

6 THE GREAT AMERICAN FORM

THE AABA FORM

This week we are exploring another common form in jazz: the 32-Bar AABA form. This form is found in many of the standards that make up the “Great American Songbook.” In its most basic form, the 32-bar AABA form, describes four sections of eight bars. First, a statement of two A-sections that share similar melodic and harmonic content. Then, a movement to a totally new place: the B-section or Bridge. And finally, a reiteration of the A-section to wrap up the whole AABA pattern. Compared to last week’s 12 bar-form, this 32-bar form can feel considerably longer. This is why it’s helpful to be able to break it down into its various components: the first A, the second A, the bridge, and the last A.

Like the 12-bar blues, the 32-bar AABA form will repeat back to the top of the form at the start of a new chorus, and the AABA form will follow a Melody-Solos-Melody pattern of choruses.

RHYTHM CHANGES

One of the most common forms within the broader 32-bar AABA category of forms is one based on the famous George Gershwin’s show tune, “I Got Rhythm.” Throughout the years, jazz musicians have not only covered this song several times, they have also used its form and chord changes as the basis for new melodies and songs. For this reason, Gershwin’s “I Got Rhythm” and all songs based on it are known as Rhythm Changes.



LISTEN FIRST

Let’s listen to Peter run a full chorus of Rhythm Changes.

- Adam is calling out the start of each section, but listen for the similarities between the A sections.
- Listen for the movement to a totally new place at the start of the B-section.
- Listen for the return to the last A.
- Notice that each time Peter ends an A, he doesn’t always use the same ending. This variance in endings is common and expected in rhythm changes and AABA forms.

BREAKING DOWN THE A'S: THE II-V-I

Below we have the first A section in the key of C:

A

Cmaj7 Dm7 G7 Cmaj7 Dm7 G7

Gm7 C7 Fmaj7 Em7 Am7 Dm7 G7

In the first four bars, we have one measure of CMaj7 and then a **ii-V-I progression** back to Cmaj7. The ii-V-I progression is extremely common within jazz music. In this case, the ii-chord is the minor 7th chord built off the second scale degree of C Major, or Dm7. The V-chord is the dominant 7th chord built off the fifth scale degree of C Major, or G7. We say that both the Dm7 and the G7 are **diatonic** to the key of C. This is to say that these chords use only notes found within the home key of C major.

For the next two measures we temporarily leave the key of C as we shift to the key of the IV-chord, Fmaj7. We accomplish this with a ii-V-I progression in the key of F, or Gmin7-C7-FMaj7. This use of the ii-V-I progression is a good example of the way the progression acts as a “bridge to get somewhere.”

The last two bars feature a iii-vi-ii-V **turnaround** that leads back to the I-chord for the start of the second A.



NOTES

PLAY-ALONG

Let's try to play-along with Peter from the bridge this time:

B

E7 A7

D7 G7

A

Cmaj7 Dm7 G7 Cmaj7 Dm7 G7

Gm7 C7 Fmaj7 Dm7 G7 Cmaj7

BACK TO THE CORE

- **Listen:** Check out this week's listening examples and play-alongs to really get the AABA and rhythm changes forms in your ears.
- **Patience:** With such a long form, it can be easy to get lost, especially which A section you happen to be on. Don't worry, we all get lost! Remember: patience.
- **Routine:** Practice your shell voicings with and without the play-along. Get creative by using different syncopations for your comping.
- **Feedback:** Practice with a metronome, record yourself, or ask a friend to listen and give you a critique.

NOTES
