

Improvisation II

Improvising has been part of Blues music since its inception. To get a sense of how contemporary blues musicians use improvisation, watch the video *Walking Blues by Robert Johnson, featuring Keb' Mo', Playing for Change | Song around the World*.

Most of the guitarists in the video use an open right hand, or fingerpicking, rather than a pick. Some are playing acoustic guitars, some are playing electric guitars and some are using notes and techniques we haven't learned yet, but they are also doing things we can imitate, like using repeated notes in highly expressive ways.

For this improvisation session:

1. Divide into pairs or small groups.
2. Choose a soloist and one or more accompanists in each group/pair.
3. Trade roles regularly as you practice improvising several times.

The Accompanist's Role:

1. Play either the full or simplified G, C and D chords following the 12-bar blues pattern from the previous page (with each measure getting four beats):
 - G Major: 4 measures (or bars)
 - C Major: 2 measures
 - G Major: 2 measures
 - D Major: 1 measure
 - C Major: 1 measure
 - G Major: 2 measures
2. At the beginning, it is simplest to strum each chord 4 times per measure to mark the four beats in each measure and track when chord changes should happen.
3. As you get familiar with the pattern, you can try varying the rhythm.

The Soloist's Role:

1. Use the notes G, A, C, D, E and F (all the notes we have learned except for B).



2. Play them in any order or with whatever frequency you imagine.
3. Experiment with repeated notes, swinging eighth notes, tied notes and dotted rhythms if you can but also try just letting your hands play what pops into your mind.

Accompanists and soloists should practice their part several times in a row before changing roles. Even as we improvise, we make note of what we like and what we like less, and our imagination evolves.

Words to Play By:

"The most valuable possession you can own is an open heart. The most powerful weapon you can be is an instrument of peace." – Carlos Santana