

Bass-Enhanced Triads (Slash Chords) Primer

Nicknames: Power Bass, Dyna-Bass, Tri-Level Chords (for 7th chords only), Slashers, Bass-Energized, Bass-Powered, Bass-Richened

Introduction: Ted Greene, as TedGreene.com and his seminars have shown, was constantly organizing his vocabulary throughout his teaching career. His love of bass voices was one of the many things Ted looked to understand through a plethora of methods. Ted, around 1988, started to get more serious about the bass note and its chordal purpose. As he wrote about counterpoint, bass lines, and inversions at that point, his writings on slash chords were minimal. Now with a new drive to learn about them (and maybe teach a course and/or write a book on it), Ted got to work explaining the importance of a new bass note over basic chords (triads and 7th chords).

What is a Bass-Enhanced Triad?

When putting a new bass note over a simple triad (or 7th chord shape), the chord has a new energy to it. The bass note literally energizes the chord to have a whole new sound. The new sound is analyzable in two different schools of thought. (The two terms below are ones I named as Ted never directly wrote about the exact difference.)

1. *Bass-Powered:* The bass note is the new root and the upper chord is reanalyzed as chord tones and extensions.
 - a. Many colorized chords have a lot of leniency to them. Many voicings do not have a 3rd and/or 5th. This helps the chord sound very open.
 - b. The reinterpreted root also opens up new harmonic function.
2. *Bass-Richened:* The triad's root stays as the root while the new bass note becomes an 'inversion.' It enhances the flavor of the triad.
 - a. The common bass notes are the 9th, 4th, 5th, b6th, and b7th.

Example #1

Now, let's look at a chord and see how the different schools interpret the chord...

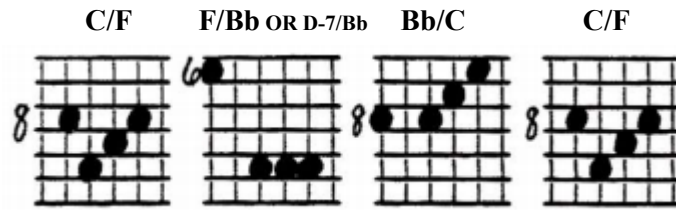
Bb-Eb-Ab-C

Bass-Powered: The chord is analyzed as a Bb11 chord and is built up R-11-b7-9. This also can be analyzed as putting a root over a bVII triad. Notice how the chord has no 3rd or 5th either.

Bass-Richened: The chord is analyzed as an Ab/9th. The 9th helps gives some pizzazz to the triad but keeps the harmonic function the same.

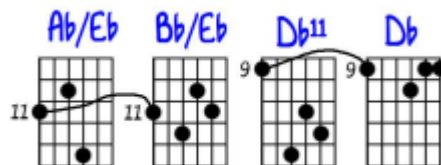
Example #2

You can use bass-enhanced triads through common progressions to get new (and brighter) voicings. The following progression used the bass-powered ‘school of thought’ to freshen up the I-IV-V progression.



Key of F: C/F is IM9(no3) F/Bb or D-7/Bb is IVM9(no3) Bb/C is V7(9 sus4)

The next progression below uses the bass-enricher for the first 2 chords while the 3rd chord follows the bass-powered concept. This example has the bass-richened chords be connected by the bass pedal.



Example #3

When you get a chart and see slash chords written out, some look like reflections of each other.

Bb/C to C/Bb

These two chords in succession need context clues in order to see if they function differently. Bb/C is C-Bb-D-F and C/Bb is Bb-C-E-G*. Both can be interpreted as a C7 chord, but both can be seen as separate as well.

- If both are C7, then the 1st chord is a bass-powered and the 2nd is a triad with a bass enricher.
- If the chords are functionally separate, both can be analyzed as bass-powered chords. Thus, Bb/C is C11 and C/Bb is a Bb6/9#11no3.

Other progressions will use one note/triad and “reflect” it as a way to get chord movements in 3rds or 5ths. The 2 progressions below show the chords moving in 5ths.

