


Fifth-String Bass: The Am Chord

Getting back to Chet, let's take a look at what he was doing, expressed in Tab. This is an authentic, genu-wine, note-for-note transcription of a major musical phrase played by the legendary Chet Atkins himself, once on TV when I was a kid.

Hold down an **Am** chord and use your right Thumb only:

Am



0	2	2	2
0	0	0	0

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

If you simply hold down the **Am** chord and use your Thumb to play the 5th, 4th, 6th and 4th strings, you'll have it. These notes are Quarter notes occurring at each of the four numbered counts, 1, 2, 3 and 4, in each measure.

Now, we really don't need to hold down the entire chord if all we want is the bassline. Looking at the **Am** Chord Diagram (where the numbers are left-hand *fingers fingers fingers*), just one finger, the 2nd finger on the 4th string, would suffice, because the 5th and 6th strings are played open anyway. Still, *hold onto the whole chord*; we'll be using other parts of it (any minute now), and sometimes it's just nice to keep a familiar chord shape in your hand.

But let's simplify one thing. Let's alternate between two strings only, the 5th and 4th:

0	2	0	2
0	0	0	0

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

We'll return to the Triple Alternating Bass later on for certain chords, but right now it's just an unnecessary complication. By the way, for you theory geeks, we almost always start with the Root Note of the chord and try to alternate with the **3rd** or **5th** degree. For the **Am** chord, the 5th string bears the A Root Note and the 4th string bears the E note, which is the **5th**. [.....cricket.....cricket.....]

Once you've done that for 5 minutes, it'll be time to Challenge Your Thumb. It won't be much of a challenge at first, but fear not, we'll have this whole thing spiralling wildly out of control before you know it. Just kidding! Maybe!

Still holding **Am**, we'll add one note to Count 1 of each measure. The second parakeet. It'll be the 1st fret of the 2nd string (already in the chord) coming at *the very same time* as the open 5th string in a *pinching motion*. In fact, this move is called a **pinch**.