Russ Nolan
Rhinoceruss Music

41-42 42nd Street, Suite 1-O
Sunnyside, NY 11104
(646) 320-3617
russ@russnolan.com
www.russnolan.com

NOTES TO JAZZ IMPROVISATION CLINIC

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1. Just like English, Spanish, German, French, Latin, etc., Jazz is a language. Did your parents sit you down one day when you were a toddler and say, "OK, Son/Daughter, now we are going to teach you English"? NO! We all learned by listening to it since we were born, well before we understood what we were hearing. We could speak it before we knew what we were saying and before we could write it.

2. Jazz is the same way—you just start listening to it, and then gradually figure out what it is you are actually listening too. With the Internet at your disposal, along with your local library, you have more educational resources available than any Jazz Great ever had. Visit iTunes, YouTube, and other sites and search for Jazz. Many sites have free downloads as well. Many jazz radio stations have streaming audio on their websites so that you could listen to music from anywhere! Search for your favorite jazz musician. If you don't have one, search for your instrument and add 'Jazz' in front of it. This will bring you to a number of sites—Jazz fan websites, jazz artist websites, and places to purchase Jazz CDs.

3. One of the best Jazz Education websites is Jamey Aebersold's company—www.jazzbooks.com. In my clinics, I made mention of a free handbook he offers entitled The Jazz Handbook. You can get to this web page by clicking on the 'Free Jazz' section on the homepage or type the direct page--www.jazzbooks.com/miva/jazz_handbook.htm. You can download the entire book in Acrobat Reader/.pdf form. It has everything you need to get started or improve—Jazz Listening Lists, Jazz Scales, Blues Progressions, etc. Also, David Baker's How to Play Bebop, (Vols. 1,2, &3) is essential in learning to apply the Bebop Scale. Of course, this should be used in conjunction with private lessons with a qualified jazz teacher.

4. Start imitating the jazz language (as you imitated your parents to learn to speak) by playing along with jazz recordings. Don't worry about playing the 'right' notes—your ear will eventually tell you what feels right. The important thing is to learn what it FEELS like to play the music and learn the mechanics by trial

and error. If you want to start learning solos, start with players like Louis Armstrong, Lester Young, and Chet Baker. These legends are known for playing beautifully simple and melodic solos. Listen to it so many times that you can sing along with it. THEN start to figure out the notes and play along with it. Don't worry about being able to write it down—that is secondary. Ask your teacher for help.

5. Improvisation is just Composition sped up and Composition is just Improvisation slowed down. They are the same, just at different speeds. It's like talking to someone instead of writing them a letter. One you do in real time, the other you sit down and think about and edit your thoughts. Every melody or harmony part you play in a Big Band or Small Group chart was first someone's 'improvised' idea. They were just writing it down—composing. You are learning how to improvise by playing parts because your ear remembers how the lines fit over the music. It's all the same thing—starting with a melody and then developing it over the course of the music—Theme and Variation.

6. One last concept regarding Jazz as a Language. Do you enjoy listening to someone who speaks in a monotone, or at one volume, carries on with run-on sentences, or jumps from topic to topic without finishing any of them? Probably not! Then don't do it with the Jazz language. Why do we enjoy reading books or going to movies? If they are good, it's because they tell a good story, right? 'Telling a Story' in Jazz doesn't mean you have to play a ton of notes and have brilliant technique on your instrument. A good solo is one that communicates to the audience that you love playing and it's shown through passion, good time feel, good rhythm, and melodic development.

Feel free to email me any questions—russ@russnolan.com

Russ Nolan Improvisation Clinic

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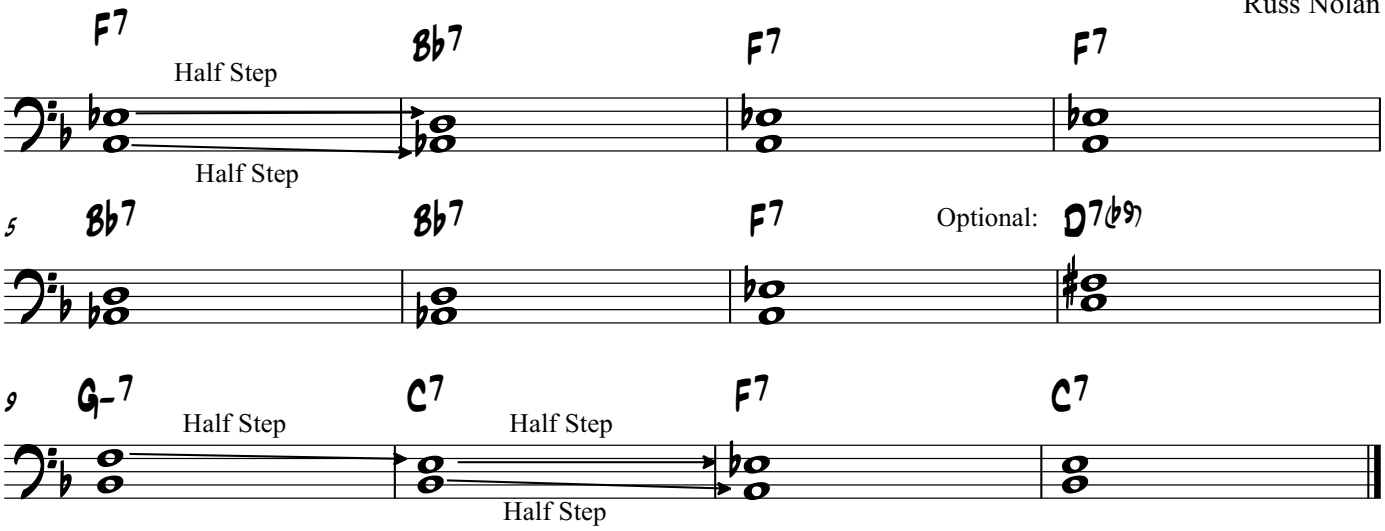
C Instruments--Bass Clef

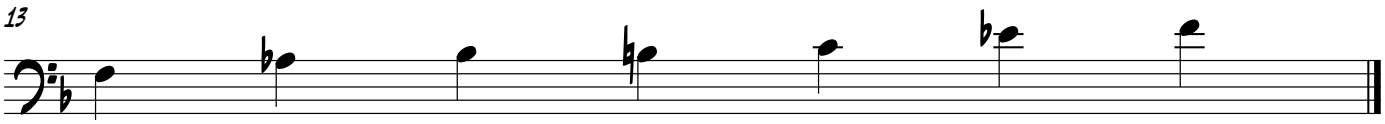
F Blues--3rds and 7ths

(Note the Half Step movements between chords)

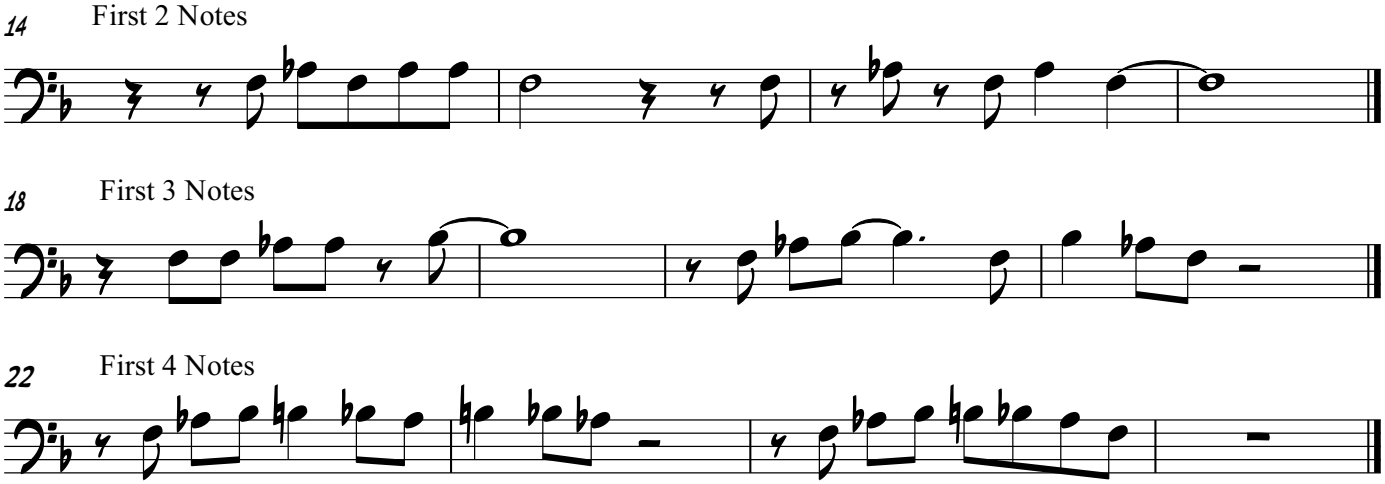
Russ Nolan

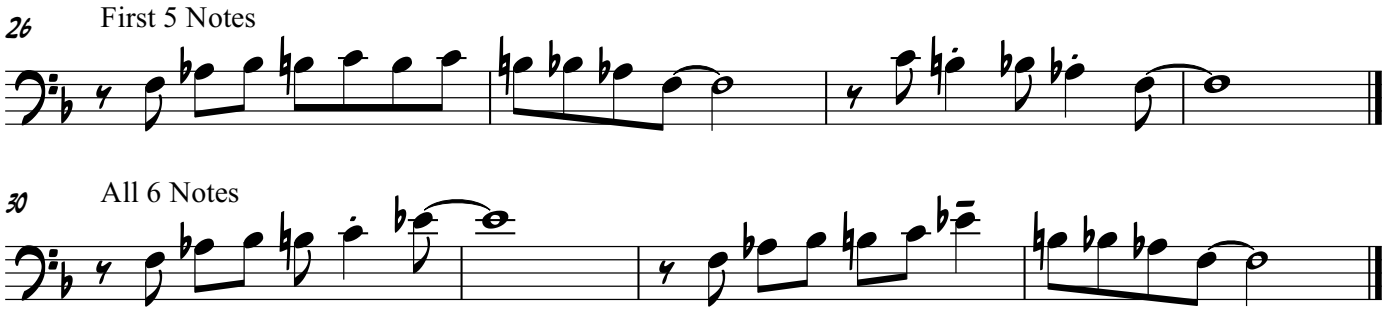


F Blues Scale



Building a Melodic Blues Line From the F Blues Scale Note by Note

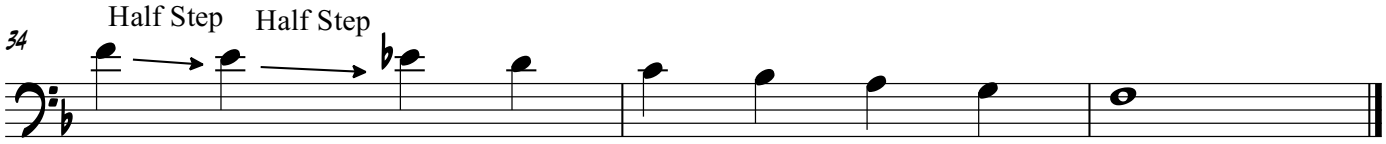




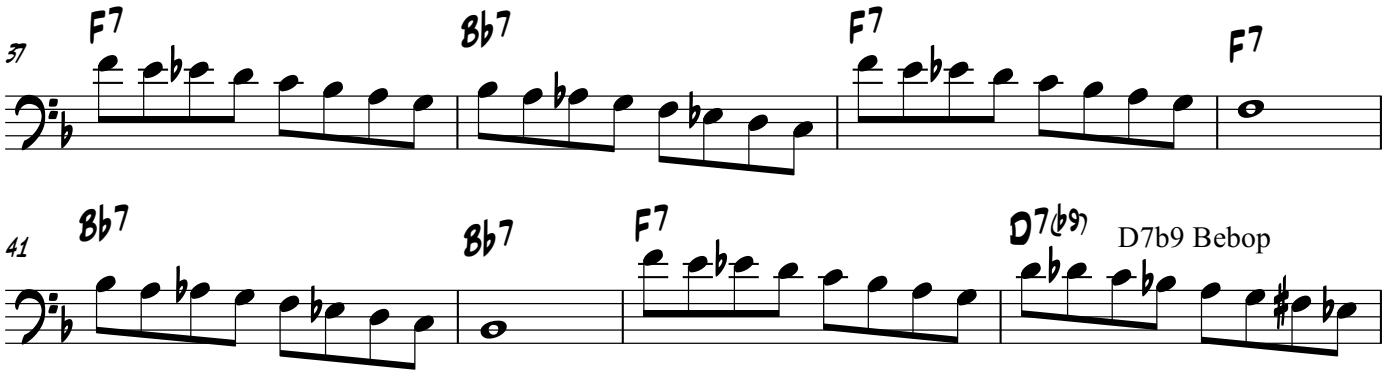
Now play 2 to 6 Note Lines going Down the Scale--Make up your own!

That's Improvising!

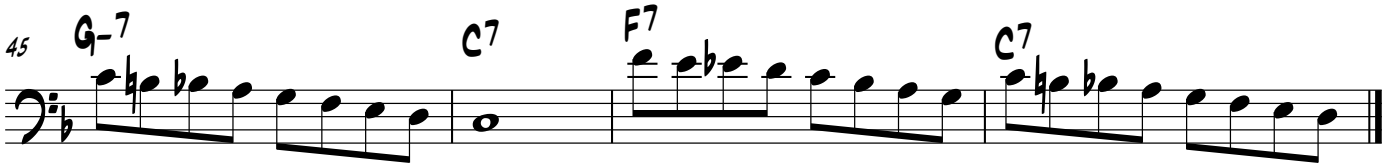
F7 Bebop Scale--Has both major 7th and dominant (flat) 7th



Using the Bebop Scale over G Blues



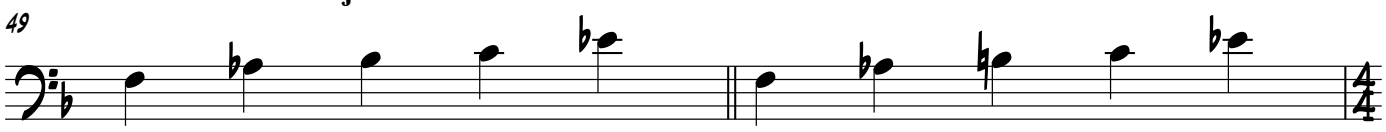
Use C7 Bebop over these two bars--ii (two) Chord to V (five) Chord



2 Pentatonic Scales (Five Notes) to use over the entire Blues Form

F Blues Scale without the B natural
--OR--
F minor/Ab Major Pentatonic

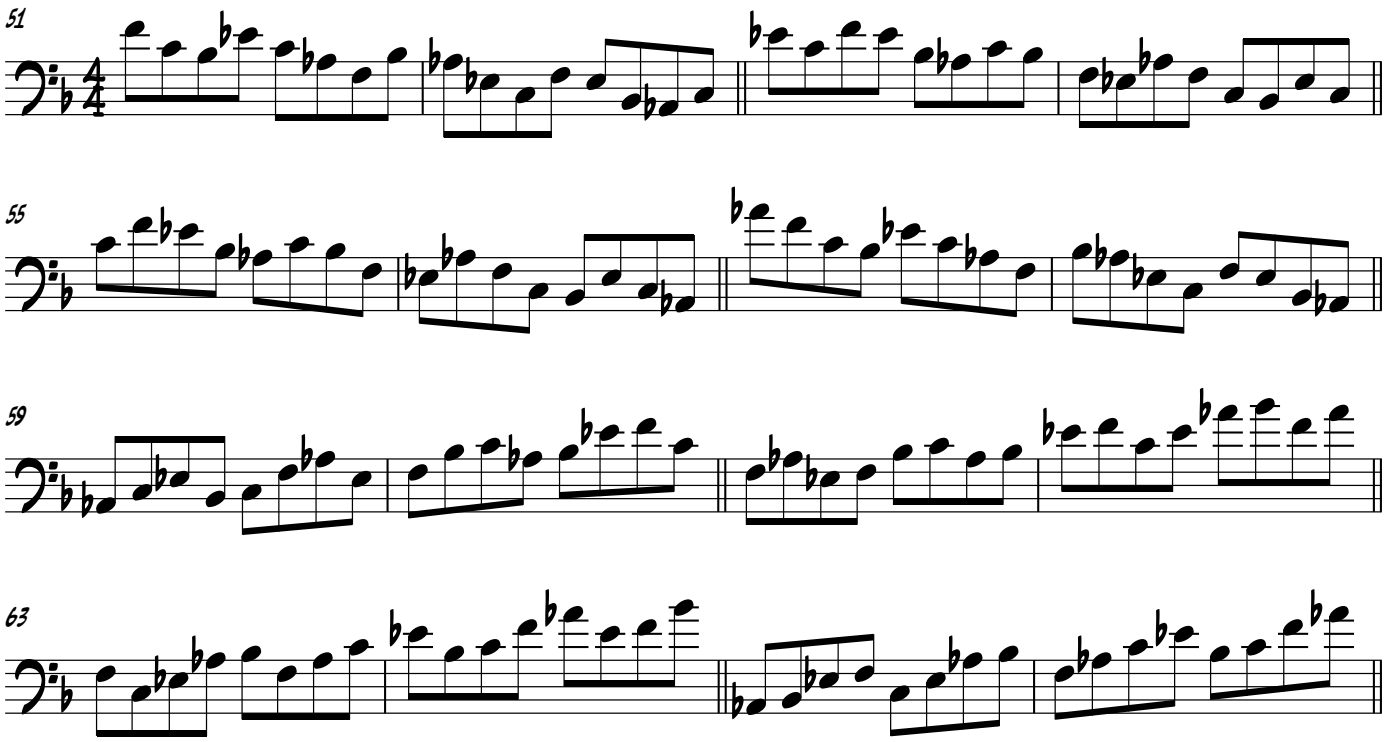
F Blues Scale without the Bb



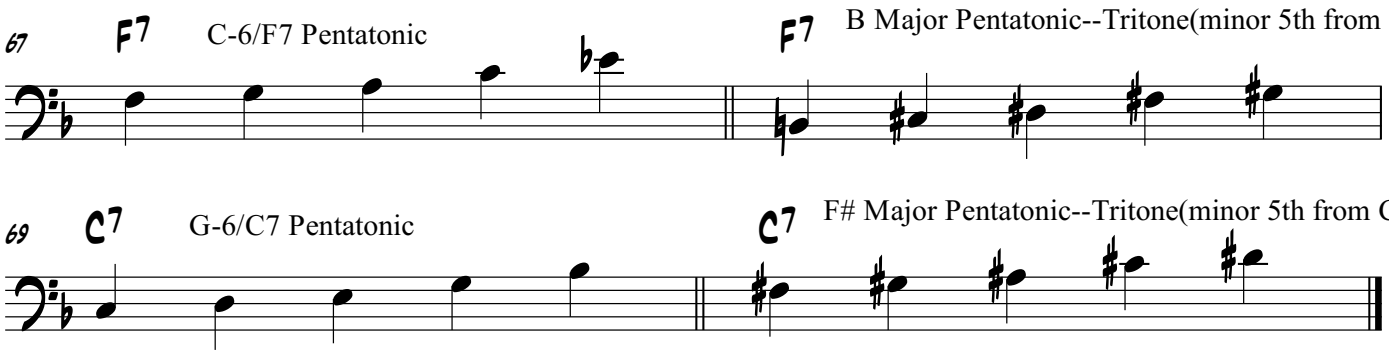
8 Pentatonic Shapes to Practice

from Jerry Bergonzi's book *Inside Improvisation Vol. 2 - Pentatonics*

Ab Major/F minor Pentatonic



Dominant and Tritone Substitution Pentatonics



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Bb Instruments--Treble Clef

G Blues--3rds and 7ths

(Note the Half Step movements between chords)

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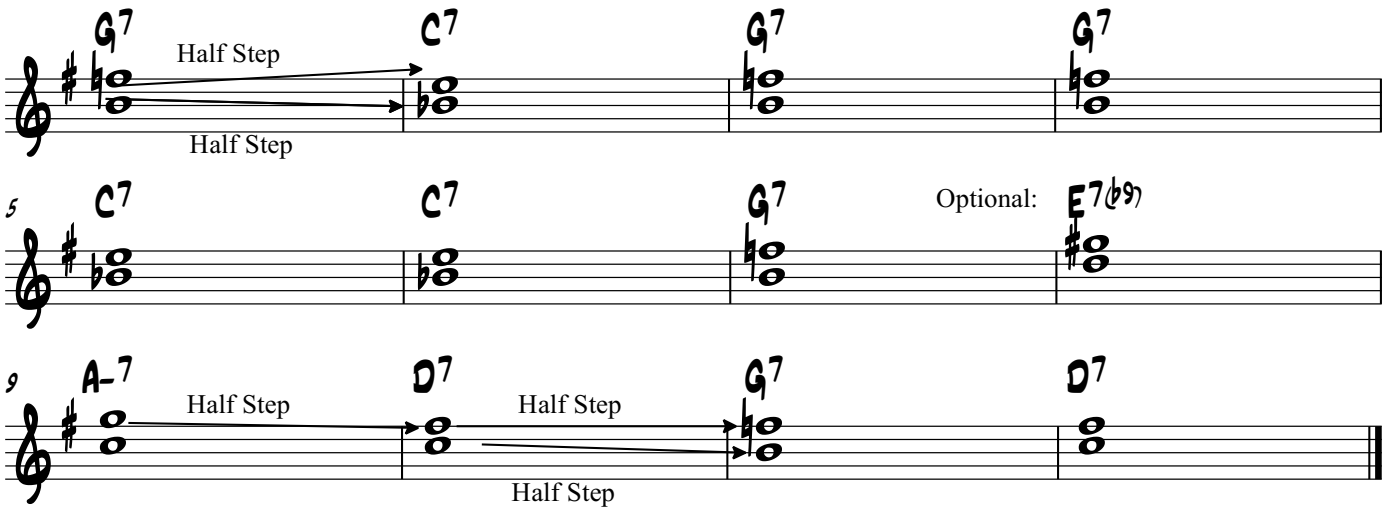
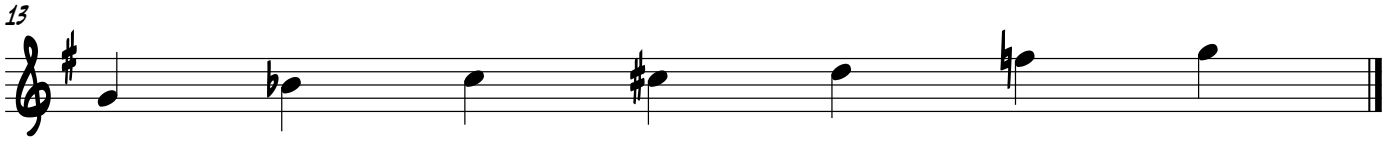
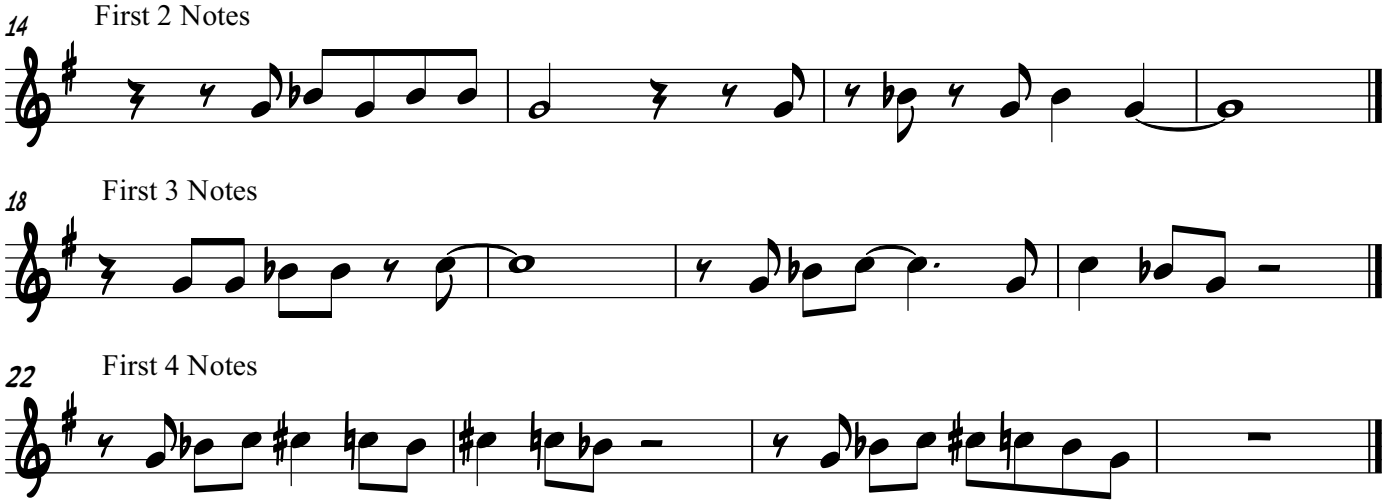
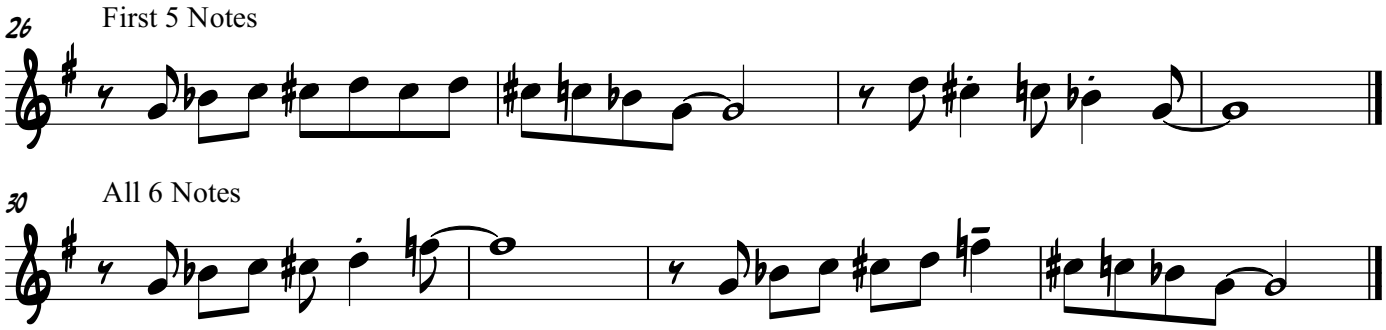


G Blues Scale



Building a Melodic Blues Line From the G Blues Scale Note by Note

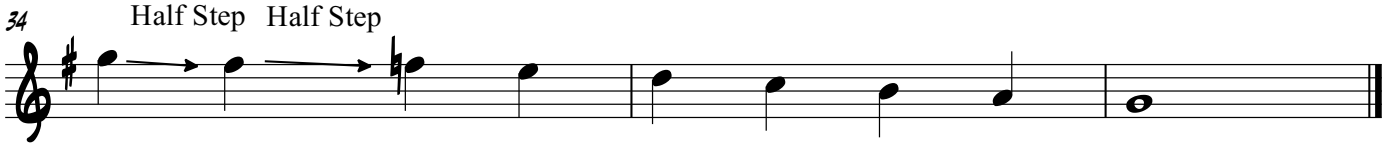




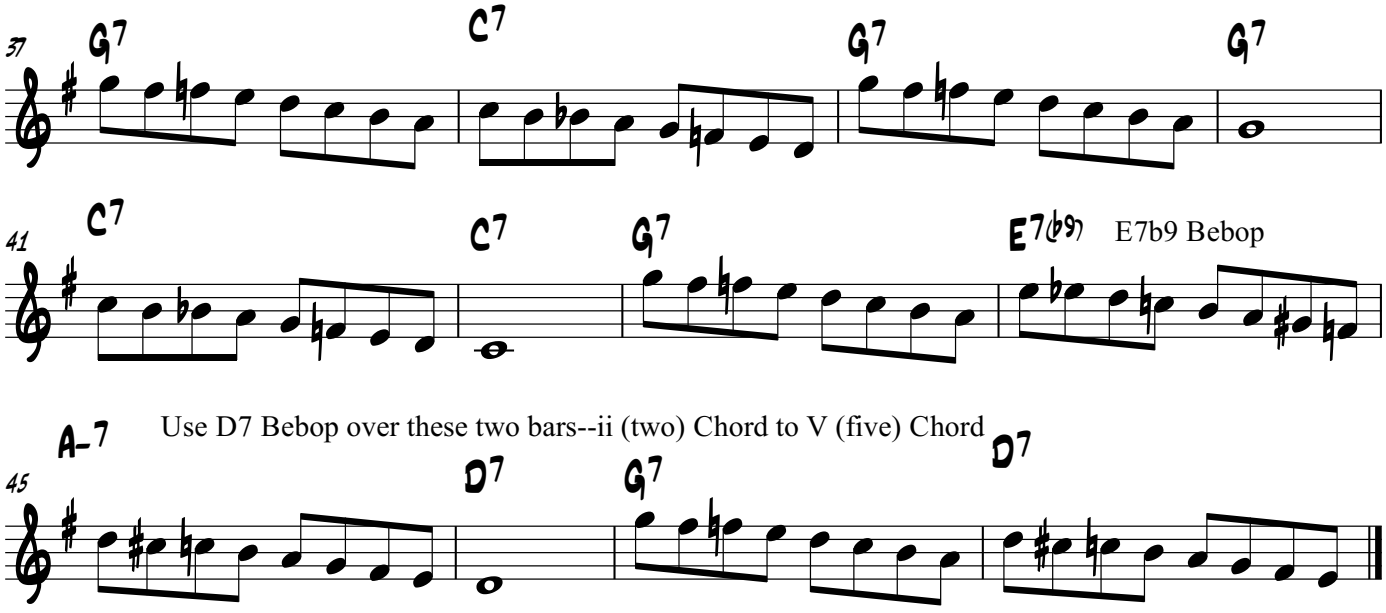
Now play 2 to 6 Note Lines going Down the Scale--Make up your own!

That's Improvising!

G7 Bebop Scale--Has both major 7th and dominant (flat) 7th



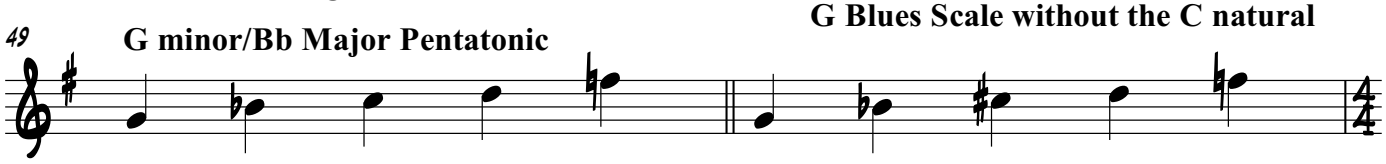
Using the Bebop Scale over G Blues



2 Pentatonic Scales (Five Notes) to use over the entire Blues Form

G Blues Scale without the C#
--OR--
G minor/Bb Major Pentatonic

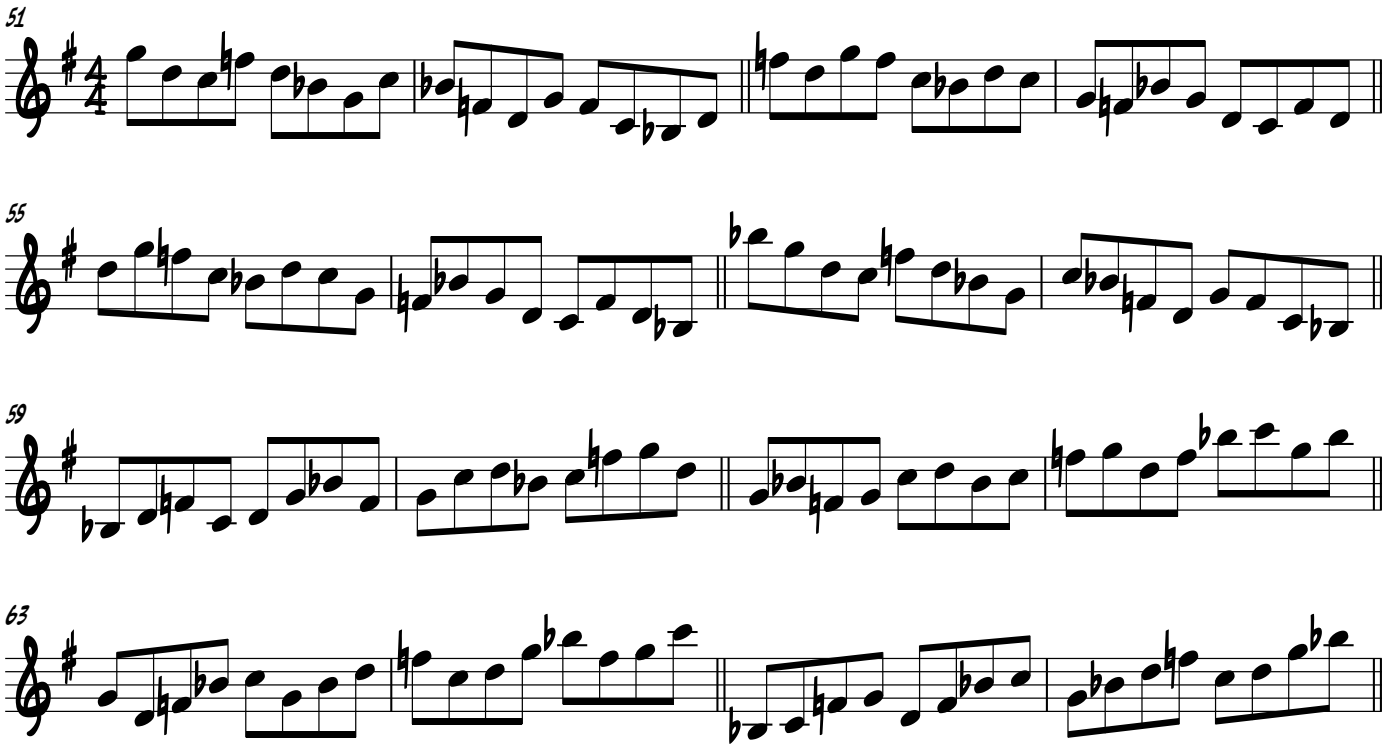
G Blues Scale without the C natural



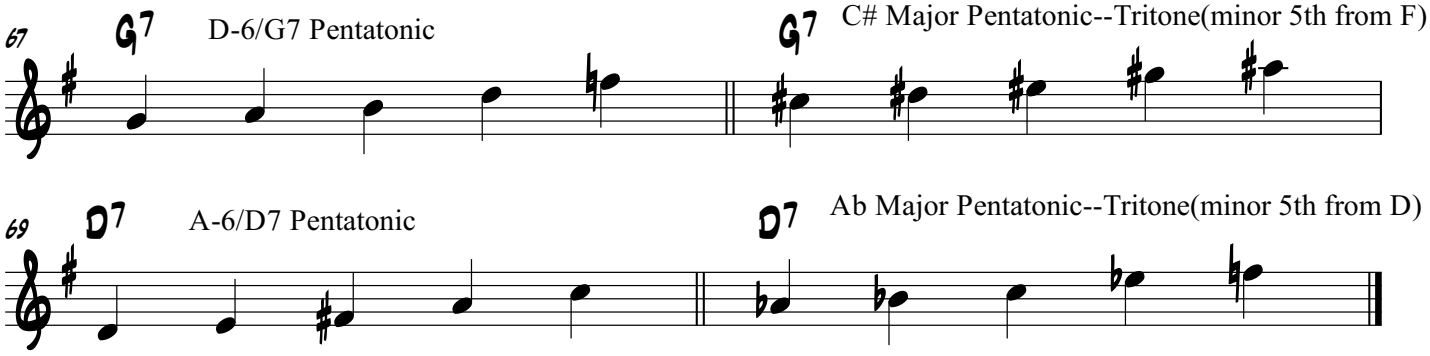
8 Pentatonic Shapes to Practice

from Jerry Bergonzi's book *Inside Improvisation Vol. 2 - Pentatonics*

Bb Major/G minor Pentatonic



Dominant and Tritone Substitution Pentatonics



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C Instruments--Treble Clef

F Blues--3rds and 7ths

(Note the Half Step movements between chords)

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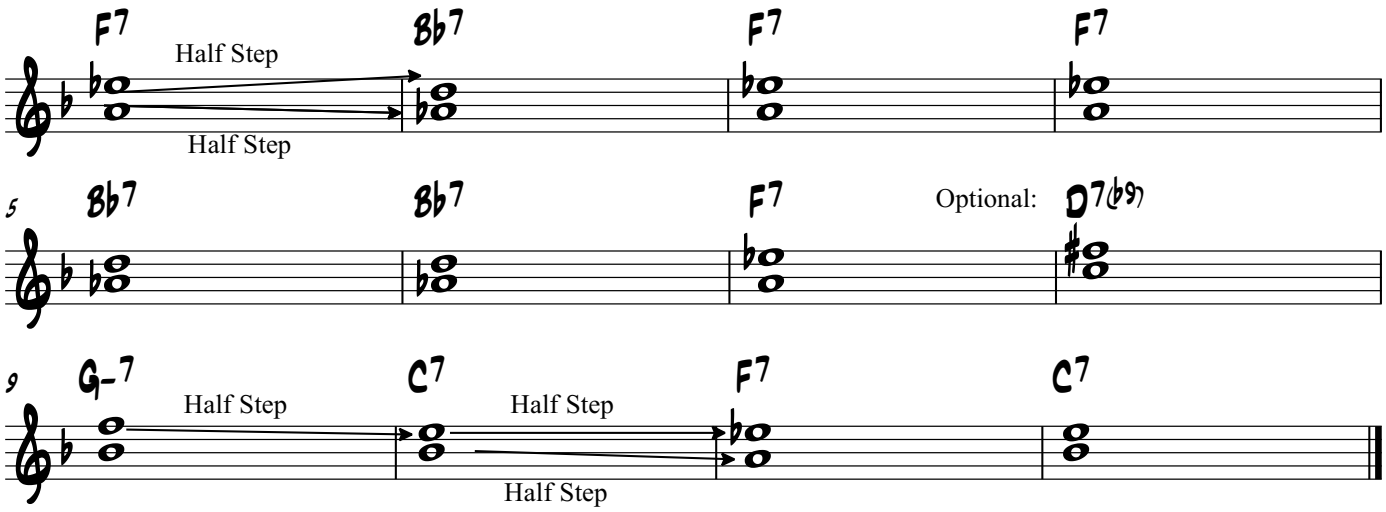
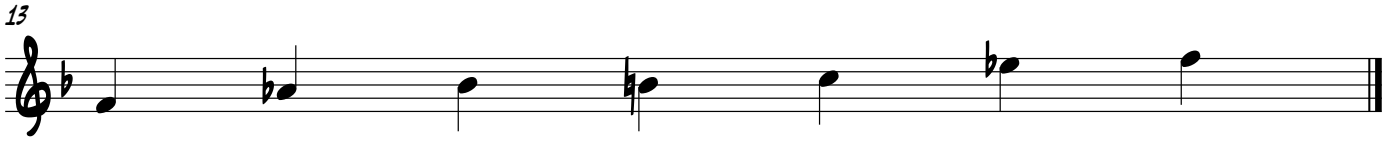
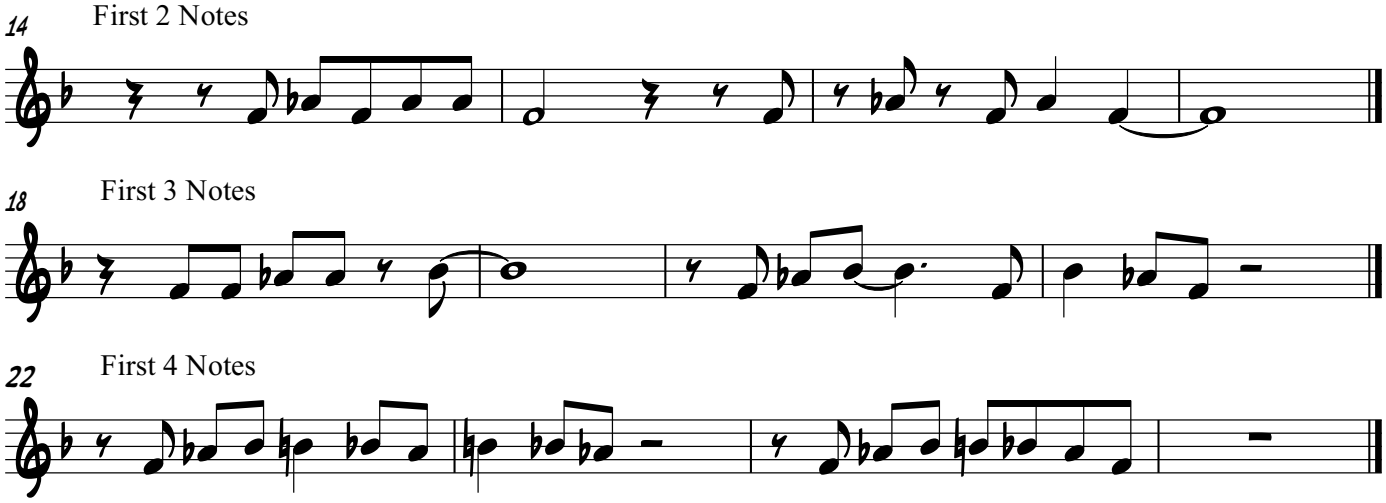
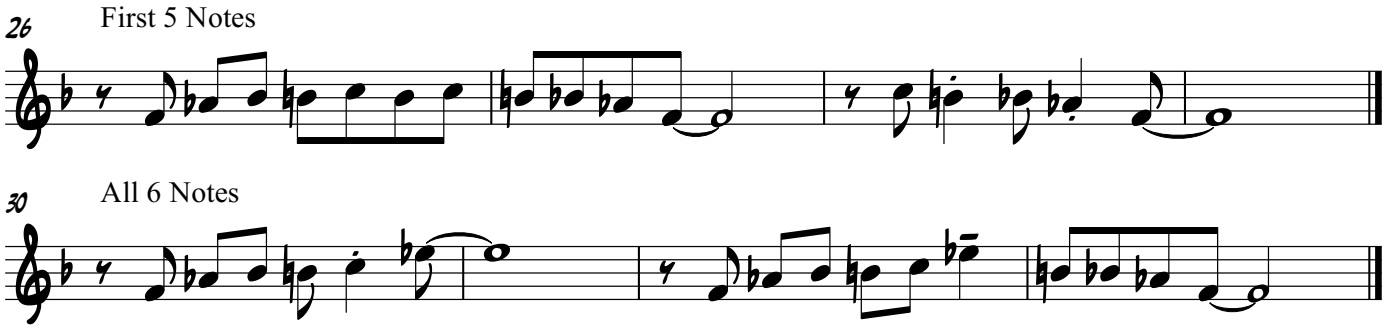


F Blues Scale



Building a Melodic Blues Line From the F Blues Scale Note by Note

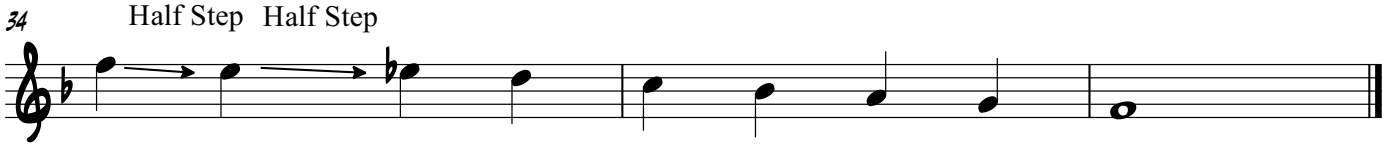




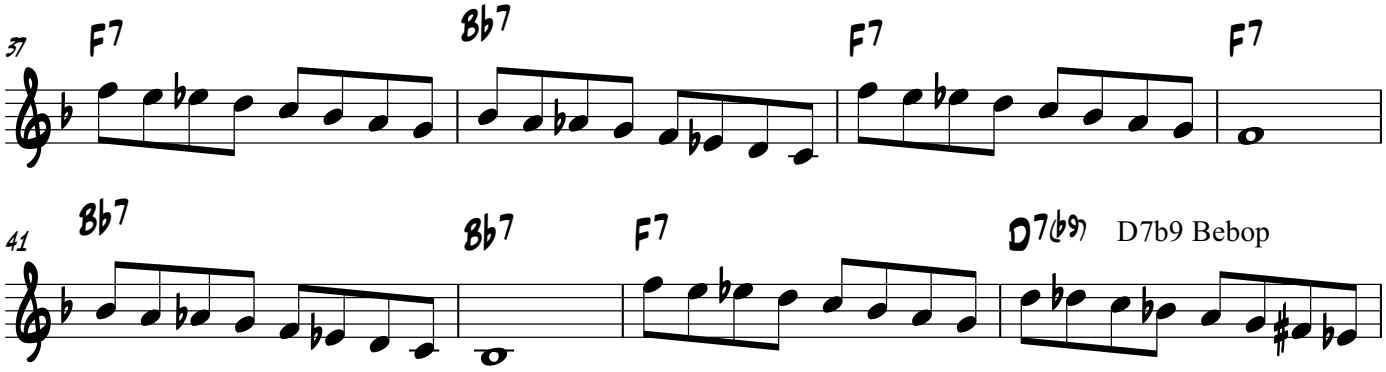
Now play 2 to 6 Note Lines going Down the Scale--Make up your own!

That's Improvising!

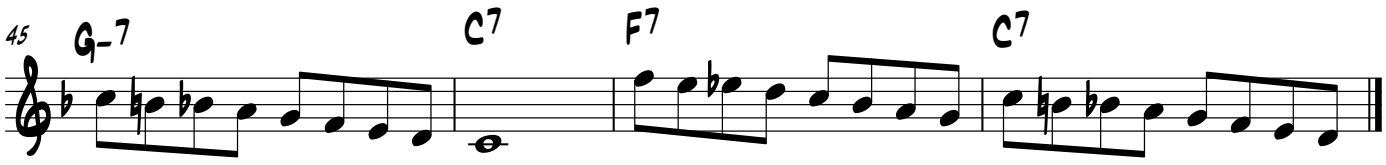
F7 Bebop Scale--Has both major 7th and dominant (flat) 7th



Using the Bebop Scale over G Blues



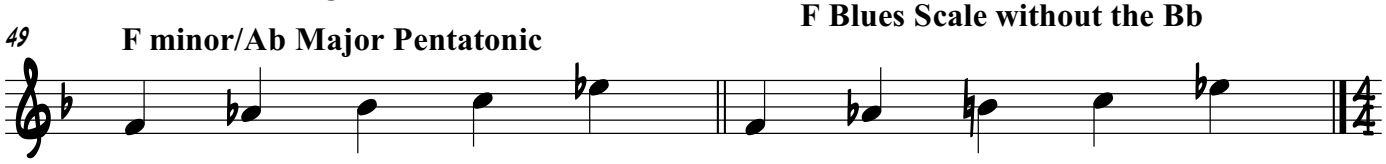
Use C7 Bebop over these two bars--ii (two) Chord to V (five) Chord



2 Pentatonic Scales (Five Notes) to use over the entire Blues Form

F Blues Scale without the B natural
--OR--
F minor/Ab Major Pentatonic

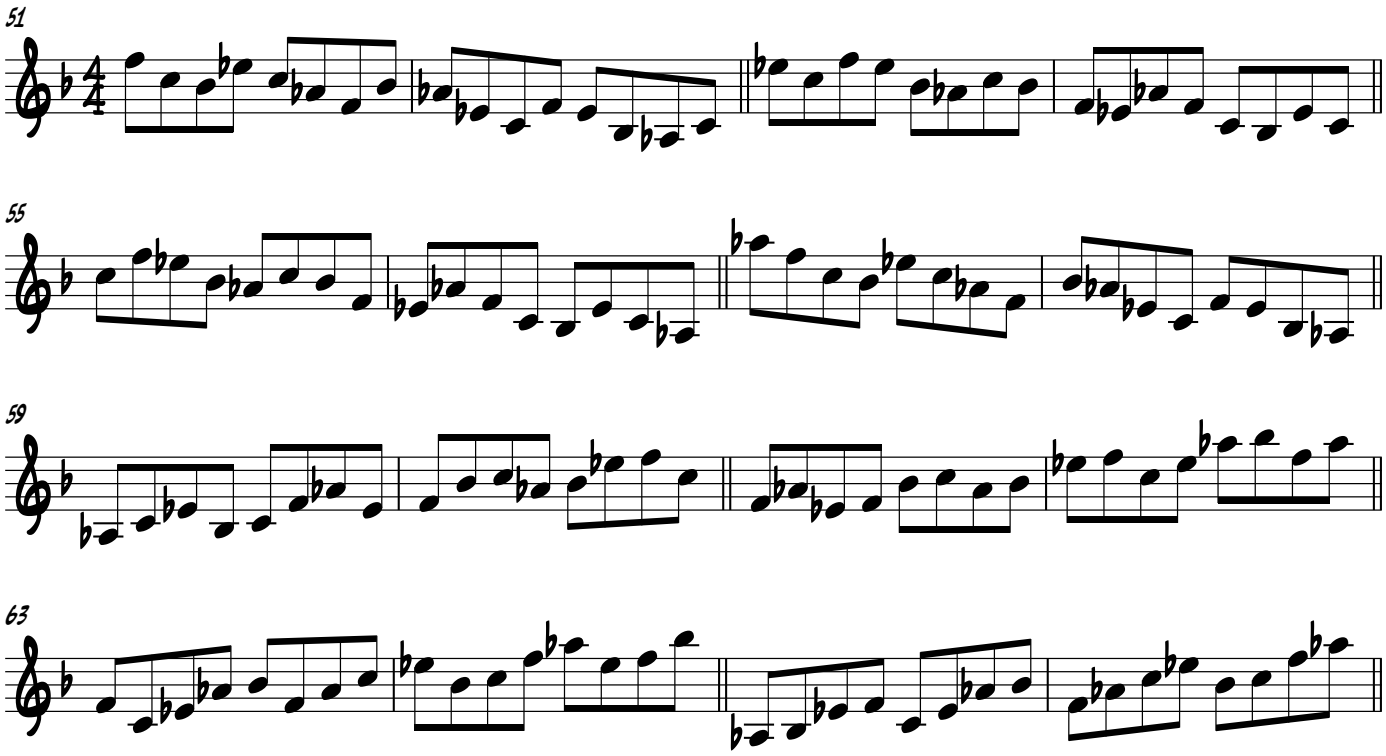
F Blues Scale without the Bb



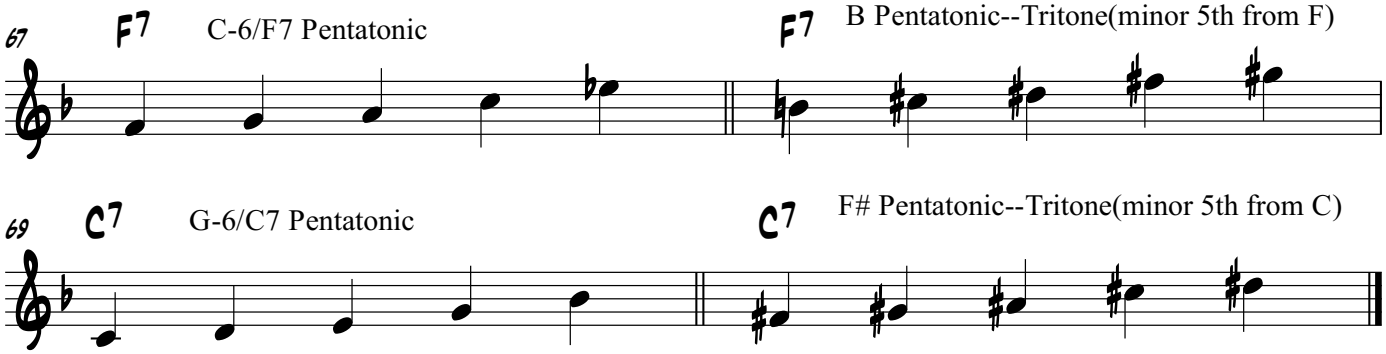
8 Pentatonic Shapes to Practice

from Jerry Bergonzi's book *Inside Improvisation Vol. 2 - Pentatonics*

F minor Pentatonic/Ab Major



Dominant and Tritone Substitution Pentatonics



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Eb Instruments--Treble Clef

D Blues--3rds and 7ths

(Note the Half Step movements between chords)

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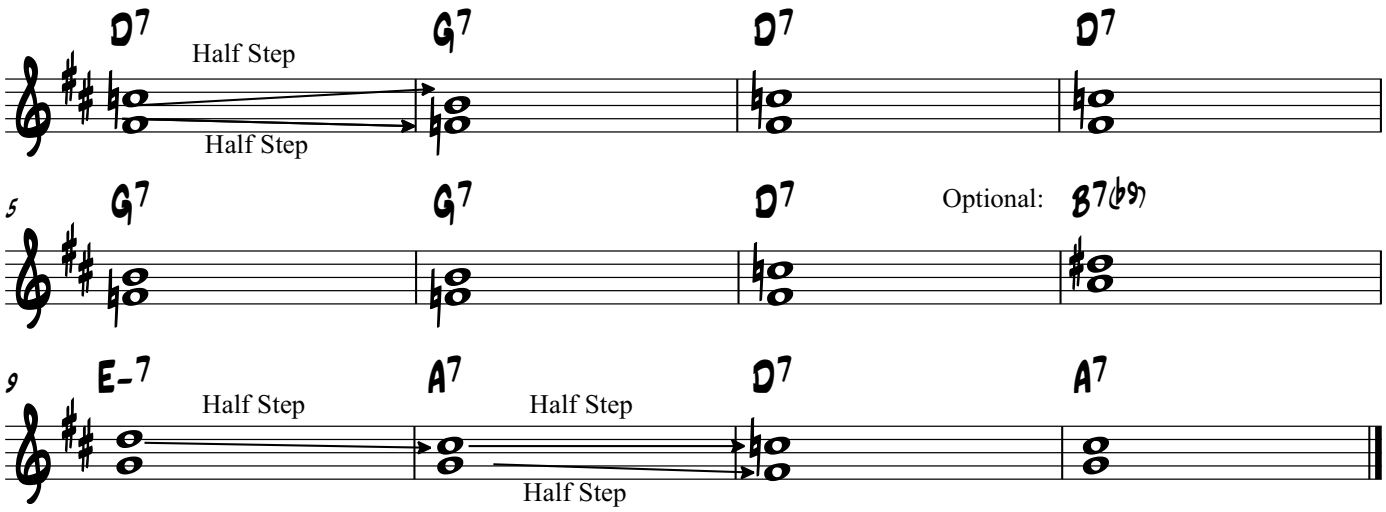
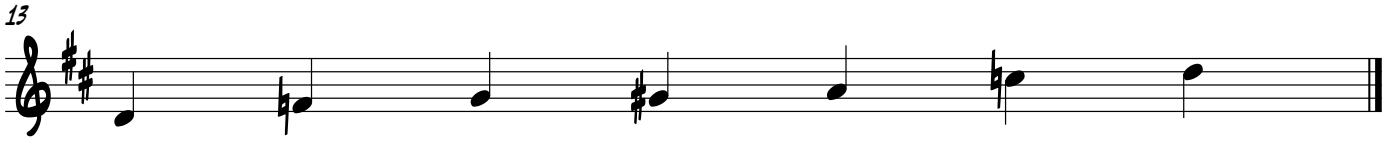
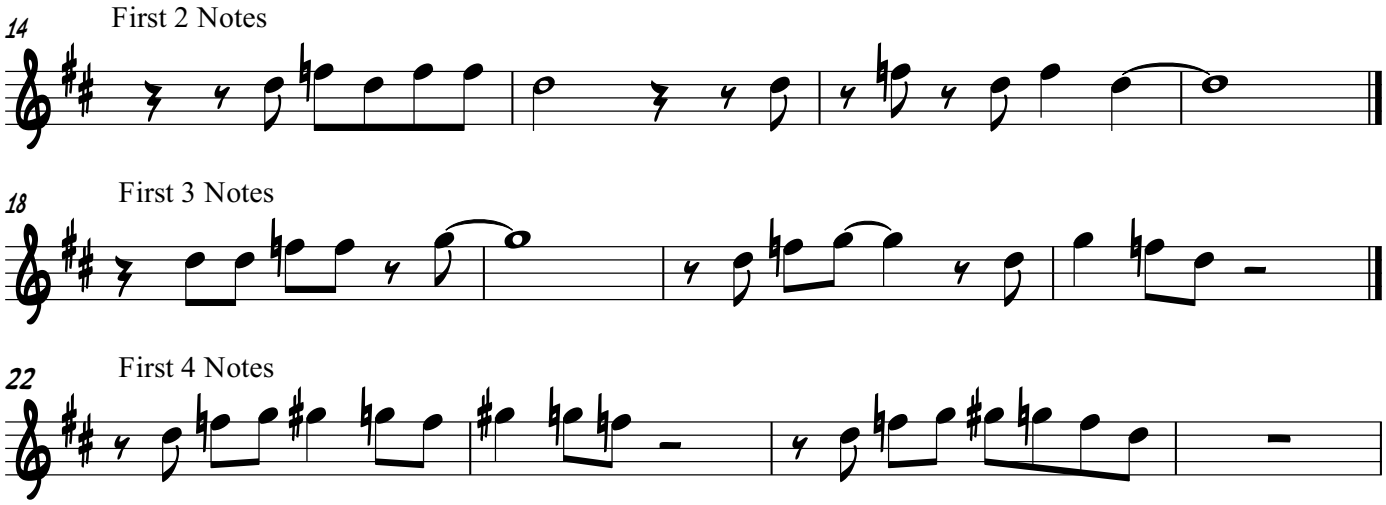
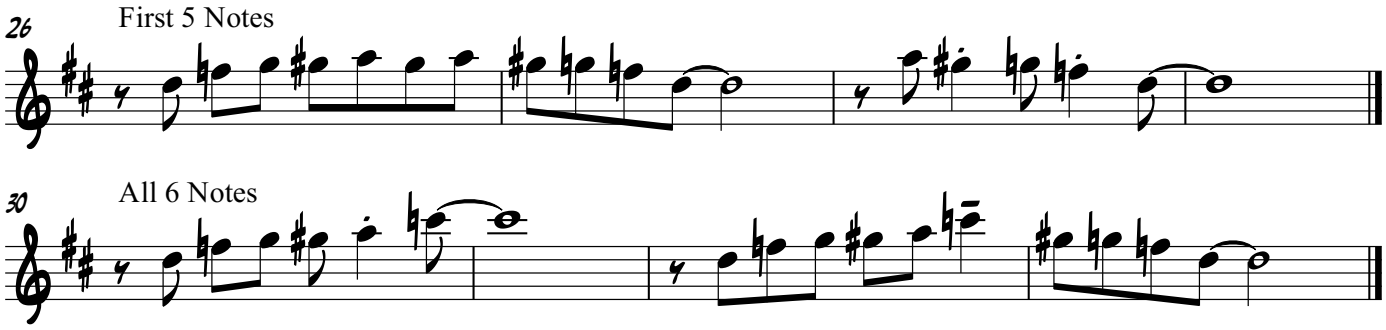


D Blues Scale



Building a Melodic Blues Line From the D Blues Scale Note by Note





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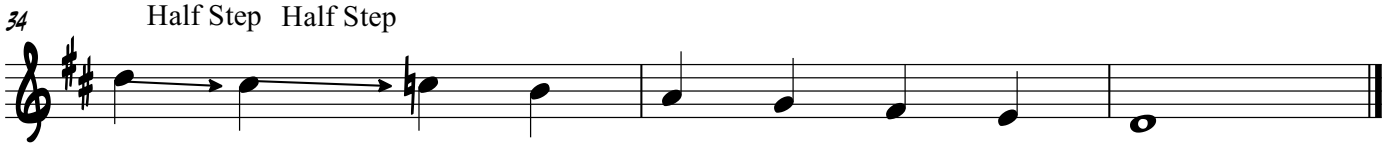
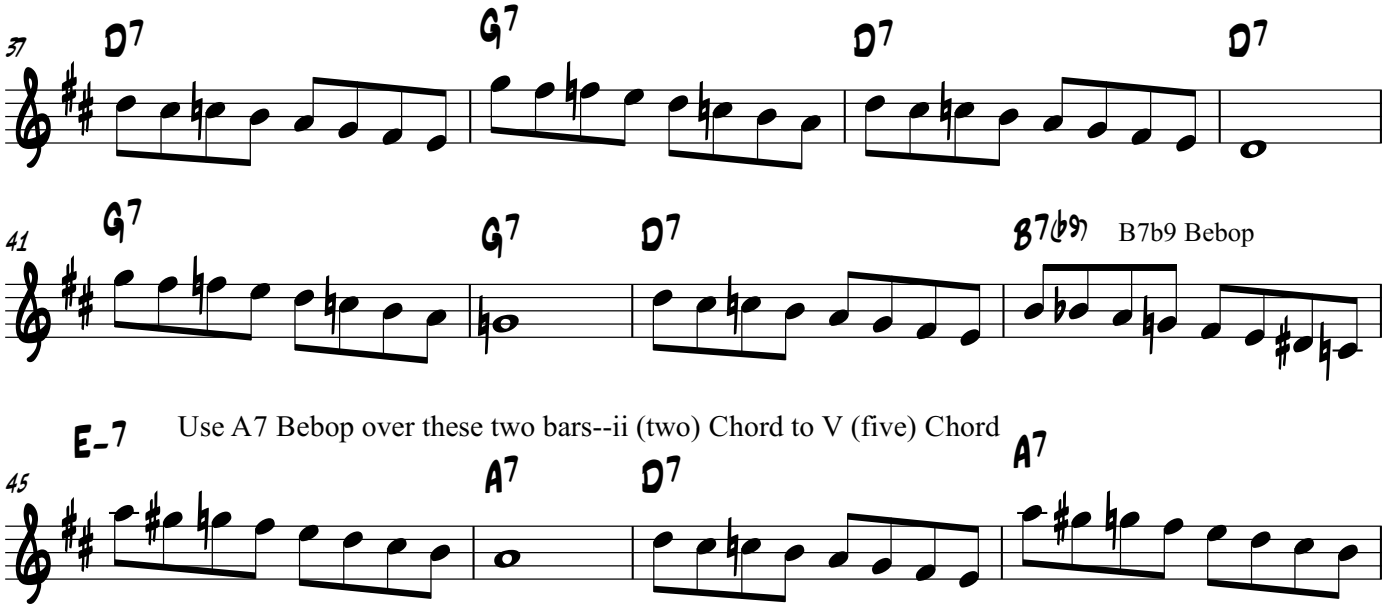
That's Improvising!

D7 Bebop Scale--Has both major 7th and dominant (flat) 7th



Using the Bebop Scale over D Blues



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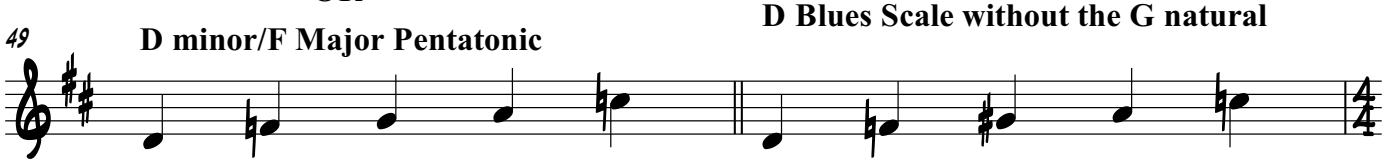
D minor/F Major Pentatonic

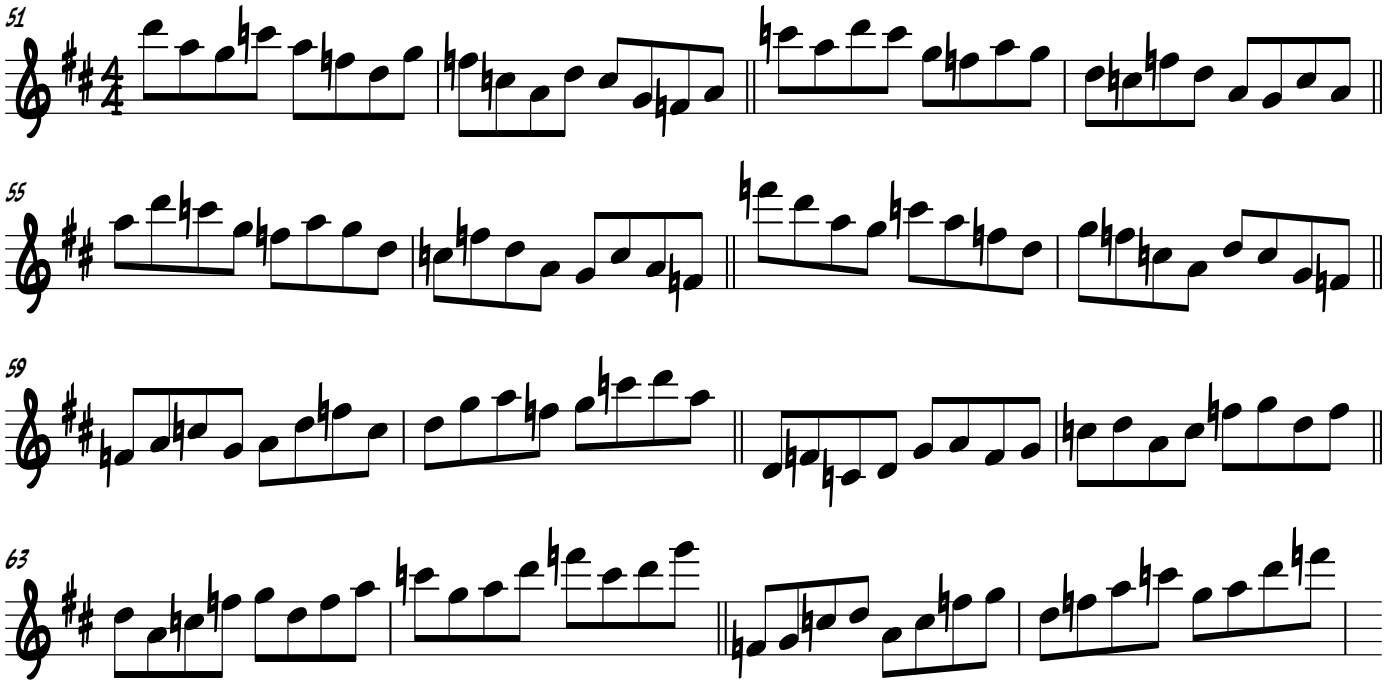
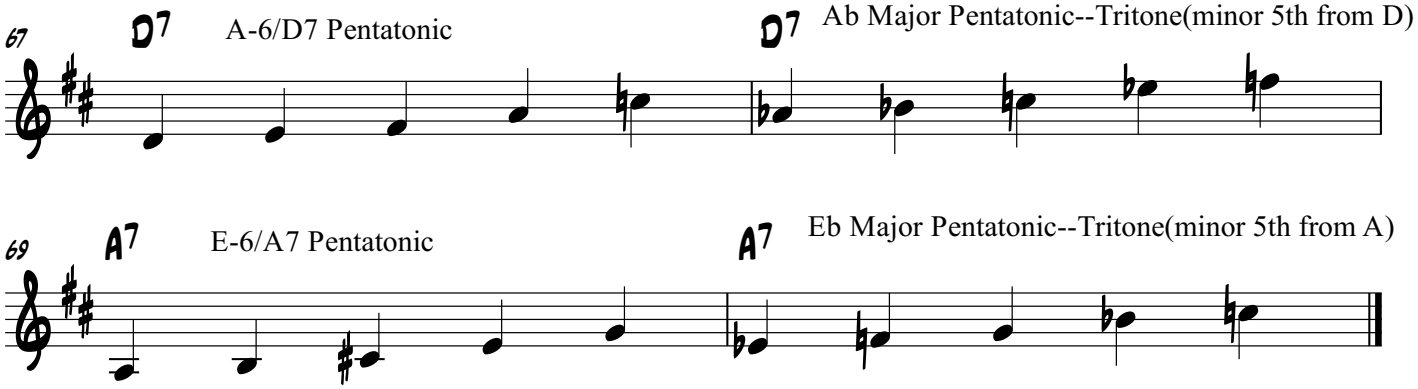
D Blues Scale without the G natural



8 Pentatonic Shapes to Practice

from Jerry Bergonzi's book *Inside Improvisation Vol. 2 - Pentatonics*

F Major/D minor Pentatonic



Dominant and Tritone Substitution Pentatonics