

BLUES BOOMERANGS

BY ANDY ELLIS

Are your blues a little tired? Crave some fresh sounds?

Nothing rejuvenates a 12-bar groove faster than a fancy

turnaround, and we've got a dozen of them in this lesson.

You can use these moves onstage tonight or at your next

jam session. In addition, as we learn

GET YOUR MOJO WORKING
WITH THESE 12 ESSENTIAL
TURNAROUNDS

satire—you can work them into your lead or rhythm parts, and you can adapt them to folk, country, and jazz.

Contrary Motion

A turnaround derives its energy from tension and release. Tension pulls you to the V7, and release occurs when you hit the I chord. **Ex. 1** shows how *contrary motion* is an excellent way to build tension and release. This turnaround begins at bar 11 and continues through bar 12—the last two bars of a 12-bar blues. We're in the key of *A*, playing in shuffle-approved 12/8 time. After establishing the I7 chord with an eighth-note *chank*, we play a series of intervals that end in an *E* octave.

Take a close look at the intervals in bar 1's second, third, and fourth beats. It's helpful to visualize them as forming two melodic lines. The top line ascends chromatically from *C#* to *E*, while the bottom line descends chromatically from *G* to *E*. Both lines obtain momentum from stepwise motion, and although they're pulling in opposite

directions, both lines draw our ears to *E*. The final *F7-E7* chord change is a classic \flat VI7-V7 blues move. We'll be seeing a lot of this tension-producing shift in subsequent turnarounds.

Contrary motion also powers **Ex. 2**. We're in the key of *C*, starting our turnaround on beat two of bar 11. Again, we have two chromatic lines that lead to an octave. This time, however, they converge: The top line descends (*Bb*, *A*, *G#*, *Gb*), while the bottom one ascends (*E*, *F*, *F#*, *G*). Watch the *let ring* markings—let the triplets sustain within each beat.

You don't have to arpeggiate the intervals. For variety, simultaneously squeeze the two notes (*E-Bb*, *F-A*, *F#-G#*, *G-G*) and hold them for a quarter-note. This approach is particularly handy at fast tempos. Whichever way you interpret the intervals—triplets or quarter-notes—play **Ex. 2** fingerstyle or with a hybrid grip.

Contractions

Many turnarounds feature a moving line against a repeated, static note. In **Ex. 3**, the stepwise line (*C#*, *D*, *Eb*, *E#*) ascends against *A*—the I chord's root. You can use this turnaround in either a 12-bar blues or an 8-bar blues, like "Key to the Highway." In a 12-bar progression, this turnaround starts at beat two, bar 11. In an 8-bar tune, you'd begin the climb at beat two, bar 7.

The *Eaug* functions as an uptown V7, adding a touch of jazzy sophistication. When *Eaug* sounds too frou-frou, simply replace it with a down-home *E7*, a rocking *E7#9*, or a swinging *F7-E7*. (Conversely, you can dress up an *A* blues turnaround by swapping *Eaug* for *E7*. Try ending **Ex. 1** this way. Substituting an augmented V for the V7 works in all keys.)

Let's first analyze this turnaround in terms of scale degrees: The line comprises 3, 4, \flat 5, and 5, and the root repeats above it. Now, try to picture the turnaround as a series of contracting intervals: a minor sixth (*C#-A*), a fifth (*D-A*), a diminished fifth (*Eb-A*), and a fourth (*E-A*). Examining the musical elements within a turnaround lets you transpose it more readily.

Such analysis also lets you compare one turnaround to another. Take **Ex. 4**: Once again, we have a stepwise line moving against a static root note, but we've flipped the turnaround over, so that this time the line *descends* against the root below it.

We're in the key of *C*. The line (*Bb*, *A*, *Ab*, *G*) translates to a \flat 7, 6, \flat 6, 5 move against 1 (*C*). The contracting intervals are a minor seventh, a sixth, a minor sixth, and a fifth. Another way to delve into a turnaround is to analyze its harmony. In this instance, we begin by implying *C7*, *F/C*, *Fm*, and *C*, a I7-IV-IVm-I progression.

This turnaround has a distinct R&B flavor and works beautifully with a Chuck Berry-style "Memphis" groove. Palm mute as indicated, and

each turnaround, we'll analyze the musical principles that propel it. Such scrutiny will help you create turnarounds of your own. So brew up a cup of something hot, grab your favorite guitar, and get rolling.

Form and Function

First, a definition: A turnaround is a short (typically two-bar) passage at the end of a blues progression that's designed to elegantly walk you to the V7, which in turn resolves to the I7 in bar 1. Think of a turnaround as a musical boomerang that spins you into the next verse, chorus, or solo. Turnarounds are ver-

Ex. 1

$\text{♩} = 60-100$ A7(I7)

F7(\flat VI7)
E7(V7)

Ex. 2

$\text{♩} = 76-92$

C(I) G9(V9)
A \flat 9(\flat VI9)

Ex. 3

$\text{♩} = 69-88$

A(I) Eaug(Vaug)

fret that low *G* with your thumb.

It's surprising what can happen to a turnaround when you shift it to a different set of strings. **Ex. 5** uses the same descending line—*B♭, A, A♭, G*—we encountered in the previous example, and we're still thumping away on a low *C*, so the implied harmony remains *C7, F/C, Fm, C*. This time, however, the action takes place on the sixth and fourth strings. The turnaround is easier to finger, and therefore works at faster tempos. Try this turnaround in a brisk honky tonk tune, snapping the fourth string with your middle finger as you flatpick the muted sixth string. Pay attention to the accents and staccato notes—they really make the phrase come alive.

Expansions

Ex. 6a illustrates what happens when you fret the static root note on the first string and work a descending chromatic line against it on the fourth string (think Billy Gibbons and "Jesus Just Left Chicago"). We still have that *I7-IV-IVm-I* progression that's been tagging along for the last two examples, but because we're in *A*, the chords are *A7, D, Dm*, and *A*. What's different is the air—this is a very open turnaround. Check it out: We start with a ninth (*G-A*) and work our way to an eleventh (*E-A*)—an octave plus a fourth—one fret at a time.

If you feel an urge to fill that space, try the spicy **Ex. 6b**. The top and bottom parts stay the same, but we add a second descending chromatic line (*E, E♭, D, C♯*) on the second string. Now we've got *two* lines pulling against the static root.

Notice how by adding the second line, we've created an *E♭dim* on beat three. We'll be hearing lots more of this *♭Vdim* passing chord, so make friends with it now.

(A note to theory junkies: Yes, I know that technically the bottom note of this *E♭dim* chord should be written *G♭*, not *F♯*. However, we're

"Once you start copying other people's licks, you begin to think they're your own—and they're not. It may take longer to absorb old blues and learn from that, but it's worth it in the long run."

—Robin Trower

Ex. 4

J = 72-86

C7(I7) Fm/C(IVm) A♭9(♭VI9)
F/C(IV) C(I) G9(V9)

Ex. 5

J = 80-112

C7(I7) F/C(IV) Fm/C(IVm) C(I) G(V)

Ex. 6a

J = 76-108

A7(I7) D(IV) Dm(IVm) A(I)

Ex. 6b

J = 76-108

A7(I7) Dm(IVm)
E♭dim(♭Vdim) A(I)

you'll see the essential physical similarities. Our *D*, *Gm*, *A \flat dim*, and *D7* changes translate to a I-IVm- \flat Vdim-I7 progression. Though often overlooked, the final dominant-9th voicing is an essential funk form. Stretch-o-rama!

turnaround a number of ways, depending on the musical setting. Acoustic blues demands that you fill rhythmic and harmonic space, as in Ex. 9. However, to cut through a noisy electric band, it's wise to simplify your rhythms and stay in a smaller fretboard area, as in Ex. 10.

Space Issues

Ex. 9 may be the mother of all turnarounds. This is classic Delta blues—wide intervals and ringing, open strings supported by an insistent, palm-muted low *E*. (For a real treat, play it on a 12-string.) Now contrast Ex. 9 with **Ex. 10**. Despite the obvious key and time signature differences, both turnarounds feature the same I7- \flat Vdim-IVm-I progression. What makes them sound so different is their density: The harmony in Ex. 9 is spread across two octaves, whereas in Ex. 10, the chords are voiced very compactly. See how they occur on only three adjacent strings? Ex. 10 sounds great with the stinging Strat-and-tweed-Champ tone Eric Clapton favored in the *Layla* sessions.

Here's the point: You can render the same

Same Wine, New Bottles

Whenever you learn a turnaround, take a moment to search for ways to reharmonize the essential line. For instance, **Ex. 11a** gets its forward motion from the descending line on the second string—*F*, *E*, *E \flat* , *D*. We're in *G*, so the line is $\flat 7$, 6, $\flat 6$, 5. We first saw this chromatic line in Ex. 4, but this time it descends against a 1 played *above*. Here, we start with a tangy major second (*G-F*) and gradually expand to a fourth (*D-G*). Compare this to Ex. 4, which moved from a minor seventh to a fifth. Ex. 11a is tighter—perfect for when you're staying out of the way of, say, keyboards or horns.

fleshing out the turnaround from Ex. 6a, and there, the line used an *F \sharp* . For the sake of comparison, the same spelling appears in Ex. 6b.)

In **Ex. 7**, we take the previous I7- \flat Vdim-IVm-I turnaround and nudge it one string set lower. Thicker strings mellow the tones, and the re-fingering yields a nice stretch from the 6th to 10th frets. Want a great warm-up exercise? Move this turnaround down to *E*, descending one fret at a time to the first position.

Ex. 8 proves that you can run Ex. 6b backward and get a brand new turnaround. There are differences—we're in 4/4 (as opposed to 12/8), we're in *D*, and we're ascending and contracting—but as soon as you play this phrase,

Ex. 7

$\text{♩} = 76-104$

A7(I7) Dm(IVm) F7(\flat V17)
 E \flat dim(\flat Vdim) A(I) E7(V7)

T 10 10 10 10 10 10 10
 A 9 9 8 8 7 7 6
 B 10 10 9 9 8 8 7

Ex. 8

$\text{♩} = 92-108$

D(I) A \flat dim(\flat Vdim) B \flat 9(\flat V19)
 Gm(IVm) D7(I7) A9(V9)

T 10 10 10 10 10 10
 A 7 7 8 8 9 9 10
 B 7 7 8 8 9 9 10

Ex. 9

$\text{♩} = 66-104$

E7(I7) Am(IVm)
 B \flat dim(\flat Vdim) E(I) B7(V7)

palm mute Ⓢ throughout

T 4 3 2 1 0
 A 5 4 3 2 1
 B (0) 5 0 4 0 0 0

Ex. 10

$\text{♩} = 66-92$

A7(I7) Dm(IVm)
 E \flat dim(\flat Vdim) A(I) E(V)

T 5 5 5 5 5 5
 A 9 9 8 8 7 7
 B 5 5 7 5 5 7

Turnaround Strategies

Although this lesson contains a bevy of “ready to wear” turnarounds, with a little ingenuity, you can generate dozens of variations. Here are some ideas:

- Shift a turnaround to a different set of strings. Typically this means having to refinger it—that’s a good thing!
- Transpose the turnaround up or down an octave, but rather than slide it 12 frets higher or lower, refinger it on a new string set.
- Work out a pet turnaround in a least three keys so that you’re comfortable playing it in low, middle, and upper fretboard positions.
- Move several turnarounds to the same key, and then try separating them into two parts (the events leading to the V7, and the V7 events themselves). Experiment with swapping the front and back ends of these turnarounds.
- Change rhythms. For instance, play melodic intervals as harmonic ones, streamline triplets to simple quarter-notes, or change straight eighth-notes to eighth-note triplets.
- Change tempos. At slow tempos, give notes two or three extra attacks. At fast tempos, simplify the rhythm.
- Experiment with picking technique. Use a flatpick (many turnarounds offer gnarly string skips that are great for building chops), then a hybrid pick-and-fingers approach, and, finally, play the entire phrase fingerstyle.
- Try different effects such as flange, tremolo, distortion, and compression, and be sure to explore synchronized echoes. (To brush up on those DDL formulae, see “Ghost in the Machine,” Oct. ’99.)

—AE

But there are times when you need to occupy *more* space, not less. In such situations, it’s often possible to fatten a lean turnaround you already know by harmonizing its essential line with more voices. **Ex. 11b** illustrates the process. Originally, our chromatic line descended against a static root. Now *F, E, Eb, D* is sandwiched between two companion lines that descend alongside it (*B, Bb, A, G* on top, and *D, Db, C, B* below).

When Bigger Is Better

When it comes to turnarounds, sometimes a single, stepwise line will do the job. But there are times when a *cluster* of stepwise lines do it even better. Consider this: You can simply view **Ex. 12** as a chordal turnaround. From this perspective, you’d analyze *C7, Am7, Ab9, G9, and C9* as a I7-VIm7- \flat VI9-V9-I9 progression, memorize this harmonic formula, and then have a new turnaround to play in all 12 keys.

That’s cool—but why stop there? Peer one level deeper, and you’ll discover that this turnaround contains *four* stepwise lines. They don’t all run the length of the progression, but at different points, each contributes important mo-

mentum. Let’s take a peek:

- The top, chromatically descending line spans five chords, yet uses only three notes: *E, Eb, D*.
- The next lower line moves in whole-steps (*Bb, C*) and half-steps (*Bb, A*). It also stretches across the two-bar turnaround.
- Another line starts on bar 1, beat three, and continues for the duration of the turnaround.

This line descends chromatically (*G, Gb, F, E*).

- A fourth line starts at bar 1, beat three, and stops at the end of bar 2. This too descends chromatically (*A, Ab, G*).

Once you learn to see lines within chord progressions and—this is important—visualize the lines on the fretboard, your playing and musicianship will take a quantum leap forward. ■

Ex. 11a

$\text{♩} = 76-96$

G7(I) C(IV) Cm(IVm) G(I) D(V)

T
A
B

Ex. 11b

$\text{♩} = 76-96$

G7(I7) Cdim(IVdim) G7(I7)

D \flat dim(\flat Vdim)

T
A
B

Ex. 12

$\text{♩} = 92-132$

C7(I7) Am7(VIm7) Ab9(\flat VI9) G9(V9) C9(I9)

T
A
B