

## “Blue Sax” and the Blues

I originally conceived “Blue Sax” as a blues without a preconceived melody, thus giving me the opportunity to start with a clean (blue) slate. Improvisation was not influenced by other set ideas, motives, or phrasing that a chart (‘head’) usually provides.

I enjoyed playing it very much and like listening to the recording. I dig the minor second motif with all its dissonance relating to the  $I_7$  chord’s root. Though this is not part of the blues scale per se, it was intended to be heard in the same spirit.

For me, playing the blues concerns not only its three primary chords  $I_7$ ,  $IV_7$ , and  $V_7$  or the minor pentatonic scale with the blue note added between its perfect fourth and perfect fifth degrees (intervals). First and foremost the blues entails respect for its musicians, both past and present, with its paradigm the culture from which it grew. I’m still amazed that the African-American people do not harbour a greater degree of malevolence toward the race that has as forefathers those who conceived and enacted the terrible oppression which unfortunately, I’m sorry to say, still rears its ugly head even today.

What a bold yet forgiving people we’ve been blessed with to share the future with. I’ve been fortunate to have known and worked with these musicians teaching me their kind, gentle wisdoms which adds to my respect for the blues.

The second thing I focus on when playing the blues is to create something authentic or valid. I try to give an honest performance without mimicking, but paying tribute and holding reverence for the roots of the music while finding parts of my identity within it. I seek ideas that I hope are valid and somewhat unique. As Ted Gioia would say, I put my stamp on it.

Thirdly, I don’t just “run” the blues scale, but try to hear the strongest while most musical placement of its notes, making sure that when I draw upon it, it seems fresh and has feeling. I listen to the manner in which other musicians approach the scale and motives made from it as well as other ideas kindred to it. I sometimes come through a different door in order to get to the blue room and hope my shoes were clean enough to wear inside it.

And sometimes I sing. I like singing the blues. It makes sense to me. Most music with words does not. I don’t hear most music that way. Some ballads I hear some of the words, but mostly even when someone sings, I just hear music. But the blues is different. Many times I hear words right along with the music, when I’m playing it, dig?

That’s the blues. I don’t ask questions. Most of the time it is good to keep an inquisitive mind, but once in awhile, it’s nice to leave things unopened.

So from time to time I will sing the blues, even in public. Does singing count and fit on and with my blues roster? Who knows; sometimes it's better not to hold a concept too rigidly; c'est la vie!

Another quality I direct my energy to is the way in which blues is harmonized. I seek chord structures and substitutions which enhance the blues form without destroying it, sometimes complex, at other times simply. I look for new and different ways to play the twelve bars, with chords that may seem unorthodox, but with insight, make sense. The phrases and time signatures are also vehicles of expression, rhythm included.

BB King, Muddy Waters, and Art Foxall are people who have taught me aspects of the blues, giving me confidence and dare I say, permission to make the idiom a place to set some of my musical offerings. I am grateful to them as well as respected musicians Bea Smith, Dee Daniels, Candy Finch, Eddie Moore, James Long, Bishop Norman Williams, Walter Zuber Armstrong, Vonne Griffin, Overton Berry, and Mickey Martin. I am indebted to them. Thank you.

It was the musical scholar and "Audio Daddio" co-worker Tom Rohan that made me aware that in almost everything I've written or played, performed live or recorded, there is always at least a hint of blue.

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