

Jazz-Blues Comping



"The master of this style of rhythm guitar was Freddie Green," said Breau. "He played in Count Basie's band for over 40 years."

BY LENNY BREAU



FOR THE MAJORITY of blues styles—including those combining elements of rock and folk music—the 12-bar structure has remained relatively simple: the I-IV-V progression, with melodies constructed from the five-note blues scale. However, in jazz, the blues is embellished with an almost limitless combination of melodic and harmonic devices.

The most common 12-bar blues progression is four bars of I, two bars of IV, two bars of I, one bar of V, one bar of IV, and two bars of I. However, jazz players employ a harmonic framework similar to that of

Ex. 1. Note the use of the VI chord (A7) in bar 8, and how from there the harmony back-cycles home to the I in bar 10. Bars 11 and 12—the turnaround measures—use a common I-VI-II-V progression, while the F#dim7 in bar 6 is a substitute that connects IV to I. Ex. 1 is just a skeleton; you can freely add substitute chords that include alterations and extensions, as long as you exercise good taste.

One of the best places to start learning jazz rhythm guitar is with four-to-the-bar comping. **Ex. 2** is a blues progression based on the chords in Ex. 1, only using a few substitutes. These voicings work especially well for straight rhythm, and they sound very full, even though they have

only three notes. For this rhythm style, you'll get a better feel if you strum with a pick or your thumb (I use a thumbpick). Strum using downstrokes, and avoid sounding the strings not played. (They can be damped by strategic placement of your fretting hand; experiment until you're successful.) Once you've memorized Ex. 1 and can embellish it with some chords, transpose it to all keys.

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Ex. 1

1 C7 F7 C7 F7 F#dim7

7 C7 A7 Dm7 G7 C7 A7 D7 G7

Ex. 2

1 C6 C7 F F#dim7 C G7 Gm7 C7

5 F7 F#dim7 C6 F7 Em7 A7

9 D7 Dm7 G7 C7 A7 D7 G7



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