Blues in Bb

Ted Greene

Boulevard Music Video

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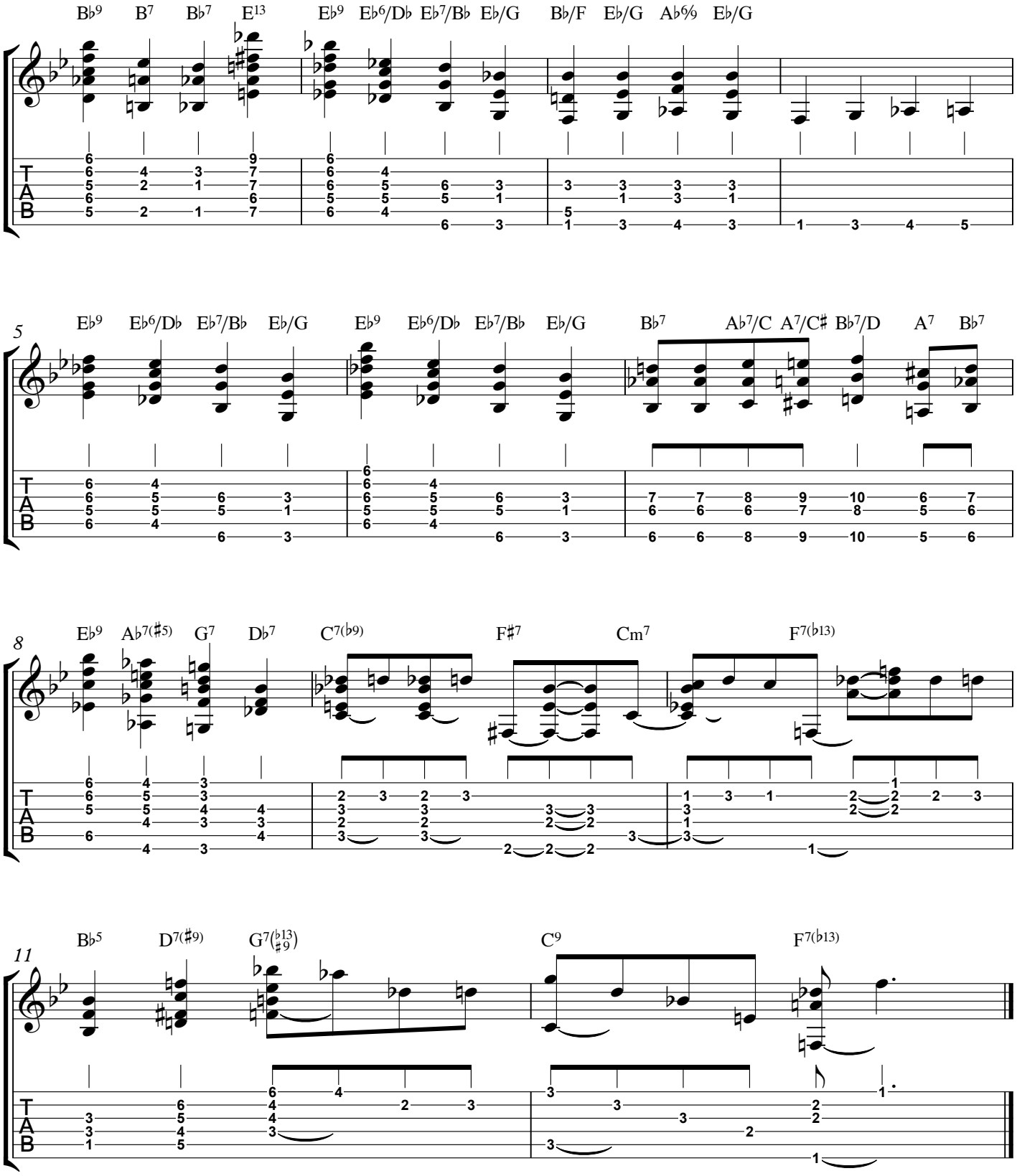

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Ted Greene — Blues in Bb

Transcribed from Ted's Boulevard Music Seminar, 2004-08-22

by Ric Molina

From Ted's 8/22/2004 Boulevard Music Seminar, part 1, beginning at 7:16. Go here: YouTube

This impromptu walking bass blues is a great study for filling in the chords under a melodic bass progression in the basic 12 bar blues style.

Ted begins with a D in the bass, the third of the tonic chord Bb9 as a springboard to a descending line.

The next chord movement to B7 is a common substitution for the I chord, known sometimes as a half-step slip. Many jazz players use this half-step up or down device to add tension to a static harmonic event like four beats of the I chord.

On beat three he resolves back to the I chord, and on beat four he anticipates the IV chord (Eb9) with the same half-step device, using E13 in this case.

Bar two is driven by the Eb7 arpeggio. The melody notes are Bb, Eb, Db and Bb. This spells out the Eb7 chord, and he fills in the chord with the lower voices. Notice how the lowest notes are descending in the same order as the melody notes. This way Ted creates a shell that strongly states the 4-note chord across the whole bar. In doing this he insures clarity of the intended chord and it gives him room to spice up the inner voices. Many novice arrangers forget that the listener really only hears the highest and lowest notes of a chord and rather "feels" the inner voices.

Bar three uses the upper Bb note to contrast the movement of the I IV I IV progression contained within this bar. In the transcription I called beat three an Ab6/9 chord, but its function is actually as a Bb5 chord with the seventh (Ab) in the bass. This is such a cool sound, like a bar band blues or an organ trio sound.

Bar four is a walk-up to the IV chord, but it begins on the fifth (F) of the tonic chord and resolves on the fifth (Bb) of the IV chord (!) Here Ted is showing us the relationship between the tonic and the fifth and how often they are interchangeable. This is the concept of "secondary dominants" or "five of five" in action.

Bars five and six are repeats of bar two, outlining the IV chord with the variation of adding the upper Bb note on beat one of bar 6.

Bar seven is back to the I chord with a common device. The bass plays the tonic and walks up chromatically between II and III. The first beat is a root position chord. The target at beat three is a Bb chord with the third in the bass, so he picks up that inversion at beat two by playing an Ab7 chord in the first inversion and slides it up in half steps. Joe Pass employed this device all the time.

Beat four uses the half-step slip again this time approaching the tonic from below.

Bar 8 is very cool. The form traditionally has the I chord on this beat but Ted is already moving to the VI chord that will appear on beat three, so he gives you the V of the Ab7#5 chord that appears on beat two. He's setting up the passing chord (Ab7) that will slip down to the VI chord (G7) by playing the Eb chord. This is an example of how far in advance his mind worked. Most players would play the I then move down to the VI but the subtlety of this move is what sets Mr. Greene apart from the average player. His depth is truly remarkable.

Bar nine is where he creates tension in what would normally be a simple ii V progression. Here he not only plays the II with a MAJOR third but he sets up a melodic motif between the Db note and the D natural. This is the b9 of the C7 chord resolving to the natural 9.

As if that were not enough, on beat three he introduces the secondary dominant of the C9 chord he's fiddling with. This F#7 chord (a tritone away) wants to go down to F, and before it does, Ted gives you the traditional ii chord (with a MINOR third) on beat four, Cm7; but not without continuing the little melody he started. Look at beat 1 of the next bar. The second eighth-note and beat two continue the motif with the Db now as a C note moving to the D. Beautiful.

Beats three and four of bar ten provide a strong melodic cadence and resolves in a no-nonsense Bb5 chord at the start of bar eleven. I can't help but think of all that Baroque improvising Ted used to do. When it comes time to really spell out the end of a phrase Ted gives us the strongest simplest resolution, root, fifth, root. A power chord.

On the second beat he's already on the turnaround and he sets up the VI chord directly this time with D7#9, the root of which also happens to be the third of Bb7. It's common to hold the I chord for two beats in this bar of the blues form, but Ted chooses to add color and lead the listener to the VI chord while still preserving the Bb arpeggio in the bass motion.

The rest of this bar along with the last is my own invention. I was having trouble hearing the actual notes so I took the liberty of closing down the turn by echoing the melody that appears on beat four of bar ten leading to the II7 arpeggio of a C9 chord and lastly the V7 with a #5 (or b13.)

There's no shortage of praise for Ted Greene's staggering virtuosity. It is a blessing that these precious examples of his work are available to us and to generations to come. It is my belief that he was one of the greatest guitarists who ever lived. This is magnified by his selfless dedication to illuminate the beautiful mysteries of music on the guitar.

~Ric Molina

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