

Improvisation Using Pentatonics

From the masterclass at Patrick Henry High School on 2/21/17

Ron Fix

G Major Scale

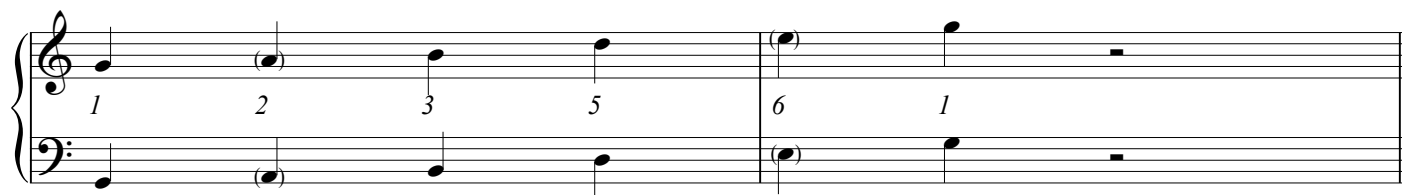


There are three types of tones: chord tones, passing tones, and altered (or color) tones.

Chord Tones

- Root/ Tonic - First note of the scale (G)
- Third - Third note of the scale (B)
- Fifth - Fifth note of the scale (D)

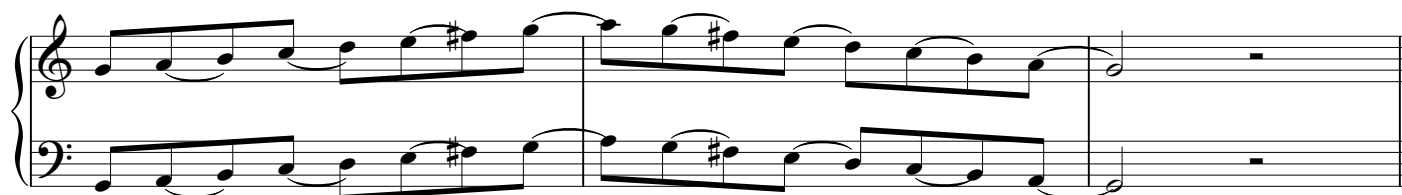
G Major Pentatonic Scale



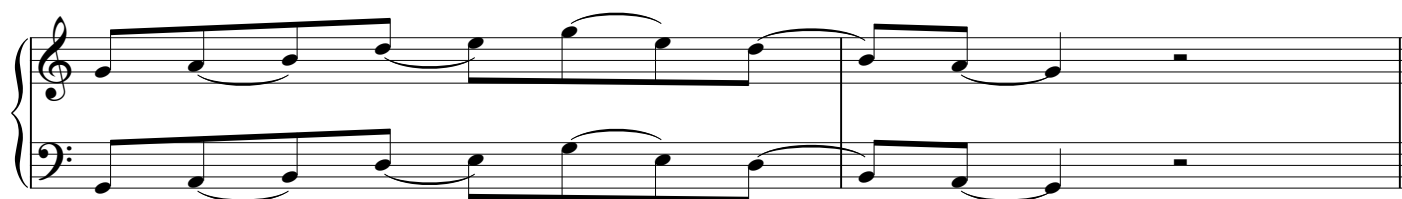
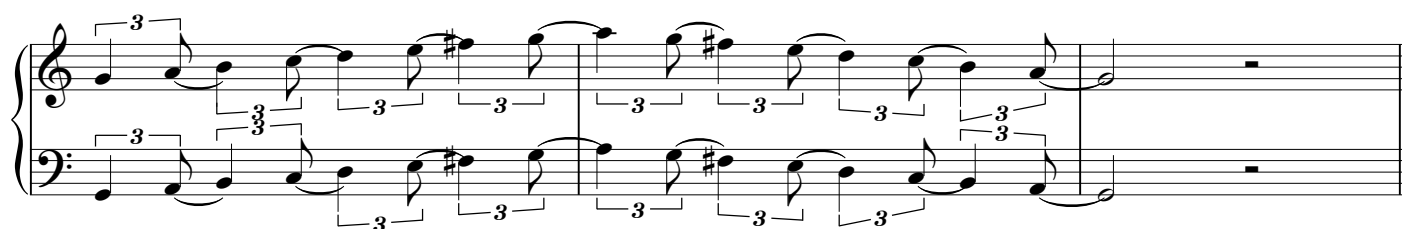
A major pentatonic scale is simply a major scale without the fourth and seventh notes.

Passing Tones - Non-chord tones (A and E, the second and sixth notes of the scale). Used for connecting chord tones in melodic lines, whereas chord tones are great places to start, rest on, and end a melodic line.


Swing Eighths - Looks like this:




Sounds like this:



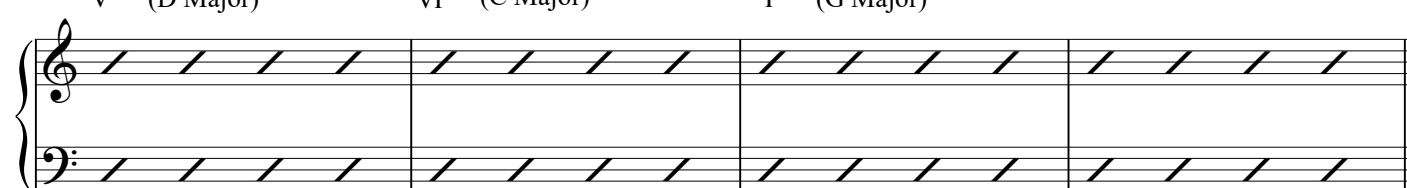
I (G Major)



IV (C Major) *I* (G Major)

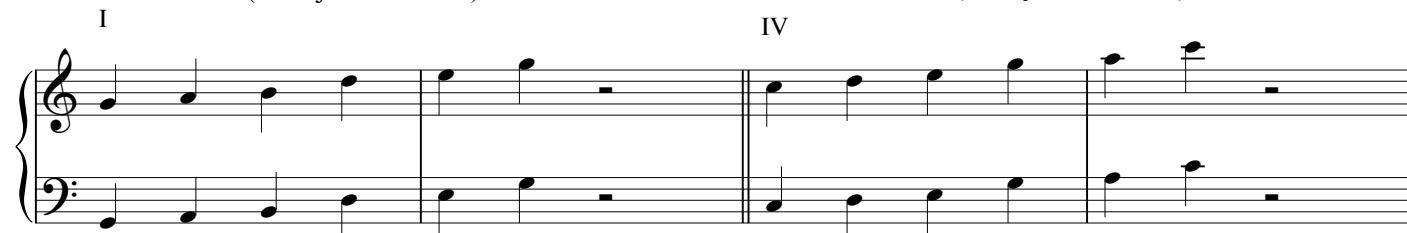


V (D Major) *VI* (C Major) *I* (G Major)

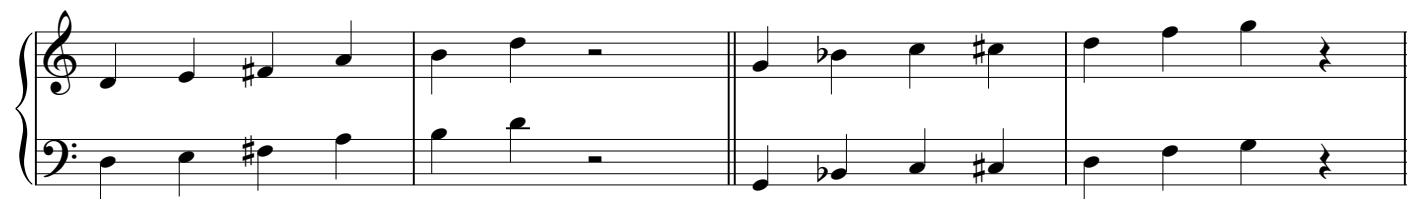


There are three different key centers in a blues. They are based off of the first, fourth, and fifth scales degrees of the I chord. So if G is the I chord, than the IV and V are C and D respectively because C and D are the fourth and fifth notes in the G major scale.

I (G Major Pentatonic) *IV* (C Major Pentatonic)



V (D Major Pentatonic) (G Blues Scale)



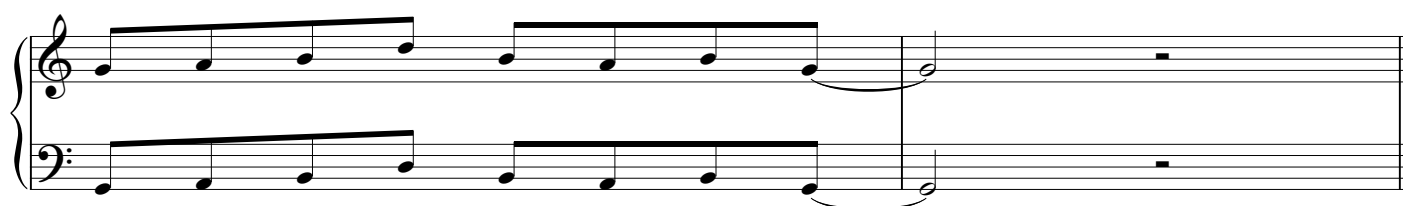
Notice how different the notes of the blues scale are from the three different key centers (G, C, and D). Some of these notes will sound good, some not so good if used improperly. The key to sounding good is understanding each note's function.

Constructing A Melodic Line

1) Choose six chord tones from G Major, you can repeat notes. The first and last notes will be the root (G).



2) Connect these chord tones with passing tones using only eighth notes.



2) Repeat the line.



2) Insert altered notes to create a bluesy sound.



G Major

Altered Tones



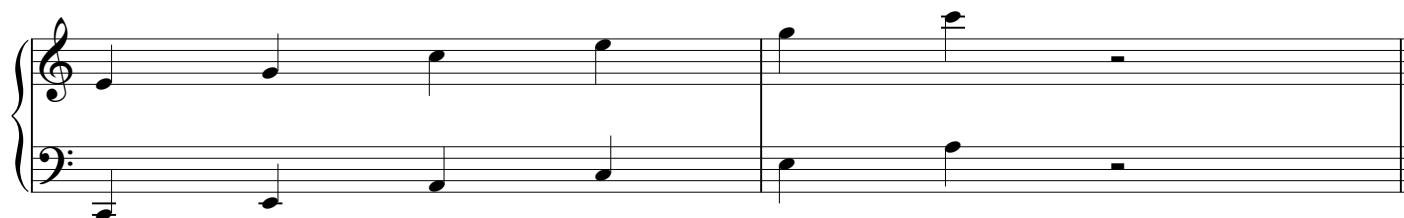
Altered tones are notes that are not found in the major scale but can be used to create a bluesy sound.

One such note is the Flat Third. In jazz, when we say "flat a note," we don't mean literally make the note flat, but simply lower the note a half-step. For example, a sharp note becomes natural, and a natural note becomes flat.

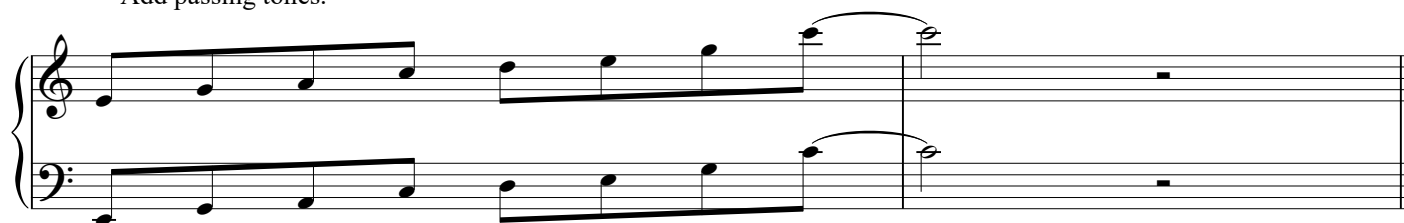
Now repeat this process for the IV chord (C) in bars 5 and 6 of the blues. Since this phrase is only two bars long, we won't need to repeat it, so skip the third step.

Let's start this melody on the third (E) and end it on the root of C.

Choose six chord tones from C Major.



Add passing tones.



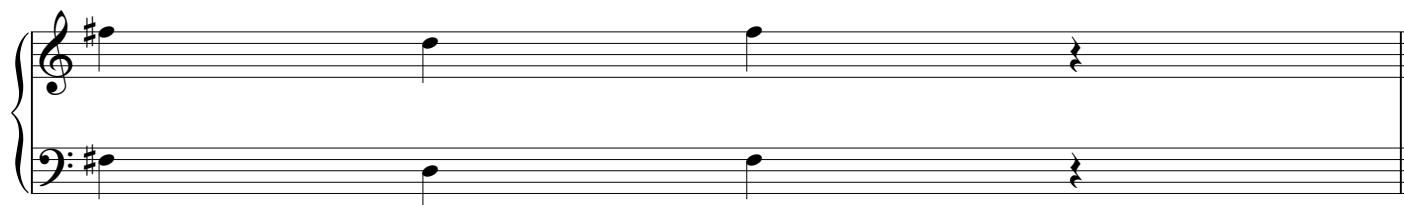
Insert altered tones. Altered tones can serve as both chord tones or passing tones.



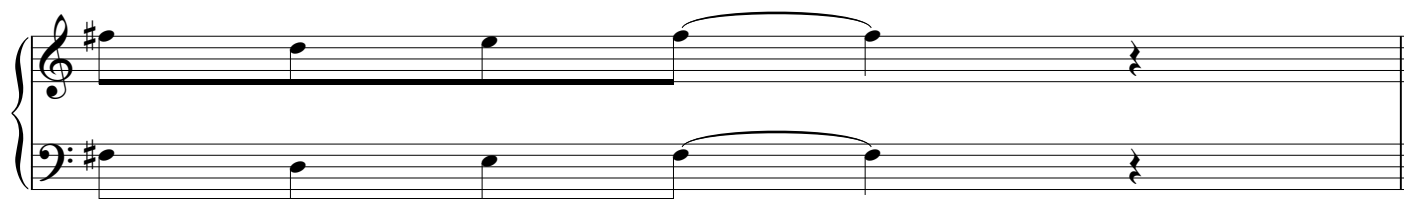
Since we already have melodic lines for bars 7, 8 and 11, 12 of the blues (the I chord - we just won't repeat it), that only leaves us bars 9 and 10 (V / IV).

We're going to do this one a little different than before.

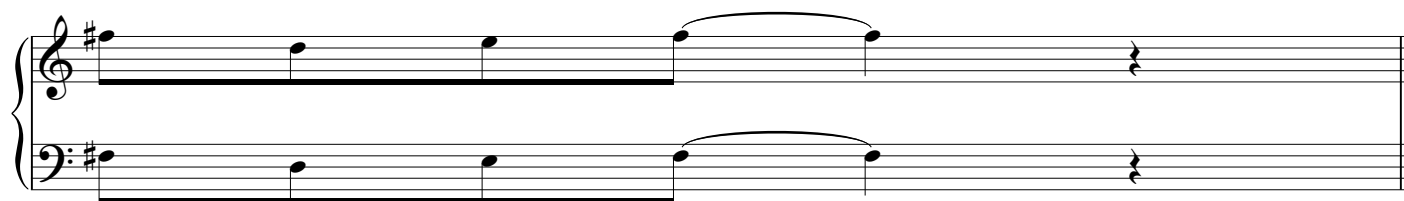
1) Choose three chord tones from the V chord (D).



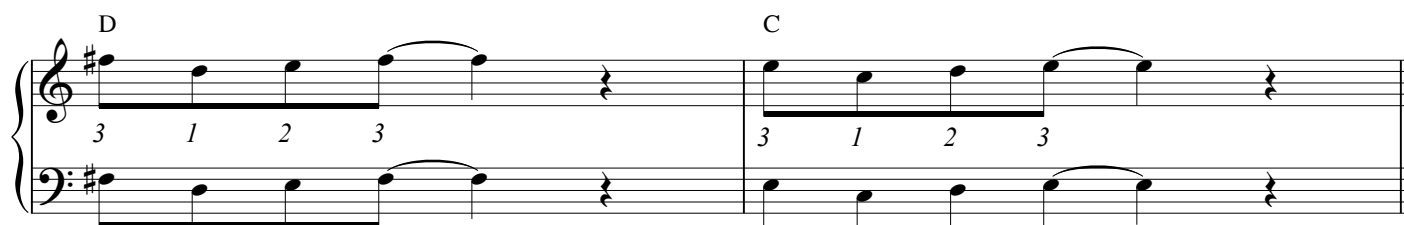
2) Add passing tones using only eighth notes.



3) Insert altered tones. Or don't. Go with what sounds good to you.



4) Now repeat this exact phrase, but in the key of the IV chord (C).



Now put it all together and you have one chorus of a blues!

The musical score is a 12-bar blues in G major. It is written for piano in treble and bass clefs. The first system (measures 1-4) is in G major, with a 'G' chord indicated above the staff. The second system (measures 5-8) features a change to C major (indicated by 'C') in measure 5, and back to G major (indicated by 'G') in measure 7. The third system (measures 9-12) features a change to D major (indicated by 'D') in measure 9, and back to C major (indicated by 'C') in measure 10. The melody is written in the treble clef, and the bass line is in the bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

A great way to learn the jazz language is to learn blues heads (melodies). Below is a list tunes you should try to learn in all twelve keys. Learn them one at a time, and focus only on the ones you really enjoy.

Sandu
 Now's the Time
 Tenor Madness
 Duke's Place/ C Jam Blues
 Sonnymoon For Two
 Straight No Chaser
 Blue Monk
 Billie's Bounce
 Cool Blues
 Relaxin' At Camarillo
 Au Privave
 Blues For Alice
 Turnaround
 Bag's Groove
 All Blues
 Barbados
 Cheryl
 St Louis Blues
 Bloomdido
 Chi-Chi
 Freddie the Freeloader
 Blue Train
 Blue 'n' Boogie
 Things Ain't What They Used To Be
 K.C. Blues

You can find some of these tune on my
 YouTube page in a playlist titled "The Blues."

There is a link to my YouTube account on my
 site, ronfix.com.