

# Tutorial 3L: Learning Standard Tunes

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Welcome! In this tutorial you'll learn:

1. The steps to memorize chord progressions
2. How to use bass cheater notes
3. How to add notes to the progression

Enjoy the learning!

Other Tutorials

- 3A: More Melodic Color
- 3B: Melodic Connections
- 3E: Melodic Patterns
- 3F: More About Patterns
- 3H: Rhythmic Development
- 3K: Dominant Alterations

- There are so many jazz standards to learn and so little time! With some helpful guidelines you can memorize chord progressions effectively and even practice them away from your instrument with Virtual Practice.
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## Part 1 ~ Memorizing Progressions

### A) Can I use the Virtual Practice Method to learn tunes?

\*You don't have to memorize chord progressions with your instrument; you can actually memorize them using the Virtual Practice Method. That way, you can practice the progressions whenever and wherever you want.

### B) What do I do first?

\*Before you memorize a tune's chord progression, you should learn the melody for the tune. These steps will help you memorize a tune melody:

- 1 Get a recording of the tune by one of your favorite artists. Or, use the sheet music for the tune, or have a friend play or record it for you.
- 2 Sing or play through the tune. Make a mental note of the tune's phrases, active tones, and interesting rhythms: they may remind you of tunes you know.
- 3 Sing or play through the tune several times again.
- 4 Looking away from the music, sing or play the tune, one section at a time until you memorize it.

Try these steps on any tune you're learning. In time you'll be able to practice the tunes anywhere, anytime you want.

### C) What steps do I follow to memorize a progression?

\*To memorize a chord progression, you need to actually *hear* the progression in your mind instead of just remembering chord letters and numbers.

**1** Write the bass "cheater" notes between each chord, as explained in *Using Bass Cheater Notes* below. This gives you a reliable way to hear each new chord without getting lost harmonically.

**2** Sing or hum a bass line with the chord roots and bass cheater notes for the entire tune. End on the same pitch where you began.

These first steps should be fairly simple, but steps 3 and 4 require more practice.

**3** Repeat step 2, adding arpeggios (like 1 3 5 3 1) to the root tones, so you begin to hear the chords along with the bass line.

**4** When step 3 is comfortable, mix the arpeggios (like 1 5 3 1), then add active tones for variety.

## (Part 1 – Memorizing Progressions)

\*When you can do these four steps reasonably well, the chord progression now becomes music to you, with a bass line and a fake melody (arpeggios) you can sing. After you master these four steps, try steps 5 and 6.

**5** Looking at the chord progression, sing or hum a simple improvised solo, keeping in mind what you've learned in steps 1 through 4. (Try some active rhythms and active tones; don't go too fast.)

**6** Repeat step 5 without looking at the progression.

\*By using these steps you can gain complete control over the chord changes, and you can practice improvisation in your head with an imaginary rhythm section. *300 Standard Tunes* has chords for jazz standards, with four bars per line and repeats and road signs marked. You can copy the chords on index cards (4 bars per line, road signs) for “pocket-size” practice.

► **TRY IT** – Use any of the suggestions above to play an easy tune in all 12 keys.

## Part 2 – Using Bass Cheater Notes

### A) What are bass cheater notes?

\*Bass cheater notes are notes you add between two chords that bridge the gap between the chord roots. For example, to bridge the gap between CMa7 and Eb7, add a bass cheater note of D. Adding bass cheater notes builds a stepwise bass line to carry you through the chords.

To add bass cheater notes to a progression,

**1** Compare the roots of the first two chord symbols and decide whether it's closer to go up to the root of the second chord or down to it. For Cm7 to F7, it's closer to go up to F7 (a fourth up) rather than down to F7 (a fifth down).

**2** Fill in any pitches needed to make a stepwise bridge between the two chord roots.

\*Use only whole steps or half-steps, in the key of the first chord. For Cm7 to F7, you would fill in a D and an Eb (after the first chord), making a C D Eb F bridge.

**3** Repeat steps 1 and 2 for each of the remaining chords in the progression.

## (Part 2 – Using Bass Cheater Notes)

Below is a simple repeating chord progression with bass cheater notes in parentheses.

Cm7 (D Eb) | F7 (Eb) | Dm7 (E F#) | G7 | F#Ma7 (G# A#):||

- All cheater notes fit the chord's key signature.
- The F7 goes down to Dm7, as it's closer that way (insert Eb, not G A Bb C D going up).
- No cheater notes are used from G7 to F#Ma7 because the chords are only a half-step apart.
- The G# and A# are the bridge back to the beginning

Cm7 chord. You can also think enharmonically, such as changing A# to Bb or vice versa, whenever helpful.

Here are more bass cheater notes, based on the A section of "Satin Dollar:"

| Em (F# G) A7 (G F#) | Em (F# G) A7 (G) |

| F#m (G# A) B7 (A G#) | F#m (G# A) B7 |

Bm (C# D) E7 (F# G#) | Bbm (C Db) Eb7 |

| DMA7 | •• ||

► **TRY IT** – Write an 8-bar chord progression and insert bass cheater notes. Then choose a short tune from *300 Standard Tunes* and write the bass notes for the entire chord progression. Then choose a longer tune.

**B)** How do I create basslines?

\*With the cheater notes completed, you've built a simple bass line that moves just by whole steps and half-steps.

\*To sing or hum this bassline, follow these steps at a slow to moderate tempo:

**1** Hum a pitch and pretend that's the pitch of the root of the first chord. (If you have perfect pitch or are near an instrument, you can get the real pitch.)

**2** Hum or sing each note in the bass line you built:

A) Go slowly, out of tempo, so each pitch is as accurate as possible.

B) If the notes get too high, jump an octave down just after singing/humming a particular root.

C) For chords that move an augmented 4th (such as F#Ma7 to Cm), be sure the three whole steps are accurate; they can be tricky to hear.

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### (Part 2 – Using Bass Cheater Notes)

If you're unsure of any of the notes, test them with an instrument (but try to rely on your ear more).

3 Put the cheater notes close to the new chords:

Dm (E F) G7(F E) | Dm (E F) G7 (F) |

4 Repeat step 3 at faster tempos until you can sing/hum the bassline easily.

- ▶ **TRY IT** – Using the bass cheater notes from the last Try It, hum the stepwise bass line all the way through the tune. Get to the same pitch you sang at the start of the tune.

C) How do I memorize chord symbols? MORE

\*After you memorize your bass line to the tune, practice seeing the chords like a map on a page.

\*Here are some visual tips to help you memorize the chord symbols:

1) Study the overall form of the tune, looking for road signs, repeated progressions, and phrase lengths.

\*Classify it with letters (AABA, AB, ABC, etc.). Learn the “road signs,” the number of bars in each section, and the total number of lines in the piece from top to bottom.

2) Learn the chords along the left side of the page, top to bottom, to use as a reference point.

3) Learn the basic key(s) for each line in the tune.

- ▶ **TRY IT** – Select a short progression in *300 Standard Tunes* and memorize the chords. Then choose a longer tune. Then choose a tune with more difficult chords.

### Part 3 – Adding Other Notes

A) How do I add other tones to basslines?

When you are confident with the bassline pitches, you can begin to create an improvised melody for the tune by adding other tones to the bass notes. You can add:

- Arpeggio tones
- Color tones
- Flexible scale notes

## (Part 3 – Adding Other Notes)

\*The key to learning the progression is repetition. Keep repeating what you've learned until the progression and its added tones are second nature.

\*If it's difficult adding notes, work on the bassline until it's stronger. Don't get lost as you add notes.

### B) How do I add arpeggio tones?

\*You can add arpeggio notes (1-3-1 or 1-3-5-3-1) before bass cheater notes. The cheater notes can be 8th-notes at the end of the bar to make more room for arpeggio notes earlier in the bar. Add arpeggio notes when there's one chord per bar; with 2 chords per bar, just use cheater notes.

Dm == (E) | Fm ===== (G Ab) | Bb

- ▶ **TRY IT – Basic:** Add arpeggio tones to the progression from Basic, Exercise C. **Medium:** Add 1 5 3 1 tones.

### C) How do I add color tones?

\*Next, add a few color tones instead of arpeggio tones. bassline.

Dm (2 7 6) (E) | Fm(2 7 6) (G Ab) | Bb

The example below adds the 2, the natural 7, and the natural 6 after each chord tone. Be sure the color tones don't disrupt the timing or pitches of your bassline.

### D) How do I add flexible scale tones?

\*To do this, think of a fermata over each chord tone so you'll have ample time for running each flexible scale.

\*The example below adds flexible melodic minor ascending scale tones to D minor and F minor. The bass cheater note (E) is the same as normal.

Dm ===== (E) | Fm==== etc.

- ▶ **TRY IT –** Add flexible scale tones to the progression from Basic, Exercise C, or another tune.

### E) How do I practice chord progressions on my own?

\*Once you're used to adding notes (arpeggios, color tones, or flexible scales) to a chord, you can improvise to the chord progression on your own. Before you try improvising alone on an instrument, you should try it humming or singing (without accompaniment). Here's a trick to help you hear a "virtual rhythm section" in your head as you improvise:

## (Part 3 – Adding Other Notes)

- 1) Hear the bass line in the back of your mind.
- 2) Hear the chords in the front of your mind. The chords are like the arpeggio tones you added to the bass line, only they happen at once.
- 3) Hear your improvised solo in the “top” of your mind, above the bass line and chords.

\*The virtual rhythm section gives you an extremely powerful way to practice your improvisations.

- ▶ **TRY IT** – Basic: Improvise to a short progression in *300 Standard Tunes*, alone. Medium: Choose a longer tune. Challenge: Choose a tune with more difficult chords.

- E) How do I do unaccompanied improvisation?

\*Improvising without accompaniment is great musical adventure that too few soloists explore. Besides being great for practice and memorizing chord, improvising alone can be a great performance skill.

\*Below are some tips to help when you improvise to a tune by yourself. These tips refer to playing a structured tune rather than free improvisation.

- 1) Choose a tempo you can handle; stick with it.
- 2) Be very familiar with the form and chords so you always know where you are in the tune.
- 3) Use the suggestions from *Improvising on Your Own* to “see” and hear the music you play.
- 4) Resist the temptation to overplay. You don’t need to fill every available moment, you just need to keep the interest level high.
- 5) Use rhythms, development, and expression wisely to help the solo build.

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That’s all for Tutorial 3K!

There is no quiz for this Tutorial.