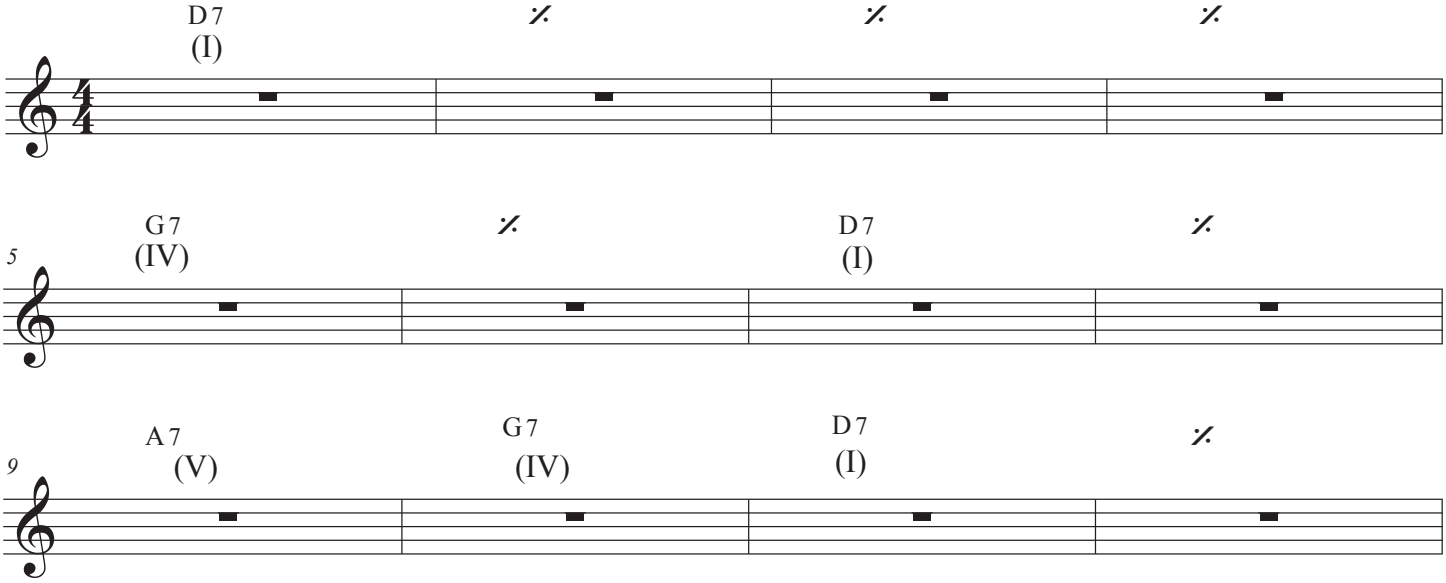
# The Blues

The blues is a musical genre and form which originated in the United States in the later 1800's. Combined with ragtime, the blues directly influence the creation of jazz and its ongoing importance to the development of jazz can't be stressed enough. Most beginning jazz improvisers learn this form first as it is relatively simple and easy to apply improvisational techniques to.

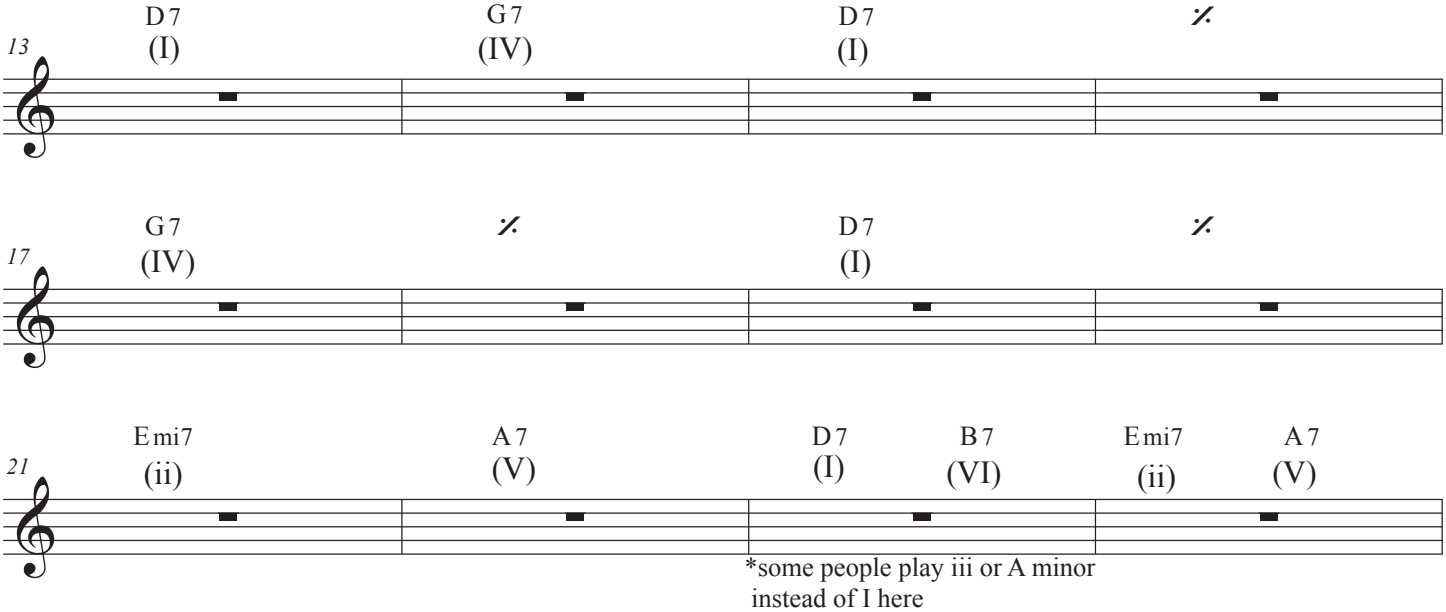
For our purposes, we will be focusing on the 12-bar blues form, which in its simplest version only utilizes three chords, the I, IV and V chords of the key. The blues can be played in any key but the most common are F and Bb. We will be working on blues in F for this course.

Here is an example of the most basic blues form:

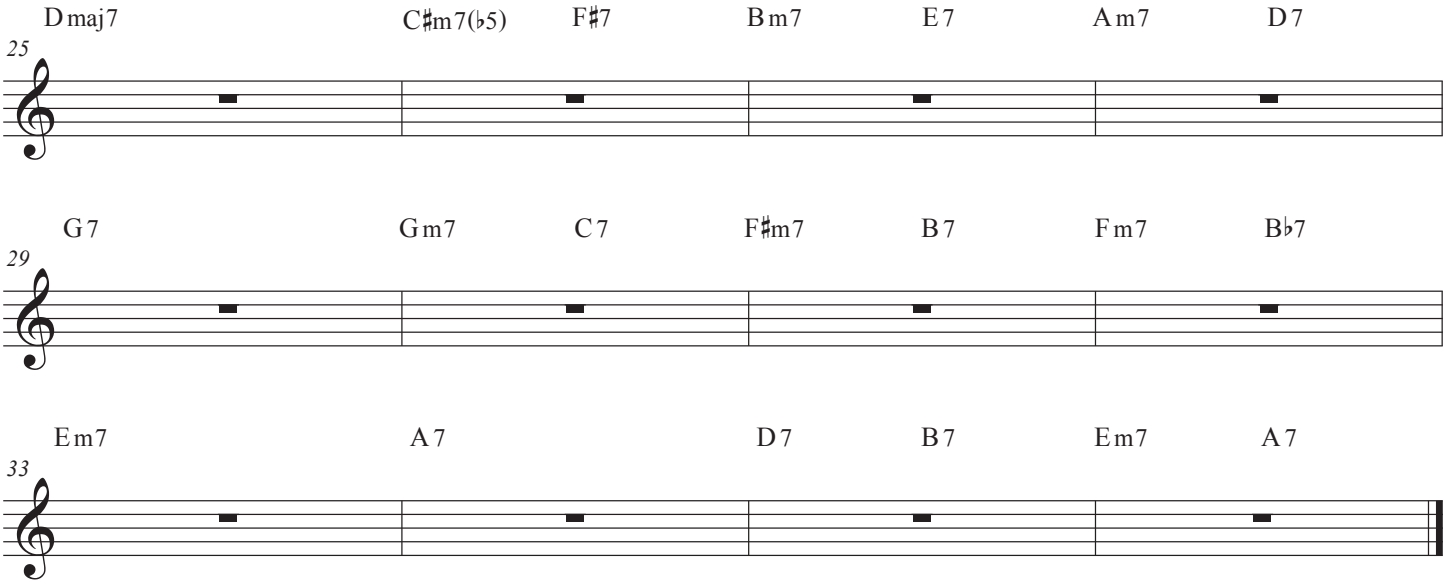



Over the years, jazz musicians have altered the structure a bit by adding chords to create more movement and voice leading possibilities.

Here is an example of a standard jazz blues:




*some people play iii or A minor instead of I here

In 1951, Charlie Parker wrote Blues for Alice which became known as “Bird Blues”. There are many more chords and it's much more complicated than the original blues. Notice the form still centers around the I and IV chords in measure 1 and 5. Also, the last 4 measures are identical to the typical jazz blues.

Here is an example of a Bird Blues: