

Variations On Blues

by Jamey Aebersold

My last article dealt with the Blues (12 bar Blues), so, I would like to follow up with variations on the blues progressions that have been in common use in the jazz idiom. The term "three chord songs" are usually referring to the simplest of blues progressions. If you are in the key of F the three chords which form the basis of the blues in that key are F7, Bb7 and C7. F7 is called a roman numeral I chord. The Bb7 is called the IV because it is built on the fourth scale step of the F7 scale and the C7 is called the V chord (usually called a V7 chord) because it is found on the fifth scale step of the F7 scale. A three chord tune could also be called a song that uses only I, IV, and V chords.

As blues evolved in the hands of the jazz musicians across the country by way of the radio and record player, more and more musicians played blues and naturally some would take liberties with the chord structure and alter the chords to match what they were hearing in their mind's ear. As the various alterations were passed from musician to musician they became part of the blues structure.

I have listed 17 different blues progressions found in Dan Haerle's book *Jazz/Rock Voicings for the Contemporary Keyboard Player*, published by Studio P/R, Inc.,

The progressions read from left to right! The ones at the top are the easier, simpler progressions. As you move down the page they become more altered and present more of a challenge to the up and coming jazz player. It is best to practice with one complete progression until you feel comfortable with it, then, move on to

the next one. You may also want to substitute a measure in one blues with the same measure in another blues below or above. Number 14 is one that Charlie Parker used on a blues called Blues for Alice and another called Laird Bird. Number 16 uses a steady stream of minor chords (II) moving to dominant 7th chords (V7) usually called II/V7-s or, a series of II/V's. Experiment with the various progressions using the exercises I showed you in the Nov. 1-Dec. 15 issue.

Begin slowly so you can hear the root progression clearly. In time your mind will remember it and you can move more rapidly. Try to memorize each progression as you are working on it. Memory is a key process in improvising! Listen to jazz players on records and see if you can hear when they are substituting chords or scales or licks or patterns over the basic three chord progression. The Masters do it all the time and with such ease that often our ears don't even realize they have deviated from the basic progression being played by the rhythm section. You may want to check out Volume 2 "Nothin' But Blues" in my play along book and record series. It contains eleven different blues progressions played by the rhythm section and you can play and practice along with them. Bass players and piano players can even turn off one channel of their stereo and substitute themselves for the player on the record. It is a great way to practice with a professional rhythm section.

In order to play blues you have to listen to people who play blues. Listen to the finest players, always!

EXAMPLES OF BLUES PROGRESSIONS																					
by DAN HAERLE																					
Read from left to right																					
measure no.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12									
1.	F7	F7	F7	F7	Bb7	Bb7	F7	F7	C7	C7	F7	F7									
2.	F7	F7	F7	F7	Bb7	Bb7	F7	F7	C7	Bb7	F7	C7									
3.	F7	Bb7	F7	F7	Bb7	Bb7	F7	F7	G7	C7	F7	C7									
4.	F7	Bb7	F7	F7	Bb7	Bb7	F7	D7	G7	C7	F7	C7									
5.	F7	Bb7	F7	F7	Bb7	Bb7	F7	D7	Gmi7	C7	F7	Gmi7 C7									
6.	F7	Bb7	F7	F7	Bb7	Eb7	F7	D7	Db7	C7	F7	Db7 C7									
7.	F7	Bb7	F7	Cmi7	F7	Bb7	Eb7	F7	Ami7	D7	Gmi7	C7	Ami7	D7	Gmi7	C7					
8.	F7	Bb7	F7	Cmi7	F7	Bb7	Eb7	Ami7	D7	Gmi7	C7	Ami7	D7	Gmi7	C7						
9.	F7	Bb7	F7	Cmi7	F7	Bb7	Bmi7	E7	F7	E7	Eb7	D7	Gmi7	C7	Bb7	Ami7	D7	Gmi7	C7		
10.	F M7	Emi7	A7	Dmi7	G7	Cmi7	F7	Bb7	Bb7	Ami7	D7	Abmi7	Db7	Gmi7	C7	Dbmi7	Cb7	F7	D7	Gmi7	C7
11.	F M7	Emi7	Ebmi7	Dmi7	Dbmi7	Cmi7	Cb7	BbM7	Bbmi7	Ami7	Abmi7	Gmi7	C7	Ami7	Abmi7	Gmi7	Gb				
12.	F M7	BbM7	Ami7	Gmi7	Gbmi7	Cb7	BbM7	Bbmi7	Ami7	Abmi7	Gmi7	Gb7	F M7	Abmi7	Gmi7	Gb					
13.	F M7	BbM7	Ami7	Gmi7	Gbmi7	Cb7	BbM7	Bbmi7	Eb7	AbM7	Abmi7	Db7	GbM7	Gmi7	C7	Ami7	D7	Dbmi7	Gb		
14.	F M7	Emi7	A7	Dmi7	G7	Cmi7	F7	BbM7	Bbmi7	Eb7	Ami7	Abmi7	Db7	Gmi7	C7	Ami7	D7	Gmi7	C7		
15.	F M7	Emi7	A7	Dmi7	G7	Gbmi7	Cb7	BbM7	Bmi7	E7	Ami7	Abmi7	Db7	Gmi7	C7	Bb7	Ami7	D7	Gmi7	C7	
16.	Fbmi7	B7	Emi7	A7	Dmi7	G7	Cmi7	F7	BbM7	Bbmi7	Eb7	AbM7	Abmi7	Db7	GbM7	Gmi7	C7	Ami7	D7	Gmi7	C7
17.	F M7	Fbmi7	B7	EM7	EbM7	DbM7	BM7	BbM7	Bmi7	E7	AM7	Ami7	D7	GM7	GbM7	FM7	AbM7	GM7	Gb		

NOTE: Portions of these progressions could be combined with each other to create hundreds of slight variations of the above. Notice that practically all blues progressions follow a similar basic form, which is as follows: First 4 measures - I chord; Second 4 measures - IV chord (returning to a I chord or its substitute); Final 4 measures - V chord (or II-V substitute) returning to a I chord.