

CHAPTER 1 • Basic Blues Theory

If you want to learn how to play jazz, one of the best places to begin is with the blues. There are several reasons for this.

First of all, the basic Blues form is one of the simplest in all of jazz.

Second, the basic Blues form is extremely widespread. There are hundreds of commonly played jazz pieces based on the Blues structure, and it also is central to most other forms of contemporary music. So when you learn how to improvise on the Blues, you are dealing with something familiar and you learn something that will be of continuing value.

Finally, the basic Blues form is extremely flexible, with many variations, and it is a form to which you will return throughout your development as an improviser. Rather than leaving the Blues behind as you get more sophisticated, you bring the Blues along with you on your path of development.

Getting Started

EXERCISE #1

Let's start with a fairly simple Blues at a relaxed tempo, the "First Step Blues." Read through the melody a few times at a comfortable tempo. Then listen carefully to how the melody is played on the saxophone track (**CD Track #1** first two choruses).

Finally, try to play the melody along with the rhythm section by turning off the saxophone track on the left channel. Try imitating the swing feel and the quarter-note articulation from the saxophone track.

CD Track #19 has both B \flat and A tuning notes, if you need them.

[*Note for horn players:* In the B \flat version of this book, some exercises will fit better with the range of the trumpet and some with the range of the saxophone. Please adjust the octaves for yourself, if necessary.]

First Step Blues

Dan Greenblatt

The musical notation for "First Step Blues" is presented in three staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, and then a triplet of eighth notes (A4, B4, C5). A repeat sign follows, with a B \flat 7 chord symbol above the first measure. The second staff continues the melody with triplet markings and includes chord symbols E \flat 7, B \flat 7, and F7. The third staff shows the final two measures of the piece, with first and second endings marked "1." and "2." above the staff, and chord symbols E \flat 7, B \flat 7, F7, B \flat 7, and F7.