

## JAZZ ELEMENTS - SYNCOPATION & TRIPLETS

One of the main characteristics of ragtime, blues and other jazz styles is **syncopation**. Syncopation is when you make the main stress or accents come on the beats that are usually weaker. For example, if you have four beats in a bar the main or strong beats usually come on beats **1** and **3**. If you are playing something that is syncopated the stress would be on the weaker beats **2** and **4** instead.

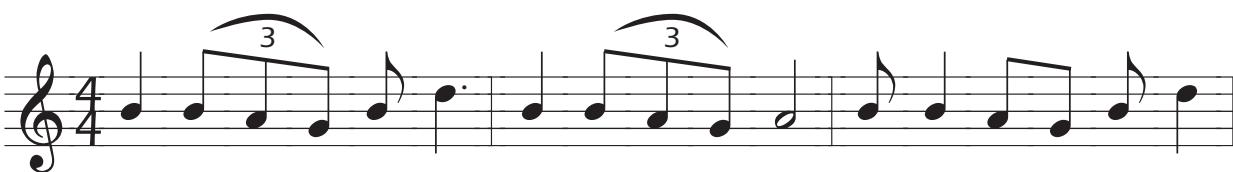
Try clapping the three groups of four beats below. Place a stress or accent on the beats that are underlined.

- a) 1 2 3 4
- b) 1 2 3 4
- c) 1 2 3 4

Another feature of jazz music, particularly the blues, is the use of **triplets**. A triplet is when three notes are played in the time it would usually take you to play two notes. Triplets give slow blues pieces a more drawn-out and relaxed feel. Sometimes blues musicians emphasise the first note in the group of three and make it slightly longer, or they may shorten the last note. This expressive variation of the rhythm helps to convey the often mournful lyrics of the song being played.

### THINGS TO DO

Try experimenting with **syncopated rhythms**. First count four beats in a bar. Then try some different patterns with the accents coming in different places. Use some quicker notes as well as some slower longer ones. Why do you think syncopation was such an important part of ragtime? What effect does it have on the music? Finally, listen to the blues melody below and describe what you can hear.



This is an example of jazz syncopation and triplet figures.



## JAZZ STYLES - THE BLUES

**Blues** is a style of jazz that can be traced back to the USA and the beginning of the 20th century. The word does not only describe the style of music but a **mood** or **state of mind** associated with it. The blues tells of the tough lives that many of the artists had experienced or of broken love affairs and sad events. The distinctive sound of blues comes not only from the choice of material but also from the harmony and melodic line.

In western musical tradition we are used to major and minor scales. In other parts of the world however, scales use different notes. Some scales have less notes and some contain notes that are higher or lower than would be found in traditional scales. Sometimes blues musicians also sing notes that fall between the notes we find on the piano. If you were singing a scale you might change the pitch slightly so that an A flat might be nearer to A. This gives the blues its mournful, sad quality.

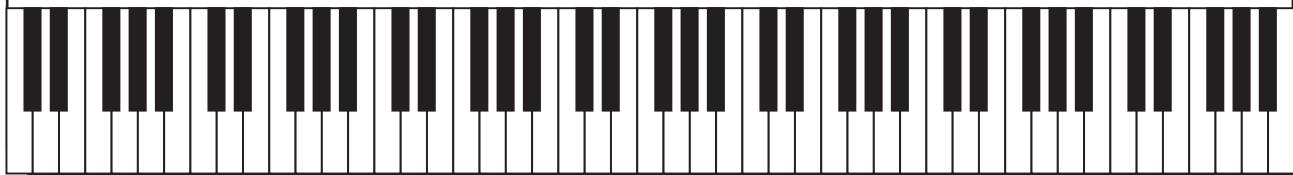
Here is a C Harmonic Minor scale. Play or sing it through then do the same for the blues scale below it. Can hear the differences between them? Does this affect the mood?

C Harmonic Minor scale.

Example of a blues scale on C. (Sometimes this scale has a G flat.)

### THINGS TO DO

Listen to an example of the blues by one of the famous jazz singers such as **Billie Holiday** or **Ella Fitzgerald**. Why do you think that the blues was so popular when it was often about quite sad events in peoples lives? How do the singers use their voices to tell the story of the song? Is the music fast or slow? How does the tempo or speed of the song add to the mood?



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Jazz Music T1

## TEACHER'S SHEET - 12 BAR BLUES CHORD PROGRESSION

Here is a basic chord progression for a 12 bar blues in the key of G. Play it through once and then repeat it, but on the second time through finish on a G major chord rather than the D7. You can transpose this into different keys. Using both tuned and untuned percussion let the class begin to improvise around this basic structure. Start with a rhythm then add tuned percussion or other instruments.



### Key of G

G7 (I)            C7 (IV)            G7 (I)            G7 (I)

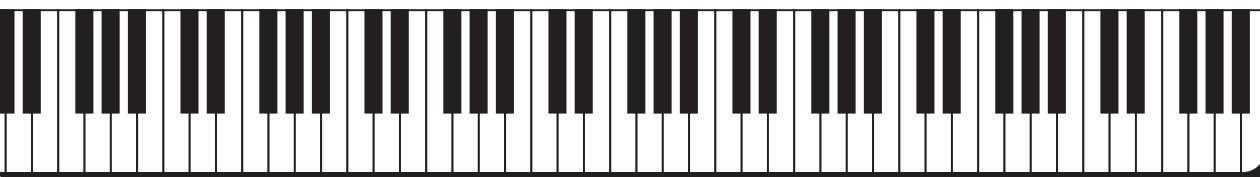
A musical staff consisting of five horizontal lines. Vertical bar lines divide the staff into four measures. Above each measure, the chord name and Roman numeral are written: G7 (I), C7 (IV), G7 (I), and G7 (I). Below the staff, a repeating rhythmic pattern is indicated by the instruction '^ . : . : . .' under each measure.

C7 (IV)            C7 (IV)            G7 (I)            G7 (I)

A musical staff consisting of five horizontal lines. Vertical bar lines divide the staff into four measures. Above each measure, the chord name and Roman numeral are written: C7 (IV), C7 (IV), G7 (I), and G7 (I). Below the staff, a repeating rhythmic pattern is indicated by the instruction '^ . : . : . .' under each measure.

D7 (V)            D7 or C7 (V, IV)            G7 (I)            D7 (V)

A musical staff consisting of five horizontal lines. Vertical bar lines divide the staff into four measures. Above each measure, the chord name and Roman numeral are written: D7 (V), D7 or C7 (V, IV), G7 (I), and D7 (V). Below the staff, a repeating rhythmic pattern is indicated by the instruction '^ . : . : . .' under each measure.



## JAZZ PERFORMERS - BILLIE HOLIDAY

**Billie Holiday** was born in 1915 in Baltimore, Maryland. The precise details of her childhood are rather vague, although it is known she was brought up by relatives after her father abandoned the family leaving her mother to seek work in New York. She grew up in great poverty and the problems from her early years seemed to haunt her throughout her life leading to drug abuse and a series of bad relationships.

As a singer she was to become one of the most famous performers of her generation. Holiday first found success in the 1930's singing in clubs in Harlem, a tough neighbourhood in New York. As her popularity grew she recorded with many of the top bands of the 1930's and 1940's. Her nickname was **Lady Day**.

Holiday did not sing traditional blues like singers such as Ella Fitzgerald and Bessie Smith, alternatively she gave the popular songs of the era a sad, mournful blues quality that touched all audiences. In 1956 she wrote her autobiography **Lady Sings the Blues**. This gives an interesting insight into her life, although some details are thought to be inaccurate. **Diana Ross** starred in the film version of **Lady Sings the Blues** in 1972 which is based on this autobiography.

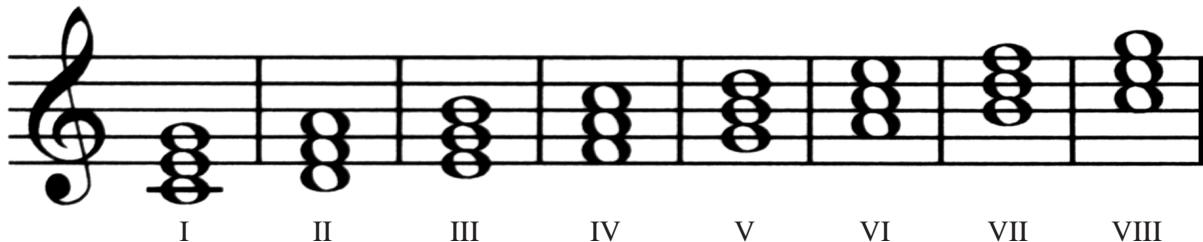
Holiday met with an unfortunate end in 1959. Sadly she died while under arrest for drug charges.

### THINGS TO DO

1. Listen to songs such as **Good Morning Heartache** and **That Old Devil Called Love**. How does Billie Holiday communicate the mood of the song? Why do you think her voice was particularly suited to slow, sad emotional songs? Why do you think she was so popular?
2. Think about the music that you listen to when you are feeling sad; what characteristics does it have? Do you choose different music depending on your mood? Discuss or write about your favourite song. Why do you like it?



## JAZZ ELEMENTS - CHORDS



There are several **chords** which are regularly found in jazz music. These are the **ninth**, **eleventh** and **thirteenth** chords. A chord or triad is basically a group of three or more notes played together. Chords can be built on every note of a scale in any key.

A chord of a ninth is simply a chord with the starting note (root) plus the third, seventh and ninth notes. Below is a ninth chord in the key of C Major. Ninth chords often start on the fifth note of the scale. In the key of C this means that the chord starts on G. Chords of the ninth, eleventh and thirteenth usually move to the tonic chord of the key they are in. In C Major this means that they move back to C as this is the tonic.



### THINGS TO DO

On the right are the key signatures for the keys of G Major and D Major. Write on the stave the chords I, IV and V in these keys. The starting note has been given to you.

The chord of the eleventh uses the root, plus the third, seventh and eleventh notes. Here is an eleventh chord in the key of C moving to chord five and back to chord one.



The chord of the thirteenth uses the root plus the third, seventh and thirteenth notes. Here is a thirteenth chord in first inversion (b) moving back to chord one in C.

