

Flatpicking Guitar Magazine

Free Lesson - June 2020

Key of G Ideas

By Mickey Abraham

Hello and welcome once again to Flatpicking Guitar Magazine's free lesson portion of our monthly newsletter. Usually I offer you guys cool arrangements of flatpicking standards and other lesser known tunes from all over the world. This month's lesson is bit different. Instead of teaching a tune I'd like to present some of my favorite flatpicking licks and phrases. These are some the exact ideas I worked out in every key when I was first learning how to solo over chords like G, C, and D. Once you learn these ideas you will be able to play a convincing solo over thousands of bluegrass songs and fiddle tune standards. Once you learn these licks the next step is for you to transpose them into other keys like A, E, and F and eventually keys like Bb and Eb.

What better place to begin than with a classic bluegrass G run. It's a lick so famous that it has its own name. If you have never transposed your G run to chords like C and D now is the time. If you are into theory you will note that the G run is a note for note major pentatonic scale with an added flat third blues note.

My second phrase is one I call a "fiddle inspired phrase." This phrase utilizes the major scale and beautifully lands on all the chord tones (root, 3rd, and 5th) on down beats. There are many tunes and players that use this phrase as the melody to so many great tunes like "Lonesome Fiddle Blues," "New Camptown Races," and "Red Wing." I really like this lick as it sounds distinctly different than a blues or rock guitar player. It really makes me feel like I'm borrowing from the language of a fiddle player.

The third lick is based on a classic Bill Monroe mandolin fill. While the G run is based on a major pentatonic scale this phrase is based on a note for note minor pentatonic scale. The only difference is every time you play the flat 3rd you play the major 3rd right after! These style licks were hard for me to grasp years ago as I was initially stuck within either major pentatonic or minor pentatonic. This move is one of the best ways to combine the sound of both minor and major pentatonic together.

When I listen to great flatpickers play they always seem to include notes in their licks that are not part of the scale. This has always fascinated me. How do they know what chromatic notes will work? The fourth idea in this lesson is one I'm calling a "chromatic idea lick." This lick incorporates two chromatic pickup notes into the root of the chord, the addition of a flat 5 blues notes, and both the natural and flatted sevenths. To me, this lick brings out the playful sound of a flatpicking guitarists.

There are so many great ideas that can be derived from these classic licks and phrases. Learn these ideas as they are written. This way you will not be improvising with one note at a time but rather with one phrase at a time. Once you get the idea of what a cool phrase sounds like and what notes you can use you will be able to come up with endless licks and phrases of your own. Make sure to listen to all the included lesson mp3s to hear how these licks sound. I'm using the following chord progression to demonstrate all the licks:

G G C C
D D G G

While many songs do have other chords this chord progression is perfect for trying these licks. It is safe to say that most bluegrass songs are this chord progression exactly or are a variation of this chord progression. I hope these licks and phrases are as useful to you as they were to me! As always should you have any questions on this lesson please contact me at michabraham@comcast.net. If you'd like to work through ideas like this in more detail I do offer lessons via Zoom, FaceTime, and Skype. I'd love to "meet" you guys!

1 **G** G Run **C** "G Run" in C

TAB

5 **D** "G Run" in D **G** "G Run" higher octave

9 **G** G fiddle style phrase **C** C fiddle style phrase

13 **D** D fiddle style phrase **D** D fiddle style phrase

17 **G** G Monroe style phrase **C** C Monroe style phrase

21 **D** D Monroe style phrase **G** two octave G phrase

25 **D** two octave D phrase **G** G chromatic idea

30 **G** G chromatic idea 2 **C** C chromatic idea

36 **C** C chromatic idea 2 **D** D chromatic idea

42 **D** D chromatic idea 2 **G** G traditional flatpicking idea

47 **C** Doc Watson idea **D** Country Flatpicking idea

5 3 4 0 1 2 0 S 0 2 0 3

5 4 3 1 2 3 4 2 3 4 2 0

3 4 2 4 0

3 4 2 4 0

51 **G** Tony Rice idea

3 1

2 3 1 2 1 3 1 3 S 4 0 3 0 0

2 3 1 2 1 3 1 3 S 4 0 3 0 0

2 3 1 2 1 3 1 3 S 4 0 3 0 0