

Dobro Crash Course #2 with Ivan Rosenberg

Class 3: February 29, 2024

Notes and Homework

Bonus Q&A Session

Please note that we're doing our bonus Q&A session on Saturday, March 16th at 11am Central time.

New: Dobro + backing track recordings

I recorded these so you can listen to the arrangements and play along without having to open up the video. These were done at moderate tempos, but fast enough that you can hear the intended rhythmic effect of rolls and syncopation.

Before we get to your homework, let's reflect on how we've approached bluegrass soloing so far...

How to find the notes:

- one pattern using three chord shapes (straight-bar, minor, diminished) for a bird's eye view of where the major scale falls in G, and remembering that if we just move the "home" starting point to the 1-chord of the new key, we can use the same major scale map
- reviewing each key's scale within the first five frets, the area of the fretboard most conducive to utilizing open strings, rolls, and ornaments such as hammer-ons and pull-offs.
- within that scale, homing in on the chord triad notes of the song's chords within the first five frets
- finding the major scale notes that are found most closely in front of and behind the straight-bar 1 chord
- flattening 7ths and 3rds as needed for bluesy sounds

Focusing solos on the sung melody

- breaking the melody down line by line, syllable by syllable with the understanding that in bluegrass and related genres, the important sung melody lines are almost certainly in the chord triad of the chord the song is on now (occasionally the melody may also use the flat 7th note of the chord, and at other times an important melody note will belong to the chord that the song will be going to imminently)
- ornamenting phrases with slides, hammer-ons, pull-offs
- adding rhythmic interest and often repeating melody notes via rolls and open strings
- adding syncopation

- adding chord melody: occasionally using a chord with the melody note on top instead of just the single-note melody – we’ve used straight-bar chord positions for this repeatedly in our arrangements
- adding open string bass or harmony notes

What haven’t we done in this workshop?

We’ve spent very little time playing through scales. It’s great to know scale patterns, especially when it comes to playing fiddle tunes and improvising, but we’ve been focusing on chord tones (which can be found within the scale) as the fastest way to start identifying melody notes and predicting which notes will be the focus of the next phrase. You should definitely pursue open and closed position scales at some point if you have time, but you don’t need to spend years playing scales to make good, melodic music on the Dobro.

Homework:

Technique

Barring: focus on making single-string moves sound good. Don’t pick up the bar unless you absolutely need to. Instead, try to keep the bar on the string, let each note sustain as long as it can, and move it to the next position exactly when the muscles of your picking fingers are starting to engage to pick the subsequent note. See video for demonstration and an exercise for practicing this essential skill.

Long Black Veil – Key of D

Work through the arrangement, paying extra attention to the rolls over the D chord, intonation on the F# note during the D chord (which, since it’s the major 3rd of a D chord will sound in tune a smidge behind the 4th fret), use of the open D (4th string as a “bass note” during the D chord, and the funky two-string “roll substitute” using the low D notes (5th string/3rd fret + open 4th string) in the second half of the song.

Long Black Veil – all keys

You’ll notice that the backing tracks include the chorus of the song. If you’re feeling ambitious, try to come up with your own solo for the chorus using the ideas and techniques we’ve been practicing. Feel free to record audio or video what you come up with and send it to me for feedback.

Washed My Hands in Muddy Water

At this point, I think you know what to do: work through the arrangements, pay attention to which notes are core melody and which notes are filler (e.g. extra open ‘drone’ strings or rolls). I recommend learning the arrangements first at the slowest backing track tempo and then working your way up to a faster speed. Also, once you learn these arrangements, see about making them your own: substitute one lick for another, change the roll, syncopate, ‘personalize’ the slides so you’re expressing yourself musically with the bar, etc.

What's next?

We'll finish Washed My Hands in Muddy Water next week and look at some ideas for playing rhythm and fills. If there's anything I can't get to in the allotted time, I'll record it in a separate lesson, and we'll upload it to the Dobro workshop webpage.

Let me know if you have any questions about the Dobro instruction:
ivanDrosenberg@gmail.com

And let Megan know if you have any technical difficulties accessing files.

Happy dobro pickin – see you next week!

Ivan