

Music Theory

Finishing The Blues (For Now)

BY JOHN DUARTE

THE CHORDS TO A 12-bar blues can be treated in many ways, one of which is to add the 6th and/or 9th to each. If you do this, the soloist is also likely to employ these notes, which increases the odds that clashes will occur. For instance, a $B\flat$ is liable to collide with the note A in $C6$, or an $E\flat$ may grind against $C9$. But good soloists and backup musicians instinctively know how to handle these situations—all it takes is experience.

A traditional 12-bar blues progression reads like so: I, IV, I, I, IV, IV, I, I, V, IV, I, V, each chord lasting for one measure. While every elaboration of the basic chords represents a step away from the original simplicity of the blues, it's also a measure of the sophistication of those who take it. But the more steps you take, the more you need to keep your balance. The following examples

show a few possibilities for building on a basic 12-bar progression in the key of C and can be permuted into almost endless variations.

In Ex. 1, think of the $Dm7$ as a IV chord with the 6th added. Following this with $E\flat dim7$ creates a nice chromatic bass line. In the sixth measure of a 12-bar blues it's common to replace IV with $IVm6$. Since $Fm6$ is an incomplete dominant 9th chord, you can substitute $B\flat9$ or just $B\flat7$ (Ex. 2), each of which leads back to C .

In Ex. 3, $C\sharp dim7$ substitutes for bar 8's C and $Dm7-G7$ replaces the next two measures' G and F chords. Ex. 4 progresses in fourths— D, G, C, F —and can be plugged into measures 9 and 10. While both Ex. 3 and Ex. 4 begin to get away from the blues' simplicity, they add a nice jazzy touch.

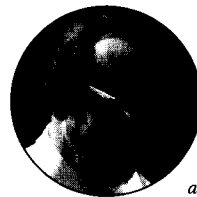
Ex. 5, Ex. 6, and Ex. 7 show how the $\flat5$

can facilitate a moving bass line. Ex. 5 fits bars 3, 4, and 5, while Ex. 6 and Ex. 7 can replace 9, 10, and 11.

Ex. 8 plugs into measures 7, 8, 9, and 10 and delays the arrival of $G7$. If you change the time values to half-notes, this "round the clock" sequence also makes a nice turnaround for bars 11 and 12.

Once you've thoroughly explored these ideas and applied them to other keys, see what you can do with this minor progression: $Im, IVm, Im, Im, IVm, IVm, Im, Im, V, V, Im, V$.

Blues can be basic or sophisticated. Regardless of the approach you take, experiment and have fun. ■



Author/educator John Duarte is one of the world's foremost composers for classical guitar, and his works have been performed by Andres Segovia, John Williams, Alexandre Lagoya, and many others.

Ex. 1 C Dm7 E \flat dim C C7

Ex. 2 F B \flat 7 or B \flat 9 C

Ex. 3 C C \sharp dim7

Ex. 4 Dm7 G7 C Dm7 G7 Cm7 F7 C

Ex. 5 C C7 \flat 5

Ex. 6 F G7 \flat 5 F7 \flat 5 C

Ex. 7 Dm7 G7 \flat 5 Cm7 F7 \flat 5 C

Ex. 8 C A7 \sharp 5 D9 G13 C