HOW TO START TO PLAY OVER CHORD CHANGES



Lesson One: Arpeggios and 3rd's & 7th's

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Learn the rules first, then, later on, you can break them. . . if you so choose.

Vertical thinking is when you improvise using larger distances between notes versus scale style where the notes are closer together. Horizontal thinking is more on a melodic, or melody-like, approach. I personally love to play horizontally and that vertical playing adds a nice change of pace. . . here and there. I feel the problem with vertical playing is that player over use it and they become indistinguishable from other players. We will get to horizontal playing in a future lesson. This lesson is to help you have control over the arpeggios of the changes so you can choose how much to implement them. You should have as many tools in your tool box (or ideas to pull from) as possible so you can just pull from them and be able to express yourself in your own style. Learn from the greats, and from the greats they learned from, then pick what you like from them and create your own style.

> **Chords:** Most chords are based on a triad (3 or more notes separated by either a minor 3rd (4 half steps) or a Major 3rd (5 half steps) in acceding order. Combining those notes together to make certain harmonic sounds that sound great when put into a sequence, or an order.

When you are first starting out, pick a piece with just a few chord changes. With this lesson, you'll start with a basic blues like John Coltrane's: ***Bessie's Blues,*** which only has 3 chords (the chord changes are on page 8). For Bb Saxes, that would be F7, Bb7, and C7. For Eb Saxes, that would be C7, F7, and G7.

You may be wondering why there is a 7 next to the chord letter. The 7 indicates the quality of the chord. In this first lesson, you're introduced to the Dominant 7th chord. Dominant chords and scales are almost identical to the Major chords or scales. The only difference is that the 7th note of the scale, or 4th note of a root position chord , is ½ step lower. For example, in C Major the 7th note in the scale is B, in a C7 scale, the 7th note is a Bb.

The first thing is to play the scale, and then the chord arpeggio. An **arpeggio** is playing the chord tones (notes) one at a time. This would be the Root, 3rd, 5th, and 7th (that is the 1st note, 3rd note, 5th note, and the 7th note of the scale), highlighted in yellow below.

SOPRANO & TENOR SAXOPHONE (Bb Horn)

Chord	Root (1st)	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	Root
F7	**F**	G	**A**	Bb	**C**	D	**Eb**	F
Bb7	**Bb**	C	**D**	Eb	**F**	G	**Ab**	Bb
C7	**C**	D	**E**	F	**G**	A	**Bb**	C

ALTO & BARITONE SAXOPHONE (Eb Horn)

Chord	Root (1st)	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	Root
C7	**C**	D	**E**	F	**G**	A	**Bb**	C
F7	**F**	G	**A**	Bb	**C**	D	**Eb**	F
G7	**G**	A	**B**	C	**D**	E	**F**	G

Step 1: Arpeggios

Just go through the arpeggios on each chord of ***Bessie's Blues,*** from beginning to end, until you are comfortable and not hesitating going from one chord arpeggio to the next.

Step 2: Arpeggios with Metronome
Once you can get through the whole tune, 5 time playing the arpeggios of each chord without hesitating, get your **metronome** and set it to 60 bpm. Have it clicking on all quarter notes and play the Root (1st note), 3rd, 5th, 7th, and the Root (up an octave) as quarter notes until you are not hesitating.

You should have the arpeggios close to, if not entirely, memorized by now. This makes this process easier as you now have the arpeggios internalized. Which means you have the chord changes memorized, awesome!!!

Step 3: 3rd and 7th notes of the chord.
Remember that Dominant 7th Chords have the same major 3rd note, **but** a lowered 7th note, also called the flat 7th, compared to its parallel Major scale:

SOPRANO & TENOR SAXOPHONE (Bb Horn)

Chord	Root	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	(FLAT) 7th	Root
F7	F	G	A	Bb	C	D	**Eb**	F
Bb7	Bb	C	D	Eb	F	G	**Ab**	Bb
C7	C	D	E	F	G	A	**Bb**	C

ALTO & BARITONE SAXOPHONE (Eb Horn)

Chord	Root	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	(FLAT) 7th	Root
C7	C	D	E	F	G	A	Bb	C
F7	F	G	A	Bb	C	D	**Eb**	F
G7	G	A	B	C	D	E	**F**	G

Bb Horns
F7 has A natural and Eb for the 3rd and 7th
Bb7 has D natural and Ab for the 3rd and 7th
C7 has E natural and Bb for the 3rd and 7th

Eb Horns
C7 has E natural and Bb for the 3rd and 7th
F7 has A natural and Eb for the 3rd and 7th
G7 has B natural and F natural for the 3rd and 7th

This leads us to just playing the 3rd and 7th of each chord. As before, start with no metronome and play the 3rd and the 7th for 2 beats each in each measure. Then add metronome at 60 BPM, play the 3rd and the 7th for 2 beats each in each measure.

Play the 3rd and 7th of each chord.

SOPRANO & TENOR SAXOPHONE (Bb Horn)

Chord	Root	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	Root
F7	**F**	G	**A**	Bb	**C**	D	**Eb**	F
Bb7	**Bb**	C	**D**	Eb	**F**	G	**Ab**	Bb
C7	**C**	D	**E**	F	**G**	A	**Bb**	C

- **ALTO & BARITONE SAXOPHONE (Eb Horn)**

Chord	Root	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	Root
C7	**C**	D	**E**	F	**G**	A	**Bb**	C
F7	**F**	G	**A**	Bb	**C**	D	**Eb**	F
G7	**G**	A	**B**	C	**D**	E	**F**	G

Why learn the arpeggio and the 3rd 's and 7th 's? They help outline the chord quality. If the 3rd is lowered by a half step, then you have a minor sounding tonality and if you have the 7th not lowered by a half step, then you have a major 7th tonality, and we don't want that....yet.

Step 4: 3rd and 7th notes as swung 8th notes.

Next is to do all of this again, the arpeggios and the 3rd and 7th of each chord change, but as swung 8th notes, don't forget to keep thinking in your head, Doo Va Doo Va. (See my YouTube video on How to Swing 8th Notes, if you need a refresher on how to swing 8th notes)

Step 5: Applying Your New Knowledge

Now it is time to take all of this knowledge and apply it over a play-along of the chord changes so you can hear the notes against the chords. You can use iReal Pro ($), or find a YouTube video of the play-along. If you use the YouTube videos, you can click on the settings icon ⚙ and then click on speed, that is where you can slow down the playback if it's too fast for you. iReal Pro has the most options on tempo adjustment and you can change the key and many other settings to fit your practice needs.

This may be a lot to take in, so remember to just take it ***one step at a time***. You need to have patience, patience, and patience. Turn off any distractions from your digital devices, while you are doing this. It will make your learning progress more focused.. This isn't going to happen in one practice session, your brain needs time to absorb the new knowledge you are presenting it. Your muscle memory in your fingers are going to need time as well.

Set goals for yourself for each practice session. Some of you will just do the arpeggio as quarter notes through the changes without the metronome, Great! Some of you will add the metronome, and others will get to the swung 8th notes. Great, as well! Whatever your goal is, don't set it too high that you will get frustrated. Change your goal, if you start feeling overwhelmed. Like life, this will be a roller-coaster with ups, downs, and plateaus. Mastery of this comes at different times to different people, the only person you are competing against is the musician you were yesterday.

On the next page (page 5) is a goal practice session outline for you to follow. Make sure you have ***Bessie's Blues*** chord changes (page 8) in front of you so you can see and follow the chord changes as you go through the practice session.



If you are better tomorrow then you are today, Congratulations!

Lesson Outline

Check | **Goals (Take it one step at a time)**

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- Play through the dominate 7th scale so you can hear the difference from the major scale. The highlighted note is the difference. If you play the 7th up a half step, then it's major.

SOPRANO & TENOR SAXOPHONE (Bb Horn)

Chord	Root	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	Root
F7	F	G	A	Bb	C	D	**Eb**	F
Bb7	Bb	C	D	Eb	F	G	**Ab**	Bb
C7	C	D	E	F	G	A	**Bb**	C

ALTO & BARITONE SAXOPHONE (Eb Horn)

Chord	Root	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	Root
C7	C	D	E	F	G	A	Bb	C
F7	F	G	A	Bb	C	D	**Eb**	F
G7	G	A	B	C	D	E	**F**	G

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- Play through the chord arpeggios (highlighted notes) as Quarter Notes on its corresponding measure – **No Metronome – 5 Times**

SOPRANO & TENOR SAXOPHONE (Bb Horn)

Chord	Root	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	Root
F7	**F**	G	**A**	Bb	**C**	D	**Eb**	F
Bb7	**Bb**	C	**D**	Eb	**F**	G	**Ab**	Bb
C7	**C**	D	**E**	F	**G**	A	**Bb**	C

ALTO & BARITONE SAXOPHONE (Eb Horn)

Chord	Root	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	Root
C7	**C**	D	**E**	F	**G**	A	**Bb**	C
F7	**F**	G	**A**	Bb	**C**	D	**Eb**	F
G7	**G**	A	**B**	C	**D**	E	**F**	G

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- Play through the chord arpeggios as Quarter Notes on its corresponding measure – **With Metronome**

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- Play through the chord arpeggios as **SWUNG 8th Notes** on its corresponding measure – **No Metronome**

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- Play through the chord arpeggios as **SWUNG 8th Notes** on its corresponding measure – **With Metronome**

_____

- Playing the 3rd and 7th of each chord. As before, start with **no metronome** and play the 3rd and the 7th for 2 beats each in each measure.

SOPRANO & TENOR SAXOPHONE (Bb Horn)

Chord	Root	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	Root
F7	**F**	G	**A**	Bb	**C**	D	**Eb**	F
Bb7	**Bb**	C	**D**	Eb	**F**	G	**Ab**	Bb
C7	**C**	D	**E**	F	**G**	A	**Bb**	C

ALTO & BARITONE SAXOPHONE (Eb Horn)

Chord	Root	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	Root
C7	**C**	D	**E**	F	**G**	A	**Bb**	C
F7	**F**	G	**A**	Bb	**C**	D	**Eb**	F
G7	**G**	A	**B**	C	**D**	E	**F**	G

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- Now **add the metronome** at 60 BPM, play the 3rd and the 7th for 2 beats each in each measure.

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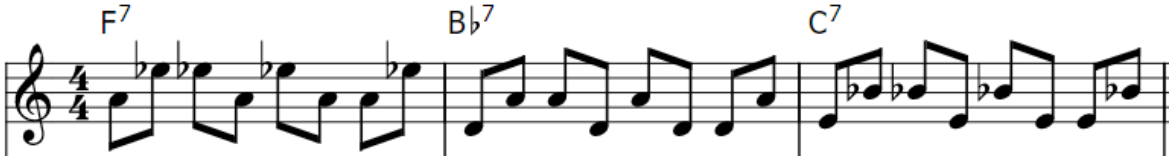
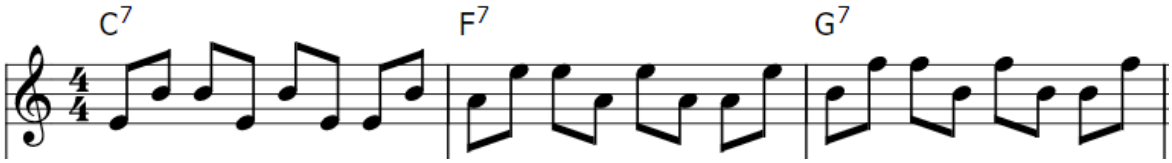
- Next play the 3rd and 7th as swung 8th notes, by doing 3, 7, 7, 3 for the 1st four 8th notes and 7, 3, 3, 7 for the next four 8th notes – **No metronome**. Just get use to the pattern. Play it over and over until you can control it (no errors) all the way through every chord change. Below is just the pattern for each chord, not the chord change sequence.

SOPRANO & TENOR SAXOPHONE (Bb Horns)



ALTO & BARITONE SAXOPHONE (Eb Horns)



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- Next play the 3rd and 7th as swung 8th notes, by doing 3, 7, 7, 3 for the 1st four 8th notes and 7, 3, 3, 7 for the next four 8th notes – **With metronome.**

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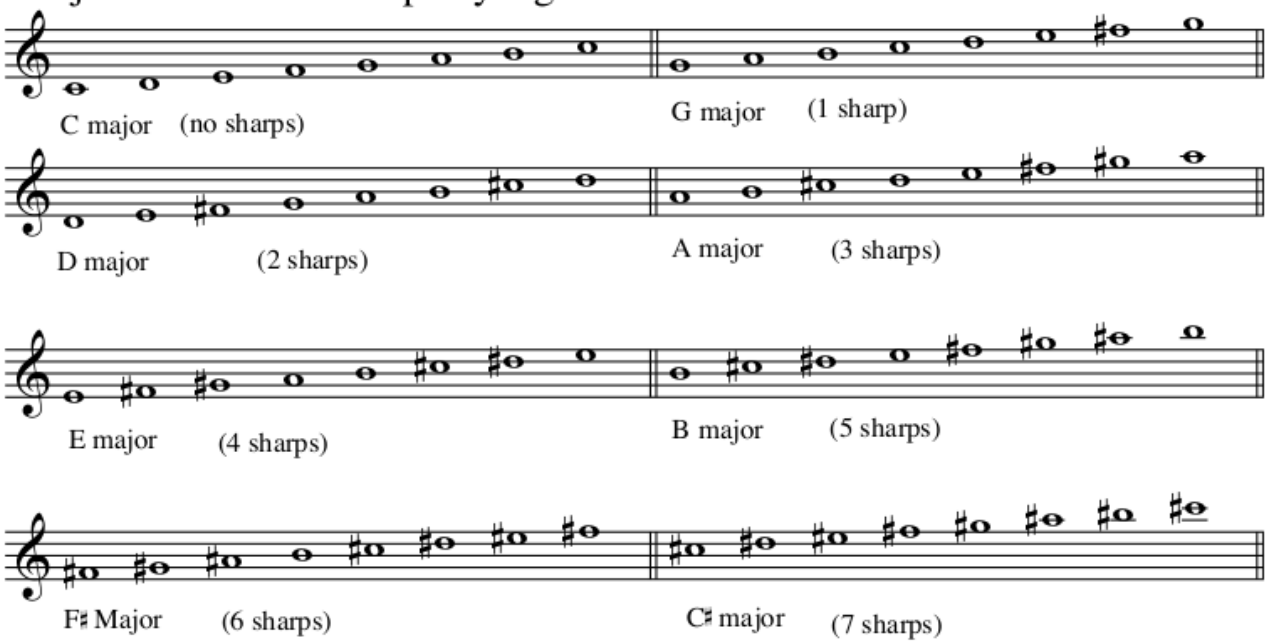
- Now it is time to take all of this knowledge and apply it over a play-along of the chord changes so you can hear the notes against the chords.
  - Start with just the arpeggio (Root, 3, 5, 7) as quarter notes.
  - Then the arpeggio as swung 8th notes
  - Next is the 3rd and 7th notes as quarter notes for 2 beats each
  - Then as the swung 8th notes with the same pattern as before.
  - Increase the tempo until failure, back off the tempo and push forward again.
  - **NOW HAVE SOME FUN!** Experiment, make horrible and great ***improvisational*** lines. Listen to others playing this tune. Listen for things you like and figure it out.

Practice these scales slowly. I suggest only moving on to the next scale once you can play the scale you are already on with no hesitations and memorized.

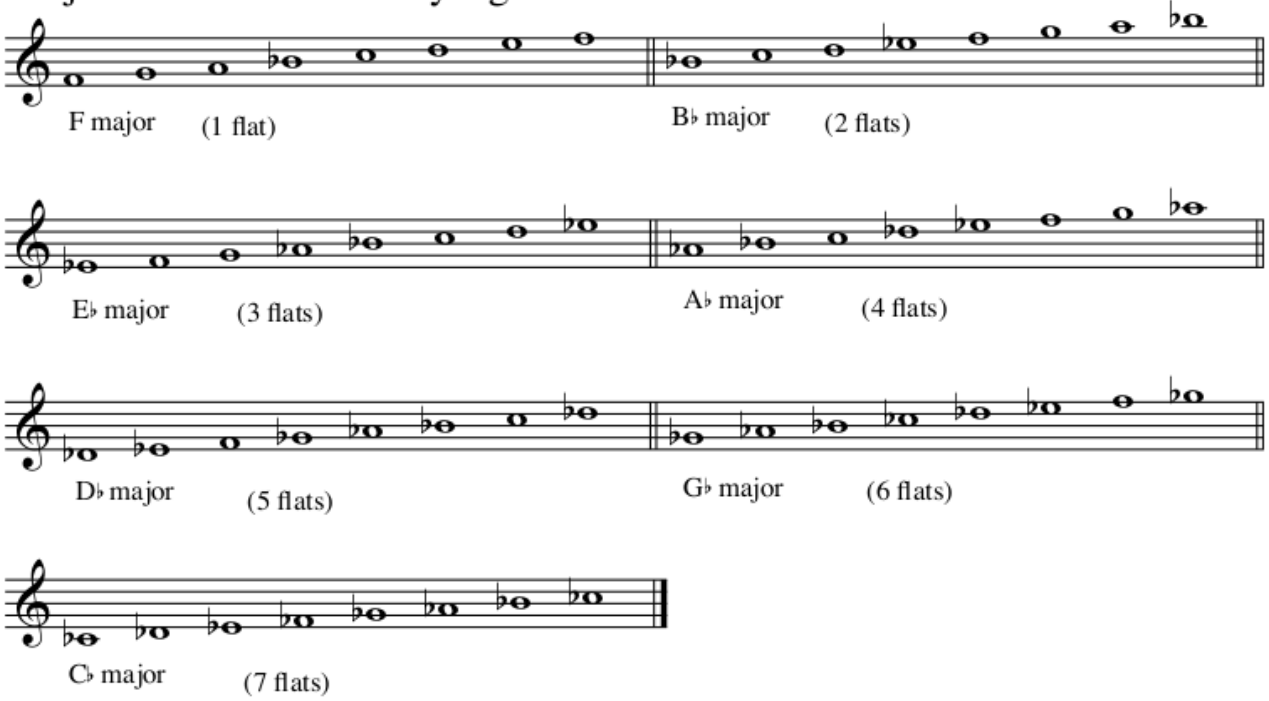
Major scales

Notice that each scale uses ONLY the accidentals used in the Key Signature with the same name (see the Key Signature page).

Major scales from sharp key signatures in the Treble clef.



Major scales from flat key signatures in the Treble clef:

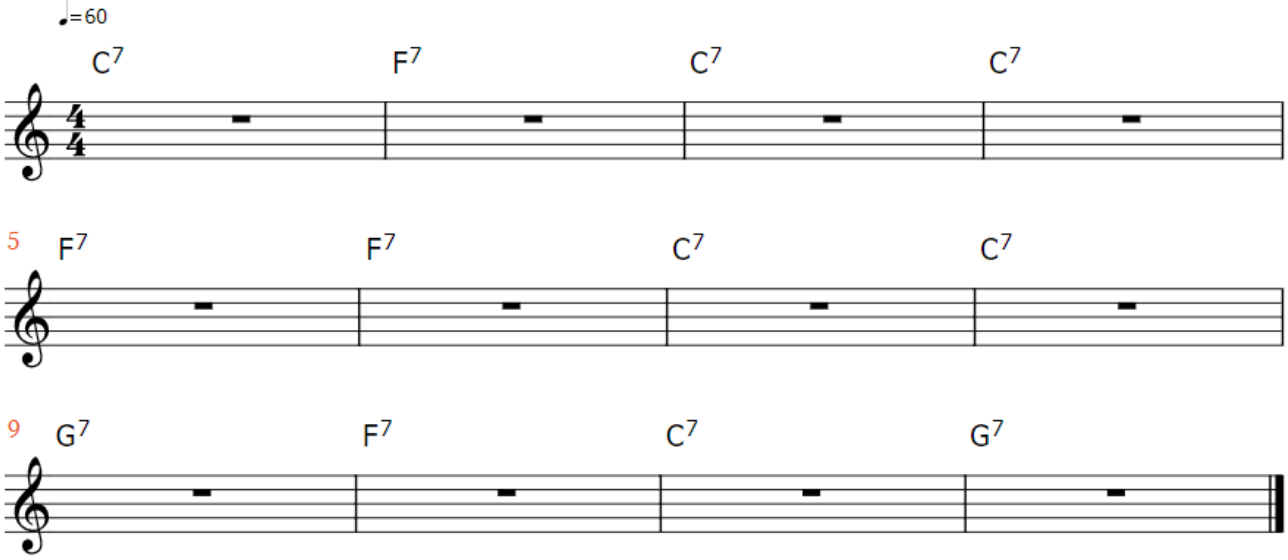


Bessie's Blues

CHORD CHANGES

Eb Sax

John Coltrane



Bessie's Blues

CHORD CHANGES

Bb Sax

John Coltrane

