Final Lesson
Big League Lead Guitar
#25
**Guitar Lore**

‘Lore’ is a set of traditions, stories, customs and knowledge for, or concerning a select group of people. This knowledge is passed through the oral tradition, from person to person. It’s like the folklore for a specific area of interest and it something that most guitarists I know are deeply interested in.

**I’m An Errand Boy For Rhythm**

Growing up and in college I worked at big hotels and resorts, before I was good enough to do play professionally I was always something like a pool boy or a bell boy. The job paid great but I was longing to be part of the live music programs at the hotels but I was still learning, studying to be a musician. It was tough on my ego and spirit because I was dying to play, I adopted the 1930’s swing song "I’m An Errand Boy For Rhythm" as a personal anthem. To me it meant I was going to keep my head in the game of music all day long. I had two choices: (A) I could be upset because I was not as talented as all the fantastic professional musicians you see at resorts or (B) I could start learning from all of them, picking their brains and making friends with them - finding out what they knew.

I opted for plan B and it was one of the best educational decisions I ever made - I have learned so much about music and about being a musician simply because I developed the ability to ask friendly questions and politely wait for an answer -an answer I would really listen to. The art of modern music and the ability to function as a serious guitarist is best taught to you from one important mentor and a series of friends, lesser mentors and of course teachers. That’s how I learned the improvising and lead guitar lore I will attempt to share in this lesson.

**Improvising Lore: Melody**

Improvising is creating music as it is being played, making it up on the spot-this is ultimately a definition for lead guitar playing. The central and critical musical elements in improvising are licks and melodies. Melodies you know, alter or compose on the spot and the same thing goes for licks of course. Riffs and licks are undeniably important but true melodic ability is more important than knowing licks.

Developing fast, flashy licks, and lots of lead patterns and scale tricks is, essential, great fun and a necessary step in the improvisor’s path of musical growth. Inevitably though, most players tire of playing and repeating someone else’s licks and the common knowledge lead guitar patterns like those found in guitar magazines and "How To Play Rock Guitar" books. The musical artist, the real guitarist needs to develop more and more melodic substance and find more musical meaning through melody with each new day of his musical journey.

Professional touring and studio players study music long and hard in order to create beautiful, memorable, musical thoughts and melodic lines when they improvise. Players on high skill levels may simply imagine coherent melodic statements and create them instantly. It is indeed the highest form of this art to create the perfect musical tune for a given situation, one which forever disappears as mysteriously as it appeared.
Licks vs. Spontaneity

Invariably, all discussions of improvising eventually involve analyzing two predominant ways of approaching lead playing:

1.) Reliance on preconceived licks, copied solos, and set fingering patterns. All accomplished players have memorized huge numbers of licks and solo patterns. The sources of these licks come from well known recordings, classic songs, and the players' imagination. Almost any of these guitar licks can be used in a variety of soloing situations and musical settings. The licks usually work well but may not fit everywhere in a certain song.

Playing only original musical ideas that are conceived entirely and especially for the moment. This method is difficult to truly implement, because it is the truest form and highest aim of improvising. Music educators and world class players often say that an improvisor should only play the music he hears in his head and should not play if he doesn't internally hear any music to fit the situation. That’s the besty of all possible worlds but it is not be very realistic for everyone.

Given, to be any good as a lead guitar player you must know a large number of common knowledge and cliche lead guitar riffs, licks, as well as standard patterns and fills. If however, you develop a style comprised entirely of preconceived licks and guitar cliches your playing will sound bland, dull, predictable, and quite ordinary.

The ability to play original and interesting original melodic ideas must constantly be developed through playing, studying and writing melodies. This is the highest level in improvising ability and requires the right setting, right musicians and proper level of inspiration. Although not always easy to do, any interesting playing style will revolve around this and strive for the consistent conception and creation of truly musical material.

These two approaches, although apparently opposites, must live side by side, hand in hand. Aach represent a correct and realistic way of thinking about lead playing and each one compliments the other. There are times when playing your tired old rock licks will sound weak or poor just as there are other times when nothing else but a good old killer rock riff will do the job. Conversely, coming up with a beautiful, original musical statement every time you play a guitar solo is probably not possible for most mere mortals. Think of these apparently conflicting schools of thought as a double edged sword. Each of these concepts is correct, each is thought of as a necessary part of the art, each is responsible for lots of great playing and enjoyable listening.

Tasty Lore

Musical taste means having good musical manners and don’t over do things. Make your plead playin a study in the 3 elements of music: melody, harmony and rhythm. Don’t be loud, don’t be busy or play with a harsh tone. Optimally, musical statements are played with restraint and good taste as well as feeling and style. Its the job of the thinking musician, the real guitarist, to strike the balance between those favorite guitar licks and tricks and meaningful, thoughtful musical substance. It’s tempting to keep writing about taste but I am sure you already agree with me. One of my favorite bands from my high school days,'The Good Rats ' has a great take on the elusive subject in their song 'Tasty':

We had a flyin' guitar man
Perhaps the fastest in the land
But he was goin' nowhere fast
'Cos speed ain't nuthin' without class
The Lore Of Musicality

Musicality is description of how musical you are, your understanding of the art and your ability to play in a clear, direct and joyous way. Musical people exude competency and cooperativeness, not monster chops and intimidation. Being musical means that your playing is tasteful and restrained but at the same time your adding something your own little spark to the musical conversation -not bogging it down by being a show off, someone who is too loud or brash.

Playing and improvising is participating in a musical conversation, your musicality is a description of how interesting and engaging a musical conversationalist you are. You become a pleasing, and musical conversationalist by understanding and learning to control and manipulate the basic elements of music: melody, harmony and rhythm. Incorporate a musical education into your study of the guitar.

Developing musicality is easily done through lots of active and analytical listening. In addition to jamming with people and machines, play your favorite music by ear and figure out guitar licks. Musicality is a love of and delight in music as if were candy for the ears and nourishment for the soul. Singing, dancing, drumming guitar jam sessions and playing along with recordings all develop musicality. Musicality can dramatically increase by developing a flair for being understated, by making the decision to simply listen more closely and play less.

Classical Lore

I often say that if I ruled the world, everyone who wanted to play the guitar would study classical guitar for one year. because of the benefit a student gains from processing great and sound musical ideas and concepts. Following that line of thinking, listening to classical music, not just classical guitar music, would also be part of the first year of study. The more classical music you understand and study, the better of an all around musician you will be.

For lead guitar players, my recommended area of study is expressionistic or music from the highly imaginative romantic period. The self and aptly named romantics (1825 - 1900), believed in a new and revolutionary conception of art in which rules and form were often ignored to better capture a feeling, mood, emotion, homage to country, or a visual image. Sensuality, the supernatural, mysticism, the exotic and occultism, held a certain fascination for many romantics, as well as famous works of literature which often became the subject of orchestral compositions called tone poems. The Romantic period legitimized and made this concept of emotional, musical expression -an indisputable feature of modern music.

Being expressive (expressing or capturing emotions) when playing is a hallmark of those who have attained a very high level of accomplishment and musicianship. Throughout the history of music this aim of self expression has been the subject of incredible amounts of art, literature and general discussion and self examination.
For me, the thing I remember, and study, is the famous melodic work and part writing of romantic composers. As you listen to and play classical melodies see how the composer uses simple melodic and rhythmic ideas to convey his thoughts and emotions or paint his picture. Any of the ideas or approaches that you discover and move you are then to be incorporated into your own personal style. Serious musicians and music students benefit tremendously from an interest in history's great musical works.

**The Lore Of Constructing Lines**

When we are soloists we are constructing a special type of melody and single note work, something musicians call 'lines'. I think that musical lines and improvisational work in general is vastly different than reciting melodies in a classical situation or reading parts on a page. Lines are longer, with more artistic latitude and less strict rules, lines can be rambling and exploratory as opposed to being timely and clever. Lines are the more advanced, more professional form of improvising and melodizing. People like Jeff Beck, John Scofield, Joe Satriani, Pat Metheny, Wes Montgomery, Carlos Santana and George Benson are playing longer more involved, more abstract solos by creating and weaving together longer lines of coherent musical ideas and phrases. Think of longer and interesting solos and lead parts found in improvisational music styles.

Much has been said and written concerning construction of lines and melody and general -some would argue that all music exists to support the lead line and that music is the central and most important element of music. In this course you've taken a lesson in which you learned to play and analyze some of the world's most beautiful and interesting melodies as a vehicle for studying scale use, phrasing and placement of scale passages and arpeggios.

In my study of guitar lore, line writing and melodic construction in general I have 6 principles of line writing and melodic composition that I keep in mind when playing hard core improvisational music and involved in creating longer, inter-related lines.

**i) Stepwise Balance.** Melodies generally and quite often employ the steps of their particular scale with the notes in their correct order. This is called the 'law of melody' or stepwise motion and is an over riding and organizing principle in the composition and improvisation of melodies. This strict scale usage is balanced with melodic leaps and skips, or at the very least, occasional playing the notes of the scale out of order.

**ii) Musical & Artistic Balance.** Lines must balance busy sections with light, restrained ones, thick note heavy passages balanced with musically sparse ones and so forth. In general, any one thing overdone of done too long is boring, trite and amateurish. Balancing the new with the old, the expected with the unexpected and so on.

**iii) Individuality.** Improvisers are known for having their own musical voice, a unique playing style or touch. Developing the ability to play and write lines which are unique and individual depends on articulation and technique as well as developing rhythmic, melodic and intervallic proficiency.
iv) **Repetition.** Again, a dual edged sword. Music, by its very nature is extremely repetitious, gaining it's form and cohesion by repeating ideas, rhythms, intervals and so on. However, too much repetition creates boring, trivial music. Not enough repetition will be the death of your melody. there is an old show business saying; “If they like it once, they’ll like it twice”.

v) **Musical Creativity.** Avoid the obvious choices such as starting every line on the root note, simple arpeggios of each chord and the excessive running of scales. Add interesting rhythms, skips, sequences, combinations and frequent changes of direction to avoid a simple minded stream of scale passages and chord outlines.

vi) **Simplicity.** Whenever possible, solve your musical riddles with the simplest possible solution. Avoid too many chromatic passing tones, and outside note choices unless you want a perplexing, complicated quality to the music. Keep things easy to understand rhythmically, building your phrases with a few note values. In other words don't use super complex rhythms of half notes, quarter notes, eighth notes, sixteenth note and triplets in one or two measures and expect your playing and writing to sound smooth and rhythmic. For each tune, work with a few basic rhythmic values.

Rules For The Lead Guitarist

1.) **CREATE MUSICAL SPACE**

Jazz and blues musicians refer to this as ‘lettin in some daylight’ meaning that an improvisor needs to stop playing occasionally to let their listeners digest what they just heard. Most experienced and accomplished musician consider it a rookie mistake to ‘over blow’, or clutter up a solo with too many runs and licks piled one on top of the other just because they can. Don’t attempt to gain or regain control of a solo by playing too fast or too much, another great old saying: ‘if you’re going down, slow down’.

Remember, music is defined as the orderly presentation of silence and sound. Musical space is created by (1) rests -well placed silences and meaningful pauses or (2) long notes. You must learn to plan out the breaks and pauses to increase the interest and musical value in your solo. Be as comfortable at using and hearing rests and meaningful, musical silences (rests) as you are at using and hearing licks and runs.

2.) **RHYTHMICIZE**

When you improvise music you’re trying to create a sound and maintain a feeling that is vibrant, rhythmic and musical. This is only achieved with a strong understanding and control of rhythm and rhythmic elements. Being acutely aware of the rhythms you play as well as those being played around you makes your playing lively and inviting. Being deeply involved in the rhythm of every song you play enables you to communicate with your band mates and communicate with them in a plain and straightforward musical language sending signals that are clear and readily understandable. Try playing a nice sounding solo while limiting yourself to only one, two or three notes -forcing you to adopt a very rhythmic style in order to get a worthwhile solo. I often tell my students that when they are soloing imagine that their picking hand is working for and being controlled by the drummer. This focus on rhythmic inventiveness and manipulation will help you to think more like a conga player or percussionist whose bread and butter is creating musical interest by using rhythm and rhythm alone.

3.) **PHRASE**

Phrases are the individual little, the logical bits or musical sentences that make sections of melodies and tunes. Phrases are well defined complete thoughts capable of making sense and sounding complete or resolved in. Students of arranging and composing are often told that phrases are caused by: (1) one and half beats of silence (2) long notes (3) melodic motion such as large skips or a change in direction.
Phrases add the periods and commas forming the sentences to whatever musical story you happen to be telling. A phrase is a complete, logical, coherent musical thought - getting across a melodic idea or musical moment. This art, phrasing, is quite elusive and highly subjective, like trying to capture lightening in a bottle or select the 'best' wine. The great composer and arranger Henry Mancini was quoted as saying "When it sounds right, it is right". This means your ear always has the final say as to when you have succeeded at making up a great riff or playing a musical, meaningful solo.

4.) THE COMPOSITIONAL APPROACH

Like virtually all works of art an improvised solo or lead line should ideally have some type of form and general overall concept. Think of the solo as a song within the song or a composition within the composition. And again, like virtually all works of art, from a poem to a symphony, an improvised solo should have a beginning, middle and climax or ending. This is highly preferable than merely playing a bunch of stock, safe riffs and achieving nothing more selecting the correct scales, adding the correct licks and avoiding bad notes. Learning and thinking about other types of creative expression could be of great value to musicians. Another discipline, such as oil painting shows the importance of form, relative size and negative space. A short story of film may have some beautiful humourous elements or highlight the values of conflict resolution. Poetry may bring you new insights into rhythmic variations and accenting strategies. True improvising is awesome expression of thought and creativity and should be viewed in the same light that all serious art work is viewed in.

5.) USE DYNAMICS

Dynamics are changes in the actual playing of the music. These include accents, volume changes, tone variations, different feelings (such as dolce for sweetly or con brio for spirited) crescendo, decrescendo, playing levels, attack intensity, accents, a different touch and so on (e.g. vibrato, legato, staccato, etc..) The great Berklee College Of Music professor Herb Pomery used to say "Dynamics make music". The creative use of dynamics and nuance represents a very high level technique and musical development. Throughout history, the best musicians have known that little things, touches and tiny details add an awful lot to music. The creative and musical use of dynamics is another way to make your guitar playing sound professional.

6.) COVER A WIDE RANGE

This rule is perhaps the most simple and obvious but also one of the most overlooked. Simply put, try to use as much of the neck as is appropriate for the solo. This is not to suggest that you play in every conceivable position, high to low, on every solo rather to give you an awareness of range - looking for interesting and beautiful high notes and low notes that might not have been your first choice. This will help you to avoid the sleepy sound of "milking" or overusing your box patterns and cliches. Its sort of like knowing when to leave the party.

7.) CREATE MELODIC INTEREST

This is similar to simply telling a baseball player to hit a home run or a boxer to smack his opponent squarely on the jaw. Its a statement of the obvious, it's what they came to do, but it isn't possible to hit a home run, or score a knockout on every occasion. The same principle holds true for creating fabulous, show stealing solos - it simply isn't automatic. But like a prize fighter or baseball player you can employ preparation techniques to help you increase your chances.

Be a student of melody - this point has been made several times in this course, classical, traditional and popular melodies and tunes are a wealth of musical knowledge and a school unto themselves. Learning to play a wide variety of melodies, ones that represent different cultures, styles and historical periods is of immeasurable value because it enhances your prowess as a melodizer.
8.) REGULARLY RECORD YOURSELF
There's an old saying in the musical community that goes something like this; "If you don't listen to your own playing, then nobody else will either". Listening to yourself play is the fast way to find your own individual voice and to gain an accurate picture of your strengths and weaknesses. Record your soloing as often as possible and listen objectively and critically -think of it as ‘finding the real you’. You'll be amazed at the progress you make as a musician.

10.) CREATE CONTRIVED SOLOS
Most music teachers will probably take issue with us here because the very word "improvisation" seems to contradict the idea of creating a planned out, contrived solo. This practice however is incredibly beneficial to your lead guitar playing in two ways: (1) as an aid in developing melodic ability. To create your first excellent sounding solo for a given set of chords may take you quite a while and a few sheets of music paper. The next solo for the next situation probably won't take as along and will even be better than the first. This process will give you the ability to quickly create interesting well developed melodies without writing them down.

Although you're not reciting a solo note for note as you would do in a cover band or possibly at a recording session you are re-exploring the licks, tricks and bits of melodic material that you know, the bits that lead to your original solos. In other words, use your pre-conceived good sounding licks and ideas as the basis of and point of departure for your lines in the same that you would as scale as the basis and framework of a solo. This is an effective technique because your working in familiar territory and can easily play themes and variations based on your own original good ideas.

11) START OUT STRONG, START OUT SIMPLE
Using a few well honed hot licks or catchy original melodies of your own creation as a basis for a solo can lead to musical and meaningful playing. When you star out with a simple hot sounding idea, you get the band and audience on your side and you are really taking the time you need to adjust to the groove and vibe of the music. the time you need to be able to get down to business. Thinkl of like a pitcher coming into a baseball game, his forst pitch will be his best fast ball, right down the middle to get things started off on the right foot.

12.) BE ABLE TO PLAY THE CHANGES
My alternate definition for guitar solo is:

*A solo is a stream of single notes that artfully and musically suggests and or imitates the sound of the chords changes on which the solo is based.*

This means that a the average listener should be able to hear the chord changes within your solo, being suggested by your solo. By playing the changes your sending clear and obvious signals to any one listening that your making your journey through the chord progression, and doing so sure footedly. This feat can also be achieved through the scale based approach but in reality these two seemingly opposite approaches (licks and scales vs. arpeggios and playing the changes) are usually practiced hand and hand within the same solo. The point is this: with the best lead guitarists, everything is framed in the context of gracefully and melodically negotiating and playing around with the sound of chord changes.
13.) GROOVE, VIBE AND MUSICIANSHIP

"When in Rome, do as the romans do!" To you as a musician this means being aware of your surroundings and current situation. As music, like all art forms, is highly personal and makes each piece and composition open to different interpretations. This being the case it would be wise to assume everyone in the music game will not be playing (or seeing) things quite your way. This means that you have to be highly adaptable and able to change your view of a certain piece of music for the good of the current playing situation. This brings back to the all important concept of listening to yourself and others as the music is happening, making changes and adaptations. The great jazz man Wes Montgomery, regarded as one of the greatest guitarists to have ever lived, felt that the most important aspect of a solo was not the notes or theory behind it, but that the feeling of the solo be maintained and built upon -yes the feeling.

As a working guitarist your playing will develop character and individuality if you learn to think of yourself as a musical chameleon, changing and adapting to his surroundings, providing the perfect compliment. As a lead player you'll be quite often be walking into established situations as the 'new guy', try to think of yourself in this situation as someone who has found the missing puzzle piece and quietly snaps it into position. Listening to the character and feeling of the band and complimenting it, telling them you understand the feeling and soul behind their music by playing something that fits in with their sound and feeling is a sure path to success. Learn to be someone who deepens the feeling and sweetens the sound of the music.

14.) BE EXPRESSIVE

Expressing feelings and emotions through music is widely accepted and is clearly evident, to some degree in all styles and time periods. There is no formula for this and again is a highly subjective deal but being expressive means playing with heart, soul, feeling and conviction.