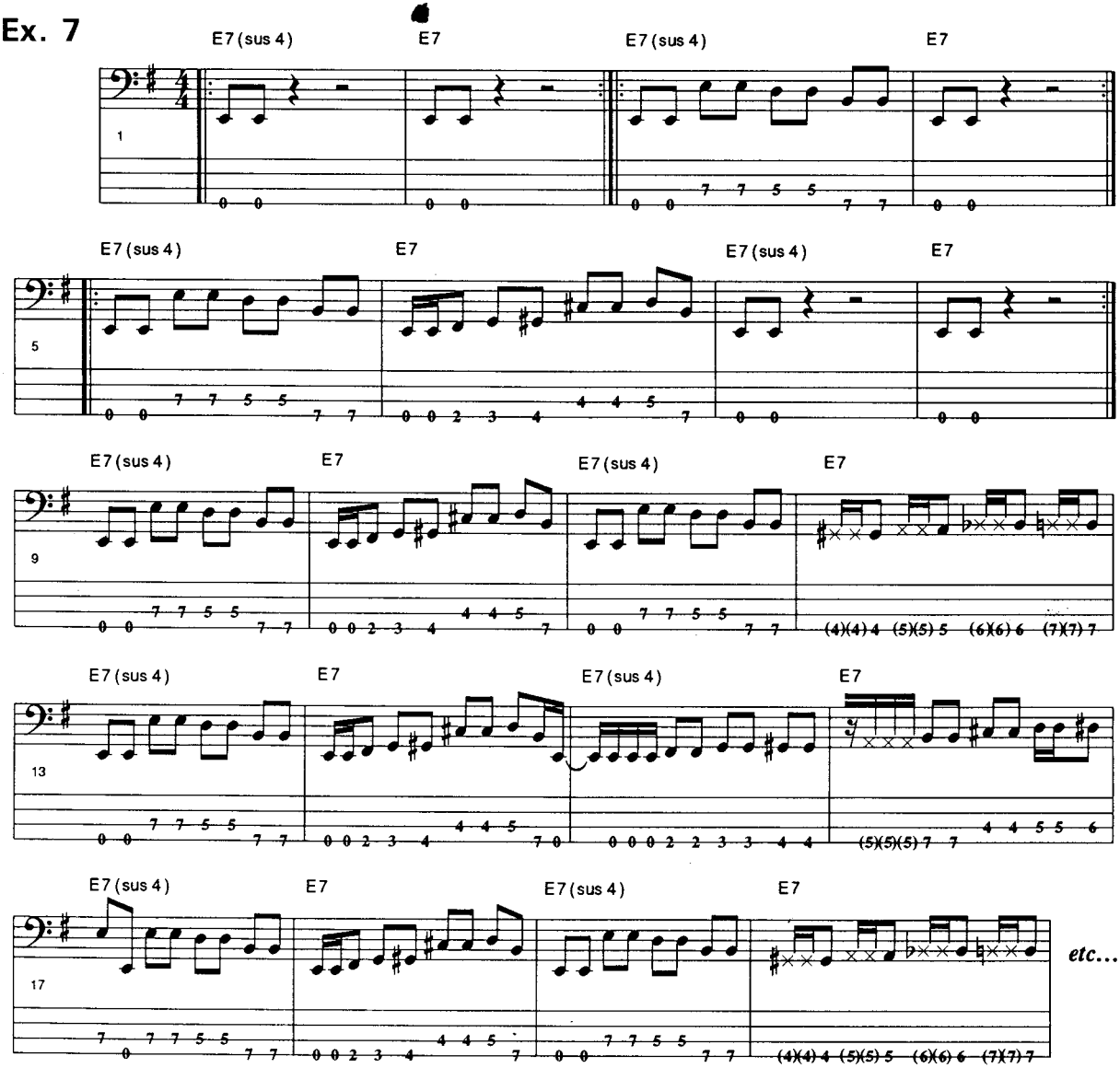
A Little Knowledge (Is A Dangerous Thing)

Let's apply this technique to the changes used in "A Little Knowledge (Is A Dangerous Thing)" (*Monster On A Leash*, Epic). Bars 1 and 2 outline the feel of the bass line in its *simplest* form. Bars 3 and 4 develop this idea one step further. Bars 5 and 6 set up the foundation for the actual bass line of the tune. This is then elaborated upon and becomes more intense through the use of rhythm, accents, ghost notes, etc. An important point here is that you should always be able to *feel* the basic line you started with even when you are embellishing and experimenting with other ideas.

Ex. 7



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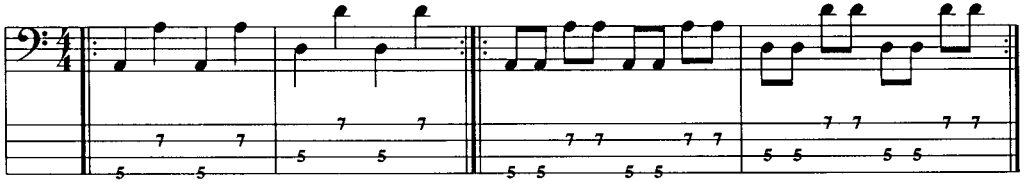
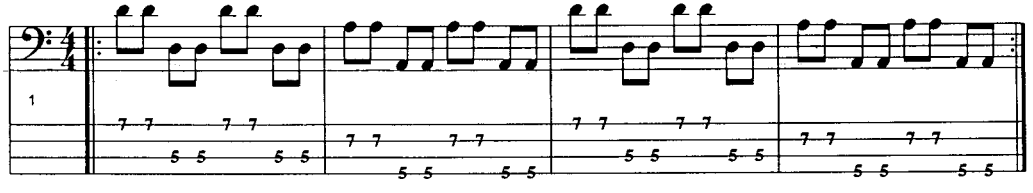
Cross-String Picking

In general, the term "cross-string picking" refers to playing lines or patterns that combine notes on non-adjacent strings. When playing octaves you will most often play the root on the E string and the octave on the D string, or the root on the A string and the octave on the G string. In both of these cases you must jump over, or "cross" a string. This can be a very tricky technique to master. In order to access all the strings some motion is required in the right-hand. You should be comfortable moving from low to high, and also from high to low.

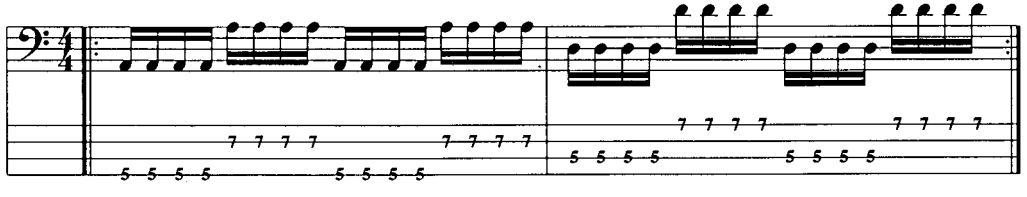
Ex. 1



Ex. 2



Ex. 3



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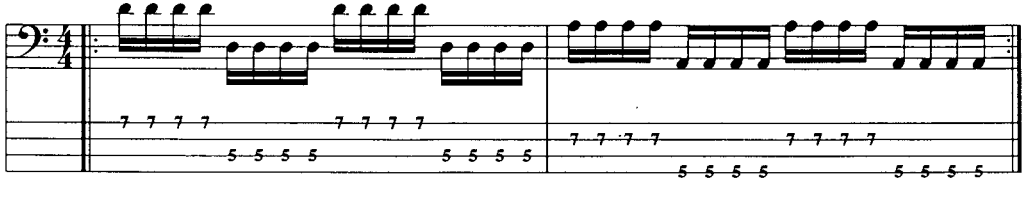
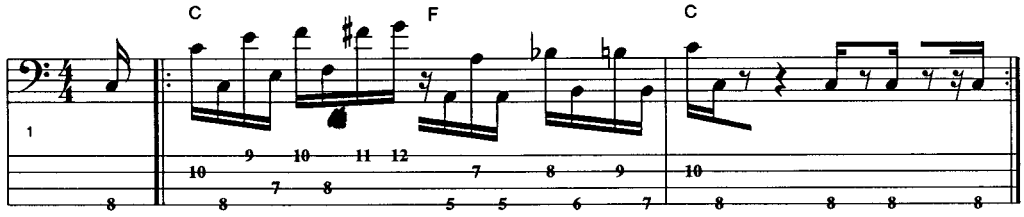


On The Serious Side

"On The Serious Side" (*In The Slot*, Warner Bros.) is a good example of using octaves in a bass line. Because the high note of the octave falls on the downbeats, it almost feels like the line is out of balance...but it's not! Play through the line a few times and you'll see that it settles in after you get used to it. This concept of "balance" is explored further on page 9.

Ex. 5



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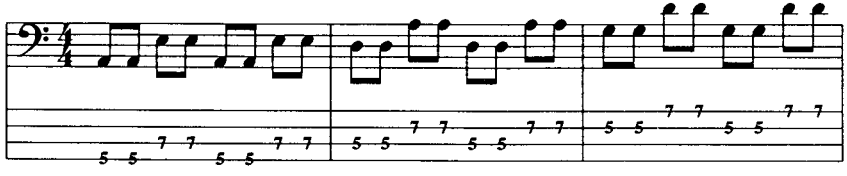
5ths

As with the octave exercises, you should be able to move from low to high and high to low while playing fifths. This concept of changing direction is very important, especially when combining fifths and octaves as in Example 9.

Ex. 6



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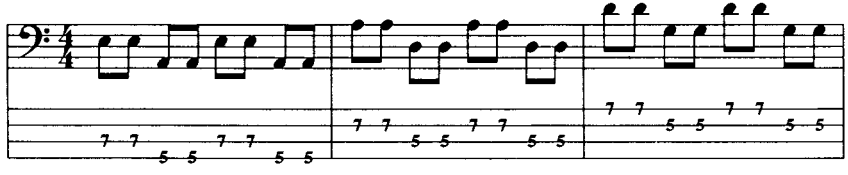
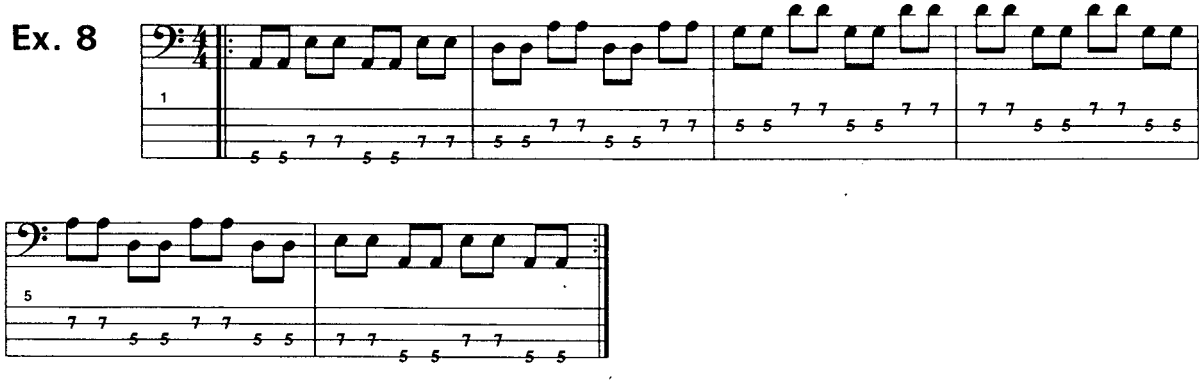
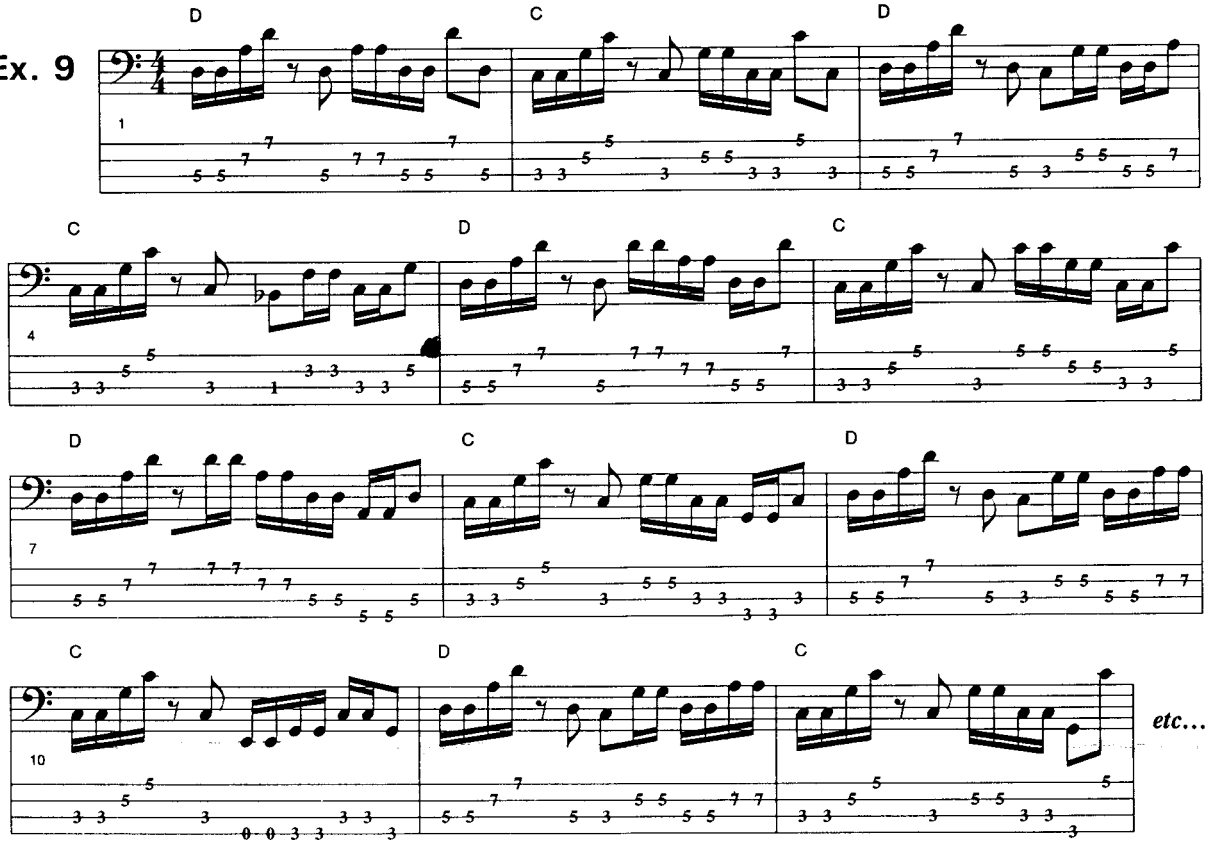


Ex. 8



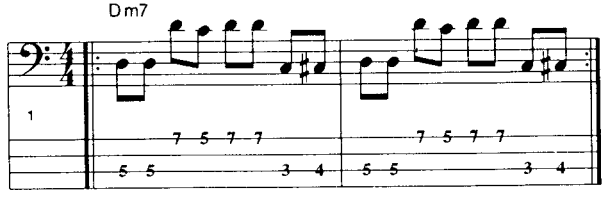
Ex. 9



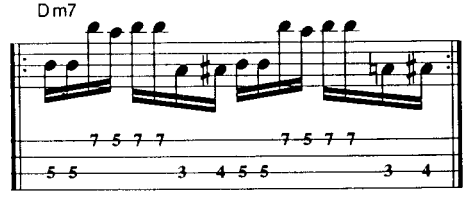
You Got To Funkifize

The actual bass line for "You Got To Funkifize" (*Bump City*, Warner Bros.) would be written in 16th notes as in the "fast" version below. When learning a busy 16th note line, it may be easier to start by subdividing the line into 8th notes as opposed to 16ths. This will help you get the timing and feel together before moving up to the faster tempo.

Ex. 10 *Slow version* (♩ = 120)



Fast version (♩ = 96)



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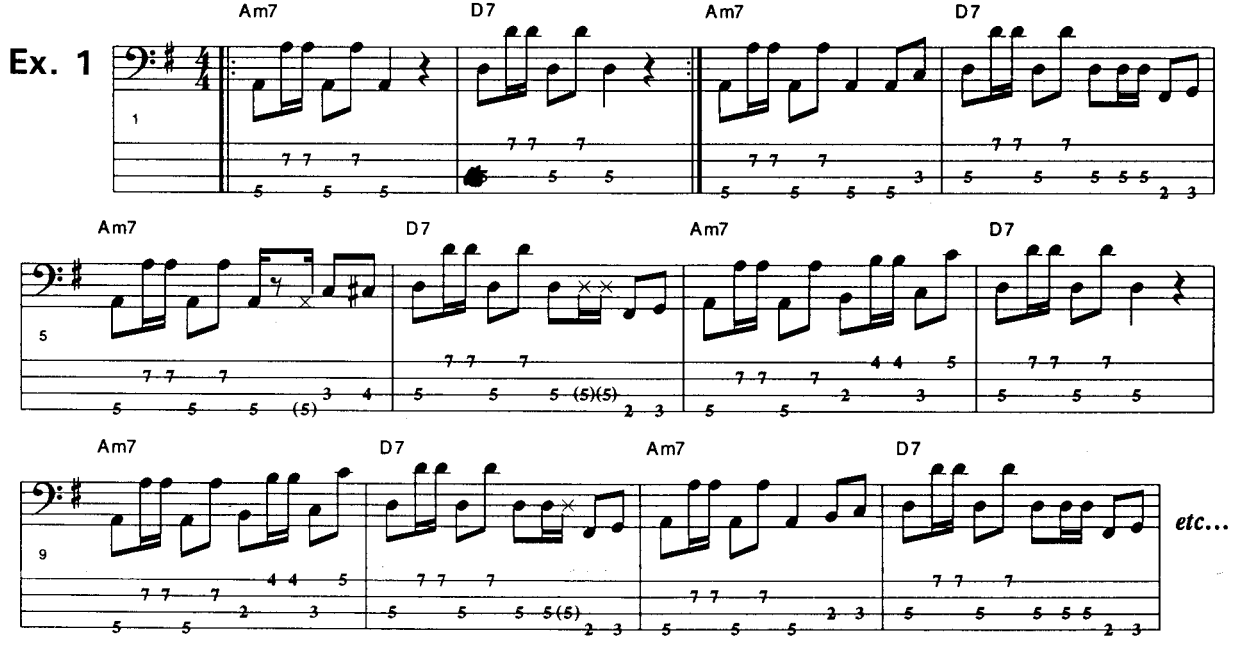
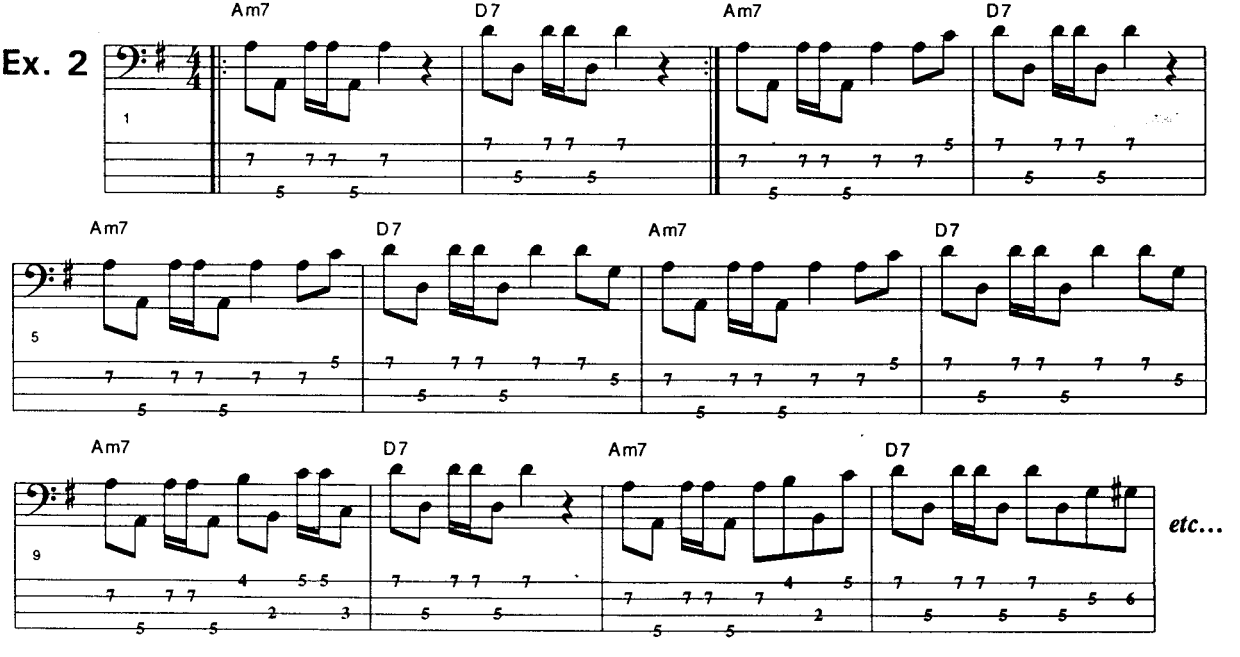
"Low" and "High" Combinations

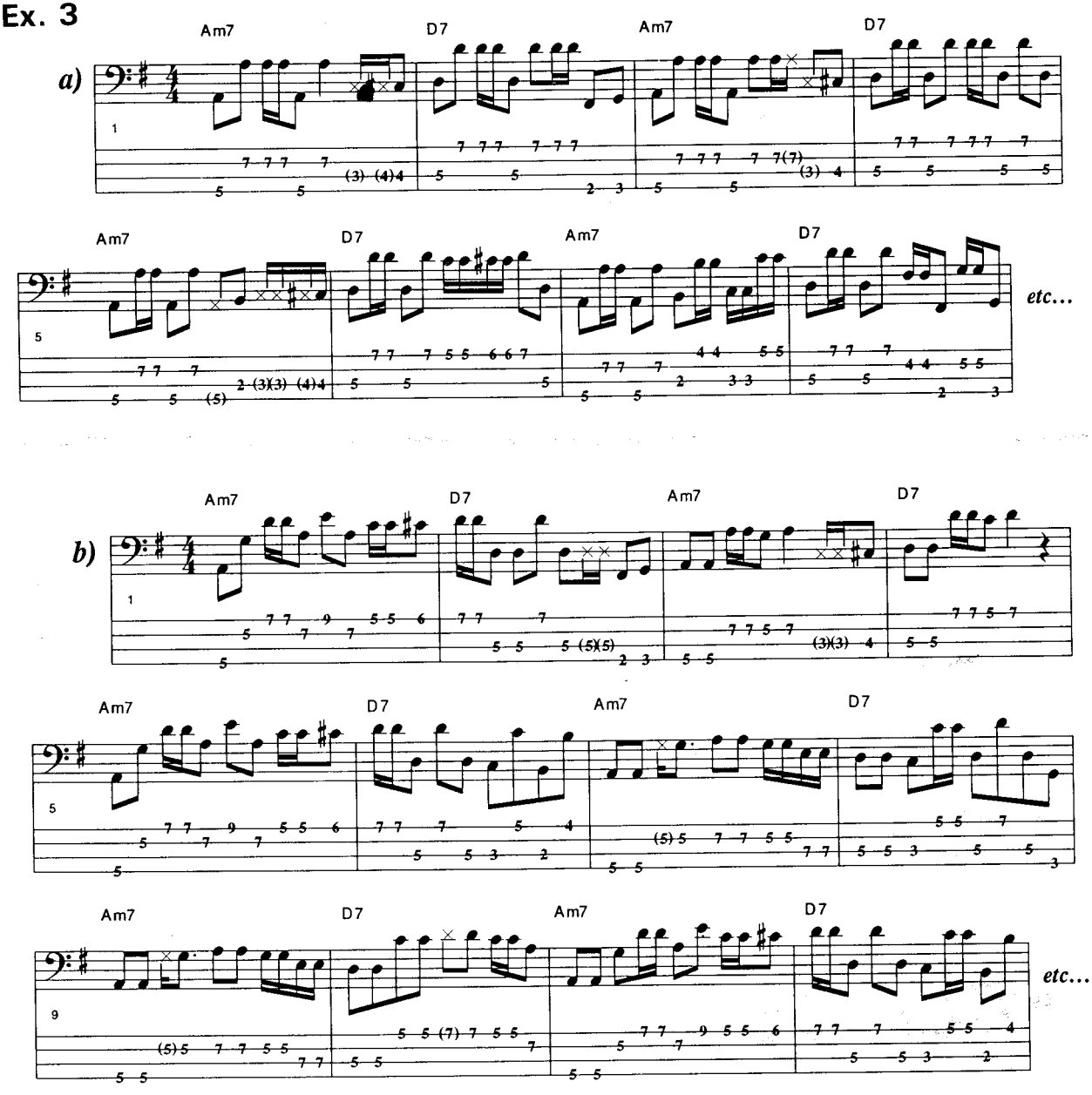
Examples 1 and 2 illustrate the difference in balance that can be achieved when playing intervals from low-to-high (Ex. 1) or from high-to-low (Ex. 2).





Examples 3(a) and 3(b) combine the low-to-high and the high-to-low idea within the same bass line. The important thing is to avoid getting your fingers tangled up. In other words, you need to come up with a clean picking system that allows for a change in direction without having to constantly reset your right-hand. Think ahead and decide how you will set your hand to play certain phrases in order to maintain a steady flow in the bass line. There are really *no* rules when it comes to picking. Through experimentation and playing in general you will come up with a system for picking that works for you.

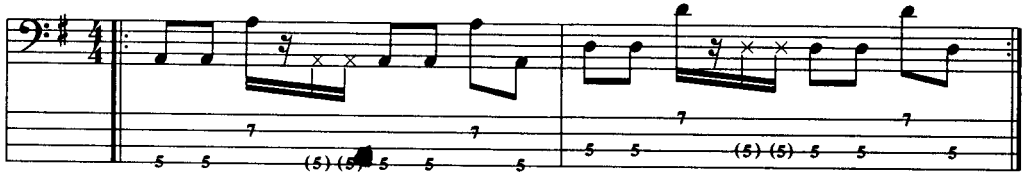
Ex. 3



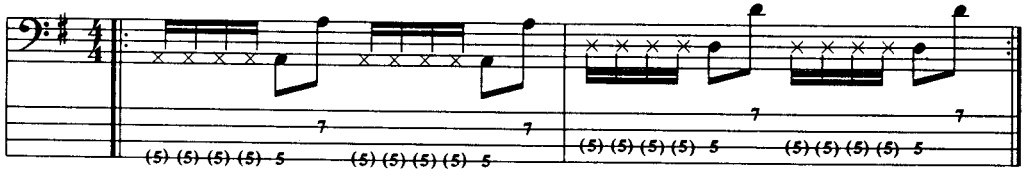
Ghosting with Octaves

In the next several examples, notice that the ghost notes produce a "stuttering" effect which helps set up the notes that follow them. Rhythmically, ghost notes can help fill up space that would normally be empty.

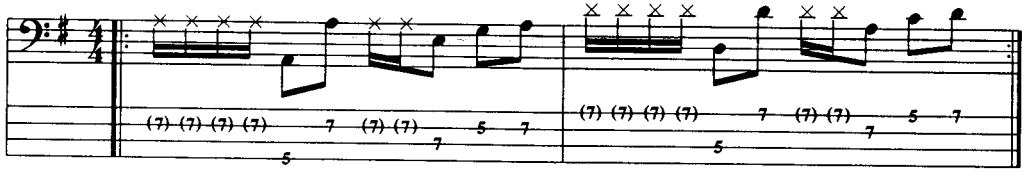
Ex. 1



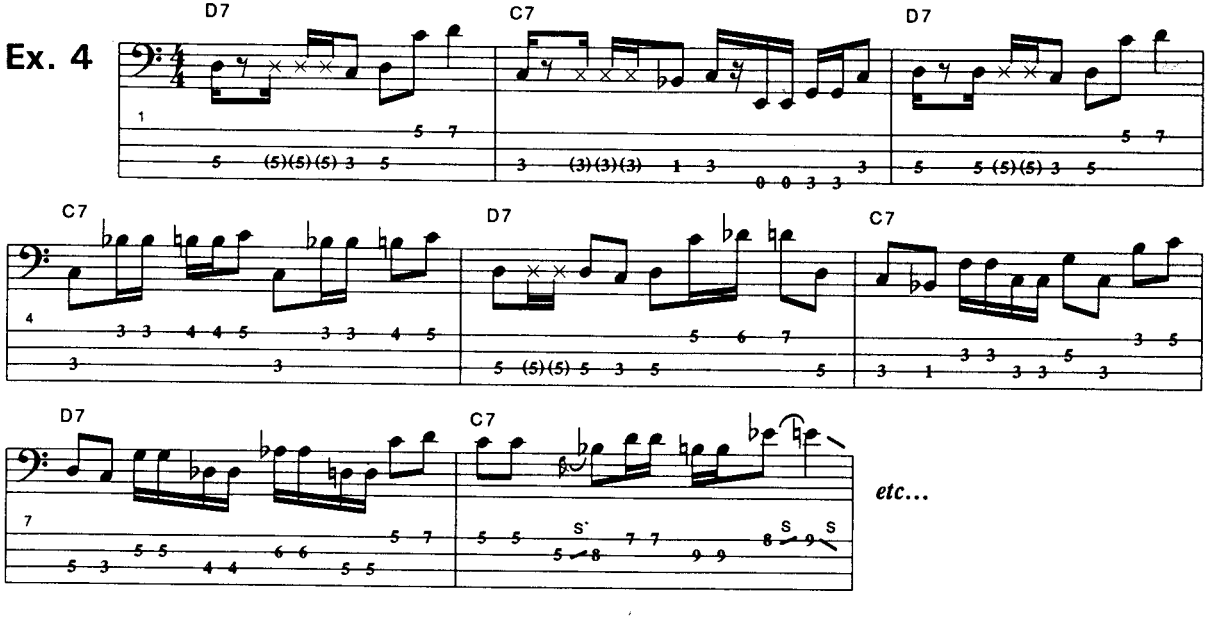
Ex. 2



Ex. 3



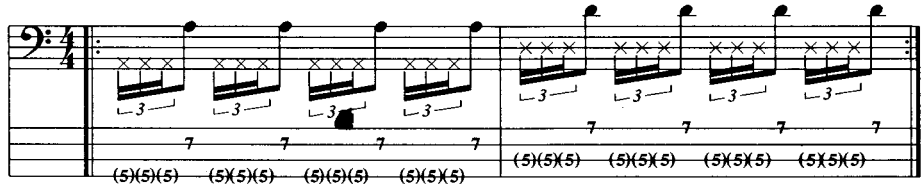
Ex. 4



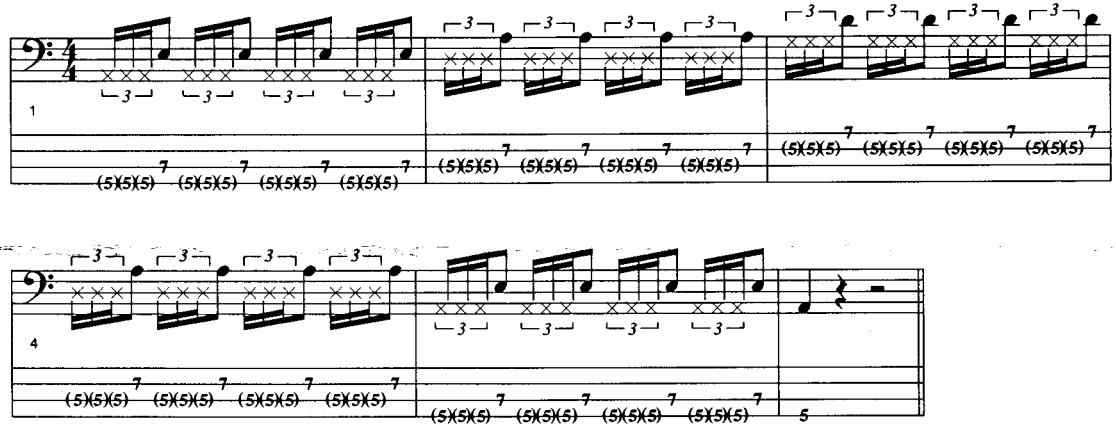
Triplets

The 16th note triplet is played in the time/space of one 8th note. It's very important you be able to feel the precise phrasing of this rhythm. No matter what the tempo, you should hear three distinct attacks. Practice slowly - accuracy is the key.

Ex. 5



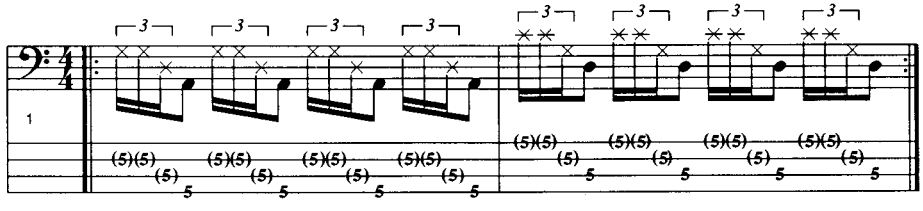
Ex. 6



Raking

The "rake" is produced by dragging one finger across two or more strings in one smooth motion. Use enough pressure so that each attack of the 16th note triplet is clearly heard. Don't allow your finger to "dig in" underneath the strings, but rather roll over them so as not to break the rhythm.

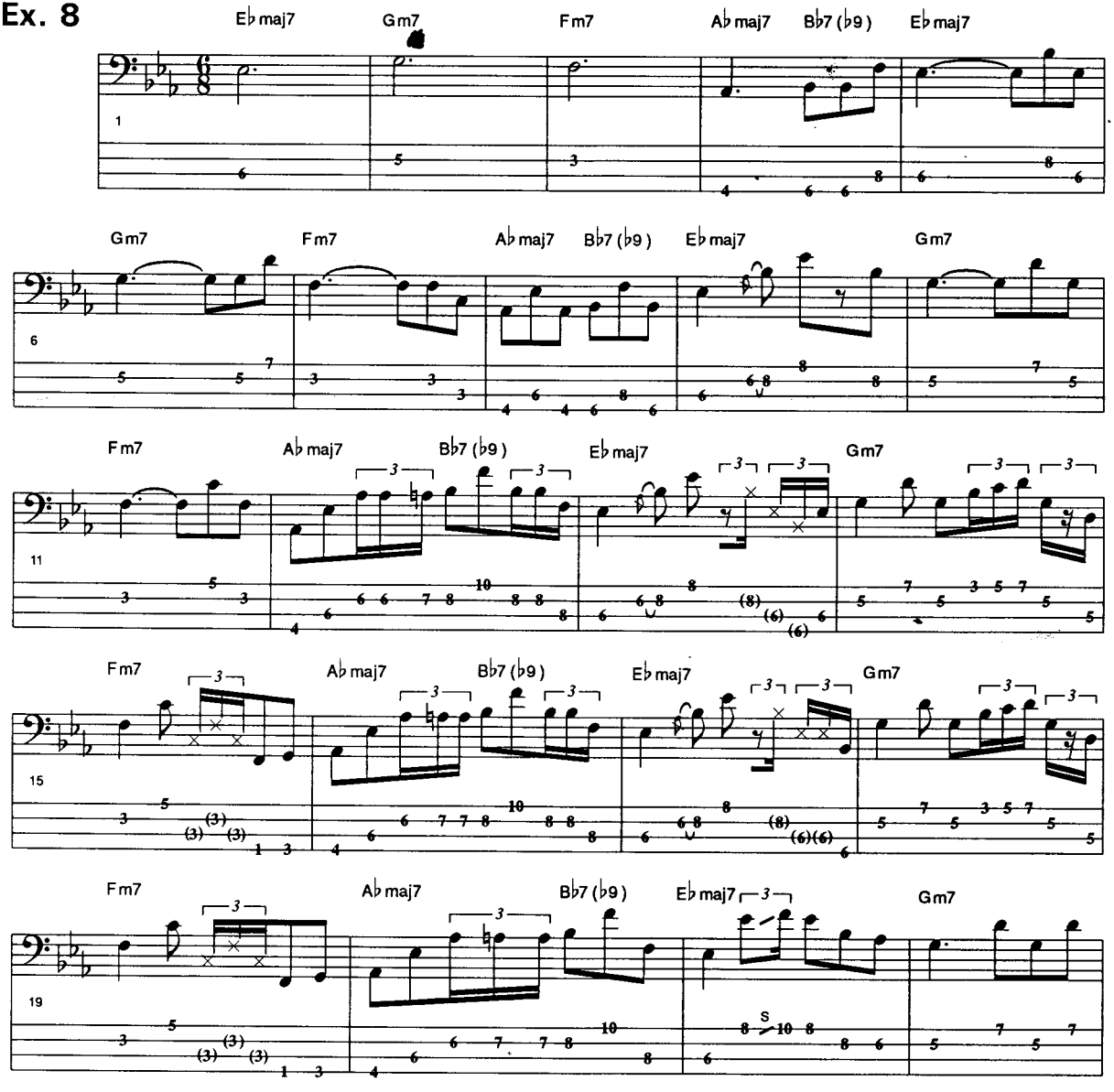
Ex. 7



You're Still A Young Man

"You're Still A Young Man" (*Bump City/Live and in Living Color*, Warner Bros.) is a classic example of a very busy bass line applied to a ballad. Most people think of ballads as having very simple, straight-ahead bass parts (as demonstrated in the first eight bars of this example). However, this tune proves that "it's okay to be busy, just as long as you don't step on nobody's toes!". This bass line makes extensive use of raking 16th note triplets, for example the last 8th note of bar 12 and the fourth 8th note of bar 15. These triplets can be very difficult to play accurately at such a slow tempo. Be sure not to rush them!

Ex. 8



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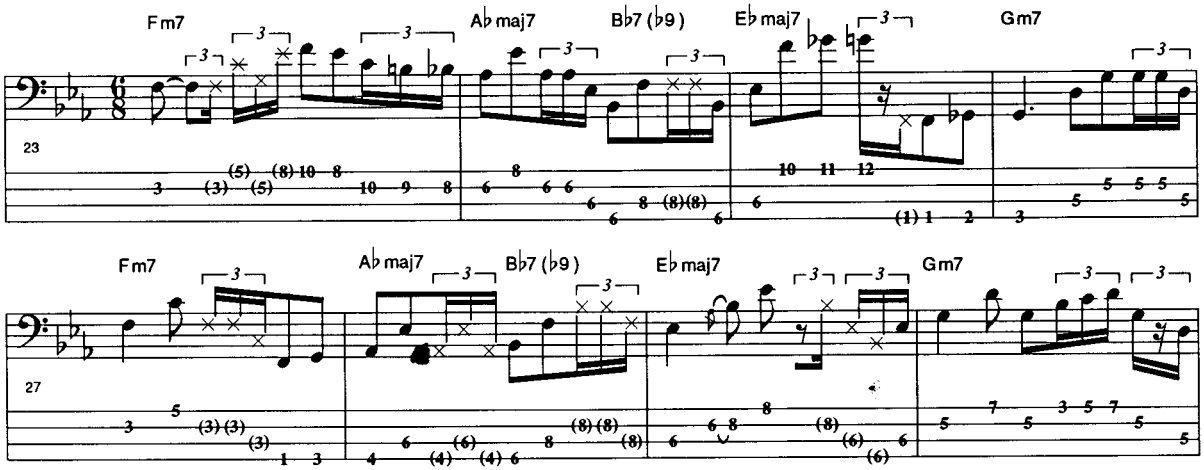
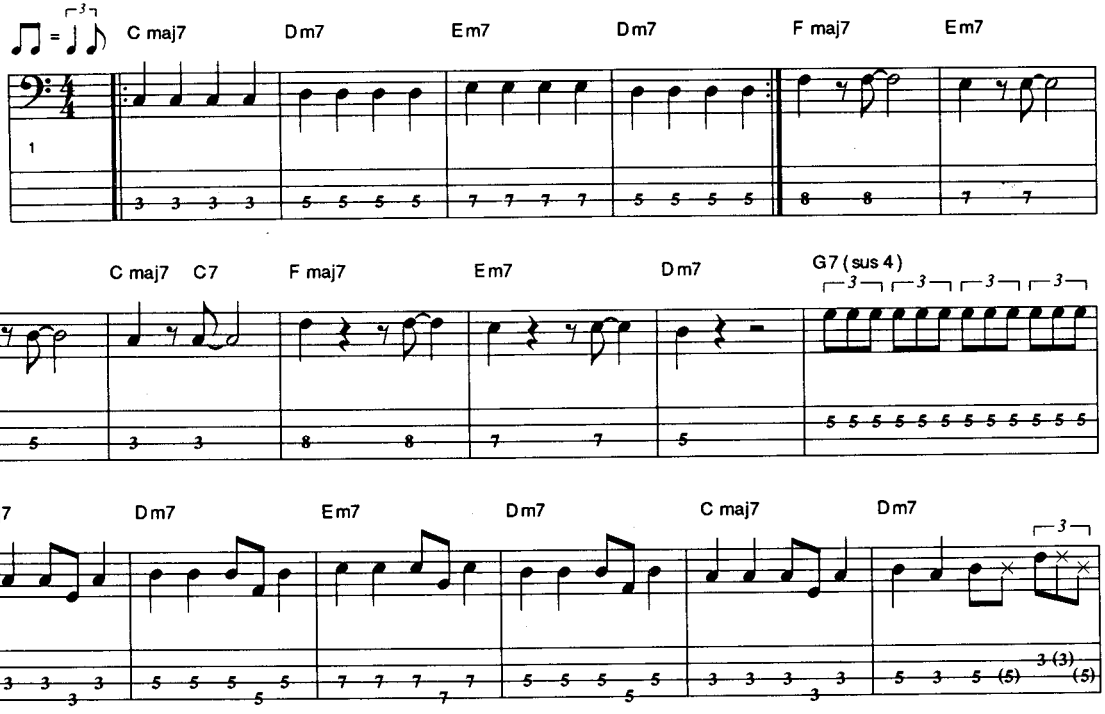


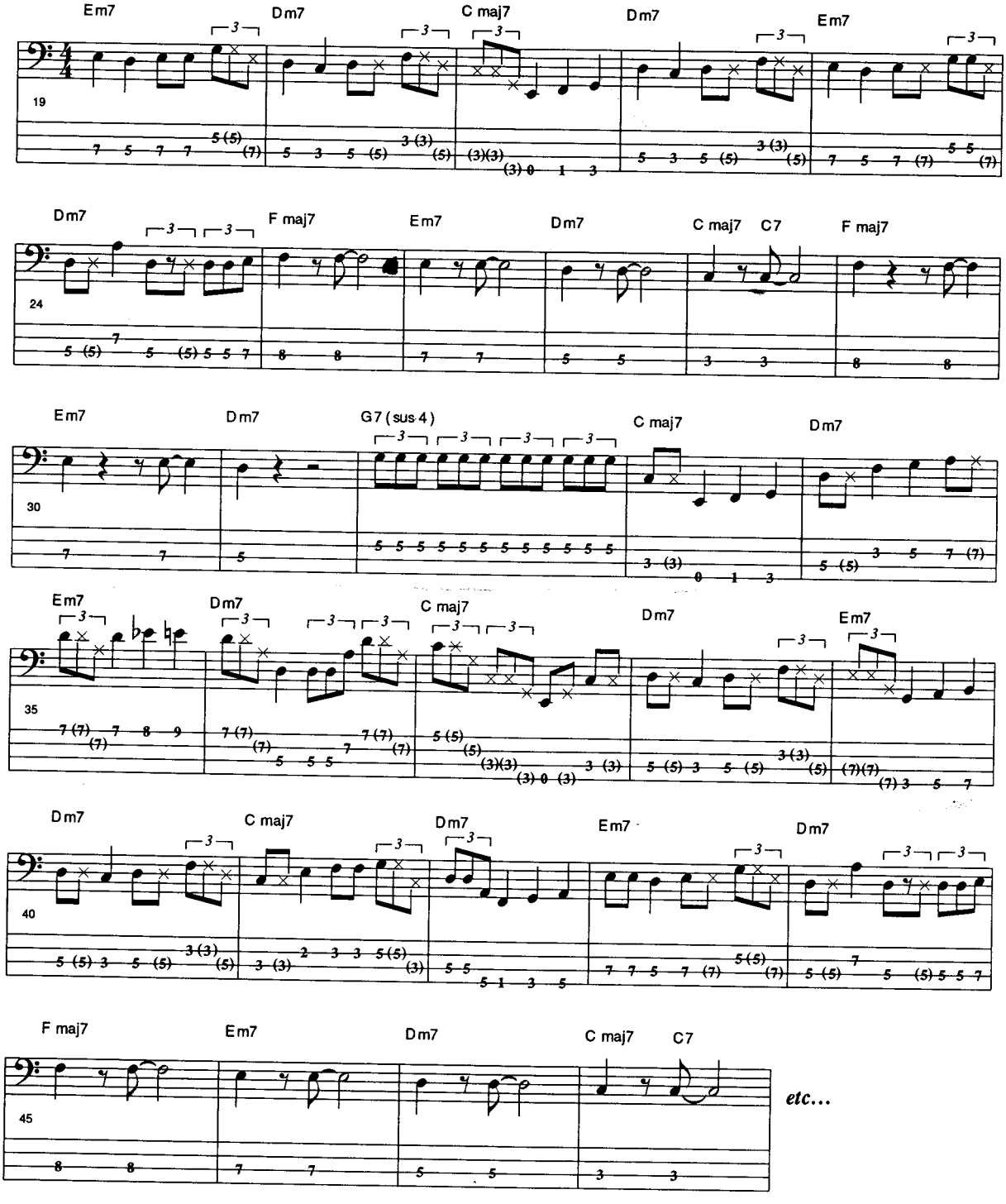
etc...

This Time It's Real

"This Time It's Real" (*Tower of Power*, Warner Bros.) presents a unique approach to a standard shuffle groove. The rhythm section maintains a strong quarter note pulse underneath a triplet feel. This combination of quarter note pulse with 8th note triplets on top really helps create a "driving" shuffle sound. The use of the raking technique is very pronounced in bars 36 and 37.

Ex. 9





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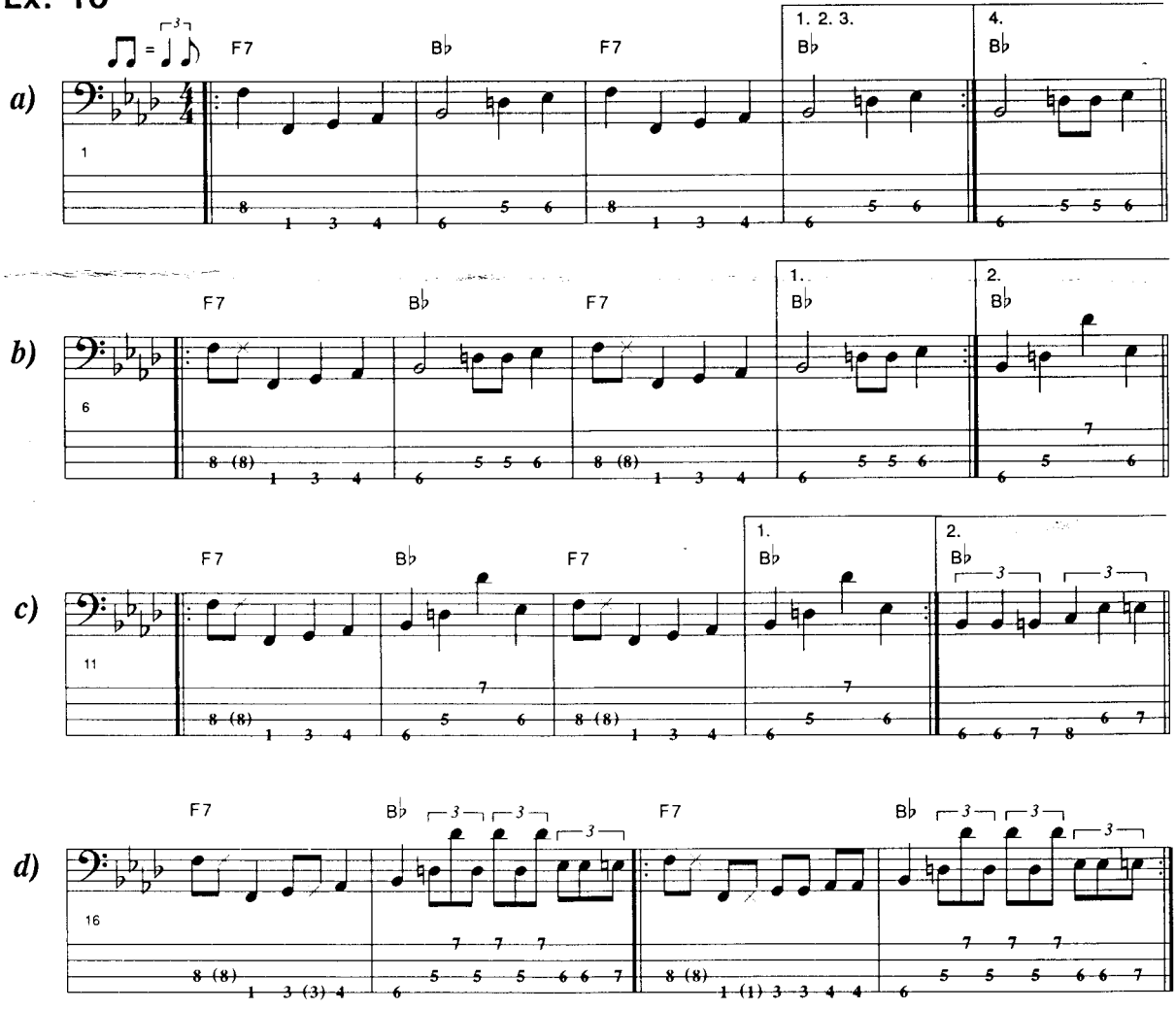
Examples 10, 11 and 12 further illustrate the idea of starting very simple, then allowing the bass line to evolve. The tunes have been divided into sections which progressively become more complex until the actual bass line from the tune is being played (with the exception of "So Very Hard To Go" where Rocco elaborates more than he normally would). Be careful not to fall into the trap of focusing on the embellishments to the point where the original concept behind the bass line becomes unclear. No matter how complex the part, the final outcome should always relate back to the basic foundation that you started with (i.e. section a).

Credit

The drum part used on "Credit" (*Power*, Cypress/A&M) is actually a half-time shuffle (i.e. the back-beat is on beat three), whereas Rocco's bass line is played as a straight-ahead shuffle. Here again the rhythmical combination of the bass line and the drums create a very unique sound.

Ex. 10



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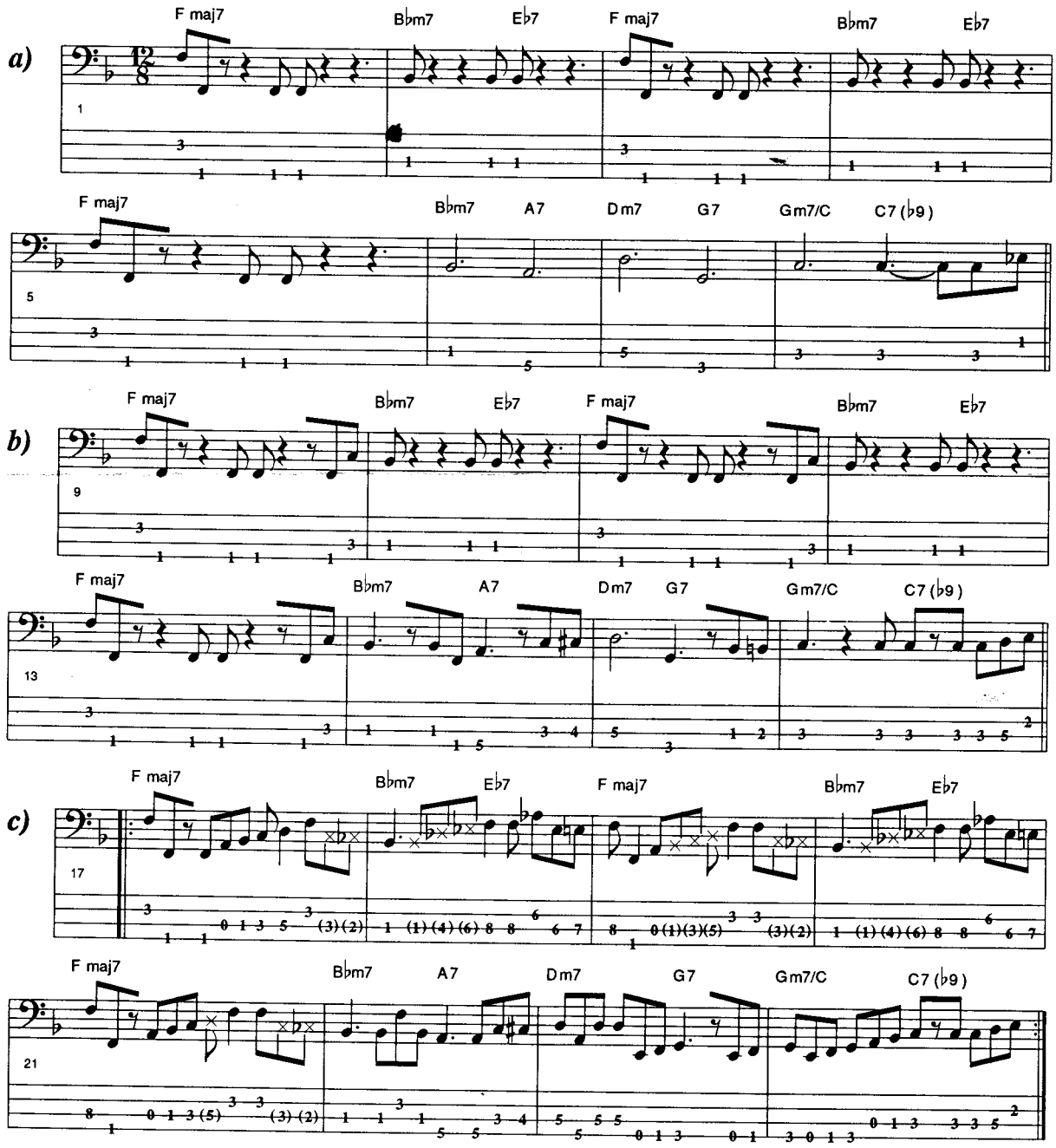
How Could This Happen To Me

The bass line to "How Could This Happen To Me" (*Monster On A Leash*, Epic) strongly outlines the 12/8 feel of the tune through extensive use of the 8th note triplet.

Ex. 11



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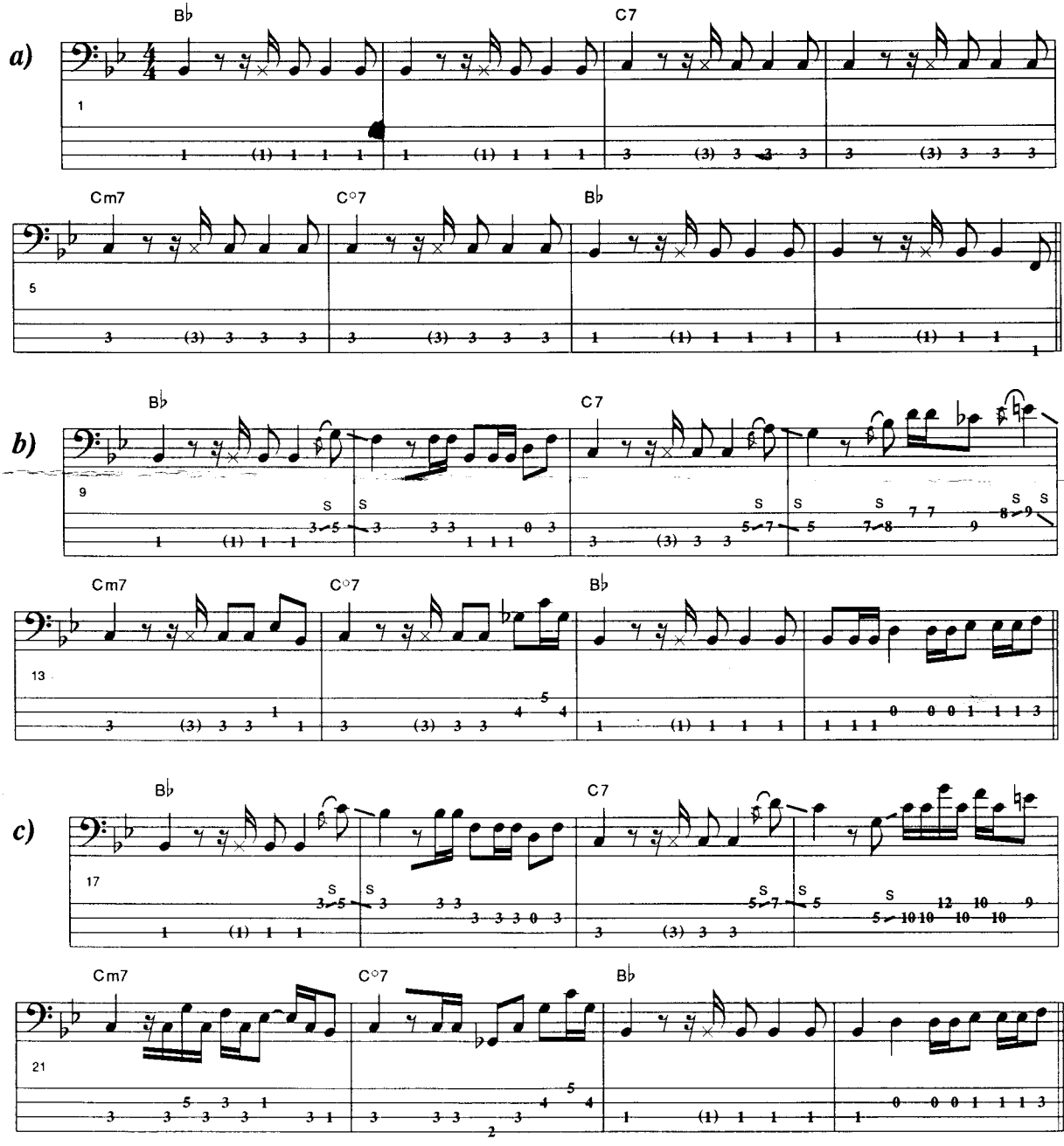
So Very Hard To Go

"So Very Hard To Go" (*Tower Of Power*, Warner Bros.) is a good example of an 8th note R&B ballad. The 16th notes in this bass line are used to embellish the basic 8th note feel.

Ex. 12



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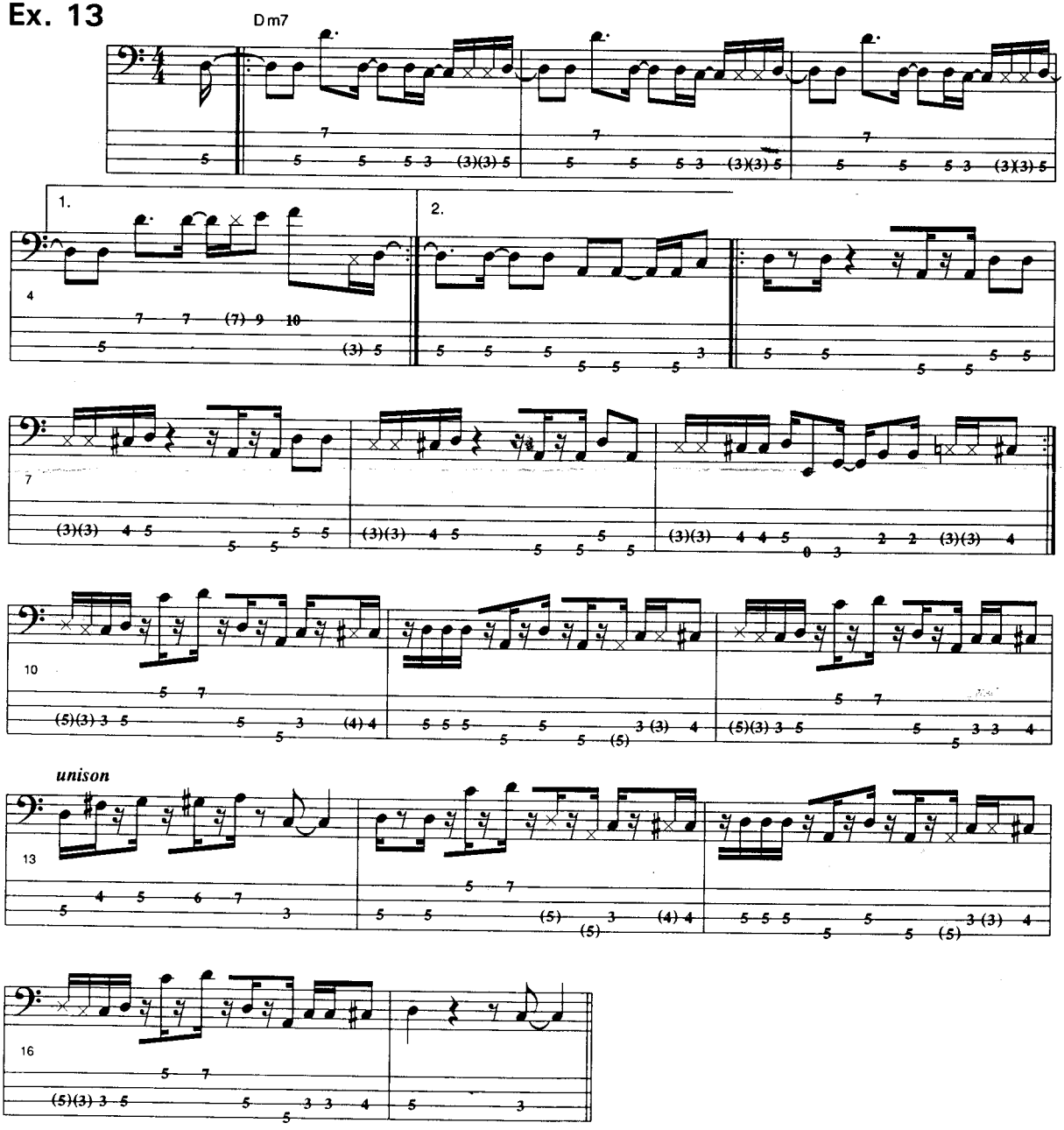
Soul Vaccination

"Soul Vaccination" (*Tower Of Power*, Warner Bros.) is a very syncopated straight 16th note funk line that meshes perfectly with a very syncopated drum part. "The bottom line is that the bass, the drums, they have to lock"... no kidding!

Ex. 13



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