

AG109

Blues and Beyond

Mule Skinner Blues Intro

One of the coolest things about being a guitar teacher, is that students come in wanting to learn all kinds of crap, so I'm well versed on Katey Perry riffs and three chord Taylor swift songs. Occasionally, however, someone wants to learn something that is a truly cool piece of work and I recently had the pleasure of knocking up this Jimmy Rodgers old blues style intro to Mule Skinner Blues.

This is once again a little project piece, so I'll break the analysis down into bars.

Bars 1-2-3

Walking into the first D chord with a diatonic walk up (that means no surprise notes) already

sets the scene for a fun, rolling tune. Two pert strums of the D major chord and we are in 1930. Unlike this sentence, this common voicing of the D chord should create no confusion. A clever strike of the E on the 4th string creates a delightful surprise when we strike the A7 chord before finally hitting the lower root note on the 5th string, quite late in the bar. This time we walk back up to the D chord again with a chromatic walk up from B. This adds tension and really let's you know you are playing a rough and tumble old blues.

Bars 4 and 5

We've just struck the open D string, pronouncing the bass note before two more strums of the chord. This separation of Bass and chord is very reminiscent of early blues players such as Big Bill Broonzy, who I've mentioned before. We then walk down chromatically, that is in semi tone increments, from the D to the next chord B7. This chord sounds particularly interesting because we really step out of Key with some of

the notes we play in the B7 Chord. Note the voicing for the B7 is simply the same voicing as the A7 moved up the board. Barre with your first finger across the 4th and use your pinky to play the 7th fret and come back to your third or second to play the fifth fret.

Bars 6 and 7

This whole procession at this point is all about the good old 5 - 1 and is the classic turnaround.

Theory noobs, hold onto your hats! The B7 previously, is the 5th chord in an E chord scale. E F# G A B. That's B7 folks, note/chord number five in the key of E. The E7 you see here is the fifth chord of an A scale. A B C# D E. Note 5, chord 5. And the A7 is the 5th chord found in a D scale.

The fifth chord wants to steer the listener to its home key, which when treated as dom7 can act as a 5th once again.

So B7 leads to E7 which leads to A7 which leads to our home base, D. This my friends, is called a turnaround!

Confused? That's ok - look into it! That E7 by the way comes from a D7 shape in the open guise. The A7 is more or less played from the C# which is the third and very relevant note of the A7. A nice change from the expected open 5th string root note.

Bar 8-9

Finishing with a neat D, A7, D end I feel resolved and happy, ready to play a blues. This song sounds really cool on an acoustic guitar and you can even get away with it being a little out of tune. Don't do that though. That would be annoying!

MULE SKINNER BLUES INTRO

STANDARD TUNING

♩ = 120

E-GT

1

D A7 D

T
A
B

0 2 4 0 2 3 4 0 4 3

5

B7 B7 A7/C# D A7

7 7 5 4 3 3 2 2 2 3 2 3 2 2

2 4 0 2 3 4 2 0 2 4 0 0

9

#

2 3 0