

# Chord Progression

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

Dr. Mark Watkins  
Director of Jazz Studies  
Brigham Young University–Idaho

©2010 by Mark Watkins

Materials herein are provided for personal use. No part may be reproduced  
without written permission from the author.

# 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 5<sup>ths</sup>

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

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

The image shows a musical staff with two systems of chords. The first system is in C major, with chords ii (D-), V7 (G7), ii (D-), and V7 (G7). The second system is in D major, with chords ii (E-), V7 (A7), ii (E-), and V7 (A7). The notes are written in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature.

2. The minor ii $\emptyset$  V7<sup>alt</sup> i is also very common. Altered supertonic (ii $\emptyset$ ) 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)

The image shows a musical staff in D minor. The chords are Dmi7(b9), G7(#9), and Cmi6. The notes are written in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature.

*What is This Thing Called Love?*, mm. 1-8 (Cole Porter)

The image shows two systems of musical notation. The first system is in D minor, with chords D $\emptyset$ , C7(b9), and F-. The second system is in D major, with chords D $\emptyset$ , G7(#9), and C $\Delta$ 7. The notes are written in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. The text "resolve to minor" is written below the first system, and "resolve to major" is written below the second system.

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)

Chords:  $E^b\Delta$  C- F-  $B^b7$   $E^b\Delta$  C- F-  $B^b7$

Roman numerals: I vi ii V7

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

Chords:  $C^6$   $A^{mi7}$   $D^{mi7}$   $G^7$   $C^6$   $A^{mi7}$   $D^{mi7}$   $G^7$

Roman numerals: I vi ii V7 I vi ii V7

Chords:  $E^{mi7}$   $A^{mi7}$   $D^{mi7}$   $G^7$   $E^7$   $A^7$   $D^7$   $G^7$

Roman numerals: iii vi ii V7

mediant (substitute for tonic)

cycle of dominants

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)

ii V7 cycle

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

ii° V7(b9)

- 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)

cycle of V7s

cycle of V7s

One chord per bar: *Yesterdays*, mm. 1-16 (Jerome Kern and Otto Harbach)

Chord progression for *Yesterdays* (mm. 1-16):

Staff 1: Dmi, E7(b9) A7, Dmi, E7(b9) A7, Dmi C#+, Dmi7/C, Bmi7(b9), E7

Staff 2: A7(#9), D9, G13, C9, F13, Bbm9, E7(b9), A7

cycle of V7s

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

Chord progression for *Perdido* (mm. 17-24 [bridge]):

Staff 1: D7, G7

Staff 2: C7, F7

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

Chord progression for *Sweet Georgia Brown* (mm. 1-16):

Staff 1: D7, G7

Staff 2: C7, F, C7(#9), F, E7, A9

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)

Chords: Fm7, Bbm7, Eb7, Abmaj7, Dbmaj7, G7, Cm7  
 Roman numerals: ii, V7, IΔ, IVΔ

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

Chords: C-7, F7, Bbm7, Eb7, Ab7, D7, G-7  
 Roman numerals: ii, V7, IΔ, IVΔ  
 Bb

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)

Chords: D-, G7, Eb-, Ab7, Db9, D-, G7  
 Roman numerals: ii, V7, ii, V7, I, ii, V7  
 Ascending Chromatic ii V7 Progression

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

Chords: Ebmi7, Ab7, Dmi7, G9, C6/9  
 Roman numerals: ii, V7, ii, V7, I  
 Chromatic ii V7 Progression



*Eternal Triangle*, mm. 17-24 (Sonny Stitt): V7 = ii V7

Chord annotations for *Eternal Triangle* (mm. 17-24):

- Staff 1:  $Bm7$ ,  $E7$ ,  $Bbm7$ ,  $Eb7$
- Staff 2:  $A7$ ,  $D7$ ,  $Abm7$ ,  $Db7$ ,  $Gm7$ ,  $C7$ ,  $F\#m7$ ,  $B7$

*Nutville*, mm 17-20 (Horace Silver)

Chord annotations for *Nutville* (mm. 17-20):

- $Bb13$ ,  $A13$ ,  $Ab13$ ,  $G13$

- 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>

$I | I | ii | V7 | I | I | ii | V7 || I$   
 G:                      F                       $E_b$

*How High the Moon*, mm. 1-9 (Morgan Lewis)

Chord annotations for *How High the Moon* (mm. 1-9):

- Staff 1:  $G^{maj7}$ ,  $G-7$ ,  $C7$
- Staff 2:  $F^{maj7}$ ,  $F-7$ ,  $Bb7$ ,  $Ebmaj7$

Functional annotations below the notes:

- Staff 1: G: I, ii, V7
- Staff 2: I, ii, V7, I

*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 3<sup>rd</sup> ii V7 I progression: C- | F7 | Bb | Bb | Eb- | Ab7 | Db | etc. ; common on bridge.

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

*On Green Dolphin Street*, mm. 17-24 (Ned Washington and Bronislau Kaper)

11. Descending minor 3<sup>rd</sup> ii V7 I progression: C- | F7 | Bb | Bb | A- | D7 | G | G | F#- | B7 | E | E | Eb- | Ab7 | Db etc. ; common on bridge.



*On the Sunny Side of the Street*, mm. 17-24 (Dorothy Fields and Jimmy McHugh)

Handwritten chord symbols above the staff: G<sup>min</sup>7, C<sup>7</sup>, F<sup>ma</sup>7. Chord symbols below the staff: C, ii, V<sup>7</sup>, I, I. A bracket below the staff labels the progression as IV (F).

Handwritten chord symbols above the staff: A<sup>min</sup>7, D<sup>7</sup>, G<sup>7</sup>. Chord symbols below the staff: ii, V<sup>7</sup>, I<sup>7</sup>, I<sup>7</sup>. A bracket below the staff labels the progression as V (G).

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

Handwritten chord symbols above the staff: C<sup>min</sup>7, F<sup>7</sup>, B<sup>ma</sup>7. Chord symbols below the staff: ii, V<sup>7</sup>, I, I. A bracket below the staff labels the progression as IV (B<sub>b</sub>).

Handwritten chord symbols above the staff: D<sup>min</sup>7, G<sup>7</sup>, C<sup>7</sup>. Chord symbols below the staff: ii, V<sup>7</sup>, I<sup>7</sup>, I<sup>7</sup>. A bracket below the staff labels the progression as V (C).

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)

Handwritten chord symbols above the staff: D<sup>-</sup>, (G<sup>7</sup>) D<sup>b7</sup>, C<sup>-</sup>, (F<sup>7</sup>) B<sup>7</sup>. Chord symbols below the staff: ii, (V<sup>7</sup>) \*TT, ii, (V<sup>7</sup>) TT. A bracket below the staff labels the progression as ii V7 Cycle. A second bracket below the staff labels the progression as B<sub>b</sub>.

\*TT = Tritone Substitution

The image displays three musical staves in B-flat major, illustrating various harmonic progressions:

- Staff 1:** Shows a ii V7 cycle starting on C. The chords are ii (F7), V7 (C7), ii (F7), and V7 (C7). The progression is labeled "ii V7 Cycle".
- Staff 2:** Shows a ii V7 I IV progression starting on E-flat. The chords are ii (F7), V7 (C7), I (E-flat), and IV (A-flat). The progression is labeled "ii V7 I IV Progression".
- Staff 3:** Shows another ii V7 cycle starting on C. The chords are ii (F7), V7 (C7), ii (F7), and V7 (C7). The progression is labeled "ii V7 Cycle".

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.

The image shows a musical staff for the *Rhythm Changes* bridge, illustrating a chromatically descending sequence of dominant 7th chords: D7, Db7/G7, C7, Bb7/F7.

*Locomotion*, mm. 13-20 [bridge] (John Coltrane): Cotrane's tune demonstrates how tritone substitutions can be placed on mm. 1-2 and 5-6.

The image shows a musical staff for the *Locomotion* bridge, illustrating a chromatically descending sequence of dominant 7th chords: Ab7/D7, G7, Fb7/C7, E7.

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)

ii V7 sequence progressing down chromatically

ii V7 sequence progressing down chromatically

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)

\*TT ii V7 Progression

Ascending Chromatic ii V7 Progression

\*TT = Tritone

Ascending Chromatic ii V7 Progression

TT Cadence

TT Cadence

17. #iv VII7 I: Sharp-4 is a tritone above tonic, VII7 is dominant in quality rather than fully or half-diminished.

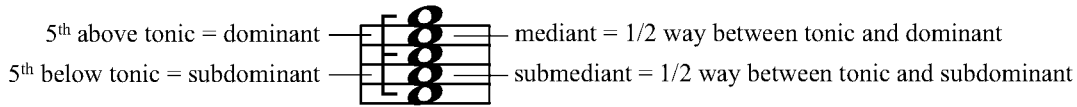
*Groovin' High*, mm. 1-4 (Dizzy Gillespie)

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

Other examples include; *An Eveining Thought*, *I'm Getting Sentimental Over You*, *Night and Day*, *Whispering*

# Mediant Relationships

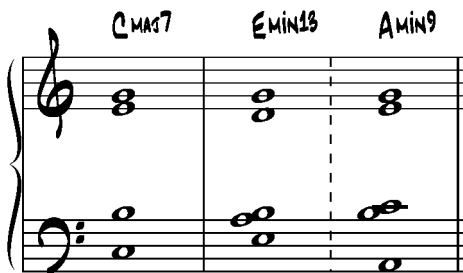
Mediants: In tonal harmony *mediant* is halfway between tonic and dominant. *Submediant* is halfway between tonic and subdominant descending. The example below is in treble clef with C being tonic.



A *mediant* relationship in a chord progression is any chord that is a 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

Mediant Wheel Lines indicate possibilities from point (C).	Compass Turn outside wheel like a compass.	Clock Turn inside arms like a clock.

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.

Cmaj7   E<sup>♯</sup>7   E7   E<sup>b</sup>7   E<sup>b</sup>7   Cmaj7   A<sup>♯</sup>7   A7   A<sup>b</sup>7   A<sup>b</sup>7   A<sup>b</sup>min7

Common Tones: B and E   \*CT: G   CT: E   CT: E, G   CT: C, G   CT: C   CT: C, B

\*Common Tone

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.

Cmaj7   E<sup>b</sup>min7   A<sup>♯</sup>7(♯5)

18. *Chromatic mediant*s can move from any chord quality to any other chord quality as long as their roots are a major or minor 3<sup>rd</sup> apart, up or down from the first chord to the second.

*Bernie's Tune*, mm. 1-4 (Bernie Miller)

D-7   B<sup>b</sup>9

*All of Me*, mm. 17-26 (Seymour Simons and Gerald Marks)

Chromatic Mediant

Diatonic Mediant

IV

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 3<sup>rd</sup>, down a perfect 5<sup>th</sup>, up a minor 3<sup>rd</sup>, down a perfect 5<sup>th</sup>, up a minor 3<sup>rd</sup>, down a perfect 5<sup>th</sup>.

*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)

Handwritten chord symbols for *Take the "A" Train* (mm. 1-8):  
 Staff 1: I, II7, D7(#5)  
 Staff 2: D-7, G7, I, D-7, G7

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

Handwritten chord symbols for *The Girl from Ipanema* (mm. 1-8):  
 Staff 1: I, G7  
 Staff 2: G-7, Gb7, F, Gb7  
 (tritone substitution for V7)

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

21. iv  $\flat$ VII7 I, IV  $\flat$ VII7 I, or IV7  $\flat$ VII I

In the minor mode the subdominant is minor (iv). The chord built on the 7<sup>th</sup> 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)

Handwritten chord symbols for *Just Friends* (mm. 1-5):  
 $\flat$ Bm7,  $\flat$ Bmin7, E $\flat$ 7, Fm7, I

*There Will Never Be Another You*, mm. 9-12 (Harry Warren and Mack Gordon)

Abma7 IV Db7(#11) bVII7 Ebma7 I Cm7

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

Bbb Bb7 Eb7 IV Ab7 bVII7 Bbb I G-7 C-7 F7

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):

$\sharp iv^\circ$  iv iii  $\flat iii$  ii  $\flat II7$  I or  $\sharp iv^\circ$  iv iii  $vii^\circ$ /ii ii V7 I ; chord qualities may vary; often as intro or ending.

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

descending chromatic root progression  
Ami7(b5) #iv° Abmi7 iv Gmi7 iii Gbmi7 biii° or vii°/ii  
Fmi7 ii Bb7(#5) V7 Ebma7 I

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

descending chromatic root progression  
Bb7 #iv° Bb-7 iv A-7 iii Ab7 biii° or vii°/ii G-7 ii C7 V7 Ab7 I

Other examples include: *Emily*, *One Note Samba*

23. Diminished passing chords (jazz rhythm): B $\flat$  B $\natural$  | C- C $\sharp$  | D- (sub for 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> A section and after the bridge, but can occur in mm. 3-4 of an A section.

Musical notation for *Rhythm Changes* showing diminished passing chords. The notation consists of a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B $\flat$ ). The staff contains four measures, each with a slash indicating a rhythmic pattern. Above the staff, the following chords are written: B $\flat$  $\Delta$ 7, (G-7) B $\flat$ 7, C-7, (F7) C $\sharp$ 7, D-7, G7, C-7, and F7.

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

Musical notation for *Imagination* showing diminished passing chords. The notation consists of a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (B $\flat$  B $\flat$ ). The staff contains four measures. Above the staff, the following chords are written: E $\flat$  $\Delta$ 7, E $\flat$ 7, F $\natural$ mi7, B $\flat$ 7, E $\flat$  $\Delta$ 7, A $\flat$  $\Delta$ 7 (with a 3-measure slur), G $\flat$ 7, and C7. Below the staff, the following Roman numerals are written: I, vii $\circ$ 7/ii, ii, V7, I, IV, ii $\circ$ , and V7. A 'F' is written below the ii $\circ$  Roman numeral.