

Blues bass lines

Playing the bass line means to produce a very important part of the music. To play along with a blues song means instantly compose a melodic line that follows the harmonic form and the general level of complexity of the music.

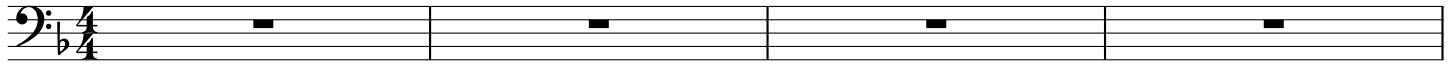
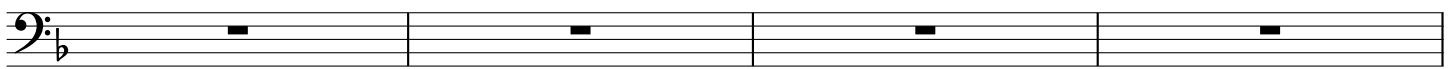
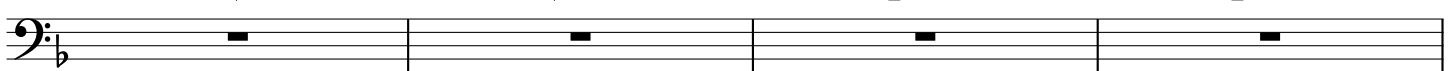
The most important skill for a bass player is to understand this level and to give a creative contribution to the song, staying in the level, or skipping to other levels carefully and organically.

To be creative and spontaneous, it's important to develop each complexity level, and explore all the possibilities that each one of those allows.

We'll start from a "phrase approach", developing a basic pattern adding gradually new melodic and harmonic elements. To face each level it is needed to have already assimilated the elements previously experienced.

The starting harmonic form we are referring to, is the common "LONG FIVE" sequence, that means that the dominant chord coming at bar 9 is played for two bars.

Harmonic form #1: "Long five"

	I	I	I	I
				
5	IV	IV	I	I
				
9	V	V	I	I
				

This pattern is mostly used in blues and rock&roll recordings from the 40's on.

BASIC "BOOGIE" PATTERN IN F

13



F7	F7	F7	F7
			

---> Audio 1

5 B \flat 7 B \flat 7 F7

9 C7 C7 F7

To be developed in a more melodical way, the root can be switched to the higher octave.

13 ROOT OCTAVE SWITCH
---> Audio 2

15 F7
---> Audio 3

19 B \flat 7 F7

23 C7 F7

27 F7

31 B \flat 7 F7

35 C7 F7

A very common variation that can be used is to reach the higher octave of the root in the second bar of the pattern.

"TO THE OCTAVE" VARIATION

---> Audio 4 39

Moreover we add a IV change on the 10th bar. The resulting sequence is named "Five four".

Harmonic form #2: "Five four"

41 I I I I

45 IV IV I I

49 V IV I I

53 F7

---> Audio 5

57 Bb7 F7

61 C7 (V) Bb7 (IV) F7

65 F7

69 Bb7 F7

73 C7 Bb7 F7

SCALE AND CROMATIC APPROACHING NOTES

The issue of how to approach a root, concerns the last note of the previous bar.
A note of the scale can be used or a chromatic one.

77 --->Audio 6

81

85

Harmonic form #3: "Final dominant"

89 I I I I

93 IV IV I I

97 V IV I V

101 F7

--->Audio 7

105 B \flat 7 F7

109 C7 B \flat 7 F7 C7

113

117

121

Another harmonic addition: a IV change in the second bar. In the "blues language", this feature is well known as "Fast four" or "Quick change".

Harmonic form #4: "Fast four" or "Quick change"

125 I IV I I

129 IV IV I I

133 V IV I V

137 F7 Bb7 (IV) F7

--->Audio 8

OCTAVE SWITCHING IN SCALE AND CHROMATIC LINKS

We face now a further complexity level concerning the melodic aspect of the line. Nothing new about the harmony, but we apply a different way to link the changes. Starting from a linear scale and/or chromatic approach, we break the line skipping to the lower or to the higher octave.

Example.

This linear scale and chromatic link:



can be broken in 4 points.

Breaking the link

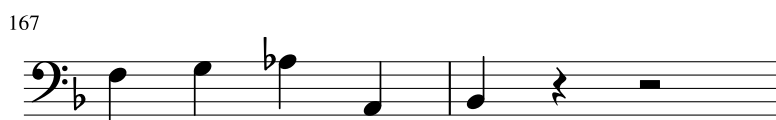
- in the 1st point:



- in the 2nd point:



- in the 3rd point:



- in the 4th point:



183



187



191



HISTORICAL EXAMPLE #1: Johnny B. Gayden on "I ain't drunk" (Albert Collins) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qPR3JKu1PEc>

In this very famous recording, you can find all the elements that we faced until now. The first 4 bars are filled by a riff, the line starts from the 5th bar (IV). The bass plays a shuffle rhythm.

Blues in A



6



10

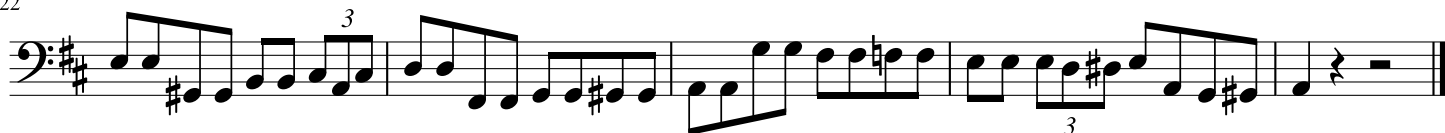


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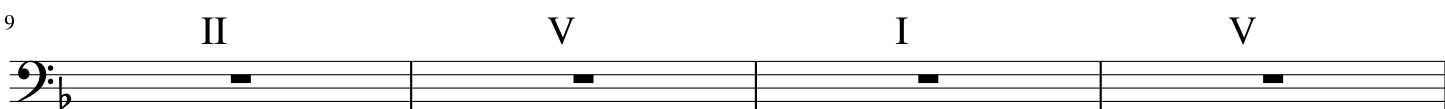
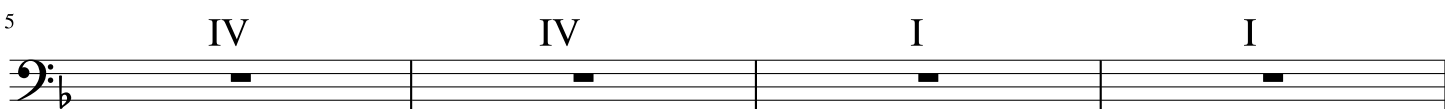
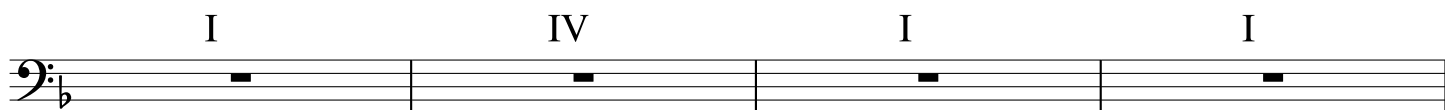
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The II and the V can take place in the 9th and 10th bars, alternatively to the V and the IV. The resulting sequence is well known in the blues language as "Two five".

Harmonic form #5: "Two five"



PLAY A NOTE OF THE CHORD ON THE FIRST BEAT

It can be avoided to play the root on the first beat. In this case make sure that the following notes let the harmony sound clear. Instead of the root, you can play another note of the triad, either the 3rd or the 5th.

25
--->Audio11

29

33

APPROACHING CHORD NOTES CHROMATICALLY.

The chord-notes at the beginning of the bar can be approached exactly like it was done with the roots of the chords.

37
--->Audio12

41

45

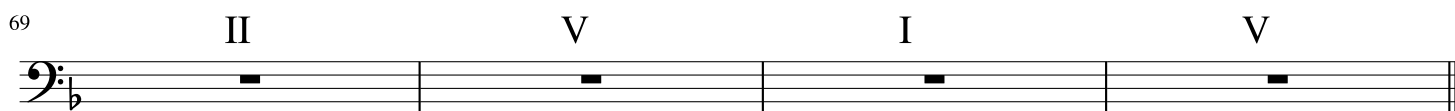
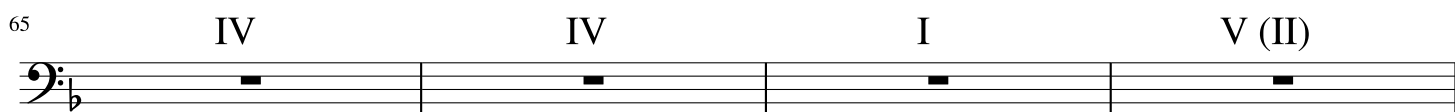
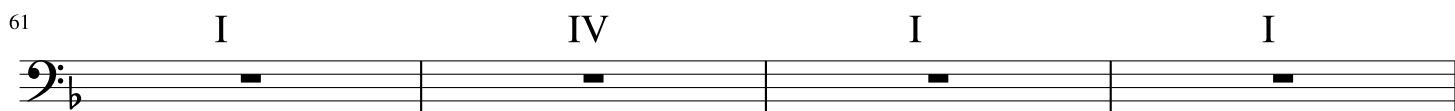


Each chord of the sequence can be introduced by it's dominant chord.

This process is named "dominantization". Here we start dominantising the II.

Harmonic form #6:

"Five of the second"



DELAYED AND DOUBLE-WAY CHROMATIC APPROACH

Approaching a note chromatically, an extra note can be played between the chromatic note and the goal-note, due to delay the approach. It's usually a chord-note.

Ex.

Normal chromatic approach:



Delayed approach:



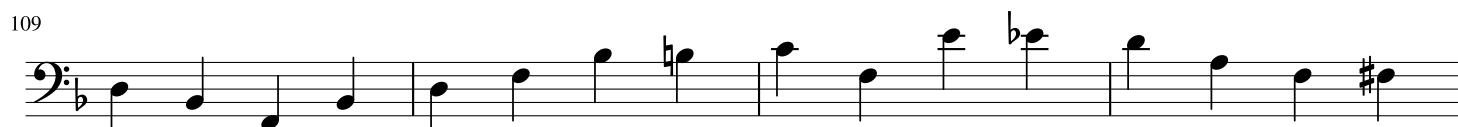
A particular kind of delayed approach is the double-way chromatic approach, that consists in approaching the note from above to below and from below to above.

Ex. The goal-note is Bb.

Approaching firstly from above and then from below:



Approaching firstly from below and then from above:



MULTIPLE STEPS CHROMATIC APPROACH

The chromatic approach can be accomplished in two or three steps, and even delayed.

117



121



125



129



133



137



141



145



149



Enjoy now this wonderful bass line by Larry Taylor. You will find several elements that you already experienced.

HISTORICAL EXAMPLE #2: Larry Taylor on "Good time boogie"

(J. Mayall "Jazz blues fusion" 1972)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWfx1hSeM-c&list=PL53B951221650C2F4>

Bb Blues



5



9



13



17



21



25



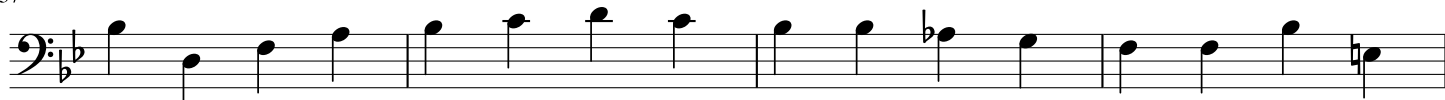
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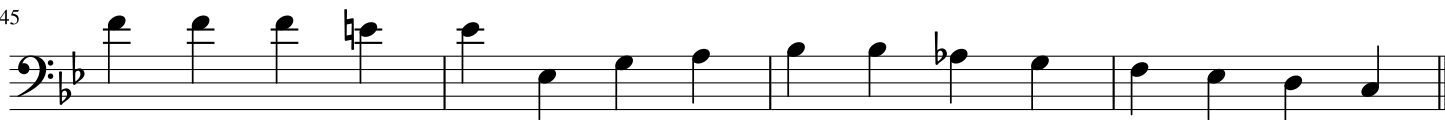
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41



45



49



53



57



ADDITIONAL II-Vs

The dominantization of a chord can be improved by a II chord right before the V. In the following new harmonic form, you'll find out that a few more chords are dominantized in this way.

I	IV	1st option 2dn option	I II(IV)	II(IV) V(IV) V(IV)
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5

IV	II V	I	II(II) V(II)
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9

II	V	I [VI]	II V
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13

F7	B \flat 7	F7	Cm7 F7
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17

B \flat 7	Gm7 C7	F7	Am5 \flat 7 D7
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21

Gm7	C7	F7	Gm7 \flat C7
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25

§ 17	Cm7	F7	
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29

Gm7 C7	Am5 \flat 7 D7		
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33

F	Dm7	Gm7 C7	
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37



41



45



Starting from the boogie basic line we achieved the complexity of a jazz bass line. In the matter playing in a blues environment is not easier than play in a jazz environment, but it corresponds to a different state of mind. Playing jazz you can enjoy more variants, that means that you got more possibilities to menage, although building a boogie line is the challenge to use a lot of possibilities related to the basic pattern, being creative and keeping the original taste at the same time.

Enjoy this wonderful Doug Watkins' bass line.

HISTORICAL EXAMPLE #3: Doug Watkins on "Base on balls" (Hank Mobley Quintet)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCpWV_WM0b8

Bb Blues



5



9



13



17



21



25



29



33

