

Variations On The BLUES

Several variations on the blues progressions have been in common use in the jazz idiom. The term "three chord songs" is 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 Bb 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 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 below 18 different blues progressions found in Dan Haerle's book *Jazz/Rock Voicings for the Contemporary Keyboard Player*. 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 aspiring 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, or a series of II/Vs.

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 recordings 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-A-Long book and recording 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 recording. 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!

	(In the Key of F)											
	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	G-	C7	F7	G- C7
6.	F7	Bb7	F7	F7	Bb7	Eb7	F7	D7	Db7	C7	F7	Db7 C7
7.	F7	Bb7	F7	C- F7	Bb7	Eb7	F7	A- D7	G-	C7	A- D7	G- C7
8.	F7	Bb7	F7	C- F7	Bb7	Eb7	A-	D7	G-	C7	A- D7	G- C7
9.	F7	Bb7	F7	C- F7	Bb7	B- E7	F7 E7	Eb7 D7	G-	C7 Bb7	A- D7	G- C7
10.	FΔ	E- A7	D- G7	C- F7	Bb7	B°	A- D7	Ab- Db7	G- C7	Db- Gb7	F7 D7	G- C7
11.	FΔ	E- Eb-	D- Db-	C- B7	BbΔ	Bb-	A-	Ab-	G-	C7	A- Ab-	G- Gb
12.	FΔ	BbΔ	A- G-	F#- B7	BbΔ	Bb-	A-	Ab-	G-	C7	FΔ Ab-	G- Gb
13.	FΔ	BbΔ	A- G-	F#- B7	BbΔ	Bb- Eb7	AbΔ	Ab- Db7	GbΔ	G- C7	A- D7	Db- Gb7
14.	FΔ	E- A7	D- G7	C- F7	BbΔ	Bb- Eb7	A-	Ab- Db7	G-	C7	A- D7	G- C7
15.	FΔ	E- A7	D- G7	F#- B7	BbΔ	Bb- E7	A-	Ab- Db7	G-	C7 Bb7	A- D7	G- C7
16.	F#- B7	E- A7	D- G7	C- F7	BbΔ	Bb- Eb7	AbΔ	Ab- Db7	GbΔ	G- C7	A- D7	G- C7
17.	FΔ	F#- B7	EΔ EbΔ	DbΔ BΔ	BbΔ	B- E7	AΔ	A- D7	GΔ	GbΔ	FΔ AbΔ	GΔ GbΔ
18.	C-/F	F-/Bb	C-/F	C-/F	F-/Bb	F-/Bb	C-/F	C-/F	G-/C	F-/Bb	C-/F	G-/C

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 a II-V substitute) returning to a I chord.