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DIG DEEPER

# Dominique Di Piazza's Wicked Technique

By [Chris Jisi](#)

Visitors strolling through aisle 5200 at the Winter NAMM show couldn't help but be drawn to the spiraling melodies and rich baritone chords emanating from the Fodera/Epifani booth, courtesy of solo bass master Dominique Di Piazza. Born in Lyon, France, Di Piazza—who has Sicilian roots but was raised among Gypsies—was a self-taught guitarist who switched to bass in the late '70s upon hearing Jaco Pastorius on Weather Report's *Heavy Weather*. Dominique's subsequent recordings with artists like John McLaughlin, Dennis Chambers, and Bireli Lagrène have earned him cult-hero status among bassists, while his rapid-fire right-hand fingerpicking and lush, close-voiced chords have been a direct influence on such bass heavies as Matt Garrison and Adam Ilti. We asked the soft-spoken 47-year-old for some insight into his right-hand technique and left-hand chordal concept. (Mike Pope, who was in the NAMM booth jamming with Di Piazza, lent a hand with the harmonic analysis.)

Di Piazza plays his 5-string (tuned EADGC) either with his bare fingers or with a fingerpick on his index or middle finger, and a custom thumbpick with a special leather edge. Regardless of your technique, he feels the best way to learn his right-hand approach is to start with alternating thumb and middle-finger plucks in octaves (Ex. 1), which is the foundation of his concept. Dominique also incorporates his index finger a great deal (and even his ring finger and pinkie at times). To work in the index finger, he suggests a minor-7th arpeggio exercise (Ex. 2).

T = thumb downstroke    M = middle finger upstroke    I = index finger upstroke    Ex. 1



Dm7

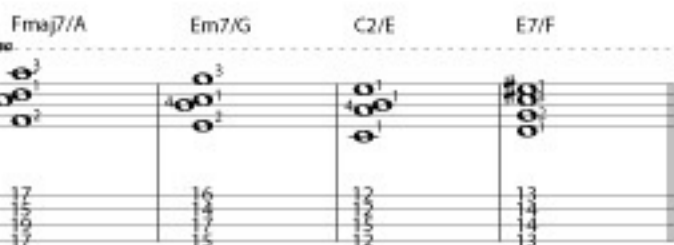


Ex. 2

He also offers a major-7th arpeggio that can be played with either the thumb and middle finger or the thumb and index finger (Ex. 3). With all three examples, begin slowly and evenly and gradually increase your speed; then feel free to play them in other keys and positions. While demonstrating how to play these examples, Dominique holds his right arm out in front of his bass, allowing a natural curl of the wrist, which gives his fingertips better access to the strings. If he needs to mute the strings with his palm, he straightens his wrist and brings his palm back against the strings, while still keeping his fingers curled for fingertip access.

Dominique's signature chord style is marked by dizzying runs, arpeggios, and hammered trills strung between angular voicings—as well as the occasional comp via thumb-plucked bass notes and finger-swept triads. For a taste, check out his solo bass track "Marie," from the John McLaughlin Trio's 1992 CD *Que Alegria* [Verve], or "Little Rose," from the 2005 bass trio CD *Carbonne-Di Piazza-Manring* [[www.carbonne-dipiazza-manring.com](http://www.carbonne-dipiazza-manring.com)]. Asked to reveal some of his favorite chord voicings, Dominique presented the four-chord progression shown in Ex. 4, from a piece in 6/8 that will be on his upcoming U.S. solo debut on Ghost Note Records (visit [www.dominiquedipiazza.com](http://www.dominiquedipiazza.com) for eventual release details). We've tabbed these chords for standard 4-string; Dominique plucked them fingerstyle, with his thumb, index, middle, and either the ring finger or pinkie. The small numerals near the noteheads indicate left-hand fingerings.

Ex. 4



The progression's basic tonal center is A minor, but with plenty of clustered color notes added on. The first chord (Fmaj7/A) functions as an Am chord with an added F, suggesting an A natural minor scale or A Aeolian mode (a C major scale starting on A). The basic shape of two 5ths stacked a minor 6th apart is a tough reach, so keep your hand relaxed, and dig that ear-grabbing minor 2nd you're creating between the E and F notes. The second chord (Em7/G) can also be looked at as a G6, while the stretch of two 5ths a major 6th apart is an easier grab. The third chord is interesting because the ear is almost anticipating an F chord, descending to the subsequent V7 (E7) chord; instead, Di Piazza plays a C2/E via an index-finger barre with a pinkie stretch, which helps create the tasty major 2nd between the D and E notes. The final chord is indeed the V7, but it's colored as an E7/F, establishing an E Phrygian sound (a C major scale or A natural minor scale starting on E). Because Dominique lets his 5-string's open E ring, the chord also suggests E7b9, opening up all sorts of diminished and half-step/whole-step possibilities for soloing.

Finally, Ex. 5 shows an alternate chord Di Piazza uses for the V7 in his progression: Fmmaj7/E. It's shown here tabbed for his EADGC-tuned 5 so that the open E can ring. (Of course, it can also be played on a standard-tuned 6-string bass.) As suggested by the chord name, although we're still in A minor, you can also think F melodic minor when blowing. It's that sense of searching that has led Dominique Di Piazza to innovate on his instrument, inspiring the rest of us to follow suit.

Senior Contributing Editor Chris Jisi has been with Bass Player since its premier issue 17 years ago—interviewing dozens of top players along the way—and he's been a busy working bassist in the New York area for even longer.

## IMAGES



## EXTERNAL WEBLINKS

Bass Player is not responsible for the content of external internet sites.

► [www.carbonne-dipiazza-manring.com](http://www.carbonne-dipiazza-manring.com)

► [www.dominiquedipiazza.com](http://www.dominiquedipiazza.com)

Ex. 3

Dm7



Fmmaj7/E

Ex. 5





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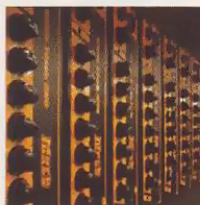
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## NEW STUFF FROM NAMM, Part 3

This month, we conclude our wrap-up of exciting new equipment from the Winter NAMM show. We first got to see this stuff back in January at the gear extravaganza in Anaheim, California, but many of these items will be arriving at stores near you right about now. So, gas up the ol' jalopy and head down to your local gear emporium for a gander at the freshest basses, amps, effects, and accessories. —GREG OLWELL & JIMMY LESLIE



**Ibanez AFB200BS and AGB200TBR** Ibanez debuted two new Artcore basses sweetened by *f*-holes and air cavities. The AFB200BS hollowbody 4-string and AGB200TBR semi-hollow 4-string (both \$599 list, \$450 street) have maple bodies, two pickups, gold hardware, and a 30"-scale set neck with a rosewood fingerboard. The AFB200 has a deep, hollow body and a rosewood bridge, while the AGB200 has a slim, semi-hollow body and a Gibraltar III metal bridge. Ibanez, (215) 638-8670, [www.ibanez.com](http://www.ibanez.com).

**Mike Lull MX4L** It looks like Mike Lull has been obsessed with 24-frets, that is, not the hyper-dramatic TV show. The new Mike Lull MX4L 4-string (\$3,699 list, \$2,900 street) is Lull's first 24-fret bass, available with a maple or rosewood fingerboard. Other accoutrements include custom Lindy Fralin pickups and an 18-volt Bartolini preamp. Mike Lull, (425) 643-8074, [www.mikelull.com](http://www.mikelull.com).

**Spector Performer Classic** Spector's new budget-minded Performer Classic series (4-string: \$549 list, \$400 street; 5-string: \$599 list, \$425 street) doesn't skimp on the classic qualities that made the curvaceous and comfortable instruments so influential. The Performers have bolt-on maple necks, curly-maple tops on carved basswood bodies, 24-fret rosewood fingerboards, and passive EMG humbuckers. Spector, (845) 246-1385, [www.spectorbass.com](http://www.spectorbass.com).

**Yamaha RBX4 A2** The Yamaha RBX4 A2 4-string (\$999 list, \$600 street) combines a high-tech, Apple-esque look with high-tech construction—and a lightweight. Using its "alternative internal resonance" (or A.I.R.) concept, Yamaha sandwiches softwood in a hardwood shell for a lightweight bass with resonance and sustain. Other features include a dot-less 24-fret rosewood fingerboard, bolt-on maple neck, and Yamaha single-coil pickups. The backlit knobs' brightness varies with volume changes. Yamaha, [www.yamaha.com](http://www.yamaha.com).



**Markbass heads, cabinets, and a combo** Markbass came out swingin' at the show with a pile of new lightweight heads and cabinets (prices not available). In the blue corner, weighing in at 4.4 pounds, we have the 500-watt Markbass F1 head. The lightweight contender, with a digital power amp and solid-state preamp, features vintage loudspeaker emulator (VLE) and variable preshape filter (VPF) filter circuits, 4-band EQ, XLR out, and an effect loop. And, in the red corner, weighing in at 20.7 pounds, we have the Minimark 150-watt 2x6 combo. The Italian amp builder also showed its vintage-inspired Classic series head and cabinets, with the Classic 300 all-tube head, the CL 104 4x10, CL 106 6x10, and CL 108 8x10 closed cabinets loaded with neodymium speakers. Markbass, [www.markbass.it](http://www.markbass.it).

**Tone Tubby Tone Tunnels** Northern California's Tone Tubby rolled out the barrel with its new Tone Tunnel cabinets. Built into a John Bonham-size kick drum shell, the visually striking 4x10 and 1x15 cabinets (prices unavailable at press time) are loaded with Super Boy hemp cone speakers. The 4x10 is rated at 600 watts and the 1x15 is rated at 400 watts. Pass it on, Tone Tubby, (415) 479-2124, [www.tonetubby.com](http://www.tonetubby.com).



**Electro-Harmonix Nano & XO Pedals** Electro-Harmonix unveiled two new lines of pedals: the mid-size XO and the small Nano series. In addition to the Micro Q-Tron voltage-controlled filter (\$110 list, \$83 street), which we reviewed in December '06, the XO series includes the Stereo Polyphase (\$278 list, \$210 street), Hum Debugger hum eliminator (\$158 list, \$120 street), and Little Big Muff distortion (\$89 list, \$67 street). The Nano line is a new breed of E-H halflings whose bass-friendly members are the Nano Bassballs envelope filter (\$110 list, \$83 street), Nano Small Stone phase shifter (\$104 list, \$78 street), Nano Clone analog chorus (\$69 list, \$52 street), Nano Muff Overdrive (\$59 list, \$43 street), and Nano Dr. Q auto-wah (\$72 list, \$54 street). Many are reworked E-H classics designed to sound better and to take up less floor space than their ancestors. Electro-Harmonix, (718) 937-8300, [www.ehx.com](http://www.ehx.com).

