

# GT156

## Country Essentials 3

### *Fiddle - Single Note Lines*

*This month Dario Cortese explains how to create single note lines licks in the tradition of the best fiddle players.*

This month will be focusing on the theory side of country music: more precisely on how to create licks and which notes to play.

All the musical examples for this month are written in the key of C major for an easier understanding. I tried to use only the basic techniques (picking, legato, etc) so you can focus on the actual notes instead of 'how to play them'. Ideally you want to understand the concepts, learn some of the licks (if you like them) and transpose everything in other keys. The final step will be to compose your own licks based on the information provided here.

#### **Basic Traditional Country Phrasing**

The basic note choice for country comes from the Major Pentatonic. In C this would be: C – D – E – G – A (Fig 1).



Players often use this scale adding a 'blue' note (b3) - in the same way you add the b5 to minor pentatonic to obtain the blues scale - resulting in the Country Scale: C – D – Eb – E – G – A (Fig 2).



The first step is to create licks using this scale. The only thing to keep in mind is that it doesn't seem very common to use the Major 3<sup>rd</sup> (E) before the Minor 3<sup>rd</sup> (Eb). Usually you'll find Min 3<sup>rd</sup> going to the Maj 3<sup>rd</sup>. The reason is very simple. The Min 3<sup>rd</sup> creates a tension which is resolved with the Maj 3<sup>rd</sup>, this create

'tension and resolution'. Playing Maj 3<sup>rd</sup> before the Min 3<sup>rd</sup> will sound like 'resolution and tension' which doesn't work so well obviously. The licks should have different length (e.g. 1 bar, 1 ½ bars, 2 bars and 4 bars) and finish on the root.

Of course these are not rules and there are lots of examples that can demonstrate the opposite of what just said. These are just 'guidelines' and should be taken as simple 'tricks' to make the licks sound smoother.

## Modern Country Phrasing

The modern country players seem to combine the Major Pentatonic or Country scales with its cousins Minor (C – Eb – F – G – Bb Fig 3) or Blues (C – Eb – F – Gb – G – Bb Fig 4) scales.

### Minor Pentatonic



### Blues



When you actually combine the Country scale with the Blues scale the result is a hybrid scale with 9 notes (Fig 5) which contains all the extension you would ever need in traditional/modern country.



This scale is the 'Holy Grail' for country players and not only. This note choice is in fact not far from Robben Ford or George Benson!

As we said for the Major Pentatonic, the next step will be to compose licks of different length using the new scale. Of course the 'suggestions' previously said are still valid!

## Western Swing

The last frontier of country music is Western Swing. This style of music is quite old and in many different ways is very close to Jazz although is harmonically

easier. Modern country players have incorporated elements of Western Swing in their playing and this can be heard especially from Brent Mason and Brad Paisley.

One of the common scale choices in Western Swing is the Diminished Scale S-W (C – Db – Eb – E – Gb – G – A – Bb Fig 6).



The reason is that this scale is quite similar to the hybrid 9 note scale previously seen and it's slightly easier to use at faster tempos because of its symmetrical nature.

The other common Western Swing approach is the use of triads combined with the Be-Bop chromatic approach (see Ex 16).

### Chord Changes

Once you get familiar with all the above you need to create licks moving from one chord to another. The most common chords movement in country is 1-4 (which can be seen also as 5-1) so I would suggest working on that at first. Of course as you change the chord you need to transpose everything to the new chord!

The final target is not to play licks exclusively but is to be able to think and compose new licks on the spot. After all, improvisation is composing on the spot so it's a good idea to become good 'lick composer' at first taking all the time needed!

**Ex 1:** This is a very common country lick built from the C Country scale. This lick it's 1 bar long and finishes on the root (C).

♩ = 140

T  
A  
B

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**Ex 2:** This is another lick using the C Country scale. This one features a position changing and the length is 1 ½ bars. Note the endings of both Ex 1 and 2: this is a traditional ending for country licks.

♩ = 140

T  
A  
B

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**Ex 3:** An extended version (1 ½ bars) of Ex 1. Again from the C Country scale this features a different country ending: min 3<sup>rd</sup> – maj 3<sup>rd</sup> – root.

♩ = 140

T  
A  
B

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**Ex 4:** This example features a reverse banjo roll over the C min arpeggio (which comes from the C Country scale).

♩ = 140

T  
A  
B

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**Ex 5:** This is the type of lick that any fiddle player can't leave without!

♩ = 140

T  
A  
B

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**Ex 6:** This lick is the long version of Ex 1 and 3 (2 bars).

♩ = 140

T  
A  
B

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**Ex 7:** This lick shows the type of lick you can come up with while improvising using the C Country scale.

♩ = 140

T  
A  
B

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**Ex 8:** Ex 8 combines the C Blues and C Country scales. Note how the min and maj 3<sup>rd</sup> are treated.

♩ = 140

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**Ex 9:** This lick is built around the common C Blues scale box and combines notes from the C Blues and C Country scale. Again the 3<sup>rd</sup> is treated as discussed.

♩ = 140

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**Ex 10:** This lick features most of the extension within the hybrid scale. It resolves chromatically on the b7.

♩ = 140

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**Ex 11:** This is quite a swing ending type of lick. The 7 (B) is again used as approaching note. This lick should be played shuffle.

♩ = 140

T 8 11 10 8 9  
A 10 7 10  
B 8 9 10 10 7 8

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**Ex 12:** This lick shows a different way to treat the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Note how the 3rds on the three different octaves are treated differently. This lick should be played shuffle.

Swing ♩ = 140

T 11 12 11 8  
A 8 11 10 9 10 8 10 9  
B 8 10 12

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**Ex 13:** This lick combines the hybrid scale with a maj 7 (B) to create stronger tension and resolution effect. This lick should be played shuffle.

Swing ♩ = 140

T 8 9 8 11 8 11 10 8 9  
A 10 8 10 9 8  
B 10 12

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**Ex 14:** This lick starts around the C shape and finishes on the E shape of C.

♩ = 140

T 15 14 13 11 12  
A 13 12 15 13 14 12 11 13 10 12 8 9  
B 10

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**Ex 15:** This example shows a very common approach to the Diminished scale. Some of the notes (Eb – Gb – A) can be seen as approaching notes to the chord tones of a C7 (C – E – G – Bb).

♩ = 140

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**Ex 16:** This is a very Western Swing lick. You can see how the notes are organized as triads (D and G major) combining with a Be-Bop chromatic approach (Eb > F > E).

♩ = 140

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**Ex 17:** This lick starts in C major and it moves to F major after two bars. You can see that the notes in the second bar, although still in C, are coming from the F hybrid scale.

♩ = 140

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**Ex 18:** Another lick from C to F. This time F is approached using the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the chord (A).

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**Ex 19:** This is the last lick for this month. As in the Ex 17, you can see the notes in the second bar coming from the F hybrid scale.

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## TONE SETTINGS

Any guitar with single coil and clean valve amp will get you close to the typical country twang but if you're serious about this music you need to get a Telecaster and a Fender Deluxe Reverb (22 Watts) amp.

You might also want to get a compressor (Keeley, Dynacomp MXR, Boss CS-2 Japan) and some kind of echo (Boss DD-2, Analog Aqua Puss, Line6 DL-4). To record the examples for GT I've used a 69' Tele into the Pod XT.