

# THE RHYTHM CHANGES GUIDE

*Exercises*  
*Concepts*  
*Practice Strategies*  
*Etudes*

LUKAS GABRIC

Sher Music Co.

# ENDORSEMENTS

“Lukas has put together an amazing, much needed book on one of music’s most universal forms. It is very clear and concise and can be used on several different levels. Whether you are a beginning or an advanced improviser, there are many things to be learned here. I plan on using it for my classes and lessons as well as for my own playing and practicing. Five stars and highly recommended!”

**RICK MARGITZA**

“This is the most thorough and useful method on the subject of “rhythm” changes I have seen. I would recommend this book to everyone who wants to improve their ability to negotiate tunes based on “rhythm” changes; always a challenge to jazz musicians. The Rhythm Changes Guide will be a tremendous asset to anyone interested in this subject.”

**WALT WEISKOPF**

“*The Rhythm Changes Guide* by Lukas Gabric has everything you need to know about playing the time-honored song form. The author, a master musician, offers detailed insight into his harmonic concepts and gives everyone the chance to learn more about the art of jazz improvisation by sharing this deep knowledge of the subject matter. A must have!”

**THOMAS GANSCH**

“Blues and rhythm changes are important milestones in jazz music. I personally know some research on playing the blues but not much on rhythm changes. This book by Lukas is a great study on this very important part of jazz. I warmly recommend it to everyone who wants to dive deeply into rhythm changes.”

**TONY LAKATOS**

“This book works well as a kind of encyclopedia of rhythm changes, and that’s a valuable thing for serious, committed mainstream jazz improvisers (certainly including myself) to have as a kind of reference work. It’s well organized, and so thorough that even though I’ve spent a few hundred hours myself on rhythm changes, I can still find pathways that I haven’t yet explored.”

**DAN GREENBLATT**

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**PDF versions of etudes in Eb, Bb, and Bass Clef available  
for free download at [www.shermusic.com](http://www.shermusic.com)**

# INTRODUCTION

The rhythm changes progression, famously derived from George Gershwin's song "I Got Rhythm," is arguably one of the most important vehicles in jazz. The song's harmonic progression and 32-bar AABA form, have been used for countless contrafacts throughout jazz history. Due to its importance, many teachers recommend the mastery of rhythm changes in every key.

The popularity of rhythm changes is likely based on the various progressions that occur within the tune. The same progressions are found in almost every jazz standard, such as the tonicization of IVmaj<sup>7</sup>, a move from IVmaj<sup>7</sup> to iv<sup>6</sup> (bVII<sup>7</sup> or #iv<sup>o</sup>), I-VI<sup>7</sup>-ii<sup>7</sup>-V<sup>7</sup> turnarounds, or chains of secondary dominants. In rhythm changes all these progressions occur in relatively rapid succession. There are seemingly countless possibilities for harmonic variations of the rhythm changes progression.

Rhythm changes has become somewhat of a testing ground for improvisers. Advanced jazz performers are expected to demonstrate their knowledge of the tradition when performing rhythm changes.

This book is aimed at presenting the dedicated musician with a variety of material derived from the tradition as well as strategies to learn and apply it effectively and creatively. Some of the most important melodic and harmonic devices from the rhythm changes tradition were used to compose the twenty etudes in the last section of the book.

# LIST OF RHYTHM CHANGES CONTRAFACTS

- “Anthropology / Thriving on a Riff”(C. Parker & D. Gillespie)
- “Apple Jump” (D. Gordon)
- “Blue’s Theme”(B. Mitchell)
- “The Bridge”(S. Rollins)
- “C.T.A.” (J. Heath)
- “Celerity” (C. Parker)
- “Chasin’ the Bird” (C. Parker)
- “Chasm” (J. Adderley)
- “Chippie” (O. Coleman)
- “Chronology”(O. Coleman)
- “Constellation” (C. Parker)
- “Cottontail” (D. Ellington)
- “Crazeology” (B. Harris)
- “Dexterity” (C. Parker)
- “Dizzy Atmosphere” (D. Gillespie)
- “Don’t Be That Way” (B. Goodman, E. Sampson, M. Parish)
- “The Eternal Triangle” (S. Stitt)
- “Tricotism” (O. Pettiford)
- “Fingers” (T. Jones)
- “Finger Poppin” (H. Silver)
- “Flintstones Theme” (H. Curtin)
- “Fungi Mama” (B. Mitchell)
- “Good Bait” (T. Dameron)
- “Jay Bird” (J.J. Johnson)
- “Jay Jay” (J.J. Johnson)
- “Lester Leaps In” (L. Young)
- “Lo Joe” (G. Coleman)
- “Moose the Mooche” (C. Parker)

- “Nutty” (T. Monk)
- “Oleo” (S. Rollins)
- “An Oscar for Treadwell” (C. Parker)
- “Passport” (C. Parker)
- “Rhythm-a-Ning” (T. Monk)
- “Room 608” (H. Silver)
- “Salt Peanuts” (D. Gillespie)
- “Second Balcony Jump” (B. Eckstine & G. Valentine)
- “Seven, Come Eleven” (C. Christian & B. Goodman)
- “Steeplechase” (C. Parker)
- “Straight Ahead” (K. Dorham)
- “Suspone” (M. Stern)
- “The Theme” (M. Davis)
- “Tippin” (H. Silver)
- “Wail” (B. Powell)
- “Webb City” (B. Powell)
- “Wee” (D. Gillespie)
- “Wells Fargo” (W. Harden)

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\*This is just a selection of contrafacts that were inspired by rhythm changes. Use the empty lines for additional contrafacts you find.



# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

1. Always practice with a reference to metronomic time
2. Start slowly and increase the tempo
3. Isolate passages that you have difficulties with
4. Use the etudes for your auditions, juries, and competitions
5. Play the exercises and etudes with your friends or with a play along
6. Record yourself playing the exercises and etudes
7. Analyze the etudes
8. Play the exercises and etudes in different keys
9. Take little segments you like and practice them through the keys at various tempos
10. Write your own etudes over the given chord progressions
11. Apply the various practice strategies to the harmonic loops
12. Use the etudes to improve and develop your:
  - Reading
  - Articulation
  - Instrumental Technique
  - Familiarity with the jazz language & knowledge of the tradition
  - Time feel
  - Transposition
  - Intonation
  - Memorization
  - Compositional and Improvisational understanding
  - Knowledge and Flexibility of Harmony

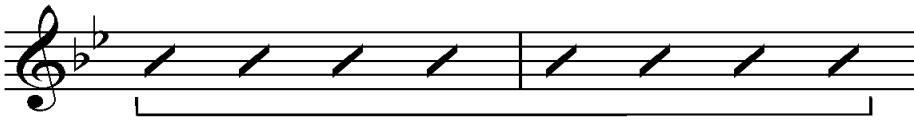
# RHYTHM CHANGES – HARMONIC STRUCTURE

Rhythm changes follows a 32-bar AABA form with specific chords (see page 12). Gershwin's original song includes a tag, which is added to the last A section that is generally left out in contrafacts.

The A sections consist of two different harmonic units. Unit A occurs three times while unit B happens only once in every A section.

## UNIT A

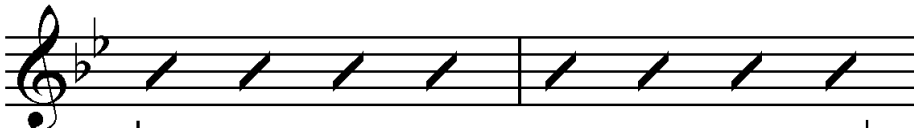
B♭maj7      Gm7      Cm7      F7



A

## UNIT B

Fm7      B♭7      E♭maj7      E♭m6



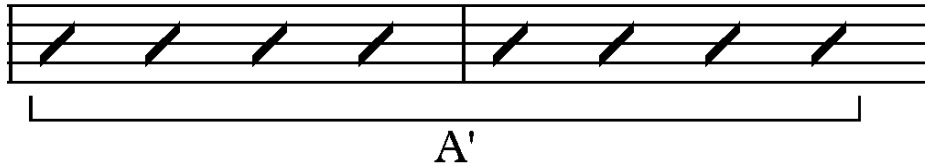
B

Unit B is part of the A section and not to be confused with the bridge, which is also designated as “B”

The second A section of rhythm changes is an exception. Its final two measures are basically just two bars of the tonic chord. This unit is labeled as A'.

### UNIT A'

B $\flat$ maj7      F7      B $\flat$ maj7



Due to the inventiveness of the jazz legends, many harmonic variations of these two-bar units have been absorbed into the jazz tradition. There are also many harmonic variations that span four-measure subsections, or even entire A sections. The same applies to the B section. Knowing the structure of the piece helps you to practice it and play with more flexibility.

# HARMONIC VARIATIONS OF UNIT A

## (Playlist Tracks 2-12)

2 B♭maj7 Gm7 Cm7 F7 B♭maj7 F7

3 B♭maj7 Gm7 Cm7 F7 B♭maj7 G7 Cm7 F7

4 B♭maj7 Gm7 Cm7 F7 Dm7 Gm7 Cm7 F7

5 B♭maj7 Gm7 Cm7 F7 Dm7 D♭° Cm7 F7

6 B♭maj7 Gm7 Cm7 F7 B♭maj7 B° Cm7 F7

7 B♭maj7 Gm7 Cm7 F7 B♭maj7 G7 Cm7 B7(#11)

8 B♭maj7 Gm7 Cm7 F7 Dm7 C♯m7 F♯7 B7(#11)

9 B♭maj7 Gm7 Cm7 F7 Dm7 C♯m7 Cm7 B7(#11)

10 B♭maj7 Gm7 Cm7 F7 B♭maj7 C♯7 F♯maj7 B7(#11)

11 B♭maj7 Gm7 Cm7 F7 Dm7 C♯7 F♯maj7 B7(#11)

12 B♭maj7 Gm7 Cm7 F7 B♭maj7 A♭7 G♭7 F7

# MAJOR THIRDS

## (Playlist Tracks 68-71)

Harmonic Variations for first and third A sections

Descending major thirds

68

E $\flat$ <sup>7</sup>      B<sup>7</sup>      G<sup>7</sup>      E $\flat$ <sup>7</sup>

B<sup>7</sup>      G<sup>7</sup>      E $\flat$ <sup>7</sup>      B<sup>7</sup>

69

A<sup>7</sup>      F<sup>7</sup>      C $\sharp$ <sup>7</sup>      A<sup>7</sup>

F<sup>7</sup>      C $\sharp$ <sup>7</sup>      A<sup>7</sup>      F<sup>7</sup>

Ascending major thirds

70

C $\sharp$ <sup>7</sup>      F<sup>7</sup>      A<sup>7</sup>      C $\sharp$ <sup>7</sup>

F<sup>7</sup>      A<sup>7</sup>      C $\sharp$ <sup>7</sup>      F<sup>7</sup>

71

G<sup>7</sup>      B<sup>7</sup>      D $\sharp$ <sup>7</sup>      G<sup>7</sup>

B<sup>7</sup>      D $\sharp$ <sup>7</sup>      G<sup>7</sup>      B<sup>7</sup>

LUKAS GABRIC

# "For Vic"

$\text{♩} = 110$

Chord progression for "For Vic":

Chords: Cmaj7, Am7, Dm7, G7, Em7, Am7, G#m7, C#7, Gm7, C7, Fmaj7, Fm6, Cmaj7/G, A7, Dm11, G7, Cmaj7, Am7, Dm7, G7, Em7, Am7, Dm7, G7, Gm7, C7, Fmaj7, Fm6, Cmaj7, G7, Cmaj7, Bm7, E7(b9), Bbm7, Eb7(#11), Am7, D7(b13), Dm7, G7(b13), Em7, A7, Dm7, G7, Em7, A7, Dm7, G7, Gm7, C7, Fmaj7, Fm6, Cmaj7/G, A7, Dm7, G7.

Star markers: ★ (first measure), ★ (last measure).

Trill: ^ (above the 5th measure of the 3rd system).

Triplet: 3 (below the 10th measure of the 7th system).