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Lesson notes: SANDY BUGLASS COUNTRY 1

100 HIGHWAYS

General notes

Sandy played this solo with a capo at the 3rd fret. Because of the dodgy way that Powertab shows capo usage, we've used a little workaround. In the Powertab file there's no capo shown, but we've tuned the guitar three half-tones higher (to GCFBbDG) which has the same effect, but looks better in the Tab.

Technique

Sandy used an acoustic guitar here, so there are no unusual techniques here. When playing lead on an acoustic, the main priority is to produce enough consistent volume, so you probably won't be using many legato techniques. Most of the solo lines here have quite an insistent 16th-note pulse so try to use strict alternate picking where possible.

Theory

All of the chords are found in the key of C minor (C D Eb F G Ab Bb) and Sandy uses this scale exclusively. Don't forget, that means you can also use the C minor pentatonic (C Eb F G Bb) as all of its notes are found in the C minor scale.

Sandy plays his solo more like a written song than a standard improvisation. Notice how he takes a melodic idea and then creates variations on it, working with each idea for 4 or 8 bars.

COUNTRY BOY

General notes

This is Sandy's little tribute to Albert Lee, so he starts off with the "double speed delay" effect. What you do is set your delay pedal to produce a single repeat after one-and-a-half beats, and then you play one note per beat. The delayed notes then fill in the gaps between your notes, making it sound like you're playing double-speed. Pat Travers and Nuno Bettencourt have both used this technique – it's not just a country thing.

Here's the science... count 15000 for every half-beat of delay you need and divide it by the tempo. We need a beat and a half, so that's 45000, and we divide that by 248 to give 181. That's our delay setting... so set your delay unit to 181 milliseconds.

Techniques

At this sort of tempo, you have to forget your usual licks, because there just isn't time. You have two options... "float" slower patterns across the beat, or try to play 8th notes in time. Sandy goes for the second option here, and that's pretty demanding, so you have to know exactly which notes you're going to be using. This is not the place for freeform blues licks!

In this situation, when the chords are going by so quickly, it's often best to stick to arpeggio notes wherever possible and Sandy does a lot of that in this solo. Of course, if all the chords were constructed from notes of the same scale, it wouldn't be a problem, but as you'll see, this is not the case.

One of Sandy's favourite moves can be seen in bars 21-22... he combines fretted and open notes to produce a "cascade" effect. All he's really doing here is playing a D Mixolydian (D E F# G A B C) scale, but the insertion of open strings produces a much more interesting effect.

Theory

The chords follow the Cycle of Fifths, a common harmonic technique in many styles of music (particularly jazz and swing). They're all dominant 7 chords, so right away we have an issue... every major scale or mode has only one "native" dominant 7 chord, so we're going to be changing scale for each chord.

For the first section with the delay, Sandy keeps things simple by playing around arpeggios... not always straight dominant 7 arpeggios, but always pretty close. When he's not playing the dominant 7 arpeggio, he's often playing a major 6 arpeggio instead. And although the G chord in the backing is a straight major chord, Sandy still plays as if it was G7.

For the second half of the solo, Sandy still pays close attention to the underlying chords, but now expands his note choice, using a mixture of major pentatonic and Mixolydian scale fragments. Here are the scales you'll need...

E Mixolydian: E F# G# A B C# D
E major pentatonic: E F# G# B C#

A Mixolydian: A B C# D E F# G
A major pentatonic: A B C# E F#

D Mixolydian: D E F# G A B C
D major pentatonic: D E F# A B

G Mixolydian: G A B C D E F
G major pentatonic: G A B D E

He also uses the bluesy trick of combining both minor and major 3rd in the same line... that's G/G# for the E7, C/C# for the A7, F/F# for the D7 and Bb/B for the G. This is a particular feature of the lick in bars 25/26.

COUNTRY HONK

General notes

Although not strictly considered a country band, the Rolling Stones absorbed country along with the rest of their diverse influences, and the effects of this can be heard throughout their late 60s and early 70s material. For this piece, Sandy takes a pattern inspired by some of Keith Richards' classic riffs and uses it as the starting point for a solo.

Techniques

The relaxed mid-tempo feel means that even relative beginners shouldn't be afraid to try improvising over this jamtrack. You can stick to one scale if you're careful (see below) and the driving rhythmic feel means that you can relax and play slow bluesy phrases to give yourself time to think.

If you decide to learn Sandy's solo, there aren't too many advanced moves here, but we do have our first example of complex bending techniques. In bar 5, you bend the B string and hold it while playing the E string. Hit the B string again and then release the bend. If you already find that lick easy, don't worry... there's a more difficult one in bar 7. This time, you need to barre the E and B strings at the 10th fret while bending and holding the G string.

The lick in bar 15 is reminiscent of Stevie Ray Vaughan and other Texas blues players... you only need a slight bend (not even enough to raise the pitch by one fret) so it's not too strenuous, but it's still a bit of a stretch if you have small hands. Hold your first finger in a barre over both strings at the 3rd fret, and try to make a quick "scoop" movement with your 3rd or 4th finger, bending briefly before letting go.

Theory

We're mostly in the key of G major here so you could use the G major scale (G A B C D E F#) but there's a couple of awkward exceptions. The Csus4 chord contains an F note, which means G Mixolydian (G A B C D E F) would be more suitable for the first four bars. And then there's the A7 chord, which is more usually associated with the key of D major... you could interpret the whole thing as being in D major (D E F# G A B C#), switching to D Mixolydian (D E F# G A B C) for the C chords.

An easier route would be to play either G major pentatonic (G A B D E) all the way through, as this lacks the notes that clash with the Csus4 and A7 chords. If you really want to sound impressive, switch to A major pentatonic (A B C# E F#) for the A7

GRISSOM'S GUITAR

General notes

As a special bonus, this is a full-length instrumental tune in tribute to the great David Grissom. The basic structure involves these parts...

- Eight-bar verse mostly featuring a single-note melody line
- Chorus based around a G5 chord and added licks
- Solo over the verse progression
- Middle section with a more laid-back feel and more lead licks
- Ending based primarily around larger chords

Techniques

For most players, the only technical difficulties here are going to be in the solo.

The first bend is quite strenuous... this half-tone/whole-tone double bend is most often found on the B and G strings, and it's a bit harder on the E and B strings, not least because you're bending at two different frets simultaneously. Don't worry too much about getting the two individual pitches right; if you aim to get the right note on the B string and keep your fingers close together, the E string usually ends up moving by the right amount.

Bars 29 and 32 feature a couple of licks where you need to hold a B string bend while playing (non-bent) notes on the E string. Use your 3rd finger for the bend, but support it with your 1st and 2nd fingers. The same goes for the big bend in bar 30/31.

The passage in bars 33-35 is probably the most challenging part of the solo. Sandy is using arpeggio fragments mixed with open strings in order to give a smooth, cascading effect. You could play all notes with a pick, but for the smoothest results, try combining pick and fingers.

Theory

The whole track is pretty clearly in some flavour of G, and the presence of the F chord basically narrows our choice down to Dorian (G A B \flat C D E F) or Mixolydian (G A B C D E F). However, none of the chords contains either a B or B \flat note, so we're not restricted to either scale, and Sandy uses both, along with the minor pentatonic (G B \flat C D F). In general, Dorian is used for the verse and chorus parts, so we've used the G minor key signature.

Once again, one of the most interesting parts is the challenging passage in the solo, bars 33-35. Bar 33 contains a great line which perfectly outlines a G7 arpeggio (that's the major/minor ambiguity right there!) with very few extra notes. Bar 35 has a more chromatic approach, and Sandy uses the open B and E strings to fill in the gap between fretted B \flat -C and E \flat -F notes.

LITTLE LIZA

General notes

This is probably a good time for a little “Yeee-hawwww!”

Sandy's playing is very solid and propulsive on this solo, using long streams of 8th notes. This sort of playing is fine if you're just burbling through scale patterns, but it's demanding when you're trying to target chord notes and arpeggio shapes. Take some time to analyse Sandy's solo and figure out which arpeggio shapes he's using... you can then use those shapes in your own solos. The trick is to be prepared for each new chord change, and know exactly what framework of chord notes you can work with. The CAGED system is very useful for this.

Techniques

The fast lick in bar 2 involves a quick position shift, pivoting at the 9th fret. Play the notes on the D string with your 1st and 3rd fingers and quickly transfer your 1st finger to the G string. There's another position shift in bar 3... play the 10/7 double-stop with your 1st and 4th finger, but then quickly aim your 3rd finger at the 7th fret on the D string, so that your 1st finger can barre the B and G strings at the 5th fret.

The bending lick spanning bars 10 and 11 is quite awkward. Hold the bend with your 3rd finger (ideally supported by your 2nd finger) while playing an unbent note with your 4th finger and then another unbent note with your 1st finger. This can put your whole hand in a less stable position, so take some time to work slowly on this lick, trying slight adjustments in hand position.

Sandy expands on that concept in bars 30-32, taking the same pattern but moving it down through three positions. Immediately after that, in bar 33, we see one of Sandy's favourite cascading scale lines, using a combination of fretted and open notes to create a smooth line.

Theory

The combination of A major and G/A (G major with an A in the bass) chords is a reliable indication that we need to use the Mixolydian mode (A B C# D E F# G). Throughout the solo, Sandy makes use of that scale, but also uses the major pentatonic (A B C# E F#). There's more to it than that, though... look at how many chromatic passing notes he uses in the first four or five bars. A “passing note” is one that doesn't belong in the scale, but is used to lead smoothly between two regular scale notes. The 8 and 5 on the G string in bar 3 are both examples of passing notes, and they're a huge feature in the playing of Albert Lee and Brent Mason, to name just two.

Another place you'll see non-scale notes is when both major and minor 3rds are used. Mixolydian is a major-type scale, so you'd expect to see the major 3rd (C#) over an A chord, but Sandy often adds the minor (C), either as a passing note leading into the C#, or as a melodic note in its own right. He also does this with the major and minor 3rd of the D chord (F-F#).