

From The Bottom Up: Building Your Own Jazz Bass Lines

Overview & Purpose

The purpose of this presentation is to learn how to create bass lines from a set of chord changes. The majority of the presentation will focus on “walking” bass lines in a 4/4 meter. While some knowledge of music theory is necessary, excellent bass lines can be created just by using notes in the triads of any chord progression.

Key Points

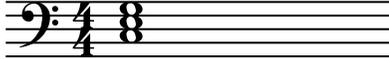
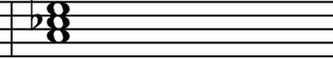
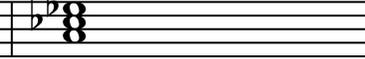
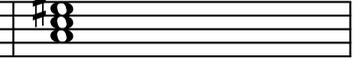
1. Always play the root of the chord when the chord changes.
2. The remaining beats of the measure can be filled using the 5th of the chord or by repeating the root.
3. Any chord change can be preceded by a note that is one half-step above or below the resolution tone. For example, if the chord is C major, the notes B-natural or Db can be played the beat before the chord change. These chromatic notes can be used regardless of what notes are in the chords or the key signature.
4. When playing jazz bass lines, accurate rhythm is always more important than accurate notes.

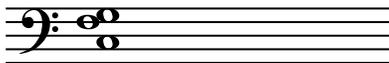
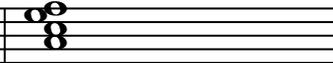
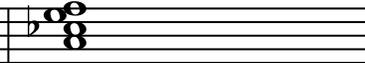
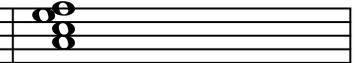
Key Terms

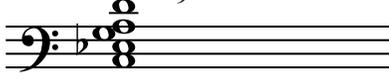
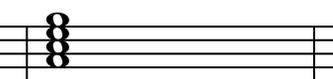
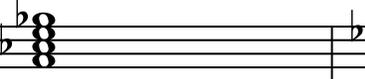
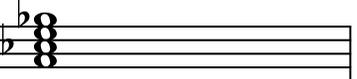
1. **Swing Rhythm** - Playing two eighth-notes as the first and third notes of a triplet.
2. **Tunes** - Jazz musicians use this term to describe songs or standards that they are playing.
3. **Transcription** - This is the act of listening to a recording and notating what one of the musicians is playing. Jazz musicians often transcribe improvised solos by instrumentalists to learn the language of improvisation. Jazz bassists perform this same activity, but usually for improvised bass lines.

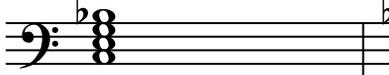
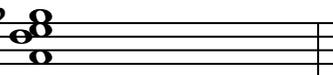
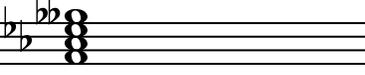
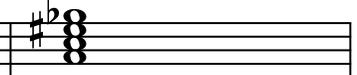
Building Bass Lines

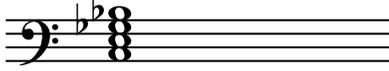
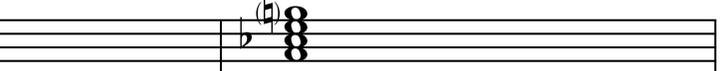
Before learning to build bass lines, the student must learn chord symbols and what they mean. The following are the most common chord symbols seen in lead sheets:

C	Cmin or C-	C ^o or Cdim	C+ or Caug
			

Csus	C6	Cmin6	C ⁶ ₉
			

Cmin ⁶ ₉	Cmaj7 or CΔ	Cmin7 or C-7	Cmin7(b5) or CØ7
			

C7	C7sus	C ^o 7 or Cdim7	C7#5 or C+7
			

C7b5	Cma7#5	Cmin (maj7)
		

In addition, chords can also have added extensions of 9ths, 11ths, and 13ths.

Major Chords

Cmaj9 Cmaj9(#11) Cmaj13(#11)

The image shows three measures of a bass clef staff. The first measure contains the chord Cmaj9 (root, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th). The second measure contains Cmaj9(#11) (root, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, #11). The third measure contains Cmaj13(#11) (root, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, #11, 13th).

Minor Chords

Cmin9 Cmin11 Cmin13

The image shows three measures of a bass clef staff. The first measure contains the chord Cmin9 (root, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th). The second measure contains Cmin11 (root, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, 11th). The third measure contains Cmin13 (root, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, 11th, 13th).

Dominant Chords

C9 C9(#11) C13

The image shows three measures of a bass clef staff. The first measure contains the chord C9 (root, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th). The second measure contains C9(#11) (root, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, #11). The third measure contains C13 (root, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, 11th, 13th).

*In major and dominant chords the 11th is almost always a #11. It is also sometimes implied and not explicitly written

Chords with extensions can also be altered, specifically by using $\flat 5$, $\sharp 5$, $\flat 9$ and $\sharp 9$. Below are some common examples

C7 ($\flat 9$) C7 $\flat 5$ ($\flat 9$) C7($\sharp 9$) C7 $\sharp 5$ ($\sharp 9$)

The image shows four measures of a bass clef staff. The first measure contains C7(b9) (root, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, flat 9th). The second measure contains C7b5(b9) (root, flat 3rd, flat 5th, 7th, 9th, flat 9th). The third measure contains C7(#9) (root, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, sharp 9th). The fourth measure contains C7#5(#9) (root, 3rd, sharp 5th, 7th, 9th, sharp 9th).

Cmin9 ($\flat 5$) C13 ($\flat 5$) Cmaj9#11 ($\sharp 5$) C9#11($\sharp 5$)

The image shows four measures of a bass clef staff. The first measure contains Cmin9(b5) (root, 3rd, flat 5th, 7th, 9th). The second measure contains C13(b5) (root, 3rd, flat 5th, 7th, 9th, 11th, 13th). The third measure contains Cmaj9#11(#5) (root, 3rd, sharp 5th, 7th, 9th, #11). The fourth measure contains C9#11(#5) (root, 3rd, sharp 5th, 7th, 9th, #11).

Keep in mind that despite what extensions are added, the foundation of the chord (root, 5th, 3rd, and 7th) remains the same.

It is common practice by jazz bassists to simplify a walking bass line by playing only on beats one and three, usually during the beginning of the tune when the melody is being played. This simplification is known as a **Two-Beat Bassline**. This style heavily utilizes the roots and 5ths of chords.

B \flat 7 E \flat 7 B \flat 7

Two-beat bass lines can be embellished by adding other notes, but it is imperative that the emphasis remain on beats one and three at all times.

B \flat 7 E \flat 7 B \flat 7

Two-beat bass lines are also used in playing **ballads**. Ballads are slow tunes that can be played with or without swing rhythms.

Fmi7 B \flat 7 E \flat ma7 Gmi7 C7 Fmi7 B \flat 7 E \flat maj7

Walking bass lines in a 4/4-meter swing style can also be used in playing ballads. For example:

Fma7 B \flat min7 E \flat 7 Ami7 A \flat mi7 D \flat 7 Gmi7 C7 Ami7 A \flat mi7 D \flat 7

When playing in a **triple meter** (3/4 or 6/8), walking bass lines are constructed the same as in a 4/4-meter. Two-beat bass lines are usually played as dotted-half notes.

B \flat maj7 D7 E \flat maj7 G7

B \flat maj7 D7 E \flat maj7 G7

Tunes in the **Latin-American styles** (bossa nova, samba, etc.) are also common in the jazz standard repertoire. The basic principle for playing Latin tunes is the same as playing two-beat bass lines.

Fmi7 Bb7 Emi7b5 A7

Latin or straight-8th note bass lines can be embellished by adding an 8th note on the offbeat of beats two and four. However, it is important that the emphasis remain on beats **one and three** and not on the syncopated notes.

Fmi7 Bb7 Emi7b5 A7

In the remaining pages of the chapter, a number of different resources have been provided for practice:

1. A two-beat and walking bass line on the changes of the tune "Beautiful Love"
2. A sample Latin bass line on the tune "Corcovado"
3. An example of four common chord progressions found in jazz, including a blues, minor blues, modal song form and rhythm changes.
4. A jazz blues progression written in all twelve keys.
5. Five different bassline transcriptions:
 - "Is You or Is You Ain't My Baby" - medium swing: Sam Jones, bass
 - "What Is This Thing Called Love" - up-tempo swing: Israel Crosby, bass
 - "Don't Blame Me" - ballad: Sam Jones, bass
 - "Gone With The Wind" - ballad: Israel Crosby, bass
 - "Days of Wine and Roses" - medium swing: Ray Brown, bass

A note on transcriptions:

While the included transcriptions will provide valuable insight into how to construct interesting bass lines, each student is highly encouraged to perform his or her own transcriptions of prominent bassists from the jazz idiom. Not only will transcribing provide insight to building bass lines, it will greatly enhance the student's ear-training and aural skills. The following is a brief list of significant jazz bassists, all of whom are worthwhile to transcribe:

Slam Stewart	Sam Jones	Ron Carter
Milt Hinton	Percy Heath	Chuck Israels
Jimmy Blanton	Charles Mingus	Eddie Gomez
Israel Crosby	Wilbur Ware	Dave Holland
Oscar Pettiford	Larry Gales	Rufus Reid
Ray Brown	Scott LaFaro	Lynn Seaton
Paul Chambers	Jimmy Garrison	Christian McBride
Doug Watkins	Charlie Haden	John Clayton

BASS

BEAUTIFUL LOVE

VICTOR YOUNG

BASS LINE BY MICHAEL T. GEIS

EM17 b5

A7 b9

DM17



GMI7

C7

FMA7

EM17 b5

A7 b9



DM17

GMI7

Bb7

A7



DM17

B7 b5

EM17 b5

A7 b9



EM17 b5

A7 b9

DM17



GMI7

C7

FMA7

EM17 b5

A7 b9



DM17

GMI7

Bb7

A7



DM17

B7 #9

Bb7

A7

DM17



BEAUTIFUL LOVE

2

EM17 b5 A7 b9 DM17

35

GMI7 C7 FMA7 EM17 b5 A7 b9

37

DM17 GMI7 Bb7 A7

41

DM17 B7 b5 EM17 b5 A7

45

EM17 b5 A7 b9 DM17

49

GMI7 C7 FMA7 EM17 b5 A7 b9

53

DM17 GMI7 Bb7 A7

57

DM17 B7 #9 Bb7 A7 DM17

61

QUIET NIGHTS OF QUIET STARS (CORCOVADO)

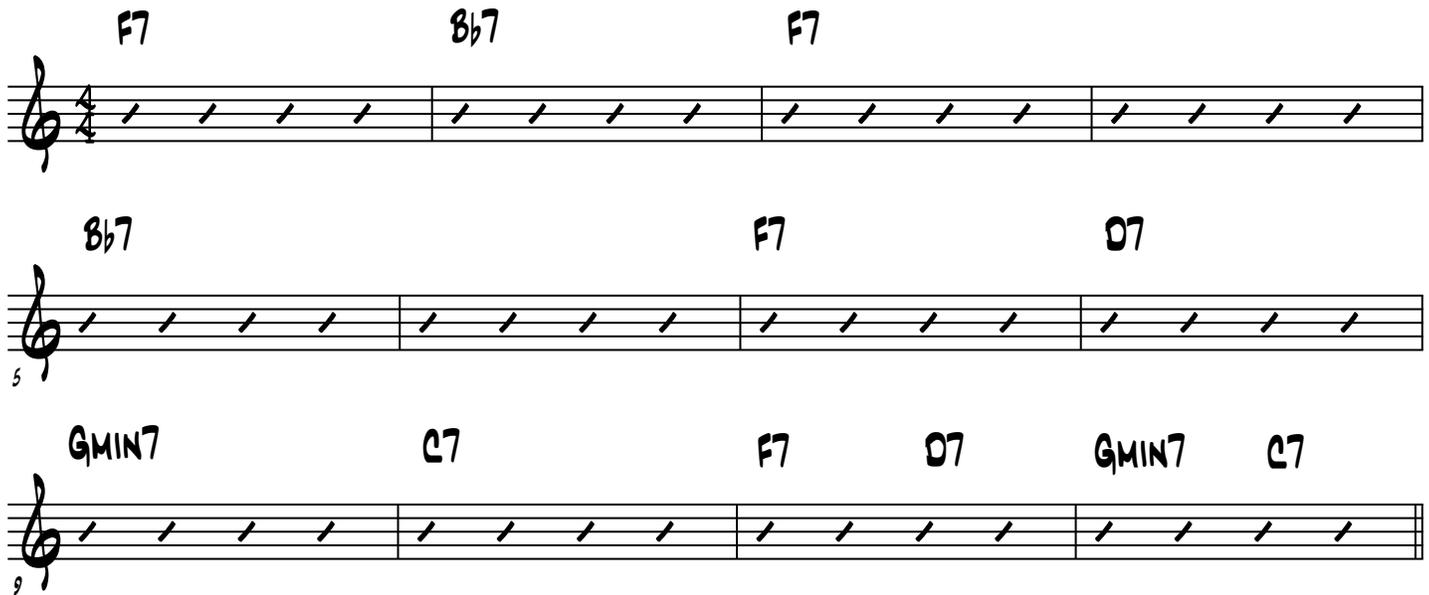
BASS

ANTONIO CARLOS JOSIM
BASS LINE BY MICHAEL T. GEIS

The image displays a bass line for the song "Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars (Corcovado)". The music is written in bass clef with a 4/4 time signature. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The bass line consists of ten staves of music, each with a measure number at the beginning (5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 25, 29, 33) and a corresponding chord symbol above it. The chords are: D7/A, A \flat oIM7, Gm17, C7, Fm7, Fm7, B \flat 7, Em7 \flat 5, A7, D7, Dm17, G7, D7/A, A \flat oIM7, Gm17, C7, Fm7, Fm7, B \flat 7, Em7 \flat 5, A7, Dm17, G7, Em7 \flat 5, A7, Dm17, G7, C6.

COMMON JAZZ CHORD PROGRESSIONS

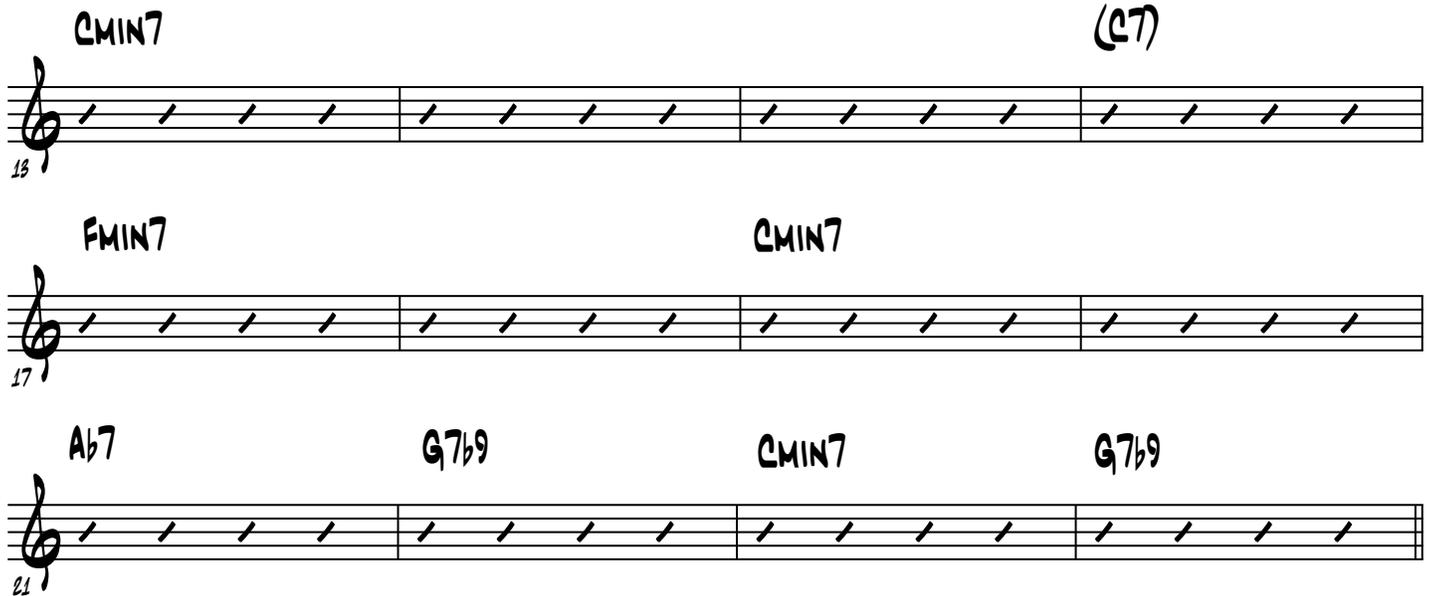
1. JAZZ BLUES



Musical notation for Jazz Blues progression in 4/4 time, starting at measure 5. The progression consists of 12 measures across three staves:

- Staff 1: F7 (measures 5-8), Bb7 (measures 9-12), F7 (measures 13-16).
- Staff 2: Bb7 (measures 5-8), F7 (measures 9-12), D7 (measures 13-16).
- Staff 3: GMIN7 (measures 5-8), C7 (measures 9-12), F7 (measures 13-14), D7 (measures 15-16), GMIN7 (measures 17-18), C7 (measures 19-20).

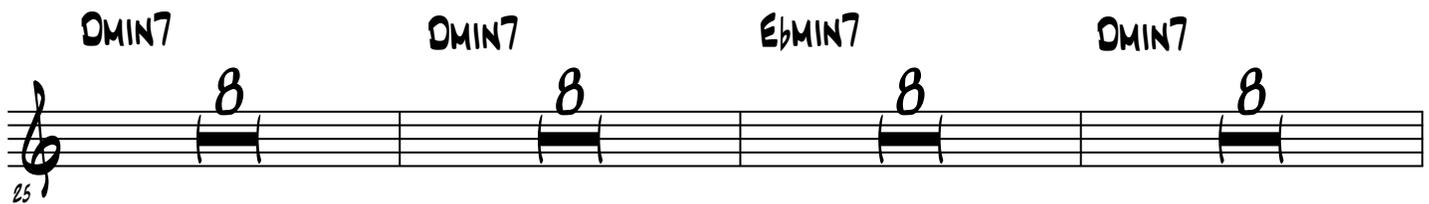
2. MINOR BLUES



Musical notation for Minor Blues progression in 4/4 time, starting at measure 13. The progression consists of 12 measures across three staves:

- Staff 1: CMIN7 (measures 13-16), (C7) (measures 17-20).
- Staff 2: FMIN7 (measures 13-16), CMIN7 (measures 17-20).
- Staff 3: Ab7 (measures 13-16), G7b9 (measures 17-18), CMIN7 (measures 19-20), G7b9 (measures 21-24).

3. MODAL TUNES (SO WHAT, IMPRESSIONS)



Musical notation for Modal Tunes progression in 4/4 time, starting at measure 25. The progression consists of 12 measures across one staff:

- Staff 1: DMIN7 (measures 25-28), DMIN7 (measures 29-32), EbMIN7 (measures 33-36), DMIN7 (measures 37-40).

Each measure contains a whole note chord symbol (8) positioned above the staff.

4. RHYTHM CHANGES

B♭MA7 G7 CMIN7 F7 DMIN7 G7 CMIN7 F7

57

FMIN7 B♭7 E♭7 A♭7 ^{1.} DMIN7 G7 CMIN7 F7 ^{2.} CMIN7 F7 B♭MA7

61

D7 G7

67

C7 F7

71

B♭MA7 G7 CMIN7 F7 DMIN7 G7 CMIN7 F7

75

FMIN7 B♭7 E♭7 A♭7 CMIN7 F7 B♭MA7

79

BLUES IN ALL KEYS

Handwritten musical notation for a blues progression in 4/4 time, consisting of ten staves of music. Each staff contains four measures of music, with slash marks indicating the rhythm. Chord symbols are written above the staves.

Staff 1: F7, Bb7, F7

Staff 2: Bb7, F7, D7

Staff 3: GMIN7, C7, F7, D7, GMIN7, C7

Staff 4: Bb7, Eb7, Bb7

Staff 5: Eb7, Bb7, G7

Staff 6: CMIN7, F7, Bb7, G7, CMIN7, F7

Staff 7: Eb7, Ab7, Eb7

Staff 8: Ab7, Eb7, C7

Staff 9: FMIN7, Bb7, Eb7, C7, FMIN7, Bb7

Measures 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 25, and 29 are indicated at the beginning of their respective staves.

BLUES IN ALL KEYS

2

Ab7 Db7 Ab7

Db7 Ab7 F7

BbMIN7 Eb7 Ab7 F7 BbMIN7 Eb7

Db7 Gb7 Db7

Gb7 Db7 Bb7

EbMIN7 Ab7 Db7 Bb7 EbMIN7 Ab7

Gb7 Cb7 Gb7

Cb7 Gb7 Eb7

AbMIN7 Db7 Gb7 Eb7 AbMIN7 Db7

BLUES IN ALL KEYS

B7 E7 B7

75

E7 B7 G#7

77

C#MIN7 F#7 B7 G#7 C#MIN7 F#7

81

E7 A7 E7

85

A7 E7 C#7

89

F#MIN7 B7 E7 C#7 F#MIN7 B7

93

A7 D7 A7

97

D7 A7 F#7

101

BMIN7 E7 A7 F#7 BMIN7 E7

105

BLUES IN ALL KEYS

4

D7

G7

D7

Musical staff 109: Treble clef, four measures of rhythmic notation (diagonal slashes) corresponding to the chords D7, G7, and D7.

109

G7

D7

B7

Musical staff 113: Treble clef, four measures of rhythmic notation (diagonal slashes) corresponding to the chords G7, D7, and B7.

113

EMIN7

A7

D7

B7

EMIN7

A7

Musical staff 117: Treble clef, four measures of rhythmic notation (diagonal slashes) corresponding to the chords EMIN7, A7, D7, B7, EMIN7, and A7.

117

G7

C7

G7

Musical staff 121: Treble clef, four measures of rhythmic notation (diagonal slashes) corresponding to the chords G7, C7, and G7.

121

C7

G7

E7

Musical staff 125: Treble clef, four measures of rhythmic notation (diagonal slashes) corresponding to the chords C7, G7, and E7.

125

AMIN7

D7

G7

E7

AMIN7

D7

Musical staff 129: Treble clef, four measures of rhythmic notation (diagonal slashes) corresponding to the chords AMIN7, D7, G7, E7, AMIN7, and D7.

129

C7

F7

C7

Musical staff 133: Treble clef, four measures of rhythmic notation (diagonal slashes) corresponding to the chords C7, F7, and C7.

133

F7

C7

A7

Musical staff 137: Treble clef, four measures of rhythmic notation (diagonal slashes) corresponding to the chords F7, C7, and A7.

137

DMIN7

G7

C7

A7

DMIN7

G7

Musical staff 141: Treble clef, four measures of rhythmic notation (diagonal slashes) corresponding to the chords DMIN7, G7, C7, A7, DMIN7, and G7.

141

ALBUM: JAZZ MOMENTS
ARTIST: GEORGE SHEARING

WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED LOVE

ISRAEL CROSSBY BASSLINE

COLE PORTER

TRANSCRIBED BY:

MICHAEL T. GEIB

$\text{♩} = 190$
0:45

BASS

5 9 13 17 21 25 29

Chord changes: Gm17, C7, Fm17, Dm17, G7, Cma7, Gm17, C7, Fm17, Dm17, G7, Cma7, Cm17, F7, Bbm7, Ab7, Dm17, G7, Gm17, C7, Fm17, Dm17, G7, Cma7

ALBUM: WE GET REQUESTS

ARTIST: OSCAR PETERSON

DAYS OF WINE AND ROSES

RAY BROWN'S BASS LINE

HENRY MANCINI

TRANSCRIBED BY:

MICHAEL T. GEIS

FMA7 Eb7#11 D7

Musical staff 1: Bass line starting with FMA7, Eb7#11, and D7 chords. Includes a whole rest and a half note with a sharp sign.

GMI7 Eb7

Musical staff 2: Bass line starting with GMI7 and Eb7 chords. Includes a measure starting at measure 5 and a triplet of eighth notes.

FMA7 DMI7 GMI7 EMI7b5 A7b9

Musical staff 3: Bass line starting with FMA7, DMI7, GMI7, EMI7b5, and A7b9 chords.

DMI7 G7 GMI7 C7

Musical staff 4: Bass line starting with DMI7, G7, GMI7, and C7 chords. Includes a measure starting at measure 13 and triplets of eighth notes.

FMA7 Eb7#11 D7

Musical staff 5: Bass line starting with FMA7, Eb7#11, and D7 chords. Includes a measure starting at measure 17.

GMI7 Eb7

Musical staff 6: Bass line starting with GMI7 and Eb7 chords. Includes a measure starting at measure 21 and a triplet of eighth notes.

FMA7 DMI7 BMI7b5 E7b9

Musical staff 7: Bass line starting with FMA7, DMI7, BMI7b5, and E7b9 chords. Includes a measure starting at measure 25.

AMI7 D7 GMI7 C7 FMA7

Musical staff 8: Bass line starting with AMI7, D7, GMI7, C7, and FMA7 chords. Includes a measure starting at measure 29.

