

Chord progressions and reharmonization theory

Another important aspect of build great bass lines is to understand first the overall structure of a chord progression and second to reharmonize that chord progression in order to create interesting new bass lines. The chord progressions found in the next section are very common in blues and jazz music. The 12 bar blues, the minor 12 bar blues and rhythm changes (a common progression in jazz music) are used to help a student learn to build bass lines to common jazz forms. 12 reharmonizations of a 12 bar blues, the minor 12 bar blues and rhythm changes are presented. This will allow a bassist to see many possible ways are applying the reharmonization methods presented here.

First lets examine the overall forms of a 12 bar blues, the minor 12 bar blues and rhythm changes. The first, the blues and the minor blues are typically a 12 bar song forms where the IV chord coming on the fifth bar. You will see as we add in our reharmonization techniques how diverse these progression can become. Rhythm Changes is a common AABA jazz form: A=8bars, A=8bars, B=8bars, A=8bars. The A sections in this book have been re-harmonized slightly to add variety. Try to learn each example at the tempo marking and make sure your bass lines are legato.

The 12 bar blues, minor blues, and rhythm changes chord progressions all have a basic progression that is then embellished with more chords and/or tensions. Pages 15 and 16 show the stripped down versions of the 12 Bar Blues, Minor Blues and Rhythm Changes. The 12 Bar Blues and the Minor Blues (see page 15) are similar in that they go to the IV chord (IV in the Key of C) on the fifth measure. You will notice that even when reharmonizations get very complex usually the IV chord will still be there on the 5th measure. Rhythm changes (see page 16) as mentioned before have an AABA form, therefore there are only two sections to the form; the A section consists of a diatonic progression in C (C, A-, D-, G7) or I, VI, II, V, with a quick II-V-I to the IV chord G-7 C7 F which is another II, V, I but in F major, then another I, VI, II, V, in C. This is followed by a bridge (B section) which goes through dominant 7th chords cycle 5. E7 to A7 to D7 to G7.

With this basic information we can now talk about the reharmonization I have added to these basic progressions. One method of reharmonization is to add and subtract tensions. By referring to the chord tones and tensions on page 5 through 13 you can see what the available tensions are for each chord. Although we will be taking available tensions into consideration in our bass lines at this point. It is important to see how these tensions have been added from a reharmonization standpoint. For example a C Major chord could be C69 because 6 and 9 are available tensions for a C chord. Another method involves adding and subtracting chords to change the chord progression. Reharmonization by adding and subtracting chords has certain rules which govern which chords are substituted. This reharmonization theory is derived from the fact that our ear wants certain types of chords to resolve in certain ways and that some chords have an affinity with others because of their internal structure. A chord's tendency to move in a particular way is called it's " resolution tendency" One chord with a very strong resolution tendency is the dominant chord. Our ear wants to hear the dominant chord resolve in one of 3 ways: up a 4th (G7 to CΔ7), down a half step (Db7 to CΔ7), or up a whole step (Bb7 to CΔ7). These resolution tendencies of the dominant are also listed in order of the strongest resolution to the weakest. Therefore G7 to CΔ7 is the strongest and Bb7 to CΔ7 is the weakest. With this information we can take a blues and put the corresponding dominant structure before any chord. This dominant will then create a resolution to the chord that follows. The first example of the 12 bar blues (page 17) does this in the 4th bar. You have an F#9 chord resolving down a half step to F9 in the 5th bar, then in bar 6 you have Bb13 resolving up a whole step to C13. Therefore a bassist can use this information to construct bass lines. Because of the openness of jazz style you will find that you can build these progression and apply your bass lines even if the accompanying instrument doesn't play the same progression you are constructing with your bass line.