

INTRODUCTION TO BLUES PIANO WELCOME

Glad to have you on board! Hope you enjoy the course and learn a lot along the way. The Blues is very close to my heart and I want to share my experience of this wonderful & expansive world with you. As someone relatively new to piano playing or the Blues, this course should give you plenty of things to work on but if you have any questions during your journey, please get in touch!

Good luck!
- Paddy Milner

GENERAL TIPS

- **PRACTICE :)**

Short & concentrated regular practice is better than long but infrequent practice. It's true that you will need to do some regular practice & playing in order to make the most of any music learning process. But the good news is you don't have to do 5 hours a day! Most of us have busy lives one way or another and Time can be a premium. So, 10 minutes a day of concentrated practice is worth more than an hour or two at the weekend.

- **LISTEN, LISTEN & LISTEN AGAIN**

Make time to listen to the style of music you're learning to play. I can't underestimate how important this is! With time, you will absorb the musical language. Listen critically and try and break down how the music is made up – e.g. what is each instrument doing, what roles do they have and how do they interact with each other.

Load up with Blues tunes and listen out for what the piano is doing and how it interacts with the rest of the instruments. Check out recordings by people such as:

Johnnie Johnson (listen to his fantastic playing on Chuck Berry records)

Otis Spann (solo records & with Muddy Waters amongst others)

Pinetop Perkins (solo records & with Muddy Waters amongst others)

Champion Jack Dupree

Memphis Slim

Albert Ammons

Pete Johnson (solo work and records with Big Joe Turner)

Meade Lux Lewis

You'll find many different styles and feels. Ask questions of the music - do you hear the same ideas in different players? As you progress through this course, we'll look at all kinds of musical material so you can listen critically to recordings and identify the musical material and feel of the piano part e.g.

- Is it based on a repeated riff? If so, is it a single note line repeated, is it based around thirds, does it rock between notes, is it based on a chord
- Is it based on the blues scale?
- What phrase lengths are being used? Short, long?
- Which octave is it being played at?
- Is the feel a shuffle or a straight feel, or perhaps somewhere in between, or perhaps the piano is playing more of a shuffle kind of feel and the drums are playing straighter? Is the piano playing light, heavy, laidback or pushing the beat? Is it 'aggressive' or 'light & witty'? etc.

GENERAL PRACTICE EXERCISES & METHODS

I've suggested specific practice exercises for each lesson but here are some general tips that can be used for most of the material we will be covering:

- **Use a metronome.** This will help instil a sense of 'musical time' and show up where you are rushing or lagging behind.

Whichever concept you are working on, **get it under your fingers consistently & fluently at a slow tempo before increasing the tempo** bit by bit until at full tempo.

- **Practice repeatedly going between the chord changes that occur within the 12 bar form** (see lesson 1) e.g. **C to F** repeatedly, **C to G** repeatedly, and **G to F** repeatedly, until it feels natural and is consistently fluent.
- Practice at **different volumes** (very loud, very soft & a moderate volume that feels natural).
- Practice with **different volumes in each hand** – e.g. quiet in the left hand and loud in the right, then swap (a little like tapping your head and rubbing your tummy!).
- **Practice with your eyes shut** so your fingers really get to know the keyboard. In the case of the left hand, try getting to a point where you can play around the 12 bar sequence repeatedly, while reading a paper or book! The aim being to get the left hand as automatic and independent as possible.

SOME MORE GENERAL PRACTICE IDEAS

Practice the concepts covered in the lesson both on the 12 Bar Blues and on these other chord sequences that are also common in blues repertoire:

1. 8 Bar Blues in the key of C e.g. 'It Hurts Me Too'

16 Bar Blues in the key of C e.g. 'Junco Partner'

2. 16 Bar Blues in the key of C e.g. 'Junco Partner'

3. For the adventurous, try playing everything you're learning on a 12 Bar Blues in the **key of G** – keep the pattern of intervals the same as in the key of C but 'transposed' to the new chords:

If you mastered that, try these sequences in some other keys! E.g. **F, Bb, D, E**. You'll find the hand positions vary but keep the pattern of intervals the same as in the key of C, and find fingering that works. Different keys have different characters – different riffs lend themselves to different keys as you'll find out! If in doubt, **let your ear be your guide** – if it doesn't sound quite right, it probably isn't!