

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

Part 6. Further development of the Blues

In Part 2 I discussed how the blues in C can be used as a platform for the first steps in to jazz improvisation. The second step is for you to listen to as many versions of the blues as you can, ranging from Robert Johnson and B.B.King on guitar, to King Curtis and Charlie Parker on saxophone and determine how they interpret the blues.

If you also listen to the call and response type blues e.g.'Worksong' by Nat Adderley and 'Moanin' by Bobby Timmons you will hear the main riff is constructed from the blues scale. In addition, this call and response type form has a clear structure for the beginner improviser to follow.

To develop your blues playing further, you should strive to challenge yourself and set targets. These targets could be;

1.Try to arrange a session/rehearsal with a competent rhythm section comprising of piano/keyboard, bass and drums. If this is not possible then find a suitable backing track or piano/keyboard player who can play a walking bass line and 3 chords. Playing with this rhythmic support will greatly enhance your playing experience and make your improvisation more meaningful and productive.

2.Think rhythmically when building your improvised solos and have a collection of rhythms which you can use to develop motifs. (See figure 1. on page 2.) Singing these before playing will help develop your swing phrasing.

3.Follow the blues in C chord chart on page 2 and try playing the triads of chords C, F and G, incorporating the rhythms from Figure 1. (See Figure 2.) This will give your improvisation a secure rhythmic foundation.

4.The next challenge is to add the harmonic colour to the blues progression, by inserting the blue notes and Dominant 7ths of the chords.(See Figure 3.)

5. Figure 4. Leaves 2 bars at the end of every line for you to improvise. Think of this as a call and response or question and answer exercise. Remember you can use a different rhythm and notes from the blues scale.

6. Figure 5. Gives you the opportunity to develop your own solo.To help you stay focused and progress I have compiled a list of guide lines;

7.(a) Play this 12-bar blues at a tempo which gives you time to think ahead.

(b) Use the rhythms from Figure 1.or rhythms you are familiar with to support your melodic ideas.

(c) Remember the rhythm section/backing tracks are outlining the chords, so you should be aiming to create a musical line built on the 3rd ,7th and blue notes.

(d) Be adventurous and take risks, remember your musical phrase can start on different notes in the chord and different beats in the bar.

(e) You will gain maximum benefit from your playing session if you record it and assess the results afterwards.