



Vision Music's

Rhythm & Blues Experience: A to Z

by Mark Stefani

"The Rhythm & Blues Experience: A to Z" is one of the most unique wings in Vision Music's One On One: Lessons by Mail program. The course consists of 24 chapters, each containing two to three lesson assignments, one of which is a classic song arranged for blues guitar. Each tune has a corresponding backing track at our Jam Central Station page. The purpose of the course is to build both song and core language vocabulary for improvising over blues-related changes, in a broad-based manner that goes far beyond traditional blues guitar influences. What follows is a chapter-by-chapter overview of the course content and specific goals:

LESSON ONE

The course begins with an introduction to two highly-important reference resources, *Improvising Guidelines* and *Blues Chord Voicings*, the latter used to break down the rhythm guitar role with a slow blues in the key of C. This involves nine different chord choices for each of the three chords in the progression. Next up is "Midnight Creeper" by saxophonist Lou Donaldson, a funky blues arranged in the key of C, featuring interplay between melody and chord punches. Finally, "Blues Language" defines the essential major, dominant, and minor blues sounds, setting the stage for all of the future transcribed blues licks to come in this course.

LESSON TWO

Moving along, this second edition is built around a follow-up to the previous chapter, plus a pair of related themes: double-stops and jazz guitar players with a strong affinity for the blues. The tune is "Blues for Del" by guitar legend Kenny Burrell, a major influence on both jazz and blues players. An instrumental slow number in the key of G as opposed to the previous key of C, this blues is played exclusively in sixths, using the right-hand thumb and fingers or a hybrid picking approach, then followed by chord responses. "Classic Double-Stops" explores some great lick examples by George Benson, Kenny Burrell, and Grant Green.

LESSON THREE

This three-part chapter begins with one of the all-time favorite minor jam tunes, "Coming Home Baby" by flutist Herbie Mann. Recorded on a famous release many years ago, this funky tune is arranged for guitar in the key of G minor, in call & response fashion using full chord punches. "Money Blues Riffs" is the subject of the next segment, a great collection of licks by Stevie Ray Vaughan, George Benson, B.B. King, Albert King, and others. "Cheap Blues Tricks" is the first look at a special sub-series of the course, this edition addressing the power of the root note played on adjacent strings, using slides, bends, vibrato, and more.

LESSON FOUR

The tune presented in the opening segment of this two-part chapter is a classic by blues guitar and vocal legend, Albert King. "Born Under A Bad Sign" is arranged in a rhythm-oriented context and centers on the famous bass line translated to guitar in the key of E, with simultaneous chord punches. "Four Chord Tricks" features eight outstanding licks from several notable artists, aimed specifically at the IV (F7) chord in the key of C. Besides expanding a player's core blues vocabulary with these examples, the lesson dissertation also covers adapting these flexible licks to creatively work for the other chords in the progression.

LESSON FIVE

This chapter represents the first departure from the 12-bar blues format, plus a return to the sax theme in the first edition. "Listen Here" by saxophonist Eddie Harris, a tune that has been performed by Albert King, Albert Collins and others, is a high-energy vamp featuring motion between the C7 and F7 chords in the key of C. This first lesson segment covers the bass line on guitar, the rhythm, and the head (melody) arrangement. "Saxy Blues Riffs" is up next, with some superb concepts from Junior Walker and Isaac "King" Curtis translated to guitar. Finally, "More Blues Language" discusses specific ideas over the I and IV chords, for blues and beyond.

LESSON SIX

Shuffle blues is the topic for this edition in the course. A unique instrumental arrangement of "Kansas City" occupies the first lesson segment. Presented in the key of C, it opens with a 4-bar intro before moving into the head, arranged in octaves to create a big guitar sound, with chord responses along the way. "Classic Shuffle Riffs" is the featured attraction for the second half of this chapter, with a hot group of plug 'n play blues licks from the likes of Robben Ford, Eric Clapton, and Shuggie Otis. All are described in the key of C and use the traditional blues bar position at the 8th fret.

LESSON SEVEN

This three-part edition opens with "The Thrill Is Gone" by B.B. King, the signature theme song from the King of the Blues. Concert original key of B minor in the vocal lead sheet translated to instrumental guitar in the 7th-fret bar position. Also includes a special "Chord Connections" aid to better explain some of the chord voicings used in the tune. Next up is the introduction of the "Just Double-Stops" sub-series, with classic two-note licks courtesy of guitarist George Benson, extracted from a half-dozen of his early blues solos. "More Cheap Blues Tricks" takes a theme from a Robben Ford transcribed solo as a vehicle to explore creative blues lick possibilities.

LESSON EIGHT

Herbie Hancock's classic "Watermelon Man" is the central focus for this lesson chapter, a funky blues composition that has enjoyed immense popularity over the years by both blues and jazz musicians. This is an extended 16-bar blues, four measures longer than the typical progression and arranged in the key of A, using a blend of octaves with chord punches. In the second half of this edition, "Odds & Ends" is a collection of outstanding transcribed blues licks from a variety of artists. Included are some memorable Kenny Burrell moves that involve his unique use of slides during solos.

LESSON NINE

Another three-part affair in the course. "The Soul Factor" is an original, funky blues composition in the key of C, based on an Albert King lick for the main theme. The head uses a wide variety of dynamic guitar techniques, including double-stops, bass fills, slides, and chord responses. The next lesson segment and related to this tune, "The Shotgun Groove" is a rhythm guitar part that fuses a bass line influenced by the Junior Walker classic with chord punches. The final part of this series chapter, "Monster Blues Jam" is another compilation of transcribed blues licks from a number of superb artists.

LESSON TEN

The topic for this edition is slow blues, beginning with a unique guitar arrangement of "Stormy Monday" by T-Bone Walker. Using the key of G, it opens with the intro, combining bass and chords from the original recording. The vocal melody follows, translated to instrumental guitar, and is similar to previous assignments in that octaves are used in a combination with chord punches. In a lick-based segment related to the slow blues theme, "Red House Riffs" features some superb highlights from one of many Jimi Hendrix recordings of this blues standard. The ideas are based on influences from one of his main mentors, legendary guitarist Albert King.

LESSON ELEVEN

It's guitarist George Benson all the way in this three-part course chapter, opening with "Giblet Gravy" from the recording by the same title in the seventies. Perhaps the funkier blues ever recorded by a guitarist, the head arrangement in the key of F combines the riff-based melody with bass parts in the lower register. Next up is a continuation of the "Just Double-Stops" sub-series based on early Benson blues solos, once again in the key of C. Last but not least, "Long Blues Cliches" examines a highly-unusual group of transcribed major and dominant blues licks, all courtesy of GB.

LESSON TWELVE

Midway point in the course and a return to the earlier shuffle blues theme, with two assignments in the key of A. "Blue City Shuffle" is an accompaniment arrangement, ideally executed finger-style but also playable with a flatpick. Each measure features interplay between bass figures and three-tone rhythm & blues chord voicings, the latter with enough alternate choices to create an ever-changing harmonic mood while retaining the basic shuffle feel. All of this sets the stage for the second lesson segment. "Rakin' My Blues Away" is an original shuffle composition, with numerous lick quotes from well-known guitarists.

LESSON THIRTEEN

The second half of the course starts off with a three-part chapter. "Chameleon" is a funky, two-chord vamp tune by Herbie Hancock, arranged in the original key of Bb. This lesson features the classic bass part translated to guitar, plus the head arrangement. A fascinating look at potential beyond the common bar position, "New Blues Horizons" showcases major, dominant, and minor blues licks that can be used in countless playing situations. In the final segment, "Beyond Blues Language" takes a look at more melodic interplay between the I and IV chords, applicable to the tune presented in this lesson as well as any standard blues composition.

LESSON FOURTEEN

This edition is based around a guitar and bass line rendition of the popular "Crosscut Saw" by Albert King. The tune, arranged in the key of G, is a mix of calypso and funk rhythms, using three-tone short chords to surround the signature bass part. Next up, "Five Chord Tricks" takes an in-depth view at harmonic possibilities while improvising over the V chord (G7) in a C blues, relying heavily on major and dominant blues licks. The first four examples are more extensive and harmonically challenging, while the remaining six are more concise. All are flexible, and can be transposed down a whole step for the IV chord (F) or moved to fit the I chord (C7).

LESSON FIFTEEN

Another three-part chapter that opens with an original, funky blues composition in the key of C. "Blues for Kenny" is dedicated to guitarist Kenny Burrell, and only fitting since the central theme for the head is based on a transcribed lick from one of his 70s vamp solos. The tune features call & response phrasing, with chord punches following the melody throughout. "Classic Grant" is next on the agenda, the first of two parts showcasing blues licks from one of his vamp solos. Many are aware that Grant was a big influence on the younger George Benson. And finally, "Just Double-Stops" is a continuation in this sub-series based on GB blues-based recordings.

LESSON SIXTEEN

A somewhat different twist in this series edition, one with a definite sax-on-guitar theme. "Mister Magic" by Grover Washington is a tune that blends many elements, including blues, latin, funk, gospel, and jazz. The intro opens with the classic lick by guitarist Eric Gale before moving into the head, then the solos over a two-chord vamp. A special "Chord Connections" supplement is useful in explaining some of the the jazz-oriented voicings in the tune. Moving on to the second lesson segment, "Sax On Six" uses the highly-popular minor pentatonic scale as a resource for guitar licks, but looking at it from a saxophonist's point of view.

LESSON SEVENTEEN

This three-part chapter in the series is once again directed at the subject of slow blues. George Benson's "Doobie Doobie Blues" is a superb instrumental composition in the key of Bb, recorded by GB in the sixties and featuring interplay between single-note melody and chord punches. In the next related lesson segment, "Blue Benson: The Early Years" takes a look at some terrific slow blues licks transcribed from his solos during that time period. Finally, "Blues Chord Tricks" harmonizes licks with upper-string chord voicings over bars nine through twelve, in a standard slow blues progression in the key of C.

LESSON EIGHTEEN

A return to shuffle blues in this course edition, with a pair of original compositions, both in the key of A and based on money licks from great players. "Don't Cross the Line" is built on a theme that uses double-stops in conjunction with string rakes and chord punches, constantly moving back and forth between the 5th-fret bar position and the second position. "Model T" is described in the next lesson segment, and is really more of a dedicated model shuffle blues solo, hence the title. Like the first tune, this 12-bar number is a tribute dedicated to a fellow guitarist, and is loaded with money licks done in call & response fashion.

LESSON NINETEEN

This chapter involves three lesson segments, beginning with the classic "Chitlins Con Carne" by guitarist Kenny Burrell. This funky 12-bar blues has been covered by numerous artists over the years, and is arranged in the concert original key of C. Up next is another edition in the "Just Double-Stops" sub-series, once again involving two-note blues licks courtesy of George Benson and extracted from earlier recorded solos. The remaining segment is a sequel to a previous lesson. This time around, "Long Blues Cliches" takes a look at some superb transcribed minor licks based on the guitar-friendly pentatonic and blues scales.

LESSON TWENTY

Speaking of minor and pentatonic, this series edition is rich in both departments. Albert King's "Oh Pretty Woman" is a great example of a funky, extended blues in the key of G minor. This 16-bar tune is arranged with the vocal melody translated to instrumental guitar, along with a second companion chart that covers the signature bass line played on the six-string. Up next is a powerful double-dose of A minor pentatonic ideas. "Money Pentatonics" is sax-oriented and rich in syncopated phrasing, while "More Money Pentatonics" is a collection of licks that include several of George Benson's favorite moves.

LESSON TWENTY-ONE

Yet another three-part affair, this one opens with a funky tune in the key of C. "Benson's Rider" is a fine example of George's creative imagination, an early instrumental blues strong with regards to phrasing and syncopation, trademarks of Benson's work throughout his entire career. Also discussed is the bass line from the original, played on guitar. What follows is the fifth part in the "Just Double-Stops" sub-series, based on vintage Benson transcribed blues licks. In the last lesson segment, "More Classic Grant" is a sequel to the previous assignment, a collection of funky blues licks based on an early vamp recording.

LESSON TWENTY-TWO

An edition in the series featuring a blend of shuffle blues with repetitive licks and concepts. For starters, "Bus Stop Blues" is an original composition and tribute in the key of A, featuring three-tone blues chord voicings continually shifting below open pedal bass tones. "Repetitive Tricks" centers on the technique of applying three-note groups within a feeling of four, a very common practice among improvisers who favor repetitions as a key part of their solo dynamics. "More Repetitive Tricks" consists of several flexible lick examples that make effective use of double-stops. Both lesson assignments are in the key of A minor.

LESSON TWENTY-THREE

Sax on guitar is the central topic for this three-part course chapter, beginning with "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy" by Cannonball Adderly. Arranged in the key of C and in octaves for the head, this classic composition is a mix of gospel, rock, and blues, with the solos taking place over a two-chord vamp between the I and IV chords. "Safe Sax for Guitar" is the next lesson segment, a terrific group of blues licks courtesy of legendary saxophonist Tom Scott and adapted to the guitar. "Saxophone Magic" is the final assignment, featuring some outstanding plug 'n play licks from several notable horn players.

LESSON TWENTY-FOUR

In a fitting conclusion to this course, the final edition is again a large dose of George Benson, opening with his classic "Body Talk" vamp composition from the album by the same title. This is an unusual arrangement in that the signature bass line is worked into the guitar rendition, using octave harmonics for a unique spin on the basic theme. The second segment is the final piece of the "Just Double-Stops" puzzle. Bringing up the rear, "Chromatic Tricks" features a group of GB licks, shedding some light on his use of chromaticism in combination with blues phrasing as a way to play more melodic solos.

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Procedure • Cost • Features • Benefits

Lessons (disc w/charts) are sent to your home mailing address on the 1st and 15th of each month, or if you prefer they can optionally be sent via digital download format (mp3/pdf).

The cost per lesson is \$30 (\$60/month), although the initial introductory discount gives you the first three lessons for the price of two. There is no obligation to complete the course.

Interactive 24/7 support via email/phone is included for all LBM students at no additional cost. All questions are welcomed, whether course-related or otherwise. Members can send recordings in mp3 format and/or pdf transcriptions for critique, comments and general advice.

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