

Blues Lines Using Guide Tones

The following blues lines were conceived to illustrate the use of guide tones to create harmonically clear melodies. They are meant to be simple enough for teaching purposes, yet still retaining some element of musicality and development. The guide tones were adhered to, but the lines are also created using the basic F triad with neighbors tones and elaboration, and created using some simple forms of motivic development. These different approaches to an improvised or composed melody are not mutually exclusive.

The guide tones are shown above the line for reference. I have beginning students sing this line in class while the others are playing to reinforce the aural sense of where the harmony is going.

The guide tones, like the outlines, can be a useful vehicle for teaching any element of melodic improvisation theory. Students can work on time feel, tone, motivic development, triad elaboration, creative noodling, or whatever and still try to connect the guide tones. The guide tones, after all are what is actually making the changes sound, and therefore can propel a solo when followed.

1

Chord progression: F, Bb7, F, F7

The first line of music consists of four measures. The top staff shows the chord progression: F, Bb7, F, and F7. The bottom staff shows the melodic line. The first measure starts on F4, moving to G4, A4, Bb4, and A4. The second measure starts on Bb4, moving to Bb4, A4, G4, and F4. The third measure starts on F4, moving to G4, A4, Bb4, and A4. The fourth measure starts on F4, moving to G4, A4, Bb4, and A4. Guide tones are indicated by circles around the notes.

5

Chord progression: Bb7, F, D7

The second line of music consists of four measures. The top staff shows the chord progression: Bb7, F, and D7. The bottom staff shows the melodic line. The first measure starts on Bb4, moving to Bb4, A4, G4, and F4. The second measure starts on F4, moving to G4, A4, Bb4, and A4. The third measure starts on F4, moving to G4, A4, Bb4, and A4. The fourth measure starts on F4, moving to G4, A4, Bb4, and A4. Guide tones are indicated by circles around the notes.

9

Chord progression: Gm7, C7, F, Gm7, C7, F

The third line of music consists of six measures. The top staff shows the chord progression: Gm7, C7, F, Gm7, C7, and F. The bottom staff shows the melodic line. The first measure starts on Gb4, moving to Gb4, F4, and E4. The second measure starts on C5, moving to Bb4, A4, and G4. The third measure starts on F4, moving to G4, A4, and Bb4. The fourth measure starts on Gb4, moving to Gb4, F4, and E4. The fifth measure starts on C5, moving to Bb4, A4, and G4. The sixth measure starts on F4, moving to G4, A4, and Bb4. Guide tones are indicated by circles around the notes.

The guide tones are not always at the start of the line or even on the beat. Sometimes they occur in other registers.

In m.7, the line suggest outline no.3 (a descending arpeggio, the 7th resolving to the next third.) From the F# in m.8 to the A in m.11, the basic line moves down in steps as shown in the staff below the line. Practicing singing and playing the simple shapes helps in creating more elaborate lines which follow the simple structures.

Musical notation for measures 1-4. The first staff shows chords: F, B \flat 7, F, F7. The second staff shows a descending arpeggio line with circled notes. A '7' is written below the staff at the end of measure 4.

Musical notation for measures 5-8. The first staff shows chords: B \flat 7, F, D7. The second staff shows a descending arpeggio line with circled notes and labels 'Outline No.3' and 'Outline No.1'. A '3' is written below the staff at the end of measure 5. The third staff shows chords: Am7, F, D7. A '7' and '3' are written below the staff at the end of measure 8.

Musical notation for measures 9-12. The first staff shows chords: Gm7, C7, F. The second staff shows a descending arpeggio line with circled notes and labels 'Outline No.3' and 'Outline No.1'. A '3' is written below the staff at the end of measure 9. The third staff shows chords: Gm7, C7, F. A '7' and '3' are written below the staff at the end of measure 12.