

Keyboard

Jeff Lorber on Blues Soloing Concepts

BY JEFF LORBER September 13, 2013



In the first installment of “Cold Fusion” in July 2013, we looked at pentatonic scales. This month, we will delve into a style that’s central to any form of fusion soloing, not to mention rock, jazz, and many other genres: the blues. Let’s put the blues to work in different improvisational situations.

1. Blues Scale Basics

Some textbooks label the blues scale as a minor pentatonic scale with a flat fifth, as in **Ex. 1a**.



This certainly points out the “butter notes” (notes that sound good when you’re playing the blues), but I’ve noticed that there really seem to be *two* types of blues: minor and major. If you’re soloing on a minor modal-based song (like “Live Wire” in my July 2013 column, or Wayne Shorter’s “Footprints”) a regular Dorian mode with the addition of the flat fifth will work, like **Ex. 1b**.



The major third in that context would be an “avoid note.” However, if you’re playing a major blues (like soloing over Zawinul’s “Black Market” or even Chuck Berry’s “Johnny B. Goode”), then you’re going to want to emphasize the major third scale degree, so the scale might look more like **Ex. 1c**. With “Black Market,” which is based on triadic, folk music-type harmony, the flat seventh degree might be an avoid note. However, the flat seventh would sound great on “Johnny B. Goode.” This illustrates the difference between soloing over a major seventh or triad-based tune like Zawinul’s, and soloing over a dominant seventh-based one like Chuck Berry’s.



2. Blues Chromatics

Ex. 1c shows the minor third to be kind of a pivot note, approaching the third the same way the flat fifth approaches either the fourth or fifth degree of the scale. That type of chromatic movement creates the funky blues effect we all know and love. **Ex. 2a** demonstrates this familiar sound with a blues/bebop lick that shows approaches to the major third from the flat third.



Ex. 2b shows another way to color your blues licks by adding the root above a phrase. The flat fifth interval at the top accents the chromatic “bent note” effect, much like how a guitarist might play a blues lick involving two adjacent strings.



3. Blues Licks

Ex. 3a is an old-school boogie-woogie lick that's based on sixth intervals.



Ex. 3b is a flashy lick that employs a pentatonic pattern with added fourth intervals.



Ex. 3c is a pentatonic blues lick based on triplets. Rhythmic patterns like this can be very effective devices to add to your improvisations.



4. Putting It All Together

Ex. 4 is based on my song “Horace” from my latest CD *Galaxy*, and is dedicated to the great jazz pianist and composer Horace Silver. Much like Silver’s own songs and improvisations, this melody includes chromatic blues movement and rhythmic variations. Throughout the three sections shown here, the song progressed from a fairly simple blues “head” to a more sophisticated B-section and then to the jam section, which reverts to a traditional one-chord vamp and groove.

D7

G13

1.

2.

G13 F13 E7#9

A7#9b13 Dmin7 G13

F13 E7#9 A7#9b13 Bb11

C11 A7#9b13 D7

Open Keyboard Solo

D7 C/D F/G Eb/F Ab/Bb Gb/Ab B/G A/B C/D