

## Blues Variations

### ◆ Introduction

This is Dr. John rapping at you. Right now we're talking about 16-bar blues. Let's take an example of a slow 16-bar blues like Ray Charles' "Sweet Sixteen Bars."

### ◆ "Sweet Sixteen Bars" (Ray Charles)

Within that slow 16-bar blues, you can see the way that it's used in a very churchy fashion. Now I'll give you an example of a 16-bar blues done in a more bluesy fashion and fast, "Got My Mojo Working."

### ◆ "Got My Mojo Working"

That's a totally different 16 bars, but what I'm trying to get at here is that the form of the song has a lot to do with what you play. Within the fast 16 bars, the rhythmic things relate to what we did earlier with the Professor Longhair thing. And the slow 16 bars, even though a very churchy style, relates to any blues ballad. It's left very much to interpretation. But the interpretation must be within the scope of the piece. You can't take something bluesy out of context. Otherwise, you'll fall within some other form of music, such as avant-garde jazz.

### ◆ 12-Bar Butterfly Stride

To get back to the 12-bar blues, I'll give an example of what we call butterfly stride style piano.

## Butterfly Stride Style

Musical notation for the Butterfly Stride Style example. It features a piano introduction with a 12-bar blues structure. The notation is in G major, 4/4 time, and includes a key signature change to F major for the second system. The first system shows a piano introduction with a 12-bar blues structure, including a key signature change to F major for the second system. The notation includes a key signature change to F major for the second system.

Musical notation for the first system of "Sweet Sixteen Bars". It features a piano introduction with a 12-bar blues structure. The notation is in G major, 4/4 time, and includes a key signature change to F major for the second system. The first system shows a piano introduction with a 12-bar blues structure, including a key signature change to F major for the second system.

Musical notation for the second system of "Sweet Sixteen Bars". It features a piano introduction with a 12-bar blues structure. The notation is in G major, 4/4 time, and includes a key signature change to F major for the second system. The first system shows a piano introduction with a 12-bar blues structure, including a key signature change to F major for the second system.

Musical notation for the third system of "Sweet Sixteen Bars". It features a piano introduction with a 12-bar blues structure. The notation is in G major, 4/4 time, and includes a key signature change to F major for the second system. The first system shows a piano introduction with a 12-bar blues structure, including a key signature change to F major for the second system.

Musical notation for the fourth system of "Sweet Sixteen Bars". It features a piano introduction with a 12-bar blues structure. The notation is in G major, 4/4 time, and includes a key signature change to F major for the second system. The first system shows a piano introduction with a 12-bar blues structure, including a key signature change to F major for the second system.

Musical notation for the fifth system of "Sweet Sixteen Bars". It features a piano introduction with a 12-bar blues structure. The notation is in G major, 4/4 time, and includes a key signature change to F major for the second system. The first system shows a piano introduction with a 12-bar blues structure, including a key signature change to F major for the second system.

The left hand is playing 10ths there. Basic stride is more of a style of playing the bass note followed by a chord. For example:

Butterfly stride is played by keeping the 10ths in the left hand moving. It's a style that keeps the piano sounding as full as possible.

### ◆ Mixed Styles

One of the values of this style is that it frees you to mix many style together. Listen to the recording for an example.

Switching Stride Styles (2nd Chorus)

In that example, we played a little boogie style and a little stride style. But within the mixture of these styles is still the basic blues. Over many years of listening to a lot of blues piano players, I've found that all the guys who were good could vary these styles within a gig, and sometimes even within one piece.

For example, maybe one time we can play it with this pattern:

Maybe the next time, we can play:

Maybe another time, we can play:

You see that you can mix many different styles in the context of the blues.

### ♥ Playing the 10ths

The problem in explaining stride piano and playing the 10ths is that in the left hand we have basically no patterns. You have to play parts that fit the song. It's left to the discretion of the piano player.

It's hard to break that into any pattern. The piano player tries to adjust chords to the style. You have to find a pattern that fits the song.

It'll change because when you're playing real blues, it's a lot up to your feelings.

Playing the 10ths is a useful style, whether playing the blues or pop music. An example of a song using 10ths would be "Georgia."

### ♦ "Georgia"

### ♦ 10ths Continued

To play "Georgia" solo like that, it feels good to play it using 10ths in the left hand because it relaxes the bass line. And you're playing rich chords. But still, you're playing just a triad, so it makes the sound very pure. Something Bobby Womack hipped to a long time ago is that when you're playing music today, it's important to give listeners simple chords at first. They haven't learned to adapt to all of the substitute chords that musicians know. Then, maybe in the second or third chorus we can play more complex chords, using substitute chords and such.

### ♦ Lloyd Glenn Style

Lloyd Glenn would play this something like (listen to the recording.)

Lloyd's style is played without a lot of bass in the left hand. This is a very jazzy style. It's a wonderful sound when you're playing with a bass player.

However, if you're playing solo or without a bass, it's hard to identify what the root of the chord is. So it really only works when you're playing with a bass.

Lloyd Glenn is a great piano player. He played on the original "Stormy Monday Blues" (a.k.a. "Call It Stormy Monday") by T-Bone Walker, on all of B.B. King's early great hits, on Lowell Fulson's early hits, and with many other West Coast blues singers. He was very innovative in the sound he put on records. It became a signature of certain records. When I hear Ray Charles play piano, I hear a lot of Lloyd Glenn's influence. I hear Lloyd Glenn's influence in Charles Brown and many other great piano players that came out of the West Coast.

I would encourage any piano player who wants to be well-rounded in the blues to get some Lloyd Glenn records.

across three notes.

Lloyd Glenn's Rolling Thumb Technique



He used this in various ways. Moving his thumb on these three notes leaves the rest of his right hand free to do other things.

Listen to the recording for an example of Lloyd's style. The first example includes in the left hand part what the bass would be playing:

*For* G7

*For* C7

G7

D7

G7 etc.

by the bass. Lloyd might also have congas playing the rhythm. His style is unique because it's not like most other piano players.

### 10 Charles Brown Style

Charles Brown is another pianist with a unique style.

He invented a sort of sound on the piano what was neither major nor minor, that he could utilize in his great blues songs which could evolve from minor to major.

## Charles Brown Style-Major/Minor Blues

2nd Chorus  
D Minor Dm Gm

Dm A7 D7

Gm

Am7 F7 Bb7 A7

D Major D Am7

Bridge - D Major D G7 etc.

Very subtly he goes from minor to major.

He starts out in minor blues, but when he gets to the turnaround V chord, he slips into the major key. In the bridge of the song, he's gone into major.

In Charles Brown's style, you can see a connection with Ray Charles and Nat "King" Cole, not only in the vocal element, but in the piano element. I mention Charles Brown and Lloyd Glenn together because there's such a close relationship between their styles.

## Right-Hand Fills

Some of Charles Brown's right-hand fills are based on bending notes from the 4 through the b5 to the 5, and also on the trill from the 5 to the 7th.

Charles Brown Right Hand Fills  
D Minor

Charles Brown used these kind of fills in his "Drifting Blues."

Here's a guitar lick.

Charles Brown's style is a good way to keep things open in the blues and not get too chordy, because one of the problems you can have is that you can make things too full. But blues should have a good space to it, especially when you're comping behind a singer. When you're comping behind somebody, it's sometimes better to give a guy a little more space rather than to fill up all the space with notes. That little extra space can give the singer or soloist freedom to really find himself.

Listen to the recorded example with singing, using Charles Brown's "Driftin' Blues."

That openness is not only good for the guy to sing to, but to let the blues breathe. Leave some room for things to develop, whether it's to let other musicians play a fill or whatever else develops. That goes for any of the blues styles.

### 13 "St. James Infirmary"

Speaking of the major-minor sort of tonality in Charles Brown's style, one of the great songs mixing major and minor tonality is "St. James Infirmary."

## St. James Infirmary

Musical notation for the first system of "St. James Infirmary". The key signature is one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 12/8. The system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. Chord symbols Gm, Eb7, and D7 are placed above the staff. The bass staff contains a simple accompaniment pattern.

Musical notation for the second system of "St. James Infirmary". The key signature is one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 12/8. The system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. Chord symbols Gm, C, and F7 are placed above the staff. The bass staff contains a simple accompaniment pattern.

Musical notation for the third system of "St. James Infirmary". The key signature is one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 12/8. The system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. The bass staff contains a simple accompaniment pattern.

Musical notation for the fourth system of "St. James Infirmary". The key signature is one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 12/8. The system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. Chord symbols Gm7 and D7 are placed above the staff. The bass staff contains a simple accompaniment pattern.

Musical notation for the fifth system of "St. James Infirmary". The key signature is one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 12/8. The system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. Chord symbols Gm, D7, A7, and D7 are placed above the staff. The bass staff contains a simple accompaniment pattern.

Musical notation for the sixth system of "St. James Infirmary". The key signature is one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 12/8. The system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. Chord symbols Gm, D7, Gm, C7, and F7 are placed above the staff. The bass staff contains a simple accompaniment pattern.

Musical notation for the seventh system of "St. James Infirmary". The key signature is one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 12/8. The system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. Chord symbols Eb7, D7, Gm, A7, and D7 are placed above the staff. The bass staff contains a simple accompaniment pattern.

B $\flat$ 7 Eb7 D7

Gm EbMaj7 D7(F9)

D $\flat$ 11 C11 F7 B $\flat$ 7

E $\flat$ 7 D7 Gm D7

Gm Eb9 D7 Gm C9 F7

B $\flat$ 7 Eb9 D9 Gm A7/C# D7

Gm F9 Eb7

D7 Gm

D7#9 F#dim7 Gm Ab9/5 Freely Gm9

C13#11



I'd like to say that even when you're playing other forms of music, not necessarily the blues, that all these things still apply. As an example here's a little pop piece I wrote called "Pretty Libby."

## ◆ Pretty Libby

Musical score for "Pretty Libby" in 12/8 time, featuring piano accompaniment. The score is divided into three systems. The first system starts with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb). The second system continues the piece with various chords. The third system concludes the piece with a final chord.

Chords: Em7A, D9b5, Bbm7, Eb7, AbMaj7, Ab7#9, Db7, GbMaj9, B7b5.

Musical score for "Pretty Libby" in 12/8 time, featuring piano accompaniment. The score is divided into three systems. The first system starts with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb). The second system includes a first ending marked "1. 3." and a "Last Time To Coda" symbol. The third system includes a second ending marked "2." and concludes with a "ruff" marking.

Chords: C7b5, B7, Bb7, A7, Ab7, Db9, Gb, GMaj7, Ab7, A7, Bb#5 B7, Cm7b5 B7, Bb7, A7, Abm7 Db7, B7, Dm7 EbMaj7, Fm, Eb7b5, Eb, Cm7, B7, Bb7, A7, Abm7 Db7, B7, Dm7b9, EbMaj7, D7, G7b5, Cm7, Ab7, G7.

Chords: Gm7, Ab7

Chords: Gm7, Am7 D7#9, Gm, F#dim7, Bb/F, Dm7b9, Eb, Em7b5, Eb7b5

Chords: Gm9, Gb9, Fm, E7, Eb Maj7, Fm, F#m, Gm

*D.S. al Coda*

Chords: Ab7Db7, Eb/G, B7, Db9, D7#9, Eb7#9, Db9

*A Tempo*

Chords: Bbm, Ab9, Fm7, Bb7, Eb, Db9, D7#9, Eb9

## Techniques Continued

All the same things that apply to a blues ballad apply to this kind of ballad:

- Try to leave a little space.
- Try to leave a cushion.
- Set up the chords.

What I'm getting at is that all types of music we play are related. Let's say, while I'm personally playing a gig, I get a request to do my song "Such A Night." That isn't my biggest hit, but it's known from the movie "The Last Waltz." Even though it's a pop song, when I play this song on solo gigs, I've arranged it in such a way to leave surprises for the listeners. It's important to play around with songs so that they don't become stale and stagnant to the people playing them or listening to them. If I had to play "Such A Night" the way I recorded it, I probably wouldn't enjoy it anymore. But here's an example of how I'd play it today:

## "Such A Night"

Note that I started with another piece I wrote that's a slow blues. And to set up the ending, I mixed in another piece I wrote for my father several years ago. This lets me play around with something and gives me a little freedom. Most times I play a song like this I try to embellish the introduction or to do a piece of another song or something to set it up. And then in the song, to not get monotonous and to give myself some freedom, I'll play a little piece of something else like I just did.

I think these kinds of things are important to give ourselves credit as musicians. Play something a little off the wall and have fun with the music. This is a very important thing you can do on solo gigs. But you can't always do these things with a band unless it's rehearsed, and that would defeat the purpose in this particular instance.

### Improvisation and Vamp Ideas

Also, this leads into another area we have spoken about. "Such A Night" is a very Dixieland oriented song. The ballad "Pretty Libby" is very pop-jazz oriented. But all these musics tie into the blues ballad structure.

My style is definitely an offshoot of Professor Longhair, Allen Toussaint, James Booker and a lot of New Orleans piano players, as well as other piano players, but mostly the New Orleans guys.

### 17 "Blues Ballad"

Now I'd like to touch on a little thing about blues ballads that we haven't rapped very much about. I'll play an example.

### 18 Improvisation Concepts

In this little blues ballad I played the melody down twice and the bridge, and I played the last chorus basically improvising on a series of parallel fifths. Any type of improvisation should basically make pictures to the listener. It's as important as just playing, because things can become very scale oriented when we're just playing the actual chord. Within the blues structures of improvisation, many things can be played just by running the pentatonic blues scale.

F Pentatonic Blues Scale



It's very important to not just get hung up on that. It's important to find things that are saying what we want to say and that are making relaxed pictures.

What I'm trying to play in the recorded example are sequences of notes that are basically the melody of the song, but just fooling around a bit with the melody rather than trying to stretch out. It's easy enough when you're playing to use just what I call "tricks." But I'm basically talking about very plain within the harmonic area of the blues. This goes for blues ballads.

The thing that's most important is to play things that you know how to play. When you practice you can try playing anything. When you're playing for people, it's not time to be practicing. That's the time to play things that you know.

Also, play within the realms of the piece that's being played. It's more important to show what the song is about than to show off all of your technique or to show off all of the things you know. We're playing songs, we're not just playing licks. So, when we're talking about songs, whether it's a 12-bar blues or whatever the form

own composition "Big Mac."

### 19 Big Mac

(2nd Chorus)



F7 Gb7 F7 Gb7 Am7 D7b9 Db7

G7b9 Bb7

Db Eb-9 E7b9

Fm7 GbMaj7 Fm7

GbMaj7 Fm7 GbMaj7

Fm7 GbMaj7 F7 Gb7

Cm7 F/A B9

Bb B7 Bb B7 Bb B7

Bb Ab G7 Gb F Gb7 F Gb7

F Gb7 Am7 D7b9 Db7 G7b9

What I was trying to do there was improvise around the melody. I was improvising, but the melody was still being played very innocently throughout.

I was reharmonizing the melody and playing around with it. This falls within the area of improvisation, but it's also in the area of playing a particular melody.

That last song is a song I wrote for my father call "Big Mac." It's basically a play on the idea of using a raised I chord, which is a very common vamp we use.

1 Raised 1 1 Raised 1

This raised I idea was started when T-Bone Walker recorded "Stormy Monday."

## Blues With a Raised I Chord

Note: Play entire example one octave lower than written.

### ◆ More Improvisation Concepts

One of the things I don't do is play the same voicing each time we raise the I. In some instances I'm using an augmented chord on the raised I.

"Big Mac" Chord Changes



Listen to the recording for an example of how Lloyd Glenn would play this vamp.

22 I-IV-I Vamps

The I-IV-V vamp is easy to play. Here's a I-IV-I vamp in the key of F:



All vamps that we use are geared off of something that is rhythmic but that also compounds the melodic picture.

It's easy for the piano to play something like:



Vamps let the singer just hang on a I chord for a long time, or let songs build in an introduction or an interlude. A lot of times I'll write songs based on a vamp. Pieces like that seem to often write themselves. I feel like I shouldn't really take credit for writing them.

Vamps are part of the big musical universe that's there for all of us to enjoy.

I hope you enjoyed these lessons.

23 "Such A Night" (Fade Out)

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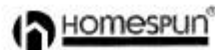
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