



Accompaniment Playing - Part 5

By David Barrett, Mel Bay's HarmonicaSessions® eZine

How do you approach playing accompaniment to a song that's hook driven? It might be a modal tune where there are no chord changes (the song stays on the I cord the whole time) and typical vocal rest areas (where you would fill) are not there. Maybe it's a tune with standard 12 bar blues chord changes, but the hook is so strong that when playing fills it feels like you're not matching with the feel of the band.

The answer is simple. If there's a dominant hook in the song, play it. The hook is a small lick (commonly one measure in length, sometimes two measures) that repeats throughout a song (usually for every verse and chorus). If the hook is one measure in length, it will commonly be sequenced over all the changes (the line is transposed up or down to match the IV and V chord). The hook is part of the groove. Like a song with a recognizable head, if a song uses a hook, the hook is the recognizable element in that song. In many cases it's important that you play the hook. For example: if the hook is primarily played by the guitarist in a four-piece band (drums, bass, guitar and you—harp), when the guitar solos, he/she expects you to continue playing the hook while they solo. Otherwise, the main element of the song disappears during the guitar solo.

Let's start with a simple example of this concept. Demonstrated in example 1 is the type of line you would play to Muddy Waters' "I'm Ready." Notice the hook is one measure in length and is sequenced over the changes.

Ex. 1

Along the same lines of "I'm Ready" is any song that plays the hook over all of the changes. Demonstrated in example 2 is a common chord-slide pattern played over a medium shuffle.

Ex. 2

17

IV7

V7

IV7

I7

In modal blues there is no chord change. It's not uncommon to go to a **IV** or **V** chord for a while somewhere in the song to grab some attention (like a bridge), but for the most part modal songs just stay on the **I** chord the whole time. Modal blues song will commonly have a strong hook for you to play along with. Many John Lee Hooker tunes are good examples of this. In Mat Murphy's "Boogie Thing," there's an upbeat rhythm guitar figure, but no strong hook. In this case you'll need to make up a hook that can be part of the song. Demonstrated in example 3 is a hook line that's commonly played to a boogie groove.

Ex. 3

2" 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 3' 4+ 2" 2 2 2 2 2 2 2" 1 1' 1+ 1

The type of lick that you would play with "Got My Mojo Working" by Muddy Waters is also a good example of making up a hook. Demonstrated in example 4 is the type of line that James Cotton would play with Muddy. The harp and piano would commonly play the same rhythm together. Notice that the harp stays the same over the **IV** chord and the harp follows the traditional harmonica accompaniment role of departing from a previously played line to new, more active material at the **V** (the last four measures).

Ex. 4

I7

IV7

I7

V7 + IV7 + I7 + + V7

4+ 4+ 4 3' 1 4 4' 4+ 3' 4' 3 2 2 2 4' 5+ 4' 2 2'' 1 1

3' 3' 3' 3' 3'

Demonstrated in example 5 is the type of line that Little Walter would play with Muddy. Notice the slight change over the IV chord and the more active material at the V.

Ex. 5

I7

1 2'' 2 1 2'' 2 1 2'' 2 1 2'' 2 1 2'' 2 1 2'' 2 1 2'' 2 1 2'' 2 1 2''

IV7 I7 +

3' 1 2'' 3' 3' 2 2'' 2 3' 1 2'' 3' 1 2'' 2 1 2'' 2 1 2'' 2 1 2'' 2 3'

V7 + IV7 + I7 + + V7

4+ 4+ 4 3' 1 4 4' 4+ 3' 4' 3 2 2 2 4' 5+ 4' 2 2'' 1 1 1 2''

3' 3' 3' 3' 3'

Demonstrated in example 6 is a mixture of the previous examples.

Ex. 6

I7

1 2'' 2 1 2'' 2 1 2'' 2 1 2'' 2 1 2'' 2 2 2 2'' 1 1' 2 2 2 2'' 1 1'

IV7 I7 + + V7

3' 1 2'' 3' 3' 2 2'' 2 3' 1 2'' 3' 1 2'' 2 2 2 2'' 1 1' 2 2 2 2'' 1 1'

V7 + IV7 + I7 + + V7

4+ 4+ 4 3' 1 4 4' 4+ 3' 4' 3 2 2 2 4' 5+ 4' 2 2'' 1 1 1 2''

3' 3' 3' 3' 3'

The type of line that you would play to John Lee Hooker’s song “Boom, Boom, Boom” is another example of grabbing on to a hook. The guitar line presented in the opening head is what you’ll use for your accompaniment. Demonstrated in example 7 is how you might play a line like this.

Ex. 7

Other songs I would recommend you listen to are:

- 1) “Walkin’ Blues,” by Robert Johnson, the Paul Butterfield version. The hook line he plays in the opening is what you would play the entire song (departing at the V though).
- 2) “You Don’t Love Me,” by Jr. Wells is also a great song to figure out the hook and play with the band.

Playing the Vocal Melody

Another approach to accompaniment playing that’s worth mentioning is to play the vocal melody. In “Walkin’ By Myself” (Jimmy Rogers) Walter Horton plays a stylized vocal melody line while Rogers is singing. In “Baby Please Don’t Go” (Muddy Waters) and “Good Morning Little School Girl” (John Lee Williamson) you’ll commonly hear harp players play the vocal melody presented in the opening with the vocals. In Jerry Portnoy’s performance of “Good Morning Little School Girl” with Muddy Waters, this is very evident. You’ll also hear that Portnoy continues to play the same vocal melody in the solo areas as well. Even though this playing is active and relatively strong, the repetition is key in why this works.

About the Author David Barrett

<http://www.harmonicamasterclass.com/david.htm>