Chord Progression

From *Fundamentals of Jazz Improvisation: What Everybody Thinks You Already Know*

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Fundamental Chord Progressions

Learning tunes is greatly facilitated by recognizing commonly used chord progressions. *Blues* and *Rhythm Changes* are chord progressions covering the entire body of the tune. Proficiency can greatly enhance one's repertoire since the form and progression are known and one only need learn melodies. Other progressions aren’t nearly as lengthy, nor all-inclusive, covering only a portion of the composition but still make tune learning easier. The more tunes one learns, the more one recognizes similarities causing the rate of learning to be exponential.

Cycles

Progressions whose roots move around the circle of 5ths

1. The ii V7 I (or ii V7) progression is the most common in jazz.

*Satin Doll*, mm. 1-4 (Duke Ellington)

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D- G7 D- G7 E- A7 E- A7
   ii       V7   ii       V7   ii       V7   ii       V7
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2. The minor iiø V7alt i is also very common. Altered supertonic (iiø) and altered dominants are from the minor mode but are often used with a major tonic (modal borrowing).

*Blue Bossa*, mm. 5-8 (Kenny Dorham)

*What is This Thing Called Love?*, mm. 1-8 (Cole Porter)
3. I vi ii V7, iii vi ii V7, and iii VI, ii V7: The mediant (iii) is a common substitute for tonic (I) and the submediant (vi) can be either minor/minor 7 or major/minor 7 depending upon the melody or other factors; essentially, they are quite similar and often interchangeable. When iii VI ii V7 is used, it is like a chain or cycle of ii V7s except that it is locked to the iii VI ii V7 relationship to tonic whereas a cycle of ii V7s may start and/or end in different key areas.

Blue Moon, mm. 1-8 (Lorenz Hart and Richard Rodgers)

Let's Fall in Love, mm. 1-8 (Ted Koehler and Harold Arlen)

Other examples include: Rhythm Changes, Ain't Misbehavin', Georgia, Autumn Leaves, Cheek to Cheek, Don't Be That Way, Have You Met Miss Jones, Isn't It Romantic, and Mean to Me.

4. Cycle of ii V7s: This is similar to iii VI7 ii V7 but with two distinctions: 1) the sequence can continue beyond two repetitions, and 2) the cycle is not related to tonic in the same way. The progression may lead to a secondary key area or start farther back around the cycle than mediant (iii) then lead to tonic. (Blues for Alice, Confirmation, The Masquerade is Over, Stella by Starlight)
Blues for Alice, mm. 1-5 (Charlie Parker)

Stella by Starlight, mm. 25-32 (Victor Young and Ned Washington)

5. Cycle of V7s: dominant chords with a root progression ascending by fourths, descending by fifths (circle of fifths progression).

Two chords per bar: Jordu, mm. 17-24 [bridge] (Duke Jordan)
One chord per bar: *Yesterdays*, mm. 1-16 (Jerome Kern and Otto Harbach)

One chord every two bars: *Perdido*, mm. 17-24 [bridge] (Juan Tizol)

One chord every four bars: *Sweet Georgia Brown*, mm. 1-16 (Ben Bernie, Maceo Pinkard and Kenneth Casey)

Two chords per bar: *Nice Work If You Can Get It*

One chord per bar: *Basin Street Blues, Bill Bailey, Come Rain or Come Shine, Ja-Da, Sister Sadie*

One chord every two bars: *Scrapple from the Apple, Rhythm Changes*

One chord every four bars: *Caravan*

6. ii V7 I IV: cycle root movement ii V7 I extended to IV. It is often followed by a Tritone Resolution to V7 *All the Things You Are*, mm. 5-6, D-flat to G) or to ii V7 (*Autumn Leaves*, mm. 4-6, E-flat to A); the same sequence occurs in *Imagination*, mm. 2-4.
All the Things You Are, mm 1-8 (Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II)

Autumn Leaves, mm. 1-8 (Joseph Kosma and Johnny Mercer)

Other examples include: Imagination (see “#15. Diminished Passing Chord” below)

**ii V7 and ii V7 I Sequences**

7. Chromatic ii V7: The Chromatic ii V7 sequence can ascend or descend. The last ii V7 can resolve in a cycle ii V7 I (Laura, Stablemates) or as a tritone substitution (Blues for Alice).

**Moment’s Notice, mm. 5-8 (John Coltrane): Chromatic ii V7 (ascending)**

Laura, mm. 29-30 (Johnny Mercer and David Raksin): Chromatic ii V7 (descending) with ii V7 I resolution
Tritone substitution derivative:

\[
\begin{align*}
D7 & \rightarrow C9 \\
A7 & \rightarrow G9 \\
Ab7 & \rightarrow G9 \\
E♭m7 & \rightarrow Ab7 \\
Dm7 & \rightarrow G9 \\
& \rightarrow C9
\end{align*}
\]

Stablemates, mm. 1-3, 23-25 (Benny Golson): Chromatic ii V7 with ii V7 I resolution

\[
\begin{align*}
& E7 \rightarrow A7 \\
& E♭7 \rightarrow Ab7 \\
& Dm7 \rightarrow G9 \\
\end{align*}
\]

Blues for Alice, mm. 5-10 (Charlie Parker): Chromatic ii V7 with Tritone substitution/resolution

\[
\begin{align*}
& G♭7 \rightarrow IV7 \\
& G♭6 \rightarrow A♭7 \\
& E♭7 \rightarrow Ab7 \\
& C7 \rightarrow I \\
\end{align*}
\]

Other examples include: Lover Man mm. 7, You Stepped Out of a Dream mm. 15-16

8. V7 descending by \( \frac{1}{2} \)-steps (chromatic): (two per bar: I Can’t Get Started, Prelude to a Kiss, Sophisticated Lady, Well You Needn’t, one per bar: Nutville, On Green Dolphin Street [major], Stablemates)
Eternal Triangle, mm. 17-24 (Sonny Stitt): V7 = ii V7

Nutville, mm 17-20 (Horace Silver)

9. Cycle of ii V7 I descending by whole step: G- | C7 | F | F | F- | B-flat 7 | E-flat | E-flat | etc.; major converts to minor becoming ii of ii V7 I; new major converts to minor becoming ii of ii V7 I, etc. In some tunes, the pattern begins with two bars of major as in How High the Moon.

The pattern with major of the key first followed by the whole step descending sequence, as in How High the Moon, can be found in other tunes:

\[ \begin{align*}
&1 \mid 1 \mid ii \mid V7 \mid 1 \mid 1 \mid ii \mid V7 \mid I \\
&G: \quad F \quad E_b
\end{align*} \]

How High the Moon, mm. 1-9 (Morgan Lewis)
Cherokee, mm. 33-48 [bridge] (Ray Noble)

Almost Like Being in Love, mm. 17-24 (Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Lowe): ii V7 I descending by whole steps; major shifting to minor from m. 19 to m. 21

Tune Up, mm. 1-11 (Miles Davis)
Other examples include: *Bebop, I Can’t Get Started, Joy Spring, Lover Man, Milestones* [bridge], *One Note Samba* [bridge], Ornithology, Secret Love, Solar, Things to Come, Tune Up, Wave, *What is This Thing Called Love*.

10. Ascending minor 3rd ii V7 I progression: C- | F7 | Bb | Bb- | Eb7 | Db | etc. ; common on bridge.

*Confirmation*, mm. 17-24 (Charlie Parker): ascending minor 3rd (B-flat to D-flat) ii V7 I progression; B-flat to E-flat cycle root movement from m. 20 to m. 21

11. Descending minor 3rd ii V7 I progression: C- | F7 | Bb | Bb | A- | D7 | G | G | F#- | B7 | E | E | Eb- | Ab7 | Db etc. ; common on bridge.
I'll Remember April, mm. 25-32 (Don Raye, Gene De Paul and Pat Johnston): descending minor 3rd (G to E) ii V7 I progression; descending chromatic root movement (G to F-sharp), mm. 27-29

All the Things You Are, mm. 17-24 (Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II)

12. Ascending by whole-step: often as a bridge.
On the Sunny Side of the Street, mm. 17-24 (Dorothy Fields and Jimmy McHugh)

Honeysuckle Rose, mm. 17-24 (Andy Razaf and Thomas Waller)

Other examples include: Satin Doll, It Don’t Mean a Thing, Pennies from Heaven (mm. 9-16), The Surrey with the Fringe on Top.

Tritone Concepts

13. Tritone Substitution in a ii V7 I Progression

One Note Samba, mm. 1-8 (Antonio Carlos Jobim)
14. Chromatically Descending V7s: Often created by a tritone substitution on every other chord of a dominant cycle, they can be placed starting on either the first or second chord of the cycle.

*Rhythm Changes* Substitution, mm. 17-24 [bridge]: The use of tritone substitutions on mm. 3-4 and 7-8 of the bridge creates a chromatically descending sequence.

*Locomotion*, mm. 13-20 [bridge] (John Coltrane): Cotrone’s tune demonstrates how tritone substitutions can be placed on mm. 1-2 and 5-6.
15. Chromatically Descending ii V7 Sequence (tritone sub to dominants, i.e. E, E-flat, D, D-flat, C, B, resolve to B-flat)

*Third Rail*, mm. 17-24 [bridge] (Michael Brecker)

Other examples include: *The Eternal Triangle*, mm. 17-24 [bridge] (Sonny Stitt), *Blues for Alice*, 7-10 (Charlie Parker), *Satin Doll*, mm. 5-8 (Duke Ellington)

16. Tritone Resolutions: Chord movement whose roots are a tritone apart, this progression is often found within a phrase or as the cadence to a phrase (TT Cadence). Most often the first chord is dominant but movement to and from other qualities are not uncommon, including tritone ii V7 sequences (TT ii V7 Progression).

*Moment’s Notice*, mm. 1-18 [after 22-bar intro] (John Coltrane)
17. #iv VII7 I: Sharp-4 is a tritone above tonic, VII7 is dominant in quality rather than fully or half-diminished.

Groovin’ High, mm. 1-4 (Dizzy Gillespie)

Almost Like Being in Love, mm 21-25 (Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Lowe)

Other examples include; An Evening Thought, I’m Getting Sentimental Over You, Night and Day, Whispering
Mediant Relationships

Mediants: In tonal harmony *mediant* is halfway between tonic and dominant. *Submediant* is halfway between tonic and subdominant descending. The example below is in treble clef with C being tonic.

- 5th above tonic = dominant
- mediant = 1/2 way between tonic and dominant
- 5th below tonic = subdominant
- submediant = 1/2 way between tonic and subdominant

A *mediant* relationship in a chord progression is any chord that is a 3rd away from the present chord in either direction. There are two types of *mediants*: 1) *diatonic mediant*, and 2) *chromatic mediant*. A *diatonic mediant* stays within the key signature of the present chord. A *chromatic mediant* has at least one note in the new chord that is outside the key signature of the present chord. *Chromatic mediant* progressions usually have at least one common tone between the two chords but in jazz they don’t always.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mediant Wheel Lines indicate possibilities from point (C).</th>
<th>Compass Turn outside wheel like a compass.</th>
<th>Clock Turn inside arms like a clock.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Mediant Wheel Diagram" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Compass Diagram" /></td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Clock Diagram" /></td>
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</tbody>
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Diatonic Mediants: C major to A minor, or C major to E minor (extensions may vary).

Chromatic Mediants (with common tones): C major to E major, E7, E-flat major, E-flat 7, A major, A7, A-flat major, A-flat 7, or A-flat minor.
Chromatic Mediants (with no common tones): C major to E-flat minor, A major 7 sharp-5, or any other altered chord that contains no common tones.

18. Chromatic mediants can move from any chord quality to any other chord quality as long as their roots are a major or minor 3rd apart, up or down from the first chord to the second.

*Bernie’s Tune, mm. 1-4 (Bernie Miller)*
19. Coltrane Changes: This progression is found in tunes such as *Giant Steps* and is often used as turn around substitutions. The pattern is: up a minor 3rd, down a perfect 5th, up a minor 3rd, down a perfect 5th, up a minor 3rd, down a perfect 5th.

*Giant Steps*, mm. 1-5 (John Coltrane)

*Countdown*, mm. 1-4 (John Coltrane): mm. 5-8 same progression in C, mm. 9-12 same progression in B-flat.
Additional Possibilities

20. I | I | II7 | II7 | ii | V7 | I

*Take the “A” Train*, mm. 1-8 (Duke Ellington)

![Music notation for Take the “A” Train](image)

*The Girl from Ipanema*, mm. 1-8 (Antonio Carlos Jobim)

![Music notation for The Girl from Ipanema](image)

Other examples include: *Desafinado, I Got I Bad, Jersey Bounce, Solitude*

21. iv 7VII7 I, IV 7VII7 I, or IV 7VI7 I

In the minor mode the subdominant is minor (iv). The chord built on the 7th scale degree is subtonic (VII7) with no need to place a flat sign before the Roman numeral; its quality is major/minor 7 (dominant). Often when in a major key a flat is placed before the VII to indicate that it is not the chord built on the leading tone. In essence, this progression is borrowed from the minor mode.

*Just Friends*, mm. 1-5 (John Klenner and Sam M. Lewis)

![Music notation for Just Friends](image)
There Will Never Be Another You, mm. 9-12 (Harry Warren and Mack Gordon)

I Got Rhythm, mm. 5-8 (George Gershwin)

Other examples include: Blue Daniel, Groovin’ High, Stella by Starlight, Misty, and many others (very common).

22. Chromatic descending roots starting on tritone of tonic (or resolution):

\[ \text{iv}^\flat iv \text{ iii} \text{ iii}^\flat \text{ II}7 \text{ I} \text{ or } \text{ iv}^\flat \text{ vii}^0 \text{ ii V7 I} \]; chord qualities may vary; often as intro or ending.

Night and Day, mm. 9-16 (Cole Porter)

When Sunny Gets Blue, mm. 5-8 (Jack Segal and Marvin Fisher)

Other examples include: Emily, One Note Samba
23. Diminished passing chords (jazz rhythm): Bb Bº | C- C#º | D- (sub for 1st two bars of Rhythm Changes, Ain’t Misbehavin’, Have You Met Miss Jones, I Remember Clifford, Imagination, It could Happen to You, Moonlight Becomes You)

*Rhythm Changes*, mm. 1-2 of the A sections, most often the 1st A section and after the bridge, but can occur in mm. 3-4 of an A section.

*Imagination*, mm. 1-2 (Jimmy Van Heusen and Johnny Burke)