

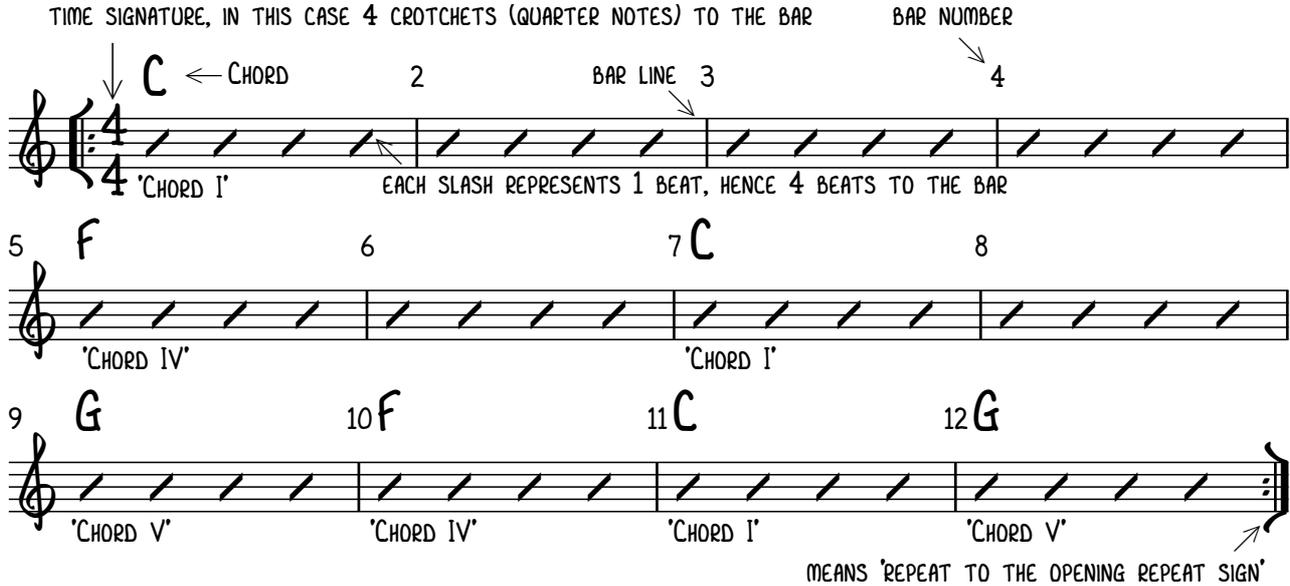
## INTRODUCTION TO BLUES PIANO LESSON 1

### GETTING STARTED: THE 12 BAR BLUES

The 12 Bar Blues is a great way to open the door to the sound-world of the Blues. Although many other forms exist (and some are pretty free and open), it's the most common form and allows us to look at stylistic parts that can be applied in many other situations.

Here is a chord chart showing the structure of a basic 12 bar blues – I've added explanations in case you've never come across a chord chart before, but essentially it tells you **what chords** come in **which order** and for **how long**:

TIME SIGNATURE, IN THIS CASE 4 CROTCHETS (QUARTER NOTES) TO THE BAR      BAR NUMBER



EACH SLASH REPRESENTS 1 BEAT, HENCE 4 BEATS TO THE BAR

MEANS 'REPEAT TO THE OPENING REPEAT SIGN'

You can see that there are 12 'bars' (or 'measures') divided up by 'barlines', each bar containing 4 'beats'. When you hear musicians counting in a song with '1...2...1, 2, 3, 4' they are essentially telling the other musicians that there are 4 beats in the bar, while the speed of the count-in sets up the tempo of the tune. A good, solid and clear count-in is so important when on stage with other musicians. I've been on stage too often when a bandleader doesn't give a clear count-in and half the band doesn't come in!

If you're not familiar with music notation, the chart may seem a little daunting with lots of concepts to learn, but don't let that confuse you. It's merely there to help reinforce what you are learning by ear and sight from the videos. The Blues is an aural tradition, so try and really understand the music in terms of how it *sounds*, not how it might *look* on the page.

There are a few terms that musicians generally use when discussing music, that would be very helpful to know:

#### Chord Names

These are represented simply by the letter of the alphabet e.g. a C chord. By 'chord' we

often mean a 'triad' which is a chord made of 3 notes, the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> degree of the major scale.

When we are playing in a key, such as C, we may often refer to the chords as numbers:

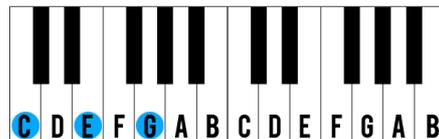
C=I or "one" chord in the key of C (or V chord in key of F, IV chord in key of G)

F=IV or "four" chord in the key of C (or V chord in key of B $\flat$ , I chord in key of F)

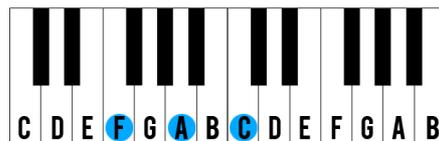
G=V or "five" chord in the key of C (or I chord in key of G, IV chord in key of D)

The roman numerals refer to the degree of the scale that the chord has it's 'root' on. E.g. F is the 4<sup>th</sup> note in the major scale of C (the key we are in) so the F can be called the 'IV' or "four" chord. Similarly, the G is the 5<sup>th</sup> note in the major scale of C so can be called the 'V' or "five" chord.

C chord or 'I' chord in the key of C:



F chord or 'IV' chord in the key of C:



G chord or 'V' chord in the key of C:



## Crotchets and Quarter Notes

These are the same thing. Americans generally use the term 'quarter notes', while the English traditionally speak of 'crotchets'. A 'quaver' or 'eighth note' is half the value of a crotchet/quarter note. Most jazz or blues musicians though use the American terminology for time – *quarter notes, eighth notes, sixteenth notes* etc. I find myself often switching between the two, so please forgive me if I jump around! **For this course, all you need to know is that we are only dealing with a 4/4 time signature which contains 4 crotchets/quarter notes in each bar/measure.**

## Feel & Notation

'Feel' varies from player to player, style to style, place to place. Therefore **there is no 'right' or 'accurate' way** to play or notate the rhythmic feel. I've written most things as 8<sup>th</sup> notes (quavers), leaving you to interpret the feel however you think is groovy! Some players may prefer a more 'swung' approach (towards a dotted or triplet feel), while some

may play 'straighter' (more even 8th notes). Also, changing up the feel can be used musically too so please experiment with different ways of playing the groove, and have a listen to the feel of piano players on recordings.

## EXERCISES FROM LESSON 1

Exercise 1, Playing 4 beats to the bar using triads in the right hand and a left hand bass note:



The musical score consists of three systems, each with a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The first system is labeled 'PIANO' and features a C major triad in the right hand and a bass line of eighth notes in the left hand. The second system is labeled 'PND.' and features F major and C major triads in the right hand. The third system is labeled 'PND.' and features G major, F major, C major, and G major triads in the right hand. Fingerings are indicated for the bass notes in the third system: 1, 2, 5, and 1.

## Practice Tips

As with most of the material in this course, you can follow general practice ideas I suggested at the start:

- **Use a metronome**, starting at a speed at which you can play the pattern comfortably before raising the tempo.
- Practice between all the chord changes that occur in the 12 Bar Blues i.e. **C to F** repeatedly, **C to G** repeatedly, and **G to F** repeatedly, until it feels natural and is consistently fluent:



The image shows three systems of piano accompaniment exercises in 4/2 time. Each system consists of a right-hand part with chords and a left-hand part with a simple bass line. The first system is in C major, the second in C major, and the third in G major. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5.

- Practice at **different volumes** (very loud, very soft & a moderate volume that feels natural).
- Practice with **different volumes in each hand** – e.g. quiet in the left hand and loud in the right, then swap (a little like tapping your head and rubbing your tummy!).
- **Practice with your eyes shut** so your fingers really get to know the keyboard.