

THOUGHTS ON SINGLE NOTE IMPROVISATION

In keeping with the theme of the minor pentatonic scale here's an excerpt from my frequently sought after, Pulitzer prize winning book :

H Y6 Y[]bbYfgEGi fj]j U'; i]XYZcf'7 cbHYa dcfUfm; i]HUF'@j Y'&"

Available at all quality music stores [i.e. The Guitar Factory Gladesville].

It's my aim to introduce you to a general break down of the processes involved in the art of single note improvisation.

Also referred to as soloing [or lead playing] this tends to be one of the more mysterious areas of music, like everything else in music, understanding it makes it less [~~As~~ ^ • c ^].

This kind of improvising tends to be largely scale based, the scales function in much the same way as an alphabet. Being able to run up and down a scale with ease while important for building up a technique is not what improvising is really about. Instead of just reciting in order the letters of a newly learnt alphabet to get yourself understood, you need to put words together from that alphabet enabling you to express something that makes sense.

These words are called **ŠICKS** [Not to be confused with riffs] they are pre-memorised combinations of notes [runs]. All guitarists who are improvisers have a vocabulary of licks, the great ones have their own unique vocabulary that gives them a more distinctive voice to create a different slant on things.

There are 3 levels of soloing-

1. Combining licks together in different ways.
2. Combining licks and adding something genuinely spontaneous.
3. Playing constantly fresh, new spontaneous ideas.

GHYd' is where you develop a basic syntax and therefore a degree of confidence in your ability to solo. You know beforehand how a lick sounds and you have a set number of licks to get you out of trouble in most cases.

Many guitar players don't get to step 1. because the style of music they're into doesn't seriously address improvising.

'GHYd' & is where the better players fall under, even the greats.

'GHYd'' . is what we all try to aspire towards however the idea of coming up with totally new ideas on the spot consistently each time you solo is super human. You'll tend to find that even with critically acclaimed guitarists who can think outside of the square will repeat and plunder their own bag of tricks, their 'signature licks'.

SOME THOUGHTS ON SINGLE NOTE IMPROVISATION

It's important to realise that all the great player/improvisers in jazz, blues and rock developed and grew as musicians by mimicking their heroes. Copying and playing along with recordings of improvisations has been the method from the 1920's onwards. Some might call this plagiarism but in music it's called being influenced by.

By listening to music you're hearing the language in context, how it's phrased, how it's pronounced. Learning licks in isolation without hearing how they're put together and built upon in any actual playing situation won't do it for you. It's like learning how to read in French without being able to actually speak/pronounce it in any cohesive manner.

Listening to what has come before in music is a must, it's all about learning from a vast wealth of knowledge and getting an appreciation of its evolutionary process that still influences today's music. I find it astounding when I get young students who love blues and rock guitar yet have never listened to or in some cases never heard of people like Jimi Hendrix. If you study classical music you know about Beethoven, it's the same thing.

The moral is don't be a passive recipient of the everything that's dished out, if you're interested in improvising don't waste your time listening to commercial or even the so called 'alternate' radio stations or the likes of MTV . You need to dig deeper and actively find music/players that are probably not the flavour of the month to help you learn off and progress.

For what it's worth, here's a list of some of my guitar heroes that myself and tens of thousands of others have learnt from by listening to their recordings.

Jimi Hendrix

Eric Clapton [60's recordings w/ John Mayall and w/ Cream]

B.B. King

Johnny Winter

Alvin Lee [w/ 10 Years After]

Mike Bloomfield

Jimmy Page [w/ Led Zeppelin]

Carlos Santana

Ted Nugent

Roy Buchanan

Steve Hunter & Dick Wagner [70's recordings w/ Lou Reed and w/ Alice Cooper]

Billy Gibbons [w/ Z. Z. Top]

Buddy Guy

Mick Ronson [70's recordings w/ David Bowie and w/ Ian Hunter]

Dave Gilmour [w/ Pink Floyd]

There are many more I could mention, but these are a handful of guys that turned me on when I first started playing. Some of these players are black, some white, some American, some English, some of them specialised in a heavier rock sound but it still comes from a blues foundation, they all have that common thread of being blues based players.