

TONE **TIME** **&** **TEMPERAMENT**

BY DEREK JONES

In this video lecture I would like to share some of my thoughts about bass playing and being a professional musician. I will focus on what I feel are the three most important assets that non bass players, ie. all the other musicians and singers we work with, expect us to bring to the gig. In the 35 years working as a touring and recording professional, these 3 concepts have proven to be an invaluable source of inspiration in my life study of music and bass playing. They are:

Tone

Time

&

Temperament

I would like to thank Mr. Jason Heath for giving me the opportunity to be a part of this wonderful online community learning project so I can share some of my experiences with you today. I also want to thank you for taking the time to view this lecture and my sincere hope is that it gives you new ways to be creative and develop your own voice further.

Sincerely,

Derek Jones

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TONE

- 1 : vocal or musical sound of a specific quality
- 2 : a sound of definite pitch and vibration
- 3 : style or manner of expression in speaking or writing
- 4 a : general character, quality, or trend
// a city's upbeat tone
- b : frame of mind : MOOD
- c : healthy elasticity : RESILIENCY

Let's start with the first thing people do when we play our bass at a rehearsal, performance, or studio session. They LISTEN. They listen to the tone that we make with our bass. The tone we bring to the music is so important because it lays the foundation for everyone else in the group. We are the glue that brings the rhythm, harmony and melody together. Our tone also shares with the world who we are. The fellow musicians in the group, whether that group is a duet, a trio, a big band, or an orchestra count on our tone to be full, in tune and inspiring.

Of course, we can't be all bass players to all people. But through our years of study and hard work , we can develop our tone and other musicians will dig it. Word of mouth will spread and we will get called for more work. This takes time and a lot of playing with others to develop. Play as much as you can with as many different musicians as you can. Ask questions and learn from your mistakes.

This brings me to the other part of Tone, what tone do we bring to the gig personally. Artists are all over the map when it comes to personalities. Do we bring a positive energy to the gig? Do we make a situation better with us being there? When you're on a bus tour for a month or a year, are we easy to get along with? I've seen situations where the best musician for the gig is looked over because no one wants to be around them. I call it "developing bus chops". As a professional musician, we need to be positive and a joy to work with. That's not saying we should be "push overs" and that we shouldn't stand up for ourselves when the situation merits it. Our work will grow much faster when we bring a good tone to every situation.

TIME

1 : a non spatial continuum that is measured in terms of events which succeed one another from past through present to future

2 a : rate of speed : TEMPO

b : the grouping of the beats of music : RHYTHM

3 : a person's experience during a specified period or on a particular occasion

As bass players, we are counted on to have good time. Our time feel is what everyone else on the stage or in the studio locks with. It's what brings people to the dance floor. It's the groove that everyone sits in. Having great time does not mean to be perfect. I believe it means to be able to adapt to the musical situation in the moment we are playing. I've had the opportunity to play with musicians with very strong

time feels and musicians that struggled with time. Everyone is different and feels the music differently.

Being present and in the moment is key. In most cases, we do not have the opportunity to rehearse and have to just go up and play. To me, having good time includes adapting to the other musicians in the band and making it all sound and feel the best it can. Again, this takes time to develop. You can work on time in the practice room to a certain extent, but only when you start playing with others can you learn to adapt in the moment.

Some situations will be easy. Others, not so much. But, no matter what the situation, we can choose to be cool and do our best. And in the process, we might have an opportunity to help someone struggling with time. Or, have someone help us. I've been very fortunate to have great musicians help me with my time feel and I try to do the same for others.

Here's another aspect of time that is very important for your career. **SHOW UP ON TIME!!** This one, seemingly simple, common sense idea is the downfall of many musicians careers. Being on time is being late in our world. If the rehearsal, studio session or performance is scheduled for 8pm, and you show up at 8pm, you're late. I always try show up to the gig at least 45 minutes before down beat so I can set up my gear, get a vibe of the room and show the band that I respect their time and that when they hire me, they have nothing to worry about. This goes a long way in building relationships with other contractors, band leaders and musicians to get the call backs.

TEMPERAMENT

1 : the slight modification of acoustically pure intervals in tuning a musical instrument

2 : the act or process of tempering or modifying

3 : characteristic or habitual inclination or mode of emotional response

4 : extremely high sensibility

especially : excessive sensitiveness or irritability

Developing our ear helps us to adapt to the different temperaments of the musical instruments we are playing with. In my experience, playing in a jazz trio with piano is a slightly different temperament than playing in a jazz trio with guitar. Even more so in a bluegrass band with the different stringed instruments. The slight modifications in the intervals of these instruments require us to adjust our intonation accordingly. If you take some time to record yourself playing in these situations, you'll be able to hear the subtle differences and adapt your intonation more quickly.

Practicing, in my humble opinion, should be a time of personal reflection and growth. It should also be honest and kind. I've noticed over the years some of my students being very hard on themselves. Frustration can be crippling. We must always give ourselves ample amounts of practice time to work out the challenges playing bass sets before us. And we must be patient with ourselves. Being an artist means being vulnerable and that can be very scary and overwhelming.

Being afraid, frustrated, doubtful... all these are normal feelings. But if we love ourselves and take care of ourselves, the negative feelings can be dealt with. Every day is a new day, with new challenges. We can meet those challenges by regular practice of music and self care. "Consistent application of force over time" is what I say to myself every day as I continue on my life's journey.

As we care for ourselves, we can care for others. It's important to remember that we all are on different planes of experience and we have to be kind to others around us. I have lamented many times in my career and in school when musicians with less experience were put down and, at times, made fun of by other musician. How can we expect to learn and improve when we are not invited to play with others that are more experienced than we are? We certainly didn't learn to speak by being put in a room with other kids that didn't know how to speak. We learned from kids and adults that had way more experience speaking than we did.

We need to take care and be kind above all. Many times I was in situations where I was not ready to be there. I did not have the experience needed or the confidence. But other musicians who were very kind, helped me along the way. I learned so much from them and I grew in ways I couldn't have imagined.

Artists are sensitive and can feel deeply. We should remember that our feelings of fear and self doubt are the same feelings others have, even when we perceive them as "having it all together" . Above all, we are human, with all the same doubts and fears. When we are kind to ourselves and others, we all win.

Oh yeah! And one more thing:

GRATITUDE

: the state of being grateful : THANKFULLNESS

Having a sense of gratitude is essential for our life and work. Being a bass player is such an awesome and noble pursuit. It's a joy to play music and we should always be grateful. Not everyone gets to do this so we are some of the lucky ones. Every time we get to play with others, let's show how grateful we are by bringing great tone, time and temperament to the gig.

Thank you so much for taking the time to be with me on this journey. I hope this has been a joy and help to you along your path. You're awesome! I wish you my very best.

The definitions used came from the Merriam-Webster dictionary app.

Other apps I use for practice include:

Drum Genius

Time Guru

Erskin Jazz Essentials

SrutiBox



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Derek Jones is recognized for his ability to perform in nearly any musical genre with outstanding facility on the electric, fretless, and double bass. As an educator, he brings a mix of real-world experience and a deep understanding of academic theory to fully prepare his students for work as professional musicians.

Derek has performed or recorded with Paul Hanson • Jeff Sipe • Ray Obiedo • Darol Anger & Mike Marshall • Rob Ickes • The Pete Escovedo Orchestra
Sheila E. • Jeff Coffin • Kai Eckhardt • Orestes Vilato • Nickel Creek

Since 2004, Derek has been the upright and electric bassist for Cirque du Soleil's production of KA at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas.