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Minor Blues: Fresh patterns

February 2011 2,732 views One Comment

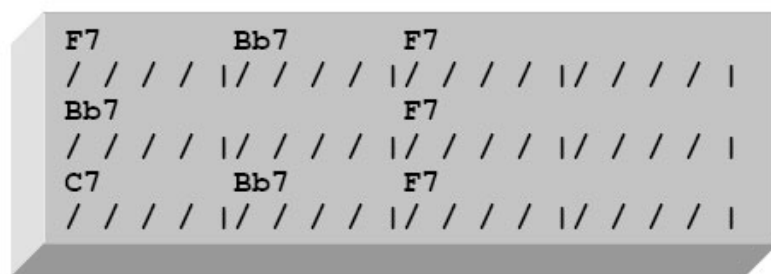


By Ted Eschliman

The Blues

Blues is one of the simplest American music art forms, an unpretentious 12-bar pattern that has been the framework for “pure” folk/roots Blues, as well as an integral ingredient in early Rock and Roll, adopted and adapted by jazz musicians, and infused with a more sophisticated set of changes and harmonic complexity.

Primitive Blues...



In its most primal, raw form, three chords are enough to cover the blues. In the changes in the above graphic, you only need the **I**, **IV**, and **V** chords, with the signature alteration of a **lowered 7th**, or a **Dominant** functioning chord. Notice how unlike the rest of Western (European) music, this dominant (V7) doesn’t ever resolve to a pure form of **tonic** (or **I**), yet to our ears accustomed to the blues, it offers its own kind of unique emotional stability.

Jazzers participate in a **hybrid** form of the blues, blending its own recipe of “**ii V7**” motion within the skeletal structure. The result, along with about a myriad of common conventions and alterations, yields a fresh approach to this relatively straightforward music. We cover a few of the possibilities in the “**Getting Into Jazz Mandolin**” book, introducing extensions that precede aural ending points, relative periods of stability within the 12 bars.

"Basic Jazz Blues" Progression

F7	Bb7	F7	Cm7	F7
/ / / /	/ / / /	/ / / /	/ / / /	/ / / /
Bb7	Eb7	F7	Am7	D7
/ / / /	/ / / /	/ / / /	/ / / /	/ / / /
Gm7	C7	F7	D7	Gm7
/ / / /	/ / / /	/ / / /	/ / / /	/ / / /

Notice the chord symbols in red are actually the 'ii V7' of the following chords, **Cm7 F7 Bb**, **Am7 D7 Gm**, and **Gm7 C7 F**. You could even skip the ii chord and just use the V7 chords, and you'd still conjure a compelling sense of motion, let alone inject some fresh harmonic variation. Note however, this is all still in a major key. Another fun kind of blues is using the minor key.

Minor Blues Progression (Basic)

Minor Blues Progression (Basic)

Dm			
/ / / /	/ / / /	/ / / /	/ / / /
Gm		Dm	
/ / / /	/ / / /	/ / / /	/ / / /
A7	Gm	Dm	
/ / / /	/ / / /	/ / / /	/ / / /

The above changes are about as primitive as you can get, and most jazzers will try to spice it up in the same way the minor is amended. Similarly, we've added some V7 and 'ii m7b5 V7' alterations here:

Minor Blues Progression (Spiced)

Dm	Gm7	Dm	(D7+9)
/ / / /	/ / / /	/ / / /	/ / / /
Gm	A7	Dm	Bm7b5
/ / / /	/ / / /	/ / / /	/ / / /
Em7b5	A7 (b9)	Dm9	A7
/ / / /	/ / / /	/ / / /	/ / / /

Not much surprise here. Other than the **m7b5** characteristic of a 'ii' chord within the context of the minor mode, and some liberties with V7 extensions, we haven't changed much from the **Major Blues**.

Alternate Minor Blues Progression

This next option journeys into the **Relative Major Key (F Major)**. It's a refreshing detour right there in the middle, set up by the C7 (C13) into the key of **F Major**; ultimately though, we are back to the minor key, or at least setting it up in the 9th and 10th measures.

Alternate Minor Blues Progression															
Dm9		Gm9		Dm9											
/	/	/	/		/	/	/	/		/	/	/	/		/
Gm9		C13		Fmaj7		Bbmaj7									
/	/	/	/		/	/	/	/		/	/	/	/		/
Em7b5		A7 (b9)		Dm9											
/	/	/	/		/	/	/	/		/	/	/	/		/

Introducing: Modal (Minor) Blues Progression

Now, check out this variation:

Modal (Minor) Blues Progression															
Dm9														(D7+9)	
/	/	/	/		/	/	/	/		/	/	/	/		/
Gm								Dm							
/	/	/	/		/	/	/	/		/	/	/	/		/
Bbm7		A7 (b9)		Dm9											
/	/	/	/		/	/	/	/		/	/	/	/		/

Notice a “retreat” to simplicity in the above **Modal Blues**. As a reaction to the later **Bebop** era, musicians such as trumpeter **Miles Davis** abandoned the often ridiculously fast past harmonic changes in exchange for structural harmonic minimalism. Though he and others would slow the progression down, a new art form of implying “subchanges” within the change allowed a soloist more freedom to play in and out of the changes. You can still inject the ‘iiv7b5 V7’ turnaround patterns at will, and frankly are expected to.

Speaking of “[Getting Into Jazz Mandolin](#),” we were fortunate enough to have a premier jazz mandolinist record an interpretation of a Modal Blues song, “**Dorian’s Grey**.” It’s a perfect study in developing these techniques. If you want to hear how a real professional does it, listen to the URL link below:

Demo Song Track (Don Stiernberg Guitar and Mandolin)

[DS_DoriansGrey.mp3](#) | [Printable Version](#)

Have it your way

The beauty of the Blues is you can make it all as simple or as complex as you want. It’s a terrific jumping off point for your own personal aesthetic journey. Take it at your own pace. Enjoy the ride!

Purchase book: <http://www.melbay.com/product.asp?ProductID=20835BCD>

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By the way, if you ever want a title summary of all the **JazzMandology** topics (over three dozen, now!) here’s a page that lists them: http://jazzmando.com/mandolin_sessions.shtml. There’s a lot to uncover there, and **Mel Bay Publishing** has brought these all to you for free. Share them with your **Facebook** and **Twitter** friends. In case you are completely new to the **FFcP**

concept referred to in previous Jazz Mandology articles, here's a good primer on the JazzMando site:

http://jazzmando.com/fcp_studies.shtml

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Jim Fichter said:

Very nice article. I love the blues and am delving into them more deeply, altho the jazz is still like a foreign language to me. Maybe show some chord shapes along with the charts? Thanks again and keep up the good work.

Jim

8 February 2011 at 1:59 pm

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