

# Smoke On The Water Bass

Recorded by DEEP PURPLE

## SMOKE ON THE WATER

BASS/  
ELECTRIC BASS

Words and Music by RITCHIE BLACKMORE, IAN GILLAN,  
ROGER GLOVER, JON LORD and IAN PAICE  
*Arranged by LARRY MOORE*

Driving Rock

5

6

11

13

16

21

26

29

31

35

To Coda

36

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**Smoke on the Water bass** is a term that resonates with musicians and music enthusiasts alike, particularly those who appreciate the iconic rock band Deep Purple. The song "Smoke on the Water" features one of the most recognizable guitar riffs in rock music history. However, for bassists, the term also signifies a unique opportunity to explore the bass lines that contribute to this classic track. In this article, we will delve into the origins of "Smoke on the Water," its musical structure, and how bassists can effectively play and interpret this legendary piece.

## Origins of "Smoke on the Water"

"Smoke on the Water" was released in 1972 on Deep Purple's album "Machine Head." The song's lyrics recount a true story about a fire that broke out at a casino in Montreux,

Switzerland, during a Frank Zappa and The Mothers of Invention concert. The band was in the area to record an album when they witnessed the event unfold, leading to the creation of this classic rock anthem.

## **The Backstory**

The incident occurred when a fan fired a flare gun inside the Montreux Casino, causing a fire that resulted in significant damage. Deep Purple's band members, including guitarist Ritchie Blackmore and bassist Roger Glover, were staying nearby and quickly became inspired to write a song about the experience. The phrase "Smoke on the water" refers to the smoke from the fire rising over Lake Geneva, and the song's lyrics reflect the chaos of the event.

## **Musical Structure of "Smoke on the Water"**

The musical structure of "Smoke on the Water" is relatively straightforward but effective. The song is primarily built around a simple four-chord progression and features a memorable riff that has become synonymous with classic rock.

### **Chord Progression**

The main chord progression in "Smoke on the Water" is:

1. G
2. Bb
3. C
4. G

This progression remains consistent throughout the verses and choruses, providing a solid foundation for the iconic riff.

### **The Iconic Riff**

The opening guitar riff, played by Ritchie Blackmore, is one of the most recognizable in music history. The riff is based on the aforementioned chord progression but adds a distinct melodic line. Bassists looking to play "Smoke on the Water" will find that the bass line complements the guitar riff beautifully, enhancing the overall sound of the song.

## **How to Play the Bass Line**

Playing the bass line for "Smoke on the Water" can be a fun and rewarding experience. The

bass part not only supports the rhythm but also adds depth to the song.

## Essential Techniques

Here are some essential techniques to consider when learning the bass line:

1. **Fingerstyle vs. Pick Playing:** Decide whether you want to play using your fingers or a pick. Many bassists prefer using a pick for this song to achieve a sharper attack, while others may choose fingerstyle for a warmer tone.
2. **Palm Muting:** Use palm muting on the lower strings to create a percussive effect, especially during the verses. This technique helps to define the groove and maintain a steady rhythm.
3. **Syncopation:** Pay attention to the syncopation in the bass line. The bass often plays slightly behind the beat, which adds a laid-back feel to the groove.

## Step-by-Step Breakdown

To make it easier for bassists to learn the song, here's a step-by-step breakdown of the bass line:

1. **Intro:** Start with the root notes of the chords. For the G chord, play the G note on the 3rd fret of the E string. For Bb, play the Bb note on the 1st fret of the A string, followed by C on the 3rd fret of the A string, and return to G.
2. **Verse:** During the verses, play the following pattern:
  - G (3rd fret, E string)
  - Bb (1st fret, A string)
  - C (3rd fret, A string)
  - G (3rd fret, E string)

Repeat this pattern, keeping a steady rhythm.

3. **Chorus:** For the chorus, emphasize the root notes while also incorporating some rhythmic variations. This can be achieved by adding slides or hammer-ons between notes to create a more dynamic feel.
4. **Bridge:** The bridge features a slight variation in the bass line. Focus on transitioning smoothly between the different sections while maintaining the groove established in the verses and chorus.

## Tips for Practicing "Smoke on the Water"

Learning "Smoke on the Water" requires practice and patience. Here are some helpful tips

for bassists:

- **Use a Metronome:** Practicing with a metronome will help you maintain a steady tempo and improve your timing.
- **Slow Down:** If you're struggling with specific sections, slow down the tempo until you feel comfortable, then gradually increase the speed.
- **Play Along with the Track:** Once you feel confident with the bass line, play along with the original recording to develop your timing and synchronization with the band.
- **Record Yourself:** Recording your practice sessions can help you identify areas for improvement and track your progress.

## The Impact of "Smoke on the Water"

"Smoke on the Water" has had a lasting impact on rock music and popular culture. Its catchy riff and powerful lyrics resonate with audiences, making it a staple in live performances and jam sessions.

## Influence on Other Musicians

The song has inspired countless musicians across various genres. Its simple yet effective structure makes it accessible for beginners while providing deeper musical insights for more advanced players. Many bassists cite "Smoke on the Water" as one of the first songs they learned, and it continues to be a popular choice for aspiring musicians.

## Cultural References

Beyond its musical influence, "Smoke on the Water" has been referenced in movies, television shows, and even video games, solidifying its place in pop culture. Its legacy continues to thrive, ensuring that new generations of musicians and fans will discover and appreciate its significance.

## Conclusion

**Smoke on the Water bass** is more than just a part of a classic rock song; it represents a significant moment in music history. Understanding the song's origins, structure, and the techniques required to play its bass line provides valuable insights into its enduring appeal. Whether you are a seasoned bassist or a beginner, learning "Smoke on the Water" offers a

rewarding experience that connects you with the rich tapestry of rock music. So grab your bass, practice those riffs, and immerse yourself in the legendary sound of Deep Purple.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is 'Smoke on the Water' and why is it popular among bass players?**

'Smoke on the Water' is a famous rock song by Deep Purple, known for its iconic guitar riff. It's popular among bass players due to its simple yet catchy bassline, making it an excellent choice for beginners to practice.

### **What are the key bass notes in 'Smoke on the Water'?**

The key bass notes in 'Smoke on the Water' typically follow the chord progression of G5, Bb5, and F5, which creates the foundation for the song's memorable groove.

### **Which bass techniques are commonly used in 'Smoke on the Water'?**

Common bass techniques used in 'Smoke on the Water' include fingerstyle playing, slides, and occasional palm muting to enhance the rhythmic feel of the song.

### **Are there any notable bass covers of 'Smoke on the Water'?**

Yes, many bassists have covered 'Smoke on the Water', including famous musicians like Billy Sheehan and Victor Wooten, each bringing their unique flair to the classic riff.

### **What equipment do bassists typically use to play 'Smoke on the Water'?**

Bassists usually play 'Smoke on the Water' on a four-string bass guitar, often using a pick for a sharper attack, and they may use amplifiers with a good overdrive to replicate the song's classic rock sound.

### **How can beginners learn to play the bassline of 'Smoke on the Water'?**

Beginners can learn the bassline of 'Smoke on the Water' by practicing along with the song, using tabs or instructional videos online, and starting at a slower tempo to master the notes.

### **What is the historical significance of 'Smoke on the**

## Water' in rock music?

'Smoke on the Water' is significant in rock music due to its storytelling lyrics about a fire at a casino in Montreux, Switzerland, and it has influenced countless musicians and bands since its release in 1972.

## How does the bassline of 'Smoke on the Water' contribute to its overall sound?

The bassline of 'Smoke on the Water' adds depth and groove to the song, anchoring the harmonic structure and complementing the guitars, which helps create the song's powerful and recognizable sound.

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