

CULTIVATING CREATIVITY: THE THREE CRITICAL MOMENTS

A Practical Methodology for Bass Line Creation and Musical Composition

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The Problem: Closed Mind During Practice Time

Creativity in music comes from everywhere. Sometimes we can hear melodies in our head as the first thing in the morning. Something during the day inspires us—nature, conversations, experiences, other music. We can hear from many composers and famous artists how they got ideas and inspiration not just from music, but from life itself.

*I was inspired for my album *Catching the Wind* by the people I met in Grožnjan, Croatia—by the atmosphere, the whole place, by the music that was played there, but also by the instrument itself: my new bass guitar. The whole album I played on one bass guitar—a new 4-string passive bass I received as an endorsement from Tomišić Luthier. I was so inspired by the sound of that instrument that I decided to record all tunes on that bass, although for years before I had played active 5-string bass. Inspiration came from multiple directions and sources converging in one creative moment. This is totally normal—inspiration is everywhere around us.*

But here's what I discovered in my 30-year career of playing and practicing: The moments we spend with our instrument during practice time are also very important sources of creative ideas—but we often close ourselves to them.

Think about it: We spend so much time with our instrument—hours every day, weeks, months, years. During this practice time, we're usually thinking about specific things: lines and songs we need to cover, transcriptions we need to learn, techniques we need to rehearse, passages we need to play better or faster. We're thinking about mechanical things, music theory, and

applying theory to our instrument. We're focused on executing correctly, practicing efficiently, mastering technically.

And very often, we are completely closed and stuck in that state of mind—thinking specifically and only about those technical goals. We're not open to letting creative ideas come in those moments.

This is especially true for bass players. We usually have problems being open and creative on the spot, in real time playing. We're the rhythm section, the foundation—we're trained to be solid, reliable, consistent. This mindset, while valuable, can close us to spontaneous creativity. But practice time—those hours we spend with our instrument—is GOLD for creative development. If we can learn to stay open during practice, to recognize and capture the creative flashes that naturally emerge, we unlock enormous creative potential that most musicians miss completely.

That's why I think this is a great technique and concept for all musicians, but especially for bass players: learning to be open and letting ideas come in during practice time itself, not just waiting for inspiration to strike randomly.

The three moments I'm about to share are specific practices I discovered over 30 years that helped me stay open and creative during practice. I've also heard from other players—some quite famous—that they had similar experiences in their practicing time, when new melodies and ideas came to them unexpectedly.

The difference is: most musicians let these moments pass unnoticed. I learned to recognize them, capture them, and systematically cultivate them.

Music is like an ocean with endless ideas. The ocean is always offering gifts. But if we're too closed, too focused only on our technical agenda, we swim past these gifts without even seeing them. We need to dive in, be present - be open.

Let me show you how to stay open.

THE THREE CRITICAL MOMENTS

Overview:

MOMENT 1: *The First Touch (Before practice begins)*

When you first pick up your instrument—fresh mind, spontaneous exploration

MOMENT 2: *The Creative Accident (During focused practice)*

When unexpected ideas emerge while practicing technique—the "happy accidents"

MOMENT 3: The Post-Practice Creative Space (After practice ends)
When practiced material transforms into new creative combinations

MOMENT 1: The First Touch

What It Is:

The moment when you first approach your instrument each day—before warming up, before exercises, before structured practice—there exists a unique creative window lasting approximately 3-5 minutes.

Why It Works:

Your mind at this moment is:

- *Fresh and unburdened by technical concerns*
- *Not yet in "practice mode" (which engages critical, analytical thinking)*
- *Open to spontaneous musical ideas*
- *Free from the pressure to "do something correctly"*
- *In what psychologists call "diffuse thinking" (as opposed to focused thinking)*

The brain alternates between focused mode (analytical, critical, executing specific tasks) and diffuse mode (open, associative, making unexpected connections). Creative breakthroughs often occur in diffuse mode. The first touch moment captures this state before focused practice mode engages.

How to Practice It:

The Protocol:

1. *Pick up your instrument immediately (before warming up, before tuning obsessively, before checking your phone)*
2. *Set no agenda - Don't decide "I'm going to work on X" or "I'm going to play in Y style"*
3. *Simply explore for 3-5 minutes:*
 - *Play whatever your fingers want to play*
 - *Follow musical impulses without judging them*
 - *Let one idea lead to another organically*
 - *Don't worry about mistakes or "wrong notes"*
 - *Think of it as musical meditation, not practice*
4. *If something interesting emerges:*
 - *Record it immediately on your phone (30 seconds, no overthinking)*
 - *Play it a few times to commit to memory*
 - *Don't judge whether it's "good"—just capture it*

- Then let it go and proceed to regular practice
5. *If nothing special happens:*
- That's completely fine
 - The practice is what matters, not forcing results
 - Tomorrow is another first touch moment

Real Example from My Experience:

My composition GRISIGNANA (both parts, Night and Day) from the album CATCHING THE WIND (SKC NS 2022) was created, writing at first the basic bass lines. After picking up the bass guitar, I played around a bit with the pentatonic Am phrase and soon got a pattern I liked. I immediately turned on the recording on my phone and realized that it was an odd time signature in 5/4 with a natural pause in the second part of the beat so that the groove could breathe and flow more easily with the drum pattern that was also playing in my head. It didn't take much, the melody came in its raw form, which I polished into a final version a little later.

MOMENT 2: The Creative Accident During Practice

What It Is:

While practicing scales, arpeggios, patterns, melodic variations, or rhythmic exercises—when you're totally focused and in the zone—creative accidents happen. You stumble upon an interesting melodic shape, an unexpected tone combination, a short bass groove, or a rhythmic variation that wasn't planned.

This is the moment when the ocean of music offers you something new—an unplanned discovery that emerges from the intersection of focused technique work and spontaneous creativity.

Why It's Different from Moments 1 & 3:

- *Moment 1 happens BEFORE practice (fresh, spontaneous, no technical agenda)*
- *Moment 2 happens DURING practice (emerges FROM technical work, while "in the zone")*
- *Moment 3 happens AFTER practice (intentional creative exploration using practiced material)*

Moment 2 is unique because:

- *You didn't plan to create—you were practicing technique*
- *The idea emerges accidentally from focused work*
- *It's a gift from the practice itself*

- *It connects technical facility with musical ideas organically*

Why It Works:

When you're deeply focused on technical practice:

- *Your analytical mind is occupied with executing the pattern*
- *Your creative subconscious is free to make unexpected connections*
- *Your fingers may discover something before your conscious mind plans it*
- *You're in "flow state"—where accidents become insights*

This is why many great musical ideas come during practice, not during "trying to compose."

The focused mind creates space for the creative mind to surprise you.

How to Practice It:

The Protocol:

1. *Practice your technical material with full focus:*
 - *Scales, arpeggios, patterns, exercises*
 - *Whatever you've planned to work on*
 - *Give it genuine attention and engagement*
2. *Stay open and aware:*
 - *Don't practice mechanically or mindlessly*
 - *Notice what your fingers do*
 - *Listen to what emerges*
 - *Be present, not just executing repetitions*
3. *When something unexpected and interesting happens:*
 - *STOP immediately*
 - *Don't think "I'll remember this later" (you won't)*
 - *Don't think "I should finish this scale first" (the idea will vanish)*
 - *Recognize this as a creative flash—a gift from the music ocean*
4. *Capture it instantly:*
 - *Pull out your phone*
 - *Record yourself playing the idea (30 - 60 seconds maximum)*
 - *Play it 2-3 times to solidify*
 - *Don't overthink, don't judge, don't elaborate yet*
 - *Just capture the raw idea*
5. *Return immediately to planned practice:*
 - *You weren't "interrupted"—you received a gift*
 - *Now continue with your technical work*
 - *The idea is safely captured and can be developed later*
6. *Don't lose momentum in your practice session:*
 - *Total interruption: 30-60 seconds*
 - *This doesn't derail practice—it enriches it*
 - *You've just transformed a technical exercise into source material for composition*

What This Teaches:

Students discover that:

- *Technical practice isn't separate from creativity—it GENERATES creativity*
- *Scales aren't boring when they spontaneously suggest melodies*
- *Patterns aren't mechanical when they accidentally create grooves*
- *"Mistakes" or unexpected fingerings often contain the best ideas*
- *Practice becomes more engaging when you're hunting for creative accidents*

Real Examples from My Experience:

I was practicing quarter intervals within different minor scales using certain sequences that I had come up with. At one point, while applying rhythmical displacement, I "heard" a new phrase as a combination of two patterns, and I really liked it. I immediately placed it in 7/4 time and got the initial bass line for the title track from my album CATCHING THE WIND (SKC NS, 2022). Since my phone wasn't with me, I took a sheet of music paper and quickly wrote it down so I wouldn't forget it. I played it for a few more minutes while tapping my foot in 7/4 and realized that I felt quite comfortable playing it and applying small variations. It sounded very natural to me from the start.

Common Student Questions:

- *"How do I know if something is worth stopping for?"*

Trust your instinct. If something makes you go "Oh, that's interesting!" or "I haven't heard that before," stop and capture it. You can evaluate later whether it's truly valuable. Better to capture 10 ideas and use 2 than to lose 2 great ideas because you didn't stop.

- *"Won't this constantly interrupt my practice?"*

No. Creative accidents don't happen every 2 minutes. They might happen 2-3 times in an hour-long practice session or won't happen at all that day. Each capture takes 30-60 seconds. That's 2-3 minutes total "interruption" that actually makes your practice MORE valuable, not less.

- *"What if I'm in a lesson or group class and can't stop?"*

Mental note immediately: "That thing I just played in measure 3." After the lesson, try to reconstruct it and record. Not ideal, but better than losing it completely. This is why personal practice time is so valuable—you have freedom to capture creative accidents.

MOMENT 3: The Post-Practice Creative Space

What It Is:

After technical practice—scales, arpeggios, exercises, repertoire work—take a 3-5 minute mental break, then return with creative intention: "What can I create using what I just practiced?"

Why It Works:

After focused practice, your mind has:

- *Absorbed new technical material (it's "fresh in your fingers")*
- *Not yet filed it away as "exercise material" (still flexible)*
- *Built new neural pathways that are activated but not rigid*
- *Some fatigue in the analytical/critical brain (which actually helps creativity!)*

The material is accessible but not yet automatic—this is the perfect state for creative recombination.

How to Practice It:

The Protocol:

1. *Complete your focused practice session:*
 - *Scales, arpeggios, technical exercises*
 - *Whatever material you've been working on*
 - *Practice it thoroughly—this isn't skipping practice for "creative time"*
2. *Take a brief mental break (2-5 minutes):*
 - *Put the bass down*
 - *Walk around, stretch, look out window*
 - *Let your mind wander*
 - *Don't think about music*
 - *This allows transition from focused to diffuse thinking mode*
3. *Return with creative question:*
 - *Pick up bass and ask: "What can I create with this material?"*
 - *If you practiced C major scale, ask: "What melody can I make from these notes?"*
 - *If you practiced dominant 7 arpeggios: "What bass line can I build using this shape?"*
 - *If you practiced rhythmic pattern: "What groove emerges from this rhythm?"*
4. *Explore without judgment (5-10 minutes):*
 - *Combine the technical material in new ways*
 - *Add rhythmic variations*
 - *Change the order of notes*

- Apply the pattern to different harmonic contexts
 - Let one idea suggest another
5. Capture anything interesting:
 - Record it
 - Write it down
 - Play it multiple times
 - Develop it if inspiration continues
 6. Repeat daily

What This Transforms:

Before this practice:

- Scales are boring exercises disconnected from music-making
- Students practice technique and create music as separate activities
- Technical material feels hard to "get through"

After this practice:

- Every scale becomes potential melodic material
 - Every arpeggio becomes potential harmonic vocabulary
 - Every rhythmic exercise becomes potential groove foundation
 - Practice and creativity are integrated, not separate
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THE INTEGRATION: All Three Moments in Daily Practice

Daily Practice Structure:

Total time: 60 minutes

0:00-0:05 - MOMENT 1: FIRST TOUCH (5 min)

- Pick up bass, explore freely
- No agenda, no judgment
- Capture any interesting ideas (30 seconds if needed)
- This sets creative tone for entire session

0:05-0:10 - Warm-up (5 min)

- Physical warm-up
- Basic technical work
- Prepare body/mind for focused practice

0:10-0:40 - Focused Technical Practice (30 min)

- Scales, arpeggios, exercises, repertoire
- STAY OPEN for MOMENT 2: CREATIVE ACCIDENTS
- When unexpected ideas emerge: STOP, RECORD (30 sec), CONTINUE

- *Might happen 2-3 times during this period—that's perfect*
- 0:40-0:45 - *MENTAL BREAK (5 min)*
- *Put bass down*
 - *Walk, stretch, rest*
 - *Let mind transition from focused to diffuse*
- 0:45-0:55 - *MOMENT 3: POST-PRACTICE CREATIVE SPACE (10 min)*
- *Return with creative question*
 - *Explore using practiced material*
 - *Create, experiment, play*
 - *Capture interesting ideas*
- 0:55-1:00 - *Cool-down & Documentation (5 min)*
- *Review what you captured*
 - *Make notes in practice journal*
 - *Plan next session*

Weekly Creative Output:

Following this structure:

- *5 first-touch explorations per week (Moment 1)*
- *10-15 creative accidents captured per week (Moment 2)*
- *5 post-practice creative sessions per week (Moment 3)*
- *= 20-25 creative moments captured per week*
- *= 80-100 creative ideas per month*

If only 10% yield usable material:

- *That's 8-10 original bass lines or melodic themes per month*
- *100+ per year*
- *More original material than most bassists create in a decade*

And the reality is usually much higher than 10%.

THE THREE MOMENTS COMPARED

Aspect	Moment 1: First Touch	Moment 2: Creative Accident	Moment 3: Post-Practice
<i>When</i>	<i>Before practice</i>	<i>During practice</i>	<i>After practice</i>
<i>Mental state</i>	<i>Fresh, open, spontaneous</i>	<i>Focused but receptive</i>	<i>Intentionally creative</i>

Origin	Pure spontaneity	Emerges from technique	Uses practiced material
How planned	Completely unplanned	Unplanned (accident)	Intentionally structured
Duration	3-5 minutes	Instant (30-60 sec capture)	5-10 minutes
Frequency	Once per session	2-3 times per session	Once per session
Mind mode	Diffuse, exploratory	Flow state, "in zone"	Deliberate creativity
Character of ideas	Raw, intuitive	Emerges from technique	Developed, intentional

All three are essential. They capture different types of creative emergence.

COMMON OBJECTIONS ANSWERED

"I don't have time for three creative moments in my practice."

Answer: You're misunderstanding. These aren't additions—they're recognitions.

- *Moment 1: 5 minutes (you were going to pick up your bass anyway)*
- *Moment 2: up to 1 minute (it happens during practice; capturing takes 30-60 seconds)*
- *Moment 3: 10 minutes (valuable enough to prioritize)*

Total "added" time: 16 minutes. If you have time to practice, you have time for these moments.

"I tried this and nothing happened."

Answer: How long did you try? One session? One week?

Like any skill, this takes consistent practice. Some days yield nothing. Over weeks and months, ideas accumulate. Commit to 30 days minimum before judging results.

Also check: Are you truly open and listening, or going through motions mechanically?

"My 'creative accidents' are just mistakes."

Answer: Sometimes, yes and usually, yes. But often what feels like a mistake contains something valuable.

Record it anyway. Listen later. You might discover it was better than you thought in the moment. Many great musical innovations started as "mistakes" that someone had the wisdom to capture and develop.

"This feels unstructured. I prefer systematic practice plans."

Answer: This IS systematic. It's structured spontaneity.

You have planned practice time (scales, exercises). The three moments add systematic openness WITHIN that structure. You're not abandoning discipline—you're adding receptivity to discipline.

ADVANCED APPLICATIONS

For Composition Students:

Use the three moments as your PRIMARY compositional method:

- *Maintain "creative capture" collection (all three moments)*
- *Weekly review: choose best 3-4 ideas*
- *Develop one fully each week*
- *By semester end: substantial portfolio of original work*

For Improvisation Development:

The three moments train spontaneous creativity essential for improvisation:

- *Moment 1: practicing spontaneous idea generation*
- *Moment 2: recognizing unexpected but valuable ideas (key improv skill)*
- *Moment 3: recombining vocabulary creatively*

Students report improved improvisational confidence and vocabulary expansion.

For Ensemble/Band Members:

Share creative accidents with bandmates:

- *"Listen to this thing that happened during practice..."*
- *Collaborative development of ideas*
- *Band compositions emerging from individual practice moments*

For Recording Projects:

Monthly recording project:

- *Week 1-3: Capture ideas via three moments*
- *Week 4: Select best idea, develop and record fully*

- 12 original compositions per year = album
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MEASURING PROGRESS

After 1 Month:

- 40-60 creative moments captured
- 10-15 contain usable ideas
- More comfortable with spontaneous playing
- Practice feels more engaging

After 3 Months:

- 30-40 developed ideas in your collection
- Several complete compositions
- Creative moments happening more frequently
- Technical practice no longer feels disconnected from music-making

After 6 Months:

- Substantial catalog of original material
- Compositional voice emerging clearly
- Creativity feels natural, not forced
- Others recognize your distinctive musical ideas

After 1 Year:

- Creating original music is integrated habit
 - Might be performing your compositions
 - Teaching these methods to others
 - You ARE the creative bassist you wanted to become
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CONCLUSION: The Ocean is Always Offering

Music is an ocean with endless ideas. The ocean is always offering gifts—melodic fragments, rhythmic patterns, harmonic combinations, groove ideas.

Most musicians swim past these gifts without noticing. They're too focused on "doing their practice correctly" to recognize the creative flashes occurring naturally.

The three moments methodology teaches you to:

1. *Position yourself to receive (Moment 1: First Touch)*
2. *Recognize gifts when they appear (Moment 2: Creative Accidents)*

3. *Intentionally explore what you've received (Moment 3: Post-Practice)*

This isn't forcing creativity. It's developing creative awareness—the ability to notice and capture musical ideas as they naturally emerge throughout your practice.

Start tomorrow. Practice all three moments for 30 days.

In 30 days, you'll have captured 60-90 creative ideas. At least 15-20 will be valuable. You'll have proof that you ARE creative—not by magic, but by systematic awareness and capture.

Want to learn more about neuroscience-informed practice strategies? Follow my blog for regular insights on bass pedagogy, practice optimization, and the science of musical learning.

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