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Lesson notes: SANDY BUGLASS COUNTRY 2

I BELIEVE IN YOU

General notes

A note about tunings. Although the lead guitar is in standard tuning, the rhythm guitar is tuned a whole-tone lower, to DGCFAD. The chord shapes shown above the Tab are for this tuning, although you can of course try playing the chords in standard tuning if you prefer... you'll just have to use different shapes, with different sounds.

Technique

There's nothing too difficult in Sandy's solo, but the slow tempo makes it easy to rush. Relax!

For the very first notes of the solo, you'll need to do the double bend while your volume control (or volume pedal) is still turned down. That means you'll need to know how far to bend the strings without hearing the notes, so take some time to learn how it feels to bend the two strings to the correct notes. Then, when you've hit the notes, fade in with your volume control.

There's a couple of complex bends in bars 17 and 18... you'll need to hold that bend steady while playing a static (unbent) note on the E string. Remember that if you're using a guitar with a floating tremolo, the note on the E string will sound out of tune. This is because the increased tension on the B string (created by the bend) pulls the bridge forward, reducing tension on the other strings and causing them to go flat. If you're using that classic country guitar, the Fender Telecaster, this won't be a problem!

Theory

The three main chords (D, Gsus2, A7) are all from the key of D major (D E F# G A B C#). With just a couple of exceptions, that's what Sandy uses throughout the solo, but he doesn't always use all the notes on offer. Whenever you're using the major, Lydian or Mixolydian scales, you always have the option of using the major pentatonic (D E F# A B), because its notes are in all three of the larger scales.

The two exceptions are in bar 7... a couple of F notes (the minor 3rd) which just add a touch of blues to the phrases here.

With slow ballads like this, it's all too easy to fall back on auto-pilot scale patterns, not really thinking about the notes you're playing. You can make your playing sound a lot more professional if you choose notes that relate to the underlying chords. There are several ways to do this... for example, in bars 1-6, Sandy starts each bar with two notes taken from the underlying chord. You don't have to be as explicit as that, though... even if you can just emphasise the root note of each chord, your playing will sound better.

MAN! I LIKE WOMEN

Techniques

There are no particularly fast or fiddly licks in this solo. The hardest part may well be the series of bends in bars 9-11... you need to know you can hold down each bend while playing two unbent notes simultaneously. Be careful here, and if you find it too much of a strain, don't be afraid to use a lighter string gauge. Losing a tiny bit of tone is better than tendonitis or carpal tunnel syndrome!

You might also find it tricky to play the triplets in bars 20-22 exactly like Sandy. The pattern of notes (alternating between E and B strings) sits naturally into 2s and 4s, but of course the triplet rhythm means the notes are grouped in 3s. Start practising slowly and gain speed gradually.

Theory

The chords (Ab Eb Bb) indicate the Bb Mixolydian (Bb C D Eb F G Ab). In theory, those three chords could also suggest the Ab Lydian or Eb major, but when you're deciding what key or scale is being used you also have to use your ears! The chord progression here is moving fairly clearly to a tonal centre of Bb.

So, the easiest scale to use would be the Mixolydian, but that also means you can automatically use the major pentatonic (Bb C D F G) as its notes are also found in the Mixolydian. However, there's another option... you can interpret a Mixolydian tonality as being "bluesy major" and then use the minor pentatonic instead (Bb Db Eb F Ab). This is because our ears recognise blues as being ambiguously major and minor. Sandy uses the minor pentatonic for the first six bars.

Bars 7-8 are still largely minor pentatonic, but Sandy now adds the major 3rd (the D, hammering on from the Db). Then, bars 9-13 are pure Mixolydian. This is what you can do when the underlying chord sequence gives you a choice of scales... you can change the overall mood of your solo simply by changing scale.

NASHVILLE EXPRESS

General notes

The tempo here is actually a terrifying 292 beats per minute, but to make the notation easier to read, we've treated it as 146, but with a double-time feel.

Techniques

The steady stream of sixteenth notes is what makes this solo challenging. Sixteenth notes at 146bpm isn't exactly shred speed, and would be fairly comfortable for flashy "feature licks", but to maintain that speed constantly, through a wide range of melodic lines, is hard work. If you decide to learn the solo note-for-note, start off by playing slowly... in common with the very best country players, Sandy's licks still sound good at slow speeds.

If you're going to get the authentic sound, you'll need to learn to use hybrid picking (pick and fingers together). We haven't suggested any picking hand details on the Tab, but here's an idea of how you might use hybrid picking in bar 5. Pluck the first note with your middle finger and then the next note with your pick. The next three notes would be 3rd finger, middle finger, pick. You then alternate between B and G strings a couple of times, so use your middle finger for the B string and your pick for the G string. See how it works?

Another ideal part for hybrid picking would be the string-skipping patterns in bars 7 and 9-10

Theory

The three chords (G, C, D) are all found in the key of G major (G A B C D E F#) so that would be the most obvious scale to use, with the usual alternative of the major pentatonic (G A B D E). However, that can sound a little bland and "Doh a Deer", so Sandy uses a few other options as well.

For the G chords, he mostly uses the Mixolydian (G A B C D E F); while this will create a clash with the eventual D chord, we have plenty of time before we have to worry about that. Then, for the change to C, he switches to the C major pentatonic (C D E G A) and C Mixolydian (C D E F G A Bb) treating the chord change more like a key change. Notice how he also uses occasional Bb notes over the G chords, suggesting the Dorian mode (G A Bb C D E F) and introducing a bluesy major/minor ambiguity.

ROCK AND ROLL

General notes

Another high-tempo workout, this time covering the common musical ground between country and rock'n'roll.

Techniques

Apart from the fast tempo, there's nothing particularly difficult here. The trickiest move is probably the behind-the-nut bend in bar 2 (on the open A string). Because this occurs during a steady stream of notes, you don't have too much time to manoeuvre your hand into position, so practise slowly at first.

For the line in bars 17-18, play the G string triplets with your pick and pluck the high E string notes with your middle or 3rd finger. For the lick in bar 27, Sandy plucks the B and G strings with his fingers, then plays the 0-6 notes on the G and D strings with his pick (downstroke then upstroke).

Theory

The melodic vocabulary of rock'n'roll features elements of both country and blues. The chord progression here is a double-length I-IV-V progression (a 24-bar blues, basically) and Sandy approaches it much as any blues or blues-rock player would... with a seamless blend of both major pentatonic (E F# G# B C#) and minor pentatonic (E G A B D).

This isn't simply a matter of blending both scales into one nightmare scale, though... the way you do it is to play licks that come primarily from one scale, but add notes from the other scale. Take bars 1-4... this is essentially a series of E minor pentatonic licks, but look at the G# notes (1st fret on the G string, 4th fret on the E string). That's the major third.

Compare that with bars 13-14. Here, the primary scale is E major pentatonic, but the G note (minor 3rd) is now the added "flavour note".

For the A chord in bars 9-12, Sandy keeps things simple by outlining an A7 chord (A C# E G) and in bars 33-36 he builds a chordal lick around a lower A7 voicing. However, for the A chord in the third chorus (bars 57-60) he blends A major pentatonic (A B C# E F#) and minor pentatonic (A C D E G)

For all three instances of B7, Sandy avoids using either of the E pentatonic scales and builds licks around the B major chord shapes and arpeggios.

WIRED UP

General notes

The swing flavour here gives you a chance to experiment with some jazzy chords. After the 8-bar introduction on a static A chord, the backing is basically two choruses of a 24-bar blues (same as a 12-bar, but with twice as long on each chord). The turnaround is different from the standard version... instead of playing E7-D7 in bars 17-20, we have F7-G7.

Techniques

The fast tempo means that you don't have much time to make the frequent position shifts. Try to move your fingers as efficiently as possible, being aware of which finger is required to hit the first note after a position shift... that finger will need to move slightly ahead of the beat.

Theory

For the ambiguous use of both major and minor pentatonics, see the notes for "Rock and Roll". The difference here is that Sandy is playing more chromatic passing notes (notes from outside of the scale, used to lead smoothly into, out of, and between scale notes). For example, the D# (the augmented 4th) serves this purpose in bars 21-22.

There's a more unusual scale in bars 17-18... Sandy is using the D diminished scale here. The diminished scale is built from alternating whole-tones and half-tones, and there are two versions...

D half-whole diminished: D Eb F F# G# A B C
D whole-half diminished: D E F G G# A# B C#

It's the half-whole version that Sandy uses here – it's note content is ideally suited to a D7 chord, as it also contains the common "altered" extensions of Eb, F and G# (the b9, #9 and b5 respectively).

The second chorus is based completely around chords, and it makes a great lesson in alternative chord shapes that you can use over any jazzy blues progression.