Lesson # 2

Theme and Variations

By

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Foreword

There is a lot to talk about this week, including our introductory notes so I won’t waste any time on small talk. Well, maybe just a little.

First, let me mention something about the delivery schedule of the lessons. As you probably know, e-mail is not an exact science. When I say “lessons will arrive every 7 days” that’s the schedule and that’s what I have programmed into the sequence.

However there are a variety of scenarios (that I won’t list) which might cause a delay in you receiving the lesson. There are things that might cause a delay on MY end with the autoresponder service and there things that might cause a delay on YOUR end with your e-mail service provider.

If a lesson doesn’t arrive exactly on the day you are expecting it, please don’t panic. You WILL receive the lesson...I promise. If you absolutely have to have it that day and it cannot wait or bad things are gonna happen (seriously, if it’s your day off and you want to work on it that day...) then e-mail at bob@leadguitartactics.com and I’ll manually send you the link.

Otherwise, please give it 48 hours past your expected time before you become concerned. If it doesn’t arrive by then, certainly feel free to e-mail me and I WILL get you the lesson.

Read this - > Additionally all lessons have download links for all previous lessons in the sequence. So, if for whatever reason you completely misplace something, check the current lesson (located on the last page of the PDF) for links to anything you might have missed.

Note: Most weekly lessons will be 2-5 pages in length (not including cover page, legal page and foreward).

Having said all that, let’s dive into this weeks lesson.
Introduction

Is anything more mysterious than improvising a guitar solo? Well, I’m sure there are a few things but in the guitar world this one causes lots of confusion and frustration. I’m often asked the question, “I’ve learned a scale, now what?”

I’ve spent many years as a player and a teacher and I have made a few observations that I hope will start to clear things up. Let me start by saying that playing a solo is not some mystical, magical thing that only the privileged few have access to.

There are some common elements that I believe are found in all great solos and I want to share those things with you so that you to can enjoy the fun and excitement of playing a ripping guitar solo.

Let’s break down some of these components now.

1. Technique

You have to develop technique to play a solo. Technique involves several different elements that include picking, bending, hammer ons, pull offs, slides, etc. How do you develop technique? One word…repetition.

I know of no other way to develop your technique other than spending time with your guitar in your hands and playing the same thing over and over. This is where the daily routines from Pentatonic Power come into play.

They give you an organized daily lesson plan to help develop your skill. The nature of the patterns force you to use different fingering combinations and help you develop the independence in each finger that’s required to play the guitar at a high level.

Remember to play at a speed that comfortable and allow your speed to develop naturally. Play slow and clean. I will take slow clean playing over fast and sloppy any day of the week.
2. Develop Your Ear

This is another biggie. You have to train your ears. You want to develop the skills necessary to recognize sounds. There are certain chords progressions that have been used over and over in all types of music and songs. Over time you should be able to instantly recognize these progressions when you hear them.

You should also learn the interval names and be able to pick them out when you hear them. Think about the first two notes to the Star Wars theme. That interval is known as a perfect fifth. You hear it all the time. Again you should be able to recognize that when you hear it.

You just need to learn some basic music theory to get the interval names. There are all kinds of free ear training sites on the internet. Just Google ear training and spend a few minutes each day on interval and chord recognition.

And, another benefit to practicing the patterns in Pentatonic Power. You guessed it....they train your ear. Practicing patterns on the guitar is the best way to understand the layout of the guitar and where melodies lie on the fretboard.

3. Expand Your Vocabulary

Every great player has a vocabulary of licks to draw from. This is one of the big misconceptions about playing a solo, that a solo is magically pulled out of thin air. This is not the case at all.

When improvising, players are drawing upon their pool of stored knowledge and using that material to play their solos. They are just combing and recombining what they already know into new combinations.

If you have a conversation with a friend about the most recent movie they have seen, you don’t have to plan the conversation out in advance. You just talk. You have a vocabulary of words from your native language and sometimes more than one language.

Or think about books. They use the same words over and over again but the authors are able to tell different stories with those same words. It’s the same in soloing. The same licks get used again and again but the solos are different.
Strive to expand your vocabulary. Learn some new licks and the most important thing is to apply them right away. Use them when you are jamming with friends or over a backing track. This will help to internalize them and make them a part of your playing.

4. Play And Jam As Much As You Can

This pretty much goes without saying but have some fun with your guitar. Jam to backing tracks and with your friends. There is no substitute for experience. Don’t worry about sounding great (or bad for that matter). Just get out there and play. The more you do the better you will sound.

Theme and Variations

This week I would like to focus on the theme and variation. What is a theme and variation? A theme is a short musical statement, usually just a few notes. You can then take that theme and alter it slightly to create several variations.

Lets look at an example. Here’s the theme from Rock and Blues soloing 1.

Example 1
One of the easiest ways to create a variation on a theme is to simply shorten it by cutting a few notes off the beginning or the end of the lick. Here, I cut a few notes off of the end.

**Example 2**

Another simple way to create a variation is to add notes onto the theme.

**Example 3**
This Weeks Assignments

1. Continue to work through the material in Pentatonic Power.

2. Watch the videos demonstrating theme and variations. Apply these key points from the videos.
   
   A. Pick just a few notes (3 to 6) and create a little musical statement. This statement becomes your theme.
   
   B. Remember what you just played. This is very important but easier said than done.
   
   C. Alter your theme, make it shorter by chopping a note or two off. Make it longer by adding a note or two.
   
   D. If you wander away from the theme, see if you can come back to it. This will have the effect of tying the solo together. It will be logical to the listener.

   E. Use the jam track provided and apply what you have learned immediately. This is one of the biggest keys to learning the guitar...take any new info and put it to use right away. This will help you internalize the material and make it a natural part of your playing.

That's it for this lesson. Keep it simple. See you next week.

Coming up Next

Lesson # 2 - “Getting started with soloing”

In the next lesson we will continue with the theme and variation. We will also start to explore the use of double stops. A double stop is simply playing two notes at the same time. And, as usual, we will continue to work our way through the material in Pentatonic Power.
Previous Lessons -

Lesson #1...Click Here to access.