

LESSON 11.
BLUES LEGACY & ACHIEVING AN EFFECT.

11.1 Melody.

Achieving an effect.

In this lesson we will attempt to explain a method of playing in the BLUES idiom which has become very popular and is likely to remain so because it is simple and effective. The method is simple because it is based on the use of a pentatonic scale and it is effective because the particular selection of scale notes results in a very characteristic blues sound.

Ex.1. shows the major pentatonic scale on Eb and Ex.2. shows the blues scale as outlined in lesson 10, also on Eb. Although the tonic of these scales in their normal form is Eb, we are going to discuss their use AS IF THE TONIC WAS C, or at least as if the AXIS of sound was C. The first task then is to get aural and technical orientation into the idiom by playing the pentatonic and blues scales as if their tonics were as shown in the chart below. Note that when using the blues scale the Db IS GENERALLY OMITTED and the Gb can be thought of as a flat 3rd.

The trick is to be able to think simple pentatonic, but by switching scales to Eb the selected notes are THE VERY ONES which give the characteristic blues sound when played against the chord progression in C!

Examples 3 to 12 are examples using these scales in a C major environment. These should be practised and memorised. Attempts should be made to transpose this principle to other scales. You will notice the strong blues sound emerges from these simple scales. This must be a great boon for improvisers –

A SIMPLE SCALE AND A STRONG SOUND.

The following chart gives the scale and sound axis relationship for all the 12 scales, whether they are used in the pentatonic form or the blues form –

SCALE	Eb	D	Db	C	B	Bb	A	Ab	G	Gb	F	E
Sound AXIS	C	B	Bb	A	Ab	G	F#	F	E	Eb	D	Db

11.2 Harmony.

Relationship between scale and chord

Achieving this astonishing effect with melody simplifies the harmonic demands.

In all blues idioms there is a tendency to think DOWNWARDS from the scale to the chord. In other words the scale is the MAJOR COMPONENT.

The type of chords used can be ANYTHING from a simple triad to the advanced discords we will meet later ... however the melody WILL SOUND OK and the idiom WILL EMERGE as long as the axis of sound and scale are chosen as indicated above.

The scale can remain the same over changing chords. See Ex.13 and 14.

The scale can change as the chord changes. See Ex.15 and 16.

You should be hearing a flexible and powerful resource emerging?!

In order to explain clearly what is happening we shall deal with just one set of scale / chord relationships.

Let's take the Eb pentatonic and blues scale (remember to omit the Db) but with the axis or tonic on C –

1	2	3	4	5	6
C	Eb	F	Gb	G	Bb

It probable that any chord which contains the C and Eb may support the scale. These will occur on the flat side of C –

Chord –	notes of the scale supported –
Cm	1 2 & 5
Cm7	1 2 5 & 6
Cm7b5	1 2 4 & 6
C7	1 5 & 6
F7	1 2 3 & 5
Eb7	1 2 3 5 & 6
Ab7	1 2 3 4 & 6

Clearly the scale producing the blues effect is compatible with a large number of chords.

Many more chords support at least two notes of the scale.

You should now be hearing and understanding how a flexible and powerful resource can emerge

–

- a simple scale can be used.
- the harmonic demands are low.
- the same scale can be used over many changing chords.

It follows that different pentatonic/blues scales can be used over the same chord.

Example = C7 chord

Pentatonic scales = Eb - Bb - C - G

Axis of sound = C - G - A - E

The flexibility of this resource makes good news for the improviser!

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We don't expect these relationships to be mastered quickly, however –

THE PRINCIPLES REPRESENT WHAT COULD BE DESCRIBED AS
A COMPLETE MELODIC / HARMONIC SYSTEM PRODUCING THE BLUES EFFECT.

11.3 The Blues system. *Extending the effect.*

The universal appeal of the blues with its simple scales and dramatic effects tempts us to experiment with further sounds structured along the same principles.

The principle is the playing of scales against moving chords where the scale and chord are not CONVENTIONALLY associated. We are not playing chord notes! The effect is the juxtaposition of a 'foreign' scale or chord against a 'known' scale or chord.

Essentially the blues plays a foreign scale against well understood chords.

In extending the principle it maybe possible to play the 'known' blues scale against 'foreign' chords?

This moves us onto ANOTHER harmonic system which is used in conjunction with the pentatonic / blues scales.

This is much EASIER to master and multinote instrumentalists, pianists and guitarists, should find little difficulty in manipulating it.

First of all we need to master a series of spacings from root C which include the diminished 5th Gb, plus a major 3rd, Bb.

Here is the complete chart for these structures moving chromatically downwards –

Bb	A	G#	G	F#	F	E	Eb	D	C#	C	B
Gb	F	E	Eb	D	Db	C	B	Bb	A	Ab	G
C	B	Bb	A	G#	G	F#	F	E	D#	D	C#

The above chart should be memorised as soon as possible because these structures can be superimposed QUITE FREELY against the blues scale and you may find a continuity using blues scales with harmonic support from these structures gives –

THE IMPRESSION THAT ALL KINDS OF HIGH TENSION CHORDS ARE BEING USED while, in fact, no chords are being thought of as such.

Ex.17 shows a 12 bar blues continuity for practice. To generate the effect we require a piano or guitar to play the above structures as support, replacing the conventional '3 chord trick'.

We have attempted to illustrate a possibility - we are playing a now familiar blues scale against 'strange' structures to see if we can create an effect ... try it ... if it sounds good it is good ... if not stick to something you think sounds good!

11.4 Rhythm.

'Additive' polyrhythms & juxtaposition.

We now move on to achieving an effect with rhythm. Effects which are the essence of the jazz idiom and equally applicable to the blues and 'playing the changes'. The essential element in playing jazz is the rhythmic interpretation of a melody line in terms of syncopation and accent. Properly played these rhythmic melodies will sound unmistakably like jazz, they SWING !.

But how is swing achieved?

In Africa they say rhythm is in the blood. The jazzman has to imbibe rhythm so it is 'as if' in his soul. The great jazzmen can make single pitches exciting simply through rhythmic interpretation. Rhythm is both accent and metric division. Lesson 4.4 was teaching about divisive rhythm.

They say African drummers think of their rhythms as tunes and jazz players must think of their tunes as drum rhythms. Refer back to lesson 6.4.

But jazz rhythm swings when it is ADDITIVE not divisive. Jazz begins to swing when different rhythmic lines are juxtaposed. The lines have to be 'set up', see the last lesson, seldom does jazz swing from the start. One line on top of another line. THINK ADDITIVE !

We have stressed that jazz is predominantly built up from 4 beats to the bar and 4 bar sections but rhythmic complexity and excitement comes from building a '3 feel' within this 4 context. Lesson 9.6 conceived of an extension of syncopation as 3 eighth notes played against 4 or what the old timers called 'secondary rag'. THINK IN THREES !

These polyrhythms are much more difficult to grasp than syncopation and divisive rhythms. However they do make the difference between a competent jazz performance and an exciting, swinging one.

The sophistication of polyrhythms dictates that the student should initially confine study to the common 3 over 4 cross rhythms we have mentioned. During performance it is likely that good players will swing with more complex rhythms but it is impossible to teach and consciously learn this sophistication. 3 over 4 can be learned by studying the nature of the rumba rhythm as mentioned in lesson 9.

The third element in the jazz swing effect is the TERNARY interpretation of eighth notes. Lesson 9.6 again.

Ternary or three part rhythms refer to the way the quarter note is split up. In binary rhythm, the quarter note is split into two eighths of equal length, or even eighths. In ternary rhythms the quarter note is split into eighth triplets. When you play an eighth pattern in ternary rhythm or swing eighths, the first eighth gets the value of two eighths of the eighth triplet.

Just to confuse you completely notation is invariably written as straight eighths, but the swing interpretation is always expected if you are playing in the jazz idiom.

This all sounds very complicated but it is in fact quite simple once you HEAR the difference. Listen to Louis Armstrong and the lilt as he skips through the beat.

Thus as we mentioned in lesson 6.4, musical style is distinguished by rhythmic pattern. Jazz has three characteristic rhythmic concepts –

- syncopation or emphasis on the OFF BEAT
- superimposed 3 over 4 rhythmic lines or SECONDARY RAG
- TERNARY interpretation of eighth notes

The jazz rhythmic conception is THE distinguishing feature of the style but don't confuse syncopation and playing 'hot' with swing –

JAZZ SWING IS A SORT OF 'LOOSE LIMBED' 12 / 8 LILT
PLAYED AGAINST A STEADY 4 / 4!!

Now we repeat ourselves jazz swing cannot easily be taught but it can be imitated –
LISTEN, PRACTICE AND IMITATE

11.5 Originality.

Individuality within a tradition.

Finally we will discuss achieving an effect with style.

The beauty of the blues scale is that it can be played over an entire blues progression with no real 'avoid' notes. If you try playing lines based on this blues usage, for instance, a C blues scale over a C7 chord, you get instant positive feedback, since almost everything you can do sounds good. This unfortunately leads many players to overuse the scale, and to run out of interesting ideas quickly. There are only so many phrases or licks that can be played over a six note scale, and many of them have already been played thousands of times by now. This is not to say you should never use the blues scale; on the contrary, it is vitally important to jazz. But do not become so enamoured of the easy gratification it can yield that you practice blues licks over and over rather than expand your harmonic vocabulary.

The language metaphor is a good one. It is hard to say interesting things with a limited vocabulary. Often players do manage to make a lot out of a little, but there is a difference between saying few words because you are choosing them carefully, and saying few words because your vocabulary is too limited to express your thoughts. This advice transcends the blues scale, of course.

In this lesson we have introduced three simple variations which produce interesting effects and add variety to whatever we have to 'say'. The simple trick of playing the Eb pentatonic against the C sound, the possibility of playing changing structures against the blues scale and the major play of rhythmic swing. These can produce a massive effect with simple means.

Thus it is not always necessary to vary the harmonic content of your playing if you are sufficiently creative with other aspects.

Although rhythm is the prime focus another way to introduce added interest when using the blues scale is to use special effects at your disposal to vary your sound. This can include honking and screaming for saxophonists, mutes and growling for brass players, or using clusters on the piano. See lesson 10.6.

We can note that what sounds good will follow the rules we have discussed. Sure we can do it all by ear and imitation but it is reassuring to know that there are known tricks that can easily be exploited.

Whistle a familiar tune and introduce a few improvised licks. Most of the good ones that sound interesting will follow the 'rules' that you now know!

But if anyone and everyone can learn the tricks and 'rules' in this course how do we develop individuality and style? Originality is the dream and ambition of most of us. What does it mean and how can we attain it?

It does not mean the INDISCRIMINATE use of the material available to us but it does mean some peculiar organisation of this material in a way that is DIFFERENT to others?

An old sage once said that "a river only reaches the sea because it is hemmed in by its banks"! If we pursue this analogy we can see the water as an inexhaustible source which, were it not

for gravitation forces which compel it to fall to the lowest level, would disperse aimlessly over the land. We can thus postulate that the course material, if it is to produce MEANINGFUL results, must be ORGANISED and channelled into a more or less RECOGNISABLE form.

We suggest that LIMITATION and SELECTION are thus fundamental to style. From this it might be supposed that two individuals, given the same set of limitations or selections, would end up producing the same result. This is a mechanical conception which ignores the essential DIFFERENCES IN PERSONALITY of any two individuals.

We can, therefore, say, that originality, when it exists, is the result of the IMPACT OF THE PERSONALITY ON SELECTED MATERIAL.

Originality, or the organisation of material in your own way, could be easy to attain but it would not necessarily be appreciated by others who had not had some similar type of experience. We must conclude therefore, that originality is the ability to ORGANISE selected materials, which are COMMON PROPERTY, in a way which appears DISTINCTIVE when compared to that of others.

It would be possible for us to supply you with certain types of chord structures and certain scales and rhythms which, when put together, would produce a highly original continuity. It is likely, however, that you, yourself, would not like it, nor would others! Originality is more than being different. It is being –

APPEALINGLY DIFFERENT WITHIN A TRADITION THAT OTHERS UNDERSTAND.

Here are some tips on creativity and originality for you to think about –

- all the COMMON DEVICES of music can be used in structuring your solo. Remember repetition, variation, development and contrast are important. After a soloist plays a phrase, he often repeats it, or a variation of it and then develops a contrast. The variation might be simply to alter key notes to conform to a new chord. The phrase itself may be altered rhythmically by exploiting combinations, recombinations and displacements of the original
- you should be aware of the CONTOUR of your solo. You start simply, build phrases through a series of smaller peaks to a climax, and then come to a concluding phrase. This works well in most situations. However, you may wish to vary from this format occasionally. You can decide to start strongly to introduce your solo, or you may wish to finish right at the climax and forego the denouement. You may wish to keep the entire solo at a low intensity level to convey a lazy feel, although you probably don't want to bore the listeners, either. Alternatively you may wish to keep the intensity level at a controlled simmer
- related to the idea of repetition is the concept of CALL and RESPONSE. Rather than repeat the original phrase, you can consider the phrase as a question or call, and follow it up with an answer or response
- you can introduce variation through changed DYNAMICS, by playing louder, higher, faster; softer or lower and more or less intense with different accents
- don't forget RESTS can be just as potent as notes and one LONG held note can also generate intensity through suspense, although pianists may have to use trills to achieve this effect
- the relationships between chords and scales develop EXPECTATIONS in listeners but they should not be seen as limiting surprise is an essential component of originality. However never lose your listeners
- contrast playing SCALAR lines that are based mostly on small steps with ANGULAR lines that are based mostly on leaps, but remember leaps are more difficult to follow, there must be rationale in your solo.
- when 'playing the changes' you should not think one chord at a time, CONTINUITY from one chord to the next is the aim

- try to develop the trajectory of your solo with TARGET notes in mind, remember the third and seventh of each chord are the notes that define the sound of the chord
- build a 'library' of your own personal 'LICKS' which appeal to you and help define your own individual style. A stock of licks which 'fit' the common changes will be invaluable
- above all lie back and have fun, your own creative originality will naturally emerge ...

11.6 Progress Report.

Conclusion to part 1.

We have studied two distinct jazz styles which we have called, 'playing the changes' and the 'blues', the first is based on chords and their progressions, while the other is based on various scales in the blues idiom.

Whilst it will be difficult to prevent some personal preference from developing, we suggest this is delayed as long as possible. Remember that good improvisers are able to change styles at will, and this seems to be very desirable to cater for the different preferences of listeners and colleagues. In any case, although the styles are different, they complement one another. When playing over chord progressions it is essential to develop a smooth line which follows from scale playing and, similarly, when playing the blues the chord changes are an important characteristic to preserve. The development of modern jazz has stressed the selection and playing of appropriate scales against the defined chord progression but the styles are complementary and in performance often merge into one rhythmic idiom.

It is the rhythmic idiom which has dominated our studies. We have supplemented it with insights into melody and harmony which should provide understanding and material for performance.

To sum up part 1 we can identify some key phrases –

- listen, practice and imitate
- conscious absorption, subconscious performance
- instinctively know that 'these finger positions produce this sound' and 'this is the first beat of bar 5'
- learn the basics, 'they all go the same old way'
- play simple trajectories as smooth continuities
- if the right note emerges at the right time in the right place and is juxtaposed against a steady 4/4 jazz will swing
- astonishing and dramatic effects are produced from simple rules when you know how

Improvisation is, perhaps, a misnomer we are learning to create a rhythmic music which swings and 'appears' to be a spontaneous creation. The reality is we are subconsciously performing ingrained habits -

HABITS OF FINGERS, SOUNDS AND RHYTHMS

Charlie Parker understood –

"you gotta learn every song in every key with every chord and every inversion ...

... and then forget it and play" ...

there is no other way ...

11.7 Written Work.

Produce a 12 or 16 bar continuity illustrating the melodic and harmonic techniques described in this lesson.

NB. Congratulations, you have reached the end of part1!

We now move on to more sophisticated material but nevertheless the basic musical principles we have studied in part 1 still hold!

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