Walking Bass Lines

By
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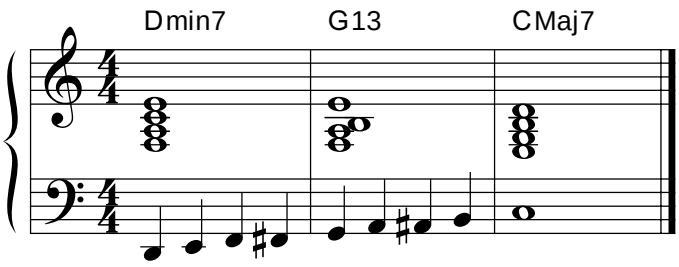
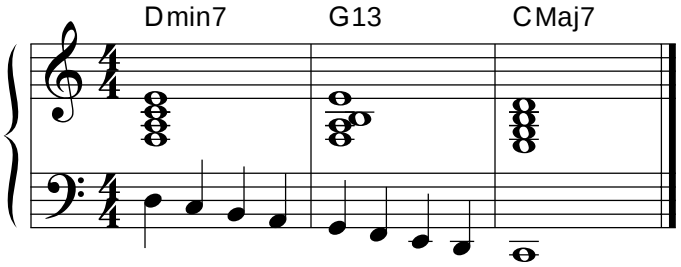
When accompanying by using walking bass lines, you can turn the piano into an entire rhythm section. Except for the guitar, piano is the only instrument that has this unique capability. The right hand will supply the harmony and the left is doing the job of the bass player. If both hands are played rhythmically perfect we can also assume the role of a drummer.

In order to create a strong harmonic sense the bass lines have to be harmonically solid. This is where the solo pianist has an advantage, since the right hand always knows what the left hand is doing. It is easy to use the exact same changes, creating the effect of a well rehearsed rhythm section. This is especially fun when you improvise chord substitutions.

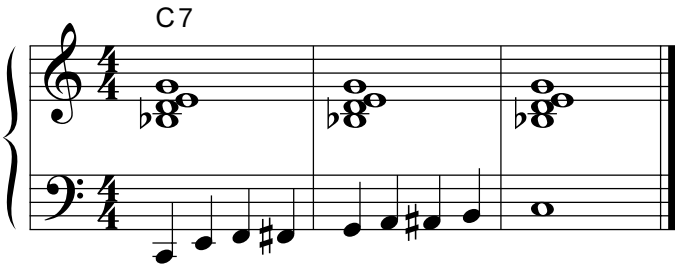
This article will introduce you to some basic concepts for playing bass lines. I recommend taking the time to transcribe some lines by skilled bass players. It will help you improve your understanding of walking bass lines and how they are played.

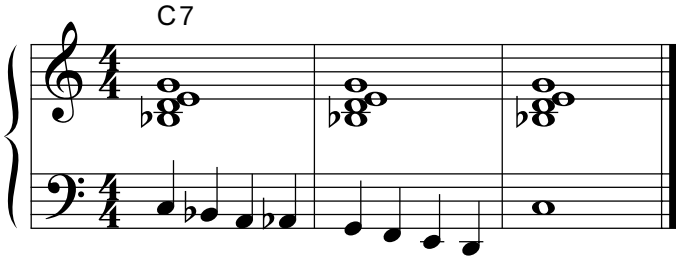
Bass lines over a ii-V-I progression.



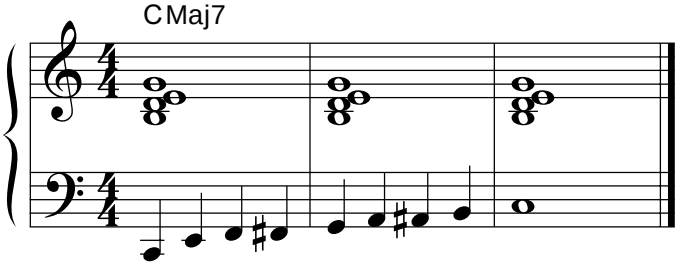


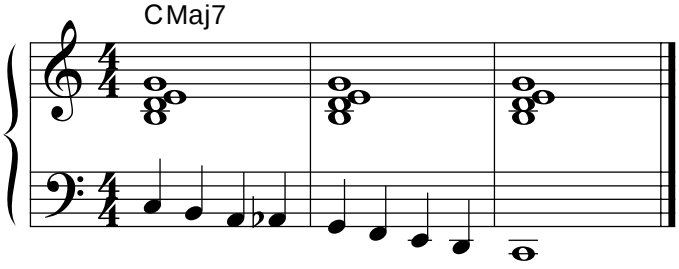
Dominant chord bass line.





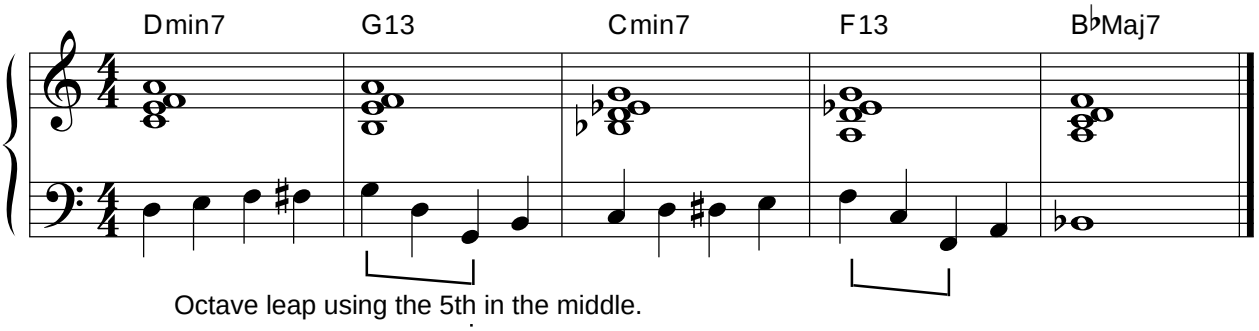
Major chord bass line.





1. Octave leap.

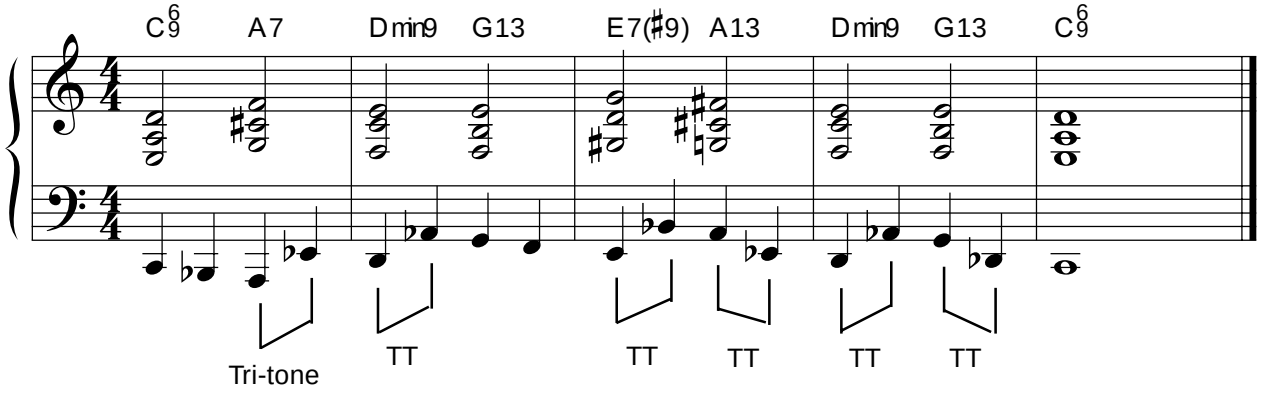
The octave leap is used to keep the bass line in a good sounding register.



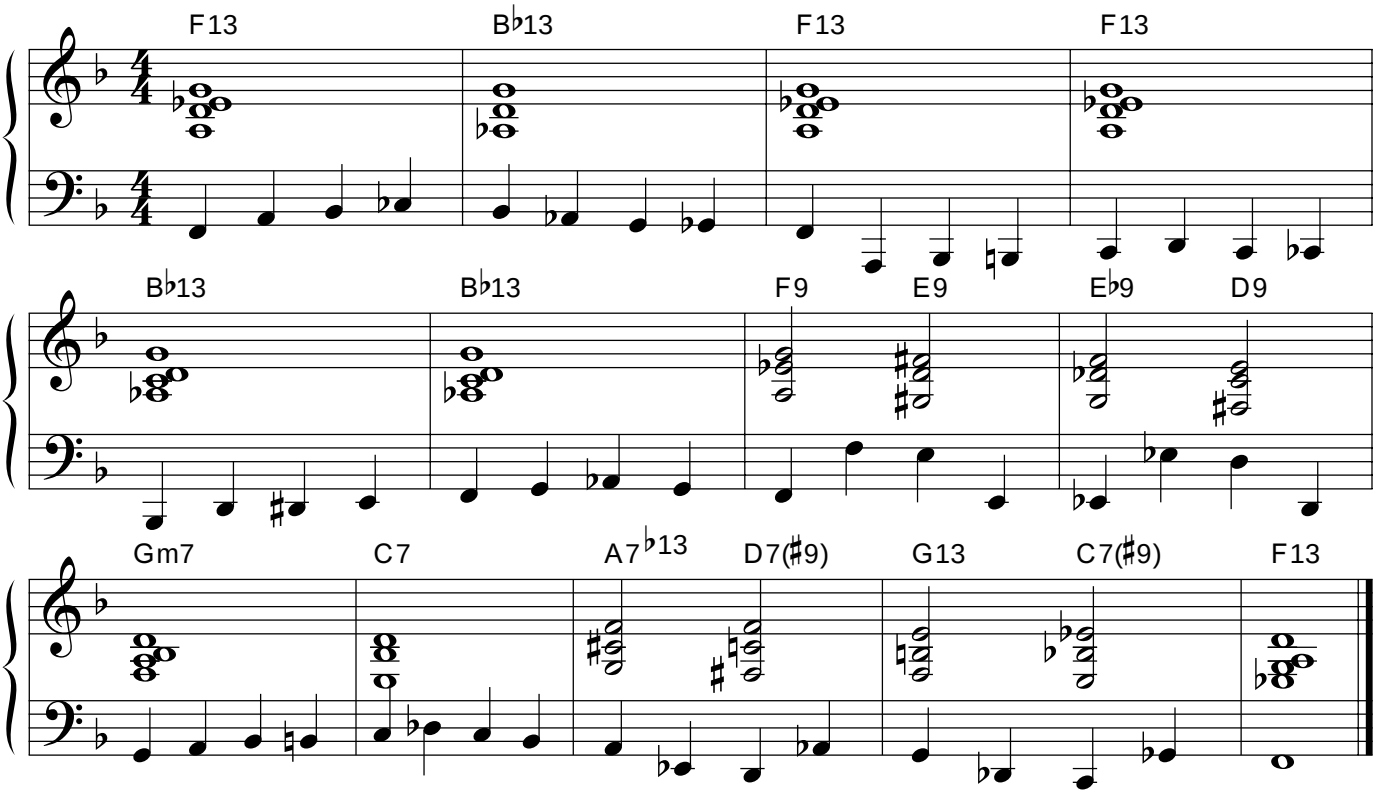
Octave leap using the 5th in the middle.

2. Chromatic approach tones.

You can create a flowing bass line by using chromatic approach tones. This works because of a constant feel of tension and release. Notice the tri-tone intervals.



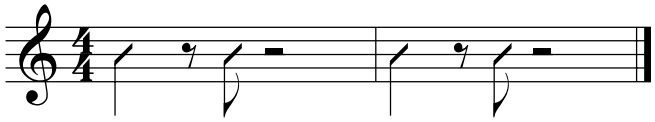
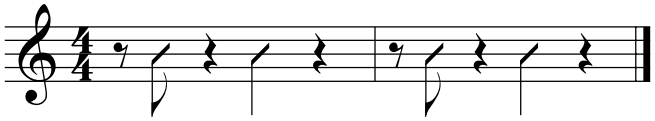
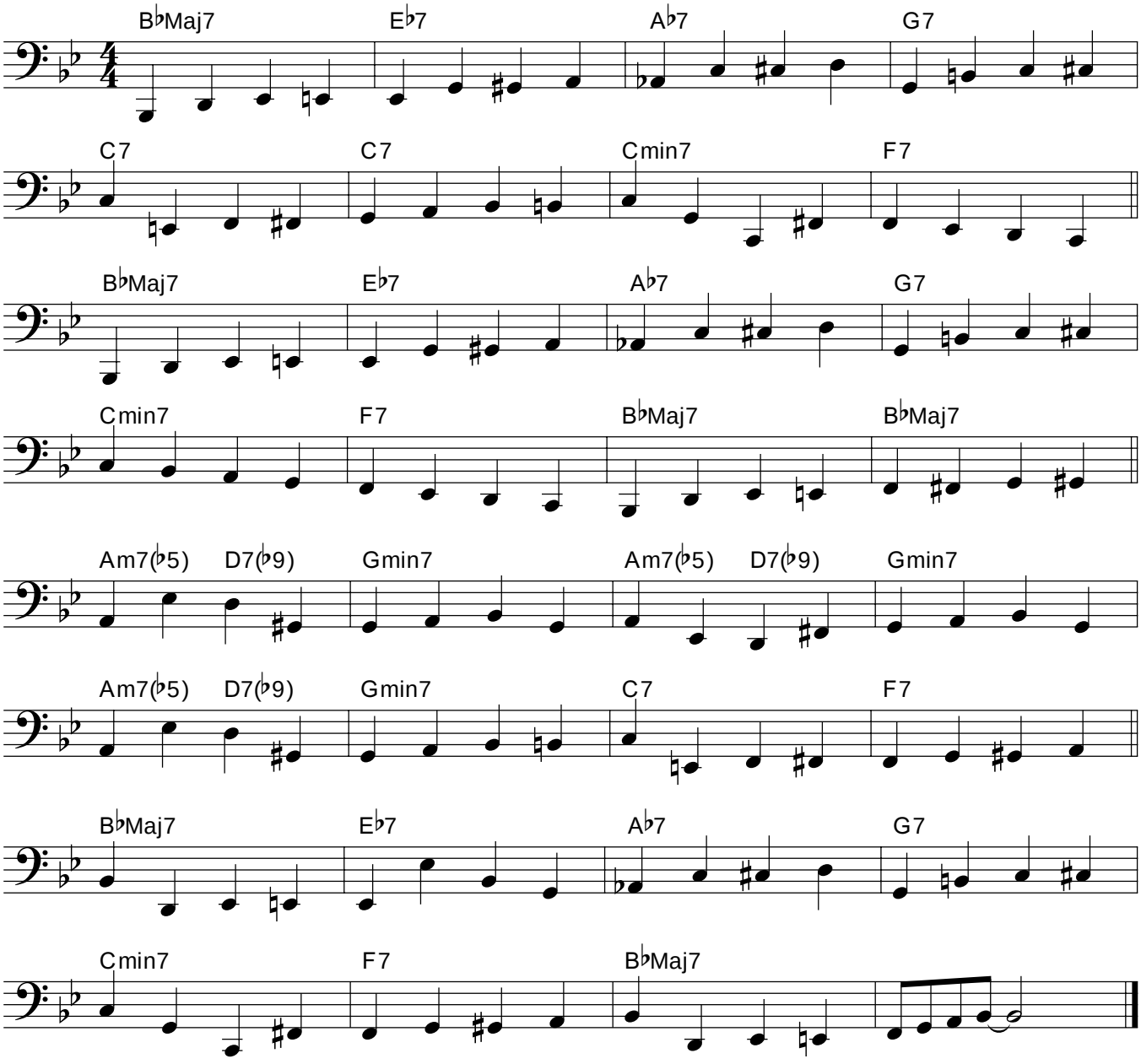
Blues in F.



Analyze this excercise: Where are the octave leaps?
Locate the tri-tone intervals.
Locate the chromatic approach tones.

Practice Hints: Play the bass line legato.
Practice with a metronome.
Play the bass line together with a repeated comping pattern in the right hand.

Comping Pattern 1.



Comping Pattern 2.