SOFTWARE & TECH

John The Fisherman Bass Tab

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Introduction: The Unmistakable Groove of Primus

Few songs in the alternative rock canon announce themselves with as much bass-driven authority as "John the Fisherman." Released on Primus's 1990 album *Frijazz Fried Chicken*—wait, that's not right. The album is actually *Frizzle Fry*, the band's debut full-length studio album. The track is a cornerstone of the band's early work and remains a fan favorite to this day. For bass players, it represents a rite of passage. The **John The Fisherman Bass Tab** is more than just a set of notes; it is a study in rhythmic oddity, percussive slapping, and the unique musical language of Les Claypool.

Unlike many bass lines that serve a purely supportive role, the bass in "John the Fisherman" is the lead instrument. It carries the melody, dictates the rhythm, and creates the song's signature quirky atmosphere. For any aspiring bassist looking to move beyond simple root-note patterns, diving into this tab is an educational experience in itself. This article will provide a comprehensive guide to the song, breaking down the intricate bass tab, exploring the techniques required, and offering insights into how you can master this iconic piece of music. Whether you are a seasoned player or a beginner with a taste for the unconventional, understanding this tab will open your ears to a new world of bass playing.

About the Song and Its Legendary Bassist

Before we dive into the specifics of the tab, it is essential to understand the context. "John the Fisherman" tells the story of a man who dreams of being a fisherman from a young age and eventually achieves his dream, only to meet a grim fate at sea. The narrative is darkly comedic, a hallmark of Primus's style, and the music mirrors this twisted tale perfectly.

Les Claypool, the band's frontman and bassist, is widely regarded as one of the most innovative and technically proficient bass players in rock history. His style is a melting pot of influences including funk, progressive rock, bluegrass, and jazz. He is famous for his aggressive slapping technique, use of odd time signatures, and his unique "fretless" style, even when playing a fretted instrument. The **John The Fisherman Bass Tab** encapsulates all of these elements. It is not simply a line to be played; it is a performance. The tab showcases Claypool's ability to make the bass sing, growl, and dance all at once.

Understanding the John The Fisherman Bass Tab: An Overview

Finding an accurate version of the **John The Fisherman Bass Tab** is the first step. Because of the song's complexity, many online tabs can be incomplete or contain errors. The official tab book for *Frizzle Fry* is the gold standard, but many high-quality user-submitted tabs on sites like Ultimate Guitar and Songsterr are reliable.

The song is primarily played in the key of A minor, but it ventures into other territories. The time signature is a wild ride; the verses are in 4/4, but the chorus shifts into a peculiar 5/4 feel, which is one of the reasons the

track feels so off-kilter and compelling. The bass line is built on a foundation of open strings, hammer-ons, pull-offs, and rapid slapping.

Here is what you will generally see in a standard transcription:

- Tuning: Standard E-A-D-G
- Tempo: Approximately 120 BPM
- Main Technique: Slap and Pop (thumb and index finger)
- Key Elements: Ghost notes, syncopation, rapid string crossings.

The Main Verse Riff: The Heart of the Tab

The verse riff is the most recognizable part of the **John The Fisherman Bass Tab** . It is a repetitive, hypnotic pattern that relies heavily on the open A string. The core of the riff is a rhythmic pulse created by slapping the open A string with the thumb, followed by a pop of the D string. However, it is the addition of ghost notes and muted percussive slaps that gives the line its drive.

Think of the verse as a percussive engine. You are not just playing notes; you are creating a texture. The tab will typically show a pattern like this:

(Slap) Open A - (Pop) 5th fret D string - (Slap) Open A - (Pop) 5th fret D string - (Slap Muted) - (Slap) Open A - (Pop) 7th fret D string.

This pattern is deceptively simple. The difficulty lies in the timing and the consistency of the ghost notes. The "muted slap" is achieved by laying your fretting hand flat across the strings while slapping with your thumb. This creates a deep, percussive "thwack" that fills the sonic space. Mastering this section of the tab is about locking into a groove that feels both mechanical and fluid.

The Pre-Chorus and Chorus: Navigating the 5/4 Shift

This is where the **John The Fisherman Bass Tab** becomes truly challenging and musically brilliant. As the song builds tension, the bass line ascends the fretboard. The pre-chorus introduces a climbing pattern that uses hammer-ons and pull-offs on the G and D strings.

When the chorus hits, the time signature shifts to 5/4. This means there are five beats in a measure instead of the usual four. For many players, this is the most difficult part to count. The bass line in the chorus is more melodic and less percussive. It follows the vocal melody more closely.

In the chorus, you will see intervals and wider leaps. You are moving from the low A to higher notes on the G string, creating a sense of urgency and release. Do not try to rush this section. When practicing the chorus of the **John The Fisherman Bass Tab** , count out loud: **1-2-3-4-5**. Feel the odd grouping. Once your ear adjusts to the 5/4 pulse, it becomes natural.

Essential Techniques for Playing the Tab

Simply reading the notes from the **John The Fisherman Bass Tab** is not enough. You must apply the correct techniques to make it sound like Les Claypool. Here are the three most critical techniques to master.

1. The Slap and Pop (Thumb and Index)

This is the foundation. You will be slapping the low E and A strings with the side of your thumb, hitting the string so it snaps against the fretboard. Your index or middle finger will then "pop" the D and G strings by hooking under them and pulling them away from the fretboard. This creates a sharp, percussive attack.

In the **John The Fisherman Bass Tab** , the slap is used primarily on the open A string. The pop is used on the D string. You must ensure your "pops" are loud and clear. A common mistake is to have a loud slap but a weak pop. Your goal is to have equal volume and attack between the two hand motions.

2. Ghost Notes and Muting

This is what separates a good performance from a great one. Ghost notes are percussive sounds that have no definite pitch. They are created by fretting the strings with a very light touch while slapping or popping. In the tab, these are often shown as an "X" on the staff.

In "John the Fisherman," ghost notes are used constantly to mimic the sound of a snare drum or a hi-hat. You must keep your fretting hand loose. If you press too hard, you will get a pitched note. If you press too lightly, you will get a buzz. Finding the sweet spot is key to making the **John The Fisherman Bass Tab** sound authentic.

3. Rhythmic Precision and Odd Meter

The song lives and dies on the rhythm. You must internalize the 5/4 time signature in the chorus. A metronome is your best friend here. Start by just clapping the rhythm of the bass line without your instrument. Then, play only the open A string slaps in time. Slowly layer in the pops and the ghost notes. If you get lost in the chorus, stop, find beat one, and start again. Do not let the "oddness" of the time signature intimidate you. The tab is a map, but your ear is the compass.

Common Mistakes to Avoid When Learning the Tab

Many players struggle with the **John The Fisherman Bass Tab** not because it is physically impossible, but because of common technical errors. Here are the pitfalls to watch out for:

- Playing Too Fast Too Soon: This is the number one mistake. The verse riff sounds simple, so players try to play it at full speed immediately. This leads to sloppy ghost notes and inconsistent slaps. Slow down to 50% speed and get it perfect first.
- Ignoring the Ghost Notes: Many online tabs simplify the rhythm and omit the ghost notes. Do not do this. The ghost notes are the "secret sauce." Without them, the line sounds empty and lifeless.
- Forgetting the Muted Slap: In the verse, there are specific beats where you slap the strings with your fretting hand muting them completely. This creates a deep "thud" that is distinct from the open string slap. Make sure you are differentiating between the two sounds.
- Stiff Wrist: Slap bass requires a relaxed wrist for the thumb to bounce off the string. If your wrist is tight, you will get a thud instead of a snap. Let your wrist be loose and floppy.
- Neglecting the Left Hand Muting: Your fretting hand is not just for pressing frets. It is also for muting strings you are not playing. In the chorus, when you jump from the low A to the high G, you must mute the low A string immediately with your fretting hand to prevent it from ringing sympathetically.

How to Practice the Tab Effectively

To master the **John The Fisherman Bass Tab** , you need a structured practice routine. Here is a suggested approach:

1. Listen to the Song: Before you even touch your bass, listen to the song 5-10 times. Focus only on the bass. Clap the rhythm. Sing the bass line. Internalize the feel.
2. Isolate the Sections: Do not try to play the whole song in one go. Divide it into sections: Intro, Verse, Pre-Chorus, Chorus, Bridge, Outro.
3. Practice the Verse Pattern on One String: Just slap the open A string in the correct rhythm for the verse. Add the popping notes only after you can maintain the verse slap pattern for two minutes without wavering.
4. Use a Loop Pedal or Backing Track: Playing along with a recording is invaluable. You can also find drum-less tracks of "John the Fisherman" online. Playing with a drummer (or a drum machine) will force you to lock in the groove.
5. Record Yourself: This is critical. Record a video of yourself playing the tab. Listen back. Is your timing consistent? Are the ghost notes clear? Are the pops as loud as the slaps? Be brutally honest with yourself.

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