

Jazz Theory 101

Blues

In a standard 12 bar blues the foundation consists of 3 chords, the I-IV-V chords in the key. However in a jazz blues, you will commonly find measure 9 has a ii chord substituted for the IV chord like in a rock blues.

*****Be sure to master these forms in every key, but most importantly in F and Bb for jazz purposes.*****

12 bar blues progression in F major:

- Measures 1-2: F7 (I)
- Measures 3-4: F7 (I)
- Measures 5-6: Bb7 (IV)
- Measures 7-8: F7 (I)
- Measure 9: Gm7 (ii)
- Measure 10: C7 (V)
- Measure 11: F7 (I)
- Measure 12: F7 (I)

Our first set of variations adds an extra IV (4) chord in measure 2, and an extra V (5) chord in measure 12.

12 bar blues progression with variations in F major:

- Measures 1-2: F7 (I)
- Measure 3: Bb7 (IV)
- Measure 4: F7 (I)
- Measures 5-6: Bb7 (IV)
- Measures 7-8: F7 (I)
- Measure 9: Gm7 (ii)
- Measure 10: C7 (V)
- Measure 11: F7 (I)
- Measure 12: C7 (V)

The second common variation you will hear is adding a diminished chord a tritone above the I chord, or 1/2 step above the IV chord in 2nd and 6th measures.

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Chord progression for Variation 2:

Staff 1: F7 (I), B \flat 7 (IV), B dim7 (bV(dim)), F7 (I)

Staff 2: B \flat 7 (IV), B dim7 (bV(dim)), F7 (I)

Staff 3: Gm7 (ii), C7 (V), F7 (I), C7 (V)

The third variation consists of adding more turn arounds into the form to add tension as we progress from one chord to the next. In a jazz context, this is most commonly done with adding a ii-V or just the V of the chord you are going to before it. Look for these in measures 4 and 6. We can also add a I-Vi-ii-V variation at the end in measures 11 and 12.

③

Chord progression for Variation 3:

Staff 1: F7 (I), B \flat 7 (IV), F7 (I), Cm7 (ii/IV), F7 (V/IV)

Staff 2: B \flat 7 (IV), B dim7 (bV(dim)), F7 (I), A m7(\flat 5) (ii/ii), D7(\flat 9) (V/ii)

Staff 3: Gm7 (ii), C7 (V), F7 (I), D7(\flat 9) (VI), Gm7 (ii), C7 (V)

Progressing past the conventional 12 bar blues, the "Bird" blues is very similar to variation 4 with the added ii-V cycles, however there are some notable differences with the major I and IV chords in measures 1 and 6 instead of dominant. This was named for Charlie Parker. Think of tunes such as "Blues for Alice".

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F maj7	Em7(b5)	A 7(b9)	Dm7	G7	Cm7	F7
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Bbmaj7	Bbm7	Eb7	Am7	D7	Abm7	Db7
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Gm7	C7	F7	D7(b9)	Gm7	C7
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Lastly, the minor blues takes the same blues form as we have discussed at the beginning, but makes everything minor rather than dominant except for the V chord. There are also a few common variations with this form, however most of the time the harmonic rhythm is kept slow to allow for more modal harmonies in which case the i and iv chords would change to m11 chords build your chords with quartal harmony.

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Cm7						
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Fm7			Cm7			
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Dm7(b5)	G7(b9)	Cm7		G7(b9)		
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