Jazz Blues Guitar

A lecture in vital performance aspects and their practitioners.
- Jazz Blues started with musicians such as Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk and Sonny Rollins.

- Blues has often been affiliated with Jazz music, especially amongst certain artists, and for the purposes of this lecture, many established guitarists.

- Django Reinhardt 1910-1953
- Charlie Christian 1916-1942
- Wes Montgomery 1923-1968
- Joe Pass 1929-1994
- Emily Remler 1957-1990
Jazz Blues harmony is based around the standardised 12 bar chorus. Here is an example of a Be-Bop blues (based around a cycle of 5ths), used extensively in the 1940's by Parker and Montgomery.

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(IM7)                 (IV7)                (I7)                  (V-7)     (I7)
(IV7)              (IV#7)           (I7)                  (III-7)    (VI7)
(II-7)                (V7)                 (I7)      (VI7)     (II-7)    (V7)
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Embellishments

- This basic chord structure is often embellished.
- Chord I can be interchanged with Chord V.
- Common chord tones added to harmonic structure (in traditional Jazz) are 9ths, 13ths and #9ths.
- Older style Jazz Blues commonly uses 6th and minor 6ths. (around the time of Reinhardt and Christian)
Example Chord Chart

12 bar Chord chart with added chord tones and embellishments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Medium Up Swing)</th>
<th>Blues - Jazz</th>
<th>Exercise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4/4 G7 (G713)</td>
<td>C7 (C7♯9) (C♯o7) (G7)</td>
<td>G7 (D7♯9) (D♭13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C7 (C713)</td>
<td>C♯o7 (C♯o7)</td>
<td>G7 (G713)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-7 (A-7/9)</td>
<td>D7 (D7♯9)</td>
<td>G7 (G713) (E7/9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>E7 (A-7/9) (D7♯9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Demonstration of Embellishments

- Notice use of 13\textsuperscript{th} extension on chord I
- \#9 on chord IV
- \textit{♭} 9 on F\#7 (the note of the tonic key so perfectly acceptable) leading into tonic of G. Otherwise \textit{♭} 9’s are rarely used. This can be used to lead back into chord I.
- Minor/Major 6\textsuperscript{th} in traditional Jazz blues. With 9\textsuperscript{th} extension on chords I and IV.
Melody implied by chord embellishments:

Notice how movements are relatively conjunct.

Chord shapes are also similar and often parallel shapes. (look at G713 and C7#9)
Voice Leading

With added chord tones, these extensions work as voice leading. Adding melodic contour to the harmony.

This in addition with a ‘walking’ bass line is extremely effective in Solo Jazz Blues guitar (without an accompanists). The guitarist Joe Pass is famous for this technique.

This means there is movement in both top and bottom parts of the instrument with important chord tones, predominantly 3rd’s and 7th’s, affirming the harmonic progressions in the mid-register of the instrument.
How to effectively use Voice Leading

- Pedal tones in turnarounds and changes.

- Common tones, leading into neighboring chords.

- Conjugent movement.
Chord I

- **Tonic Major**

- **Blues pentatonic with (♭5th)**

- **Lydian dominant scale**, works well when 11th is added chord tone. G Lydian dominant will work over G7.

- **B Phrygian mode** over G7, starting on the 3rd of the root note.

- **Stylistic to end phrases on 9th, 13th, 3rd or 7th.**
Chord IV

- IV (C) Major
- Blues pentatonic with (♭ 5th)
- Lydian dominant scale, works well when 11th is added chord tone. C Lydian dominant will work over C7.
- E Phrygian mode over C7, starting on the 3rd of the root note.
- Stylistic to end phrases on 9th, 13th, 3rd or 7th.
- (Similar to chord one although it must follow chord tones of IV).
Chord V

- Dominant 7\textsuperscript{th} scale and arpeggio.

- Diminished scale over a dominant 7\textsuperscript{th}. Or over C♯\#07 replacing chord V.

- B (Chord III) Locrian over II, V, I turnaround. (Very stylistic of ‘Jazz’)

- It is necessary to emphasise the 7\textsuperscript{th}, to create harmonic tension. Voice leading, back to the tonic.

- When leading back into Chord I, end a phrase using a scale above on either the root, 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 7\textsuperscript{th}, 9\textsuperscript{th} or 13\textsuperscript{th} of the tonic (G).
Summary:

- When improvising, these scales and modes work well as a foundation, however it is sometimes better to follow the example of the embellished harmony to base an improvisation. This will work over chords I, IV and V implying the desired harmony.

- This is particularly more effective during cycle of 5\textsuperscript{th} turnarounds.

- Make embellishments sound as natural (as conjunct as possible).

- Remain consistent stylistically.
Continuity of Style

It is important to keep certain elements of the style constant.

Chord extensions should predominantly follow the examples given earlier, and solo passages can be improvised over using certain scales and modes following the harmony of the embellished chord chart.

Regardless of what embellishments an accompanist provide, these chords will imply harmony over a standard I, IV, V 12 bar blues.
Solo Performance

- In solo performance, both accompaniment and melody must be provided on the guitar. This is where the use of walking bass, chord tones and embellishments must be deployed.

- There is no need to worry about ‘overcrowding’ or ‘stacking’ chords, this is perfectly acceptable when the guitar is performed as a solo instrument.

- Interchanging between chords and single note soloing is good, although it is usual that the applicable chord is introduced on beat one or connected on the fourth beat of the previous chord. This can reaffirm the harmony and give the impression of accompaniment.
Ensemble Performance (Comping)

- This is where only important guide tones should be played.

- 3rds and 7ths predominantly.

- Depending on ensemble, there is usually a bassist or a pianist to play root notes. Therefore space needs to be made for other instrumentalists.

- Embellishments are good as long as they do not create undesired dissonances with other instrumentalists. (For example a C#9 against a C9).
Idiomatic Performance
(And Technique)

The devices mentioned earlier are applicable to many instruments associated with blues music. However there are fundamental elements that are unique to Jazz Blues guitar performance.

Certain key signatures, techniques and chord inversions work idiomatically, more suitably and widely appropriated for Jazz Blues Guitar. As a consequence, they have become synonymous with the style.
Key Signatures

- It is sometimes better to avoid keys such as E, A and D.

- Open strings create drones that are undesirable and creates loss of clarity against neighboring chord tones.

- Desirable keys such as G work well. (Possibility of using the dominant 7th below the tonic). Therefore turnarounds work well, Fully utilising the lower register of the instrument.

- Keys such as B♭ and F are common in Jazz repertoire.
Devices

- Octave playing.
- Single note soloing
- Chordal soloing.
- All of these devices are common amongst respected Jazz guitarists, including Reinhardt, Montgomery and Pass.
Picking Techniques

- Alternate picking
- Rest-stroke picking
- Finger style picking
- Hybrid picking

These techniques are all acceptable and capable of portraying a convincing Jazz Blues performance. However, it is better to stick to one throughout a piece to remain constant stylistically.

The exception for this is the transition between rhythm and solo playing. For example, finger style for rhythm and plectrum for solo (greater projection).
Integration of these Devises

- Successful integration of these devices provide the foundations for improvisations stylistic of Jazz Blues Guitar.

- It is important when performing in an ensemble to be a sympathetic accompanist and not feel obliged to over use the devices. Leaving space for other musicians is vital.

- These Devices will work effectively for any Jazz performance in which the music has blues fundamentals, such as similar Harmony.
Musical Example

- ‘Four on Six’, Wes Montgomery, ‘Smokin’ At The Half Note’ (1965)
Four on Six (Montgomery)

- A modern example of Jazz Blues.
- 16-bar form.
- Phrasing and soloing borrows frequently from blues minor pentatonic.
- Cycle of 5ths leading back into tonic is typical of the Be-Bop style of Jazz Blues.
Head
Single-note head based around minor blues pentatonic. Ending on the 9th (b.27)
Turnaround Riff

(Single-note style) quoted by Joe Pass in ‘Joe’s Blues’.
Octave Playing

Gm7   D7

E 5th Chorus
Gm7   C7
Gm7   C7
Gm7   C7

* Mute inner string of octaves throughout.

Gm7   C7   Cm7   F7   Bbm7   Eb7   Am7   D7   Ebm7   Ab7
Accompaniment

- This particular standard is almost performed with accompaniment. So ‘comping’ should be based upon the other musicians in the ensemble.
Questions