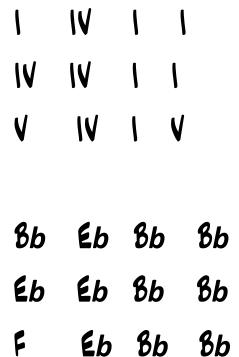# The Blues

The 12 bar blues is very important for learning and understanding all jazz music, so it is a great place to begin when you dig into jazz theory.

All chords in the simple blues below are dominant 7th chords (the chord tones are 1, 3, 5, b7 so a Bb dominant chord is Bb, D, F Ab)

Here is the chord progression for a simplified Blues:

I	I	I	I
IV	IV	I	I
V	V	I	I

This is what the progression looks like in the key of Bb:

Bb	Bb	Bb	Bb
Eb	Eb	Bb	Bb
F	F	Bb	Bb

There are several different variations on the blues form. The blues above is the simplest form, but you may see variations like the one below.

I	IV	I	I
IV	IV	I	I
V	IV	I	V

Bb	Eb	Bb	Bb
Eb	Eb	Bb	Bb
F	Eb	Bb	Bb

After becoming comfortable with a simple blues like the one above, you can begin exploring the jazz blues. This form becomes a little more interesting and complex by adding ii-V-I patterns.

Common keys for the blues are Bb, F, and C. Students should begin with these keys and work to play the blues in all 12 keys!

When playing the blues, or any jazz form, you want to know the chord changes. Students should listen to the blues often and identify when the chord changes. When listening together in class you can have students raise their hands when they hear the chord change, or they can hold up a 1, 4, or 5 to show what chord is being played. Eventually, students will easily be able to hear where they are in the chord progression!

Chord Tones and Guide Tones

Chord tones are very important to any jazz form. In a 7th chord, the chord tones are the 1, 3, 5, and 7 scale degrees. When they are used in the blues they allow us to hear the chord changes, and they can create very interesting melodies. The most important chord tones are the 3rd and the 7th.

Guide tones are the 3rd and 7th scale degree in each chord. These are the important notes so students should work to memorize these for each chord. Pianists should practice playing the 3rd and 7th in the left hand.

A good improvisation exercise is to limit notes used to only chord tones or guide tones. Focus on playing the changes in time and see how closely you can change from one chord to the next.