

JAZZ BASS LINE CONSTRUCTION

Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz Online Jazz Handbook

WELCOME TO THE BASS CHAPTER OF THE THELONIOUS MONK
INSTITUTE OF JAZZ'S ONLINE JAZZ HANDBOOK!

The function of a bass player in the jazz combo is to work with the piano player and drummer to provide both a harmonic and rhythmic stability for the tune.

A jazz bassist must learn how to walk a line based on the chords of a tune.

We are going to start with three main types of scales/chords: Major, Dominant, and Minor.

UNDERSTANDING SCALE DEGREES

Lets look at the C Major scale.

We are going to number each note. We'll get the numbers 1-8.



When we change to C Dominant scale, we change the 7th to a b7.



Now, we are going to construct the scale for C minor 7th.

Minor scales have b3 and b7.



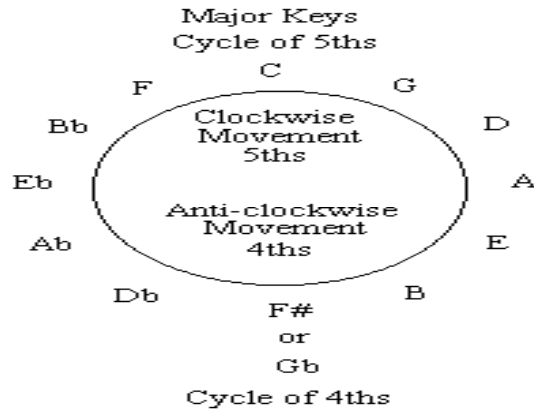
Next, we are going to look at chord tones. Chord tones are based on scale degrees. We are going to look at the chord tones 1, 3, 5 and 7.

Scale Type	Chord tones
Major	1 3 5 7
Dominant	1 3 5 b7
Minor	1 b3 5 b7

Remember: To make a note flat, lower it ½ step, or ONE FRET.

BASS LINES PART ONE

For all of these exercises, we are going to use the cycle of 4ths. The cycle of 5ths is just an organized way to travel through the keys so you hit every one. We are going to go move around the cycle counter clockwise.



SERIES 1: Major Chords

Step 1: First, just play roots around the cycle. Play four quarter notes on each chord.

C Major 7 F Major 7 Bb Major 7 Eb Major 7 Ab Major 7 Db Major 7

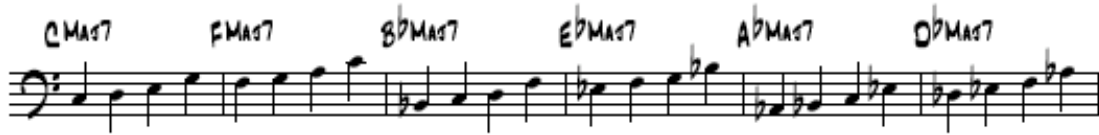
Step 2: Play ROOTS and 5ths around the cycle, two beats each

C Major 7 F Major 7 Bb Major 7 Eb Major 7 Ab Major 7 Db Major 7

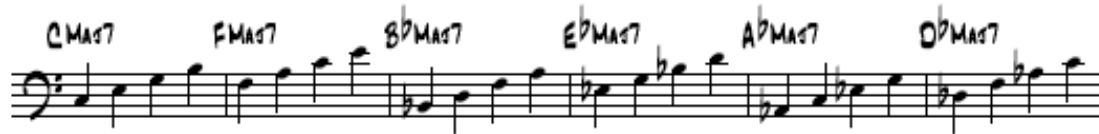
Step 3: Play the root pattern 1231 around the cycle

C Major 7 F Major 7 Bb Major 7 Eb Major 7 Ab Major 7 Db Major 7

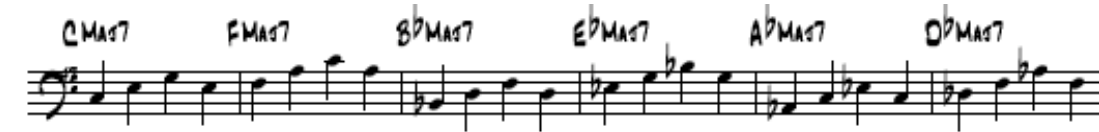
Step 4: Play the root pattern 1235 around the cycle



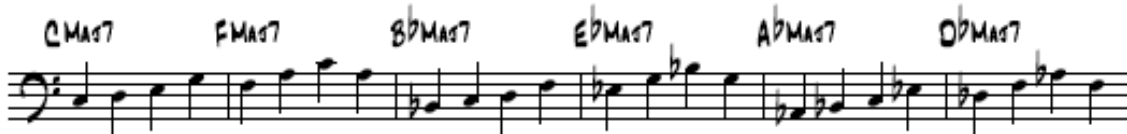
Step 5: Play the root pattern 1357 around the cycle



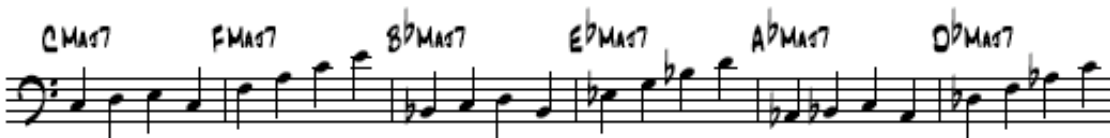
Step 6: Play the root pattern 1353 around the cycle



Now you are ready to combine these patterns. Switch between a few patterns at a time. Let's try alternating between 1235 and 1353 every chord:



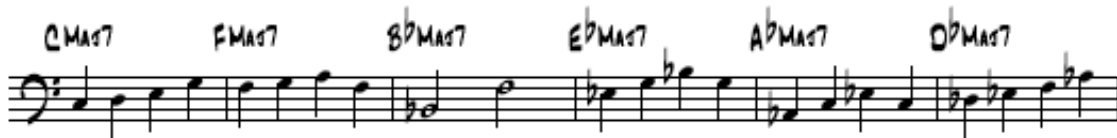
Now lets alternate between 1231 and 1357. That will look like this:



Mix and Match

We presented you with 5 patterns to use. It's your turn to improvise with these patterns. Play through the cycle over and over, trying different things each time. Whenever your mind goes blank, just go back to the root. You'll never lose!

Here's an example of mixing the 5 patterns.



Series 2: Dominant Chords

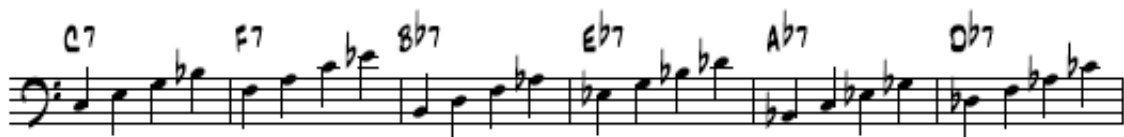
Remember, only *one* note changes when you go from the major scale to dominant scale—the 7th becomes the b7.

So, let's look at the major scale vs. the dominant scale.



We can use the SAME root patterns that we used for the C major scale. However, we must flat the 7th for root patterns that use the 7th scale degree.

Step 1: play the root pattern for 135b7 around the cycle.



Step 2: Improvise over the cycle of dominant 7th chords. Add in the other root patterns we learned with major chords.

Here is one of ENDLESS ways to do it:

The image shows a musical staff in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The staff contains six measures of music, each corresponding to a dominant 7th chord in the cycle: C7, F7, Bb7, Eb7, Ab7, and Db7. The notes are written as quarter notes, and the bass line moves in a stepwise fashion between the roots of the chords. The notes for each measure are: C7 (C, E, G, Bb), F7 (F, Ab, C, Eb), Bb7 (Bb, Db, F, Ab), Eb7 (Eb, Gb, Bb, Db), Ab7 (Ab, Cb, Eb, Gb), and Db7 (Db, Fb, Ab, Cb).

Series 3: Minor chords

Remember, to change a major seventh chord to a minor seventh chord, we are going to change two notes: the 3 will become a b3 and the 7 will become a b7.

Look at our three scales:

MAJOR



DOMINANT



MINOR



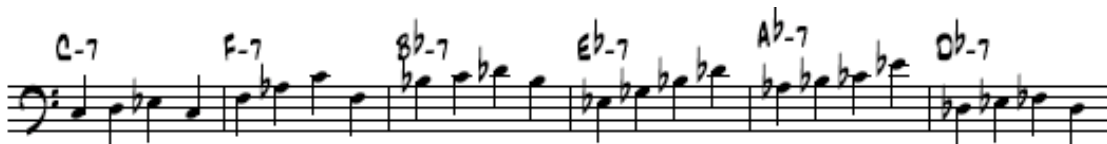
To make our root patterns work for minor chords, we need to change all of the patterns that involve a 3rd or 7th:

1353 will become 1 b3 5 b3

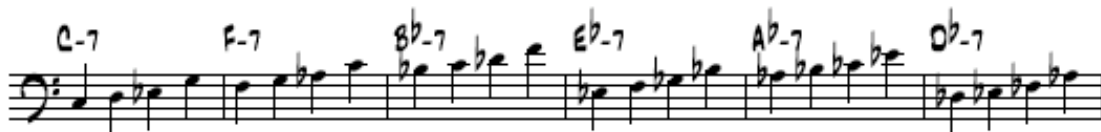
1235 will become 1 2 b3 5

1357 will become 1 b3 5 b7

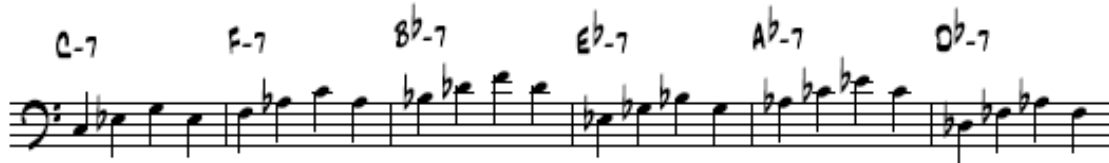
Step 1: Play the root pattern 12b31 around the cycle



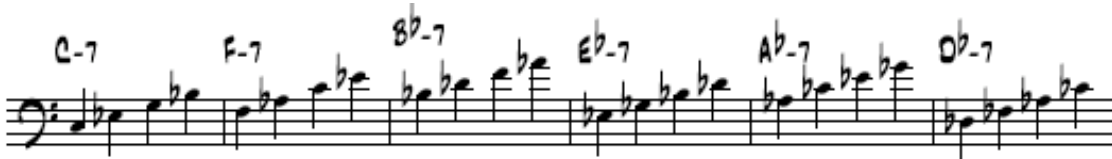
Step 2: Play the root pattern 12 b3 5 around the cycle



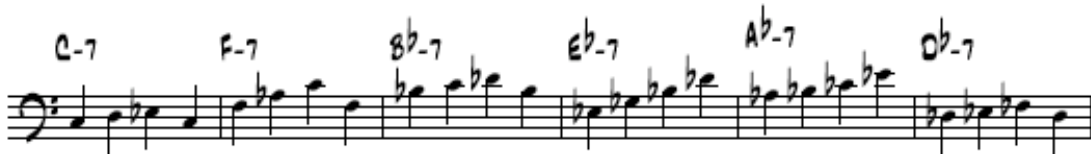
Step 3: Play the root pattern 1 b3 5 b3 around the cycle



Step 4: Play the root pattern 1b35b7 around the cycle



As before, its time to mix the minor root patterns together. Below is one example of randomly mixing the patterns around the cycle of minor chords.



Review

COMPARING THE ROOT PATTERNS

ROOT PATTERNS	Major 7th Chord	Dominant 7 th Chord	Minor 7 th Chord
15	15	15	15
1231	1235	1231	12b31
1235	1353	1235	12b35
1353	1353	1353	1b35b3
1357	1357	135b7	1b35b7

Walking a Blues

Now it's time to put our root patterns to use! We are going to first walk a blues. You'll notice that the blues below only has three different chords: B \flat 7, E \flat 7, and F7.

Your job is to mix up the root patterns over the blues. You can start by switching off every measure between root patterns. Here is an example of walking a line by switching between 1231 and 1353.

Three staves of bass notation for a blues exercise. Each staff has four measures. The first staff has B \flat 7 chords above each measure. The second staff has E \flat 7 chords above the first two measures and B \flat 7 chords above the last two. The third staff has F7 chords above the first measure, E \flat 7 above the second, B \flat 7 above the third, and B \flat 7 above the fourth.

You can do this same exercise with any of the patterns. Finally, create your own bass lines by mixing up the root patterns. Here is just one possibility.

Three staves of bass notation for a blues exercise, identical to the previous example. Each staff has four measures. The first staff has B \flat 7 chords above each measure. The second staff has E \flat 7 chords above the first two measures and B \flat 7 chords above the last two. The third staff has F7 chords above the first measure, E \flat 7 above the second, B \flat 7 above the third, and B \flat 7 above the fourth.

Part Two: Walking the ii V I

In combo, you'll learn that the ii V I is one of the most important chord progressions in jazz.

To walk bass lines on the ii V I, all we have to do is learn THREE different walking patterns.

Pattern One

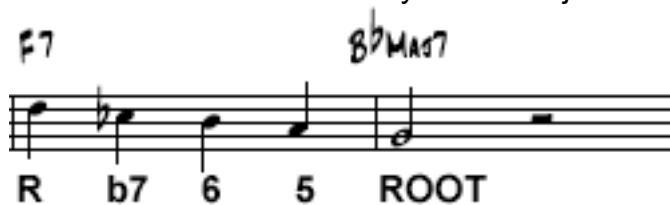
Let's look at this first pattern. The bass line descends the scale and lands on the root of the next chord: **Root, b7 6 5 Root (of next chord)**.

Here is an example with the chord progression C-7 F7:



A musical staff in bass clef showing a walking bass line for the chord progression C-7 F7. The notes are C, Bb, Bb, Ab, G, F. The notes C, Bb, Bb, and Ab are quarter notes, while G and F are half notes. The notes are labeled with their respective chord tones: R (C), b7 (Bb), 6 (Bb), 5 (Ab), and ROOT (F). The chord C-7 is written above the first four notes, and F7 is written above the last two notes.

Let's look at it in another key: F7 BbMaj7.



A musical staff in bass clef showing a walking bass line for the chord progression F7 BbMaj7. The notes are F, Eb, Eb, D, C, Bb. The notes F, Eb, Eb, and D are quarter notes, while C and Bb are half notes. The notes are labeled with their respective chord tones: R (F), b7 (Eb), 6 (Eb), 5 (D), and ROOT (Bb). The chord F7 is written above the first four notes, and BbMaj7 is written above the last two notes.

Pattern Two

Our next pattern will start with our root pattern 135, and then descend chromatically down to the root of the next chord. Remember, to descend chromatically, just move down one fret.

The scale degrees for this pattern are: **Root 3 5 b5 Root (of next chord)**

Musical notation for Pattern Two in C7 and F7. The notation shows a bass clef with a C7 chord above the first four notes and an F7 chord above the fifth note. The notes are: C (Root), Bb (b3), G (5), F (b5), and E (Root of next chord). Below the staff, the scale degrees are labeled: R, b3, 5, b5, ROOT.

In one other key:

Musical notation for Pattern Two in F7 and Bbmaj7. The notation shows a treble clef with an F7 chord above the first four notes and a Bbmaj7 chord above the fifth note. The notes are: F (Root), Eb (b3), D (5), C (b5), and Bb (Root of next chord). Below the staff, the scale degrees are labeled: R, b3, 5, b5, ROOT.

Remember, when you use this line on a minor chord, flat the 3rd!

Pattern Three

Our next pattern will walk up from one root to the next.

The scale degrees for this pattern are: **Root 2 #2 3 Root (of next chord)**

Let's look at this pattern in a few keys:

Musical notation for Pattern Three in C7 and F7. The notation shows a bass clef with a C7 chord above the first four notes and an F7 chord above the fifth note. The notes are: C (Root), D (2), Eb (b2), E (3), and F (Root of next chord). Below the staff, the scale degrees are labeled: ROOT 2 #2 3 ROOT.

Musical notation for Pattern Three in F7 and Bbmaj7. The notation shows a treble clef with an F7 chord above the first four notes and a Bbmaj7 chord above the fifth note. The notes are: F (Root), G (2), Ab (b2), A (3), and Bb (Root of next chord). Below the staff, the scale degrees are labeled: ROOT 2 #2 3 ROOT.

Mixing them Up

Once you've got these three patterns down, it's time to start mixing them together.

We're going to label them pattern 1, 2 and 3.

Diagram showing three bass guitar patterns labeled PATTERN 1, PATTERN 2, and PATTERN 3, each with its corresponding fingering notation below it:

- PATTERN 1:** R b7 6 5 ROOT
- PATTERN 2:** R 3 5 b5 ROOT
- PATTERN 3:** R 2 #2 3 ROOT

Practice mixing these patterns over the ii V I Progression

With just these three patterns, we have *nine* different ways of walking a ii V I. Here are a few possibilities:

Diagram showing three examples of walking a ii V I progression (C-7, F7, BbMaj7) using the three patterns:

- Example 1: PATTERN 1 (C-7), PATTERN 2 (F7), BbMaj7
- Example 2: PATTERN 2 (C-7), PATTERN 1 (F7), BbMaj7
- Example 3: PATTERN 3 (C-7), PATTERN 2 (F7), BbMaj7

After you can play all possibilities in one key, work on the other eleven keys!

The Minor ii V i

Now that you can walk over major ii V I progressions, it's time to look at the minor ii V i. You will learn more about minor ii V i progressions in combo class.

How do you spot a minor ii V?

In a minor ii V, the ii chord will be a minor chord with a flat 5th.

The chord symbols for this are:

C-7b5

Cm7b5

Or C SYMBOL.

Just like we did with Major ii V I's, we are going to learn three main patterns, and then mix and match.

Pattern 1:

Let's look at our first pattern

The scale degrees will be: Root, b7 #5 b5 Root (of next chord).

Here is an example with the chord progression C-7b5 F7alt:

A musical staff in bass clef showing the scale degrees for the progression C-7b5 to F7alt. The notes are: C (labeled R), Bb (labeled b7), Db (labeled #5), Eb (labeled b5), and F (labeled R). Above the staff, the chord symbols C-7(b5) and F7ALT are written. The staff ends with a whole rest.

Let's look at it in another key: F7alt Bb-7

A musical staff in bass clef showing the scale degrees for the progression F7alt to Bb-7. The notes are: F (labeled R), Eb (labeled b7), Ab (labeled #5), Bb (labeled b5), and F (labeled R). Above the staff, the chord symbols F7ALT and Bb7 are written. The staff ends with a whole rest.

Pattern Two

Our next pattern will ascend. Note that to get to the root of the next chord, you will go **down** a half-step (one fret).

The scale degrees for this pattern are: Root b2 3 b5 Root (of next chord)

When you use this bass line to go from a minor 7^{b5} chord to an altered dominant chord (ii to V), the 3rd will be FLAT.

When this bass line is used to go from an altered dominant chord to a minor 7th chord (V to i) the third will not be flat.

Here is an example with the chord progression C-7^{b5} F7^{alt}:



Let's look at it in another key: F7^{alt} B^b-7



Pattern 3:

This pattern is easy, as it ascends switching between whole and half steps.

The scale degrees for this pattern are:

Root b2 b3 #3 Root (of next chord)

However, its much easier to think, "half, whole, half, whole"

Here is an example with the chord progression C-7^{b5} F7^{alt}:



Let's look at it in another key: F7alt Bb-7

A single musical staff in bass clef showing a sequence of notes: F, Bb, Bb, Bb, Bb. Above the notes are labels: F7ALT, b2, b3, 3, and Bb7. Below the notes are labels: R, b2, b3, 3, and R.

Once you've got these three patterns down, it's time to start mixing them together.

We're going to label them pattern 1, 2 and 3.

Three musical staves, each showing a pattern for Cm7(b9) F7alt. Above each staff are labels: Cm7(b9) and F7ALT. Below each staff are labels: R b7 #5 b5 R, R b2 b3 b5 R, and R b2 b3 3 R.

Practice mixing these patterns over the minor ii V I Progression

With just these three patterns, we have *nine* different ways of walking a minor ii V i. Here are a few possibilities:

Three musical staves showing different ways to mix patterns 1, 2, and 3 over a minor ii V i progression. Each staff shows a sequence of notes with labels for the patterns and chords.

- Staff 1: PATTERN 1 (Cm7(b9) F7alt), PATTERN 3 (F7alt Bb7), PATTERN 3 (Bb7).
- Staff 2: PATTERN 2 (Cm7(b9) F7alt), PATTERN 1 (F7alt Bb7), PATTERN 1 (Bb7).
- Staff 3: PATTERN 3 (Cm7(b9) F7alt), PATTERN 3 (F7alt Bb7), PATTERN 3 (Bb7).

Other Situations

Now that you can walk root patterns, Major ii V I, and minor ii V I, its time to look at some other situations.

When the root remains the same

When one chord is followed by another chord with the same root (C-7 to CMaj7 or F7 to F-7), we can use the root patterns and arpeggios that you've already learned.

Here are a few examples

The first example shows a C7 chord with a root pattern of R, b3, 5, b7. The second example shows a CMaj7 chord with a root pattern of R, 7, 5, 3. Both examples show the root pattern for the first chord and then the root pattern for the second chord, which has the same root.

When the root moves up or down a tritone

A tritone is the interval of a #4 or b5

Let's look at a couple of ways to move by a tritone:

The first example shows a CMaj7 chord with a root pattern of R, 7, 6, 5, moving to an F#M7(b9) chord with a root pattern of R. The second example shows a CMaj7 chord with a root pattern of R, 2, 3, 4, moving to an F#7 chord with a root pattern of R. Both examples show the root pattern for the first chord and then the root pattern for the second chord, which is a tritone away.

Combining it all!

Great job on making it this far! Now it's time to put everything together. A great tune to practice all your patterns on is *Autumn Leaves*.

Let's look at the first eight bars of the tune:
Notice that we can use all our patterns:

C-7 F7 BbMA7 EbMA7 A7(b9) D7ALT G-7 G7

Major ii V Patterns ----- Tritone Pattern---minor ii V i Pattern----- Same note Pattern

These eight bars can be a terrific place to start practicing all your patterns.

First, practice these eight measures, using as many possibilities as possible. There are literally hundreds of possibilities using these eight measures.

Next, play these eight measures in all 12 keys.

