

A Step-by-Step Approach to Becoming a Jazz Musician

Part 4. In Part 3 we analysed a blues in C and the chord and scale possibilities for improvisation. Hopefully since then you will have undertaken some research into chords/scales and their functions. So far I mentioned major/minor, blues, dorian, mixolydian and pentatonic scales.

Today, I want to focus on the pentatonic, which is widely used in Scottish, Chinese, Pop and other styles of music. The well known Smokey Robinson song 'My Girl', made famous by the Temptations in 1965 starts with a pentatonic introduction on guitar.

The major and minor pentatonic scales are used extensively by many jazz musicians in their solos, e.g. 'Moongerms' by Joe Farrell or 'Hand Jive' by Herbie Hancock on Nefertiti. (See Figure 1 on page 2)

The minor pentatonic is closely related to the blues scale and is an ideal structure for soloing over a minor blues progression in conjunction with the blues scale.

Green Onions by Booker T and the M G's is a typical minor blues and has a memorable introduction and tune. I would advise you to listen to the original version before playing and studying the harmonies.

There are a number of features to consider when playing this arrangement (see Figure 2 on page 2/3).

The groove required is a rock shuffle and the quavers are not straight eighth feel but more of a dotted quaver/semiquaver division (see Figure 3 on page 3).

Listen to the strong bass line on the introduction and ask your teacher to play it while you place the off-beat hits on the and of the 4th beat in the bar e.g. 1-an 2-an 3-an 4-an.

Notice the tune at A is quite sparse and leaves space for the rhythm section to groove.

Improvised solos should aim to follow this open feel and include rests.

When you feel confident playing the introduction and tune, why not try playing the bass riff, (see Figure 2 on page 3). This bass riff is based on the pentatonics of Fm, B flat minor and Cm.

Your improvisation would sound convincing using any of the 4 notes of these chords. As indicated in the Woodwind Green Award, 'I can improvise in a jazz style' Top Tips, don't play too many notes, use repeated notes and start on different beats in the bar.

You could also think about changing or varying the tune by anticipation/delay or inverting phrases. Remember always take the tune and solo section at a tempo which gives you time to think!