

## Reharmonizing The Blues: Measures 1-5

The 12-Bar Blues form provides a classic framework to explore a wide range of reharmonization techniques. This lesson will focus specifically on the first five measures of an F Blues.

Here is the standard, common-practice harmonization for these measures.

Standard common-practice harmonization for the first five measures of an F Blues. The notation is in 4/4 time, key of F major (one flat). The first staff shows measures 1-4, each with an F7 chord. The second staff shows measure 5 with a Bb7 chord, preceded by a measure rest labeled '5'.

The defining musical events in this progression occur in measure 1, when the tonic is established, and measure 5, with the arrival of the IV chord. What happens in between is subject to the musical vocabulary and creativity of the performer. Frequently, reharmonizations are created by identifying points of resolution, and working backwards from those points. The question you must ask yourself is, "What harmonic techniques are at my disposal, and how can I use them in the given framework?"

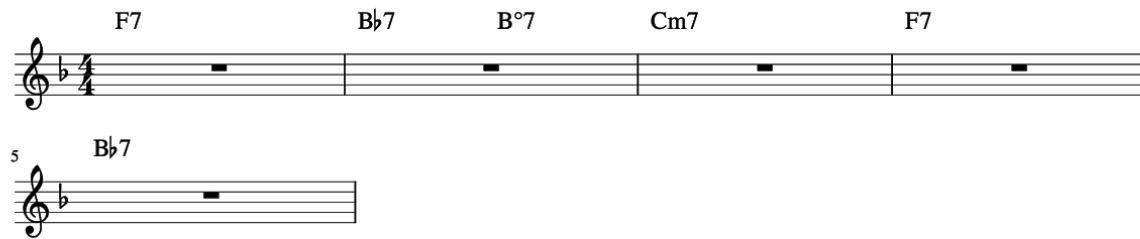
Reharmonization of the first five measures of an F Blues. The notation is in 4/4 time, key of F major (one flat). The first staff shows measures 1-4, each with an F7 chord. The second staff shows measure 5 with a Bb7 chord, preceded by a measure rest labeled '5'.

## Jazz Blues

Jazz Blues harmonization for the first five measures. The notation is in 4/4 time, key of F major (one flat). The first staff shows measures 1-5: F7, Bb7, F7, Cm7, and F7. The second staff shows measure 5 with a Bb7 chord, preceded by a measure rest labeled '5'.

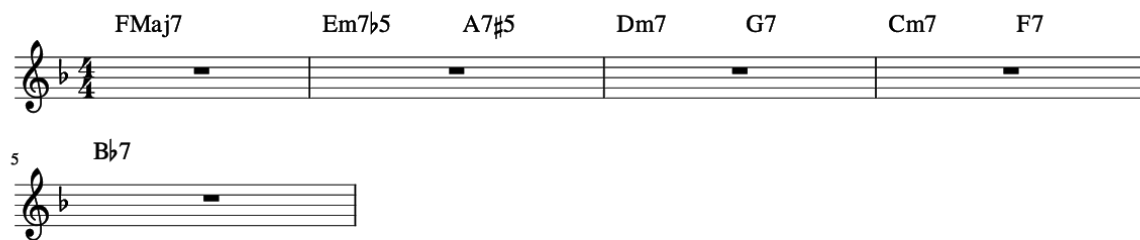
Measures 1-3 can be analyzed in at least two ways. In one analysis, the prolonged F7 chord has now been expanded by way of its IV chord, Bb7. In the other analysis, the F7 in measure 1 functions as a V7/IV, resolving naturally to Bb7, which returns to F7 via a plagal cadence.

Measure 4 is more straightforward. Here, the Bb7 in measure 5 is interpreted as a chord of resolution, and a short ii-V cadence is strategically placed before it.



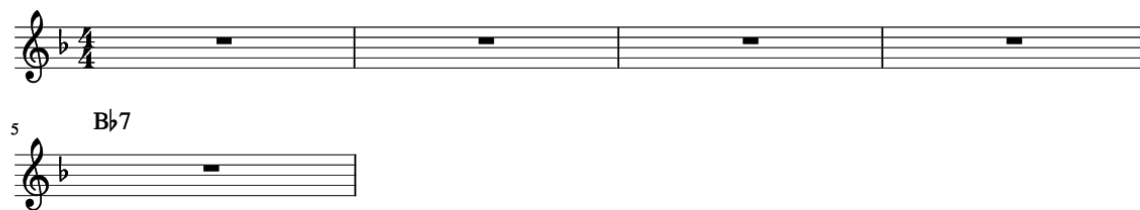
In the example above, a long ii-V cadence to B $\flat$ 7 is used, occupying measures 3-4. The B $^{\circ}$ 7 chord in measure 2 functions as vii $^{\circ}$ 7 of the Cm7 chord in measure 3.

### Bird Blues



This progression is commonly associated with Charlie Parker, who used it in compositions including *Blues for Alice*. It is also reminiscent of non-blues songs such as *Confirmation* and *There Will Never Be Another You*. Working backwards from B $\flat$ 7, there is a series of ii-V cadences that travel through the circle of fifths. In measure 4, Cm7 and F7 function as ii-V of B $\flat$ . Cm7 is then prepared by its V7, G7, which in turn is prepared by its related ii7, Dm7. Measure 2 sets up D minor with a minor ii-V progression in that key. In measure 1, FMaj7 substitutes for F7.

### Cycle Blues



Ultimately, even the tonic chord in measure 1 is subject to substitution, leaving a blank slate until arrival on the IV chord in measure 5. By working backwards from the ending, a chain of dominants beginning a half-step above the tonic leads perfectly to IV.

F#7    B7    E7    A7    D7    G7    C7    F7  
 5    Bb7

## Coltrane Blues

F7    BbMaj7    C#7    F#Maj7    A7    DMaj7    F7  
 5    Bb7

Coltrane changes connect key centers a Major Third apart using basic V7-I cadences. Once again, work backwards from the cadence in measure 5. Notice the three Major 7 chords in this example. Their roots, Bb, F#, and D, form a series of descending Major Thirds. Each Major 7th progresses to the V7 of the next Major 7th chord in the series.

The F7 in measure one can also be expanded with its related ii chord, shown below.

Cm7    F7    BbMaj7    C#7    F#Maj7    A7    DMaj7    F7  
 5    Bb7

## Tritone ii-V

F7    Bb7    F7    B7  
 5    Bb7

This example is similar to the Jazz Blues progression with the exception of measure 4. Here, B7 is substituted for F7, a tritone substitution. This new progression can be expanded using familiar techniques. First, the F7 and B7 chords can be paired with their related ii chords, Cm7 and F#m7. Finally, B°7 is added at the end of measure 2 to tonicize the new Cm7 chord.

Chord sequence: Cm7, F7, Bb7, B°7, Cm7, F7, F#m7, B7

Measure 5: Bb7

## Pedal Point, Modal Mixture, and Advanced Substitution

In these final examples, the common-practice model is reconsidered from a new perspective.

Chord sequence: F7, F7, F7, F7

Measure 5: Bb7

Instead of using functional harmony and cadences to fill the space between measure 1 and measure 5, it is possible to use a modal approach that maintains the prolonged F bass note. The trick is to use modes strategically, in a sequence that creates a sense of forward motion and increasing tension.

Chord sequence: F7sus4, BbLyd/F, Gadd9/F, Aadd9/F

Measure 5: AbMaj7b5

In this example, the chords in measures 1-4 imply various modes based around the bass note, F. F7sus4 and BbLyd/F imply F Ionian. Gadd9/F implies F Lydian, and Aadd9/F implies F Lydian Augmented. Notice that these modes get progressively brighter.

The AbMaj7b5 in measure 5 is a substitution for Bb7. It contains the b7, 9, 3, and 13 of Bb7.

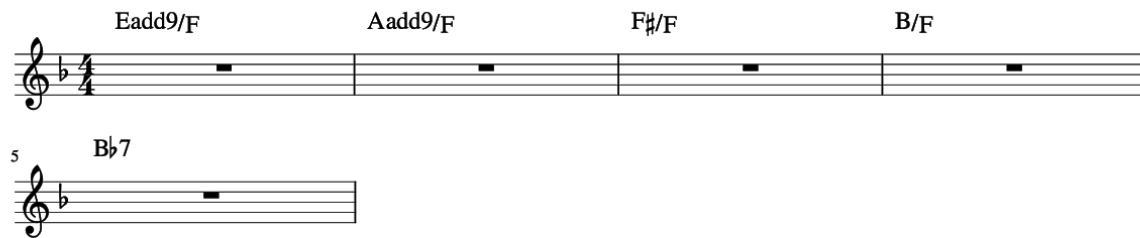
Here is a similar example with two slight variations.

Chord sequence: F7sus4, BbLyd/F, Gadd9/F, Aadd9/F

Measure 5: AbMaj7#5

In measure 1, Fsus4 has been changed to F7sus4, implying F Mixolydian. This still results in a series of modes that get progressively brighter.

In measure 5, AbMaj7b5 has been changed to AbMaj7#5, which simply exchanges the 3rd of Bb7 (D) for it's #11 (E). Altogether, it contains the b7, 9, #11, and 13 of Bb7, generating a Lydian Dominant sound.



This advanced reharmonization juxtaposes V-I cadences in A Major and B Major with an F pedal point. Note that A and B are chromatic neighbors to Bb, the resolution chord appearing in measure 5.

One reason this works so well is that the B/F in measure 4 functions just like an F7b9b5 chord, which leads naturally to the Bb7 in measure 5. Similarly, the F# triad in measure 3 functions as V of B triad.

### Creative Application

The techniques outlined here can be used to create even more possible reharmonizations. Use these and other techniques to create your own variations. Compose a melody and practice improvising over the substitute changes. Remember that the greatest soloists combine and juxtapose advanced harmonic ideas with traditional blues language.