

# Music Theory

## Shades Of Blue

BY JOHN DUARTE

**L**ET'S TALK about melody in preparation for next month's installment on dressing up a 12-bar blues progression. A typical characteristic of jazz/blues melodies is their use of "blue" notes. One of the most common is the ♭3, which is often used against a chord with a ♯3. This musical collision sounds perfectly acceptable when you consider the two-tier way in which jazz or blues is perceived—relating the solo line to the accompaniment, but keeping the two in separate mental compartments. Other blue notes include the ♭5 and the ♭7.

Blue notes have been argued about for decades. One view is that they represent major/minor ambiguity. Remember that major and minor triads can be formed by dividing the strong, stable, perfect fifth into friendly thirds. You don't need an in-depth knowledge of acoustics to know that thirds are weaker-sounding than perfect fifths, and therefore more vulnerable to manipulation. To verify this, tune your guitar as precisely as you can, using an open-position E chord to check your accuracy. Next, play an open-position C chord and notice that it's out of tune. This demonstrates that you make some sort of compromise every time you ad-

just your guitar, accommodating many keys while being as in tune as possible.

The ♭3 and the ♭7 both naturally exist in the Aeolian and Dorian modes, while Mixolydian has only the ♭7. Explaining the ♭5 (or ♯4) in this manner requires a larger leap of musical faith that is beyond this column's scope. This month's music shows the Aeolian, Dorian, and Mixolydian modes starting on the same note. Compare these to the key of C's three principal triads (C, F, and G), and you'll find more blue-note relationships.

Improvising is like composing; no matter how much theoretical knowledge you absorb, imagination is essential. Theoretical knowledge is useful—especially to those who aren't born geniuses—but it's possible to intellectualize some kinds of music out of existence. ■



*Author/educator John Duarte is one of the world's foremost composers for classical guitar, and his works have been performed by Andres Segovia, John Williams, Alexandre Lagoya, and many others.*

Ex. 1  
Aeolian



Ex. 2  
Dorian



Ex. 3  
Mixolydian



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