

The double bass – the preferred bass instrument in popular music during the 1960s – was challenged and subsequently superseded by the advent of the new electric bass instrument. From the mid-1960s and throughout the 1970s, a melismatic and inconsistent approach towards the bass role ensued, which contributed to a major change in how the electric bass was performed and perceived in the sonic landscape of mainstream popular music.

Investigating the performance practice of the new, melodic role of the electric bass as it appeared (and eventually disappeared) in the 1960s and 1970s, this thesis turns to the number one songs of the American Billboard Hot 100 charts between 1951 and 1982 as a prime source. Through interviews with players from the era under survey, numerous transcriptions – elaborations of twenty bass related features – are produced. These are juxtaposed with a critical study of four key players, who provide the case-studies for examining the performance practice of the melodic electric bass.

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