

Donald Duck Dunn

Whilst we continue our run of looking at influential bassists, many readers may be unfamiliar with Donald 'Duck' Dunn, or so you may think. Ex.1 may change your mind about whether or not you are familiar with the brilliance of Duck Dunn.

Ex.1 is obviously the theme to the Blues brothers movie, known as The Peter Gunn theme, many a new bassists first learnt tune (if you are still unfamiliar, immediately put the magazine down, and ask mum and dad if you are allowed to go and watch The Blues Brothers).

Duck Dunn, a 1992 Rock and Roll Hall of Famer, is best known for pioneering the Stax sound, through his bottom end handywork with Booker T. & The M.G. 's. The M.G. 's were the house band for Stax records, a company that produced artists such as Otis Redding, Sam & Dave, Rufus Thomas, Eddie Floyd, and William Bell. Dunn also layed it down for greats such As Elvis, Clapton and Neil Young. Whilst most of us are likely to be aware of the Motown sound, the not-quite-as-talked-about Stax sound was considered a less polished southern counterpart, to the Detroit based sound that James Jamerson pioneered.

Many of Dunn's lines are based around locking in a solid unwavering groove, often repetitive and simple 2 bar phrases, designed to get the head nodding and toes tapping. Dunn utilized a 58 P-bass strung with flats throughout his career, which Fender went on to develop as an artist series bass. In my opinion, Dunn defines the P bass sound, and whenever I try out a P-bass, Ex.2 is always the line I play to see how close a sound I can get to Dunn's.. The track is the Blues brothers tune, She Caught The Katy. Notice the laid back greasy groove, and in the pocket bounce, yet the line builds in intensity after the repeat, showing that Dunn wasn't just a sit on a couple of notes and hang back dude. Whilst the main riff utilizes notes based around the root, 5th and 6th of the chord, the build utilizes chromatic notes that assist in the dramatic tension conveyed in the build up.

Ex.3 is the line from the 1966 Eddie Floyd tune, Knock on Wood. Many of Dunn's line accent the offbeat, and this can be heard in this example, giving the sense of the tune being pushed along, as the bass accents notes between the beats.

The examples presented here are a very brief snapshot of Dunn's career. To get a deeper feel for Dunn's hypnotic grooves grab hold of a few recordings and dance your way through his simple yet superb brilliance.

Ex. 1



Ex. 2

First system of musical notation (measures 1-4). The staff is in bass clef with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The bass line is indicated by a double bar line with 'T' (Treble) and 'B' (Bass) labels, showing fingerings (1-5) and a 3-measure rest.

Second system of musical notation (measures 5-8). The melody continues with eighth and quarter notes, including some chromaticism. The bass line shows fingerings (1-5, 1-3, 1-4, 4-5, 5) and a 3-measure rest.

Third system of musical notation (measures 9-12). The melody continues with eighth and quarter notes. The bass line shows fingerings (1-5, 1-2, 3-3, 3-3, 3-3, 5-0, 1-1, 5-3, 1-1, 3-1-3, 1-1, 5-3, 1-1, 3-1-3) and a 3-measure rest.

Ex. 3

7 11 11 9 11 7 6 6 4 6