

The Blues

by Allen Cole

The Basic, Bottom-Line Chord Progression - The standard blues is 12 measures long, divided into 3 equal sections. The standard chord progression is I-IV-I-V-I, although there are many variations on it. Here's how the blues basically functions. While most blues chords including the tonic chords are dominant 7ths, I'm just putting 7ths in this progression when they function as dominant chords.

Basic Blues in G

1 G Blues chorus starts off with statement on I chord

5 C Second section statement made over IV chord

9 D Third section statement made over V chord

...and a reply on the I chord

...with a reply on the I chord

...and a reply on the I chord

Track 7 Blues from Jamey Aebersold Vol.1

Note: Most basic blues uses chords in dominant-seventh format even with they function as tonic chords

1 G7 Used to create motion with its IV-I 'Amen' effect toward G in m.3

5 C7 G7 G7 functions as the V of the approaching C chord in m.5

9 Am7 D7 G7 D7

Any dominant 7th chord can be preceded by the minor seventh chord a fifth below. This Am7 is "ii" of a ii-V-I phrase in G.

Using the V7 here creates motion, and a strong pull back to the I chord at the start of the next chorus.

Basic One-Scale Approach

Improvise over the entire form using the major pentatonic scale based on the key of the piece (#1) Then take the same major-sounding licks and transpose them to the major pentatonic a minor 3rd above. (#2) Note the change in the character of the licks.

#1 - G Major Pentatonic Scale

#2 - Bb Major Pentatonic (same notes as Gm Pentatonic)

Chord Running Approach

Take major pentatonic scales based on the I, IV and V of the key and then use them over the appropriate sections of the piece. (see first blues example above -- use this approach with Jamey Aebersold Vol.1 Track 7

G Pentatonic - for I in these examples

C Pentatonic - for IV in these examples

D Pentatonic - for V in these examples

Voice-Leading Approach

The chief area of player dissatisfaction with the single major pentatonic scale is the fact that the major 3rd (B, in this case) sounds bad over the IV chord. Adding a flat 3rd to the scale (#1) allows basic licks to be played the same over the entire form, substituting flat 3rd for major 3rd when it sounds appropriate. This is the approach taken in *Tenor Madness*. Now try modifying your up-a-minor-third pentatonic in the same way (#2). Rearrange those notes into your minor pentatonic and you now have your blues scale. (#3)

#1 - G Pent. with added B-flat

#2 - B-flat Pent. with added C#

#3 - Gm Pent. w/added C# - G Blues Scale