

AG122

Blues and Beyond

Adrian Whyte

"Chromatic Blues"

It amuses me from time to time that despite all of the institutionalisation of music, at the end of the day things seem to work, or they don't. Music is essentially the relationship between various frequencies and ultimately it's the relationship in steps from one frequency to the next that creates movement, tension and resolution.

Chromatic movement utilises notes placed one after the other in the 12 steps we utilise here in the western world of music. On your guitar, moving from one fret to the next repeatedly is considered chromatic movement. It is surprisingly useful and adds an interesting flavour to melodies, so have a go at the exercises in this months issue and I can assure you it will open your mind up to what you previously may have considered notes that were out of bounds!

All exercise at 100bpm

Exercise 1

Exercise 1 is essentially the three main movements of a blues form notated one bar at a time with the resolving root idea in the 4th bar. Not sure what that means? Play through it and you will hear the first chord in a blues, the 'Four' chord in a blues and the '5' chord in a blues, only communicated as this funky chromatic line. You'll notice the series of notes are stepwise (1 fret) from each other. Chromatics are all about where you are going, so you'll note that we land on and resolve on tones that are of key importance to each chord.

Exercise 2

This lick here works in any blues scenario from texas swing to acoustic blues. We are walking down chromatically from the flattened 7 of a G Scale, a note you'll find in your pentatonic shape 1 of the minor scale, to the fifth degree before resolving with a typical blues tail to resolve on the major 3rd. Note the bend at the beginning on the sixth fret, followed by playing the standard note without bending. That is a cool and common device from guys like BB King, Albert King and Muddy Waters. It's worth noting that the end lick almost settles any crazy chromatic dissonance, so make it part of your vocabulary.

Exercise 3

This lick here is a common jazz blues lick. In fact, I was inspired to create this lick from my memories of a Grant Green album where he uses licks like this quite commonly. He is using the step in a blues scale from the fourth and fifth degree to build this repeated walk up before dropping back and ascending from the flat third to the natural third. From here you whip down a minor pentatonic idea then play that lick similar to the end of exercise 2. You know, the one you just played and will use again below. If you aren't familiar with it, you will be!

Exercise 4

This exercise takes place over the turnaround in a blues. Working in this case of the 'Five' Chord in G, we would be playing against a D7. This is influenced heavily by country style chromatic blues ideas. You'll notice the majority of good chromatic ideas resolve on chord tones, which are the stronger tones of the chord. In this case I resolve to the root of the D7, then just as the chord shifts from a D7 to a C7, the final note in the next bar resolves to the C or root of the C chord. Then we finish with a lick reminiscent of exercise one – there is that lick again that ties up the

phrase nicely resolving from the minor third into the natural third of G!

Exercise 5

With this lick I wanted to push the boundaries a little more and chain together a longer series of chromatic notes. Again, if you land on the right notes you can really get away with some cool stuff. Whilst I like to use this sparingly, some players build their ideas on long passages of chromatics. I wouldn't recommend this unless you are looking for an excuse to play a lot of notes or unless you are lost for what to play! This whole lick is played with 'G' in mind, basically just playing around with chromatics and chord tones in G. When I say the 'right' notes, it's these chord tones that I'm referring to. The B natural at the start of the second bar of this exercise is the third of G. So the root, third, fifth or seventh are all chord tones. These are the notes you want to work into using chromatics unless you have a specific melody in mind.

Summary

The general idea with improvising is to express yourself. Think of notes as colours and the more colours you have the more detailed a picture you can paint. Use chromatics as a form of colour in

themselves and amidst some great ideas you can really mix things up. Chromatics can provide some intense dissonance, but they can also serve to carry one note to the next in the way a slide does, or the way a human voice might bend or slide into notes, so used tastefully you can do some great stuff. Alternatively, if you've got no idea what you're doing you could compose some alien robot music! Good luck with that.

Chromatic Blues

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Standard tuning

♩ = 100

E-Gt

Ex 1

mf

TAB

5	4	5	6	7	3	4
5	5	6	7	8	4	5
7	7	8	9	10	6	7

Ex 2

full

TAB

5	4	5	6	7	3	4
6	6	5	4	3	6	5
5						3
						4

Ex 3

Ex 4

TAB

8	9	10	8	9	10	6	7
8	6	7	5	5	3	4	
10	0	9	8	7	10		

Ex 5

TAB

8	0	7	6	5	8		
5	2	3	4	5	6	3	4
5							

Ex 5

TAB

3	5	4	3	6	5	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	5	1	2
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