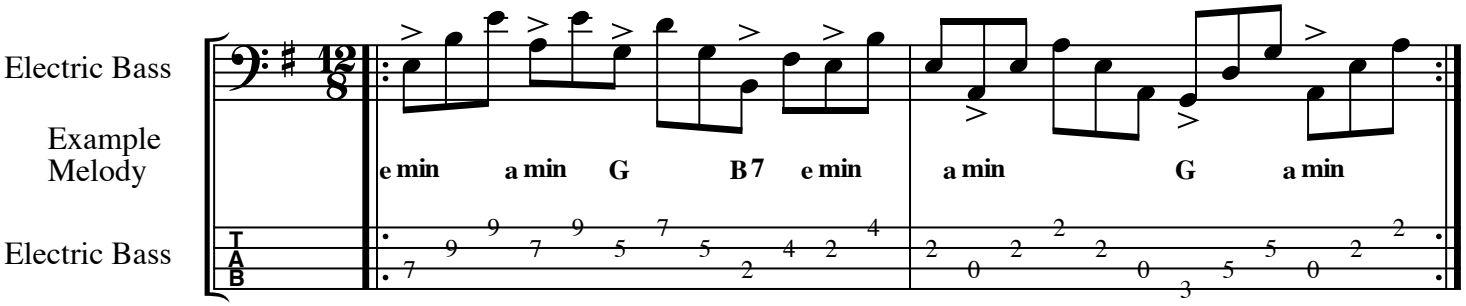
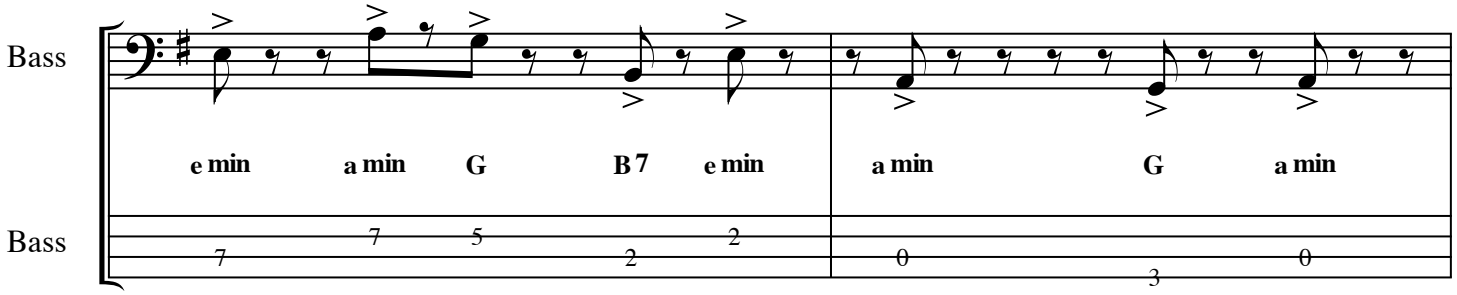
Finding the Clave

By Schalk Joubert

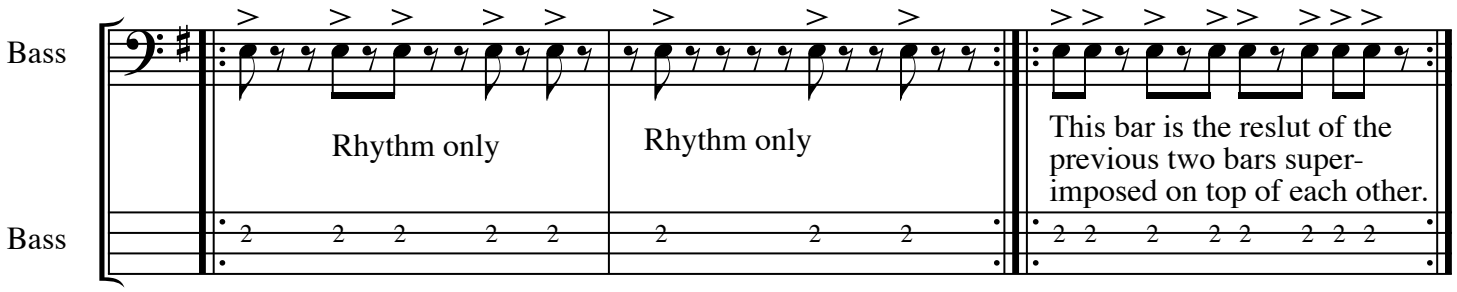
When confronted with a complicated 2 bar groove pattern played by a Piano, Marimba, Guitar etc where the changes fall in awkward places like this example underneath, there are always some easier ways to find a common pattern or clave to make your life a lot easier in constructing an easy playable bass line or groove. I have written the example pattern in the bass cleff as well so that it is easier to demonstrate. Let's see how we do this:



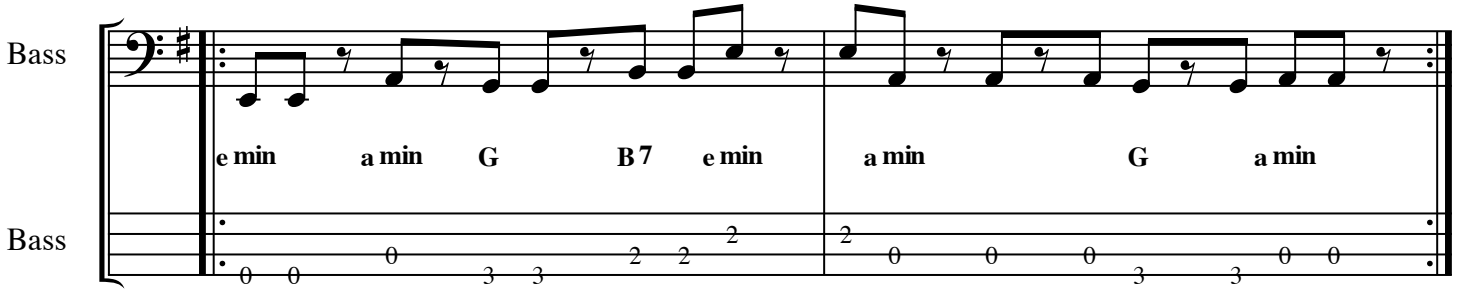
Step 1. Let's first map out all the accents where the changes are happening over the entire sequence. As you can see they are falling on beats 1, 4, 6, 9 and 11 of the first bar and on beats 2, 7 and 10 of the second bar. This won't be easy to feel naturally and if you are going to count this out all the way you will go mad and never get to play anything sensible. There is a much easier way!



Step 2. Forget about the notes for a second and map out the rhythm. The first two bars underneath is how it looks like as a rhythm pattern only. Now, let us superimpose bars 1 and 2 on top of each other. Bar 3 underneath now gives us a combined and easy rhythmic pattern or clave with accents on beats 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10 and 11. Study and memorise this pattern until it feels natural and comfortable.



Step 3. Once we are comfortable playing this rhythm we can start to add the notes of the chord changes to it. The example for a bass part underneath is a very simple one but as you start playing around with it you will feel how easy it becomes to vary on your notes and accents if you just keep the clave in your head!



Remenber, this is just one example but I hope this opens up a lot of new avenues in groove playing for you and that you will have as much fun experimenting with it as I have! - Schalk