

Playing what is required for the Music!

By: Mitchell Coates

Playing what is required for the music sounds like such a simple concept but for some applying this concept while performing it can be very illusive. I think this is good topic to talk about especially since there are some musicians who are challenged with this concept especially for many young players. When I say young I am referring to being young with experience and not young as it relates to chronological age. As I interact with bass players that are just beginning to learn the instrument so many of them get caught up with all of the very difficult and “flashy” playing that some of the hottest musicians are currently doing. I feel it is good to develop “chops” to be able to know your instrument and enhance your playing but the most important thing to remember is “playing what is required for the music”.



Let' use an example. If you attend any jam session most of the young players get on the stage to perform all the new “flashy” lines they have been practicing. They are just waiting to get the chance to get a solo so they can show everyone how great they can play. But the best approach is to play what is required for the music fist then, if you get a chance to take a solo on the tune go for it!

The top players will say that if you overplay on a gig you may not get another call from the band leader to do another gig. I have heard band leaders that hire this type of overplaying musician, for the first time, say “Wow...he/she was a great player but he/she played too much or was too busy during the song”. Have you ever heard James Jamerson (Motown) play too much during a song? James Jamerson approached his performance by first playing what was required for the music and then enhancing the song by making excellent note, rhythm, and dynamic choices. He played in a way which added to the music and not got in the way of the music. Look at it this way...if the notes, rhythm, and dynamics do not enhance the music then it is taking away from the quality of the music. Our job as bass players is to make the music sound and feel great.

I hope you enjoyed this article and found the tips in it helpful. These tips can be useful for players at all levels. And remember, when you are on the gig, play the music first and save the flashy stuff for your solo...if you get one!

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