

Rhythm Changes and the 32-bar song form

The 32-bar “Song Form” – 8-bars, repeated, followed by an 8-bar bridge, then an 8-bar repetition very similar to the first 8-bars (so-called AABA form) – has been a popular jazz structure on which to improvise since the beginning of the 20th Century. Adapted from popular songs of the early-to-mid 20th Century, the AABA 32-bar form is common in jazz and Broadway musicals alike. To understand the construction and variations of 32-bar forms requires looking deeper at the harmonic progressions based on the tune “I Got Rhythm” written by George and Ira Gershwin and published in 1930. Referred to by jazz musicians as ‘rhythm changes’ this progression is foundational in understanding and applying jazz theory to longer musical forms.

In each module, there are opportunities to look at how harmonic changes are constructed, particulars of how melodies function in concert with harmonic function, and practical applications related to improvisation and composition.

CLASSROOM/GROUP ACTIVITIES

1. Completed a Roman Numeral analysis of the two different sets of Rhythm Changes.
2. Compare the two sets of harmonic progressions:
 - a. What is same/similar/different about these harmonic progressions?
 - b. What kinds of harmonic embellishments are present? Can you identify them by sight and/or sound?
3. Transpose both of these harmonic progressions into another key.

Here is a common set of rhythm changes in the key of Bb:

♩ = 112

A B \flat ⁶ G⁻⁷ C⁻⁷ F⁷ B \flat ⁶ G⁷ C⁻⁷ F⁷

B \flat ⁶ B \flat ⁷ E \flat ⁶ E \flat ⁻⁶ D⁻⁷ G⁻⁷ C⁻⁷ F⁷ D⁻⁷ G⁻⁷ B \flat ⁶

1. 2.

B D⁷ G⁷ C⁷ F⁷

A B \flat ⁶ G⁻⁷ C⁻⁷ F⁷ B \flat ⁶ G⁷ C⁻⁷ F⁷

B \flat ⁶ B \flat ⁷ E \flat ⁶ E \flat ⁻⁶ D⁻⁷ G⁻⁷ B \flat ⁶

PLAY-A-LONG #1

RC #1 – Medium Swing, 4 Choruses

A: Piano, Bass, & Drums

B: Piano & Bass

C: Bass & Drums

D: Piano & Drums

A version more common in jazz playing might look like this:

Variation 1

$B\flat^{\Delta}$ B° C^{-7} $C^{\#\circ}$ D^{-7} G^7 C^{-7} F^7
 F^{-7} $B\flat^7$ $E\flat^{\Delta}$ E° D^{-7} G^7 C^{-7} F^7 | $B\flat^{\Delta}$ F^7 $B\flat^{\Delta}$
 A^{-7} D^7 D^{-7} G^7 G^{-7} C^7 C^{-7} F^7
 $B\flat^{\Delta}$ B° C^{-7} $C^{\#\circ}$ D^{-7} G^7 C^{-7} F^7
 F^{-7} $B\flat^7$ $E\flat^{\Delta}$ E° D^{-7} G^7 C^{-7} F^7

PLAY-A-LONG #2

RC #2 – Medium Swing, 4 Choruses

- A: Piano, Bass, & Drums
- B: Piano & Bass
- C: Bass & Drums
- D: Piano & Drums

It can be helpful to isolate the two different sections of Rhythm Changes, the 'A' section and the 'B' section. Let's look more closely at some of the most common variations.

When performing the harmonic progression, there are a few common approaches both improvisers and chordal accompaniment instruments conceive of:

A Section Variation 1

Chord progression for A Section Variation 1:

Staff 1: B \flat Δ G7(b9) C-7 F7 D-7 G7(b9) C-7 F7

Staff 2: B \flat 7 Eb7 Ab7 | 1. D-7 G7(b9) C-7 F7 | 2. C-7 F7 B \flat Δ

A Section Variation 2

Chord progression for A Section Variation 2:

Staff 1: B \flat Δ G7(b9) C-7 F7 D-7 G7(b9) C-7 F7

Staff 2: B \flat 7 B \flat 7/D Eb7 E \circ | 1. B \flat Δ /F G7(b9) C-7 F7 | 2. B \flat Δ /F F7 B \flat Δ

A Section - simplified

Chord progression for A Section - simplified:

Staff 1: B \flat Δ

Staff 2: B \flat blues B \flat Δ

The 'B' section, commonly referred to as 'the Bridge', often is harmonically embellished in a few different ways.

Most famously is the so-called "Eternal Triangle" Bridge – in reference to the famous recording on the album "Sunny Side Up" and written by saxophonist Sonny Stitt.

Eternal Triangle Bridge

The diagram shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff contains four measures with chords: B-7, E7, Bb-7, and Eb7. The bottom staff contains eight measures with chords: A-7, D7, Ab-7, Db7, G-7, C7, F#-7, and B7. Each measure is represented by a treble clef staff with diagonal lines indicating the chord.

Two other common Bridge variations may look familiar to those who already using chord substitutions while improvising or composing:

Bridge Variation 1

The diagram shows a single staff of musical notation with eight measures. The chords are: D7, Db7, C7, B7, and then two measures of D7. Each measure is represented by a treble clef staff with diagonal lines indicating the chord.

Bridge Variation 2

The diagram shows a single staff of musical notation with eight measures. The chords are: Ab7, G7, F#7, F7, and then two measures of Ab7. Each measure is represented by a treble clef staff with diagonal lines indicating the chord.

Here is a *very small* list of popular melodies (and perhaps a few of these have slightly different harmonic progressions) that might be useful to learn:

"Anthropology" (Charlie Parker/Dizzy Gillespie) "Cotton Tail" (Duke Ellington)

"The Eternal Triangle" (Sonny Stitt) "Fungi Mama" (Blue Mitchell)

"Lester Leaps In" (Lester Young) "Moose the Mooche" (Charlie Parker)

"Oleo" (Sonny Rollins) "Rhythm-A-Ning" (Thelonious Monk)

"Straighten Up and Fly Right" (Nat King Cole) "Tiptoe" (Thad Jones)

What other versions this 32-bar form might you find in a Real Book or other places? There are seemingly infinite ways to alter this popular harmonic progression. Here are two interesting charts showing variations:

Rhythm Section "A" Variants

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Bb G-	C- F7	Bb G-	C- F7	Bb Bb7	Eb Ab7	Bb G-	C- F7
2	Bb G-	C- F7	D- Db°	C- F7	Bb Bb7/D	Eb CØ	C- F7	Bb F7
3	Bb G7	C7 F7	Bb G7	C7 F7	Bb Bb7	Eb Ab7	D- G7	C- F7
4	Bb B°	C- C#°	D- G7	C- F7	F- Bb7	Eb E°	D- G7	C- F7
5	Bb G7	C- C#°	D- G7	C- F7	F- Bb7	Eb Eb-	D- G7	C- F7
6	Bb B°	C- C#°	D7 G7	C7 F7	F- Bb7	Eb Ab7	D7 G7	C7 F7
7 ¹	Bb7 Ab7	Gb7 F7	Bb7 Ab7	Gb7 F7	F- Bb7	Eb Ab7+4	D- G7	C- F7
8 ²	F#7 B7	E7 A7	D7 G7	C7 F7	Bb7	Eb Ab7	D7 G7	C7 F7
9 ³	F#- B7	E- A7	D- G7	C- F7	F- Bb7	Eb- Ab7	D- G7	C- F7
10 ⁴	Bb* Db7	Gb A7	DΔ F7	Bb	F- Bb7	Eb E°	D- G7	C- F7
11	Bb G7	C- F7	D- G7	C- F7	F- Bb7	Eb Ab7	DØ G7	CØ F7
12	Bb B°	C- C#°	D- G7	Eb- Ab7	A- D7	Ab- Db7	G- C7	F#- B7
13	Bb B°	C- C#°	D- G7	E- A7	D7	Db7	C7	B7
14	Bb G7	C- F7	D- G7	Eb- Ab7	A-/D	Ab-/Db	G-/C	F#-/B
15	Bb B°	C- C#-	D- G7	Eb- Ab7	D- G7	Db- Gb7	C- F7	F#- B7
16	Bb B°	C- C#-	D- G7	Eb- Ab7	E- A7	D- G7	C- F7	F#- B7
17	DΔ F7	Bb Db7	Gb A7	DΔ F7	Bb Bb7	Eb Ab7	D- G7	C- F7
18	DΔ F7	Bb Db7	Gb A7	DΔ F7	Bb Db7	Gb A7	DΔ F7	Bb
19	BbΔ Db7	GbΔ A7	DΔ F7	BbΔ DΔ7	Gb A7	DΔ F7	BbΔ Db7	GbΔ F7+9
20	Bb B°	C- C#°	DØ G7+9	CØ F7+9	F- Bb7	Eb- Ab7	DØ G7+9	C- F7
21	Bb7	Bb7	Bb7	Bb7	Bb7	Eb Ab7	Bb7	C- F7
22 ⁵	Bb7 B7	Bb7 B7	Bb7 B7	Bb7 B7	Bb7	Eb7	D- G7	C- F7
23	A- D7	Ab- Db7	G- C7	F#- B7	F- Bb7	Eb- Ab7	D- G7	C- F7
24	F-/Bb	F-/Bb	F-/Bb	F-/Bb	F-/Bb	Bb-/Eb	F-/Bb	F-/Bb
25	F-/Bb	F-/Bb	F-/Bb	F-/Bb	F-/Bb	Bb-/Eb	F-/Bb	F-/Bb
26	F-/Bb	F-/Bb	F-/Bb	F-/Bb	F-/Bb	Bb-/Eb	C-/F	C-/F
27	F-/Bb	F-/Bb	F-/Bb	F-/Bb	F-/Bb	Bb-/Eb	Eb-/Ab	Eb-/Ab
28	F-/Bb	F-/Bb	F-/Bb	F-/Bb	F-/Bb	Bb-/Eb	B-/E	C-/E
29	Bb7 Eb7	Ab7 Db7	GbΔ A7	DΔ F7	Bb7	Eb Ab7	D- G7	E- A7
30	Bb G7+9	C- A7+9	D- G7+9	C- F7	B- E7	Eb Ab7	D- G7	C- F7
31	Bb G7	C- F7	D- G7	C- F7	B- E7	A- D7	G- C7	F#- B7

Rhythm "Bridge" – "B" Sections Variants

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	D7	D7	G7	G7	C7	C7	F7	F7
2	A-	D7	G7	G7	C7	C7	F7	F7
3	A-	D7	D-	G7	G-	C7	C-	F7
4	A-	D7	Ab-	Db7	G-	C7	F#-	B7
5	B-	E7	Bb-	Eb7	A- D7	Ab- Db7	G- C7	F#- B7
6	B7	B7	C7	C7	Db7	D7	Eb7 E7	F7
7	F#-	B7	G-	C7	Ab- Db7	A- D7	Ab- Db7	F#- B7
8	G-	C7	Ab-	Db7	A- D7	Bb- Eb7	B- E7	C- F7
9	E-	A7	F-	Bb7	F#- B7	Ab- Db7	Bb- Eb7	C- F7
10	Ab7	Ab7	B7	B7	D7	D7	F7	F7
11	Eb-	Ab7	F#-	B7	A-	D7	C-	F7
12	F#-	B7	E-	A7	D-	G7	C-	F7
13	Bb-	Eb7	Ab-	Db7	F#- B7	E- A7	D- G7	C- F7
14	A-/D	A-/D	Ab-/Db	Ab-/Db	G-/C	G-/C	F#-/B	F#-/B
15	A-/D	A-/D	Bb-/Eb	Bb-/Eb	B-/E	B-/E	C-/F	C-/F
16	C#-	F#7	D-	G7	Eb- Ab7	E- A7	F- Bb7	F#- B7
17	C-	F7	Bb-	Eb7	Ab-	Db7	F#-	B7
18	D7	D7	Db7	Db7	C7	C7	B7	B7
19	Ab7	Ab7	G7	G7	Gb7	Gb7	F7	F7
20	Eb-	Ab7	D-	G7	Db-	Gb7	C-	F7
21	A- D7	Eb- Ab7	D- G7	Ab- Db7	G- C7	Db- Gb7	C- F7	F#- B7
22	D7	Eb- Ab7	G7	Ab- Db7	C7	C#- F#7	F7	F#- B7
23	F-	Bb7	EbΔ	EbΔ	G-	C7	C-	F7
24	Bb7	F- Bb7	EbΔ	EbΔ	C7	G- G7	F7	C- F7
25	D7	D7+9	G7	G7+9	C7	C7+9	F7	F7+9
26	A-	D7+9	D-	G7+9	G-	C7+9	C-	F7+9

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

- Apply your new understanding of a common Rhythm Changes 32-bar AABA harmonic progression
 - Choose and learn a melody
 - Outline triads and 7th chords using the supplied play-a-longs or other sources
 - Improvise on Rhythm Changes using methods shared in this course
- Compose an original Rhythm Changes melody in AABA form.
 - What harmonic progression did you choose and why?
 - What about the melody is interesting and/or applies information you learned in this course?
- Write out a two-to-three-chorus solo on a chosen Rhythm Changes progression.
 - Record yourself playing the solo
 - Provide what ideas and concepts you applied to these choruses.
- Transcribe an improvised Rhythm Changes solo from the MTC 130 Spotify Playlist.
 - Choose someone who plays your instrument. Or not.