PICKIN' AGAIN!

Just Blues (and a wee bit 'o Jazz)

By

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The Background

Around '79 or so I did my last solo recordings. I hardly performed in those days. I had a regular job in systems programming, but after eight years it drove me physically as well as mentally over several edges, so by '83 I quit and tried to make a living by playing, safely, in the backline of several bands. Since then I have done a lot of different things: orchestras, bands, trio's, duo's, theatre, radio, television, studio's, the lot. Played and accompanied the whole caboodle, from Transylvanian fiddle tunes to free jazz, from the classics to New Orleans funk. Broadened my horizons, learned loads since my blues-based beginner days. All these influences have left their mark on my approach to fingerpicking. So now, like in Plato's cave, I'm returning to the scene of the crime with a different set of tools. Same brain, face and fingers, but a different guy, and if you think it isn't good any more: do have the courtesy to grant this pig his mud. Somewhere in the noughties I did a project on Dailymotion under the (Finnish) pseudonym of Pekka Paska (I learned a lot more Finnish swear words in a theatre play at the time). I still had a lot of fingerpicking ideas I didn't want to go to waste and this cd is the result of those experiments.

Now that I've finally got the recordings over and done with I've come to the same conclusion as with the solo-albums from the 70-ies: glad I got it out of my system, but you never quite get it the way you have it in your mind's ears. And then: what took me 5 or 6 days to record in the 70-ies now took me over 2 months! I guess age is slowly creeping up on us all. Anyway, it's another step up one's stairs or maybe another knot in one's noose. Do feel free to send any reactions through the site's contact menu and if I think you're right, I'll put it in the comments-list. Flattery as well as down right lies will work...

In the meantime: don't forget to have as much fun as you possibly can, or as Tom Lehrer put it: to prolongue adolescence beyond all previously known limits.

Cheers,
Ton

P.S. My sphincter never was, and still isn't, up to being alone on stage. Certainly not with the type of guitar arrangements I come up with: somehow I've always succeeded in pushing it to (and sometimes over) the edge of my abilities. Being alone on stage still makes me die a thousand deaths; not even a bottle of Lafleur 2000 can persuade me (still got a 2004 in the cellar). I once heard Mick Jagger complain about the amount of adrenaline he had to deal with when performing. Well, here's another one, and unlike most people, it doesn't fade away after playing a couple of tunes. As I love music and making it, I don't think performing on my own will contribute to a happy, non-embarrassing experience for myself or the public. So: never ask me to! Y'understand?
A new one to me was home recording. I did get all the fancy equipment, some bought, some on loan, as well as loads of advice (see the "thanks to" list on the cover). But learning how to use it is quite a different matter. Once you get to the editing stage, you notice things you should have done, but then there's no way back except by starting all over again. And if you give that grizzly one finger it'll be curtains. You'll never finish the thing before your 80th birthday, that is if cremation doesn't get you sooner. Both singing and guitar playing influence each other simultaneously, so I decided not to record them separately. Notes sung or guitarlicks played almost right will prove to you there is an actual living and breathing human being making that music. Luckily the breathing is in rhythm.

As far as the guitar goes: I always use the dots on the fingerboard to guide me. So I don't like capo's as the dots lose their meaning. Therefore the key you hear is the key it's in. Always regular tuning, but when in D it's always dropped D, as well as Sweet Swinging Blues, Water Wagon Moan and Blind Baking Beans. Ever since I started playing acoustic rhythm guitar I've grown more and more attached/addicted to the sound of archtops. In the days of all those difficult ragtime and novelty arrangements I used to think of guitars as being good when they were easy to play. Once you start playing in completely acoustic bands and orchestras, your whole attitude towards guitars changes. I'm afraid I've never been and probably never will be comfortable with the sound of flattops, no matter how good they are supposed to be. I've tried to use my old trusty Epiphone Emperor for fingerpicking, but that would have required a completely new setup and I had to play rhythm gigs with it while doing daytime recordings as well, so I've just used my little parlour Gibson L3 (the third proud owner since 1918) for these recordings. It's not quite what an archtop usually sounds like and despite its short scale it's not the easiest to play having a 13 fret neck shaped like the leg of a snooker table, but I still love it. A flattop is, well... it's a flattop and an archtop is a guitar.

I've always been interested in the blues and jazz guitarists of the interbellum period, but in a way that would provide me with fantasies of how they thought about their guitar, whether these fantasies were true to reality or not. That way you can use their "guitar-brains" to your own advantage. At one point in my guitar life I did think of Blake or Davis as guitaristic cul-de-sacs: you can only use their techniques for playing their songs, which they've done themselves so much better than anyone else will ever do. Imagine my surprise/embarrassment when I slowly began to realise, that I do use Blake-ish thumb-stumbles as well as Davis's two-finger strumming, be it in completely different contexts as their original "owners". After turning my back on them they sneakily slipped into my fingers when I wasn't looking. That just goes to show: never trust dead guitarists!
The Tunes

01) Won't Be Long (McFarland)
   This song is from the John Hammond sessions of the very first sides recorded by Aretha Franklin in the early sixties (one of those sessions even contains a duet sung with Mahalia Jackson). For me an early guitar boogie attempt. Still a boogie bass vs licks, but that also takes it out of its straight jacket. Some thumb-stumbles here: played un-Blake-ishly without the index finger on the downbeat.

02) Sweet Swinging Blues (van Bergeijk)
   Just a jazzy blues. The first tune I did in the Pekka Paska Project on Dailymotion; now already eight years ago. The intro is based on a chord progression played in 1925 by The Halfway House Orchestra as their intro to "Squeeze Me".
   About the lyrics: one drink does cheer me up enormously. My late father in law used to say: "Some people are born a few drams under par"!

03) What Would I Do Without You (Charles)
   A Ray Charles song from his early days at Atlantic. Sometime during the 70-ies Stefan Grossman gave me a cassette tape with recordings of Steve Mann. That radically changed my way of thinking about blues guitar and song accompaniment. I distinctly remember a gospel tune Mr. Mann did which was quite impressive. That must have been in the back of my mind when I tackled this tune.

04) Keep On Gwine (Lastie) - instrumental
   I first heard this song played by James Booker, who is usually described as "the best black, gay, one-eyed junkie piano genius New Orleans has ever produced". The tune is also titled "Blues Rhapsody". I'd call this instrumental a two-chord wonder. It did ask for some thumb-stumbles, but not quite in the Blake-style. The harmonic in, what I call the "James Booker-lick", in the fourth chorus was accidental and I could not reproduce it for love or money after several attempts: good luck with it.

05) Lonesome Day Blues (James)
   A Jesse James classic: a blues that has been on my sofa-repertoire for ages now. I've used some of the bass pattern of Joe Jones' "You Talk Too Much". From 1936 to 1960 and back: a small step to make in one's attic music-room.
   I left out the prison bits of James's lyrics as I always find it silly when people sing about things that obviously do not correspond with their person. I remember a YouTube clip of a well dressed lady, the whole make-up and hairdo business, an expensive guitar, eyes closed, the eyebrows lowered to the "I'm-serious-here"-level, and then singing: "I ain't got a nickle or a lousy dime".
06) Gimme Some More (van Bergeijk)

The regular imbiber’s answer to “How did you sleep?” was: “I slept like a baby, woke up every two hours and cried until I got a drink”. Always wanted to do a drinking song: a man’s got to have a hobby. I recently came across the word "supernacular": having an urge to go for the very last drop in a glass or bottle.

It's roughly based on the chords of Leadbelly’s "Fannin’ Street" but with plenty of traces of Jerry Reed's clawing and even bits of Roger Miller thrown in: he was the first one I heard singing in harmony with his guitar licks. It wasn't until I wrote down the guitar pattern in tab that I found out that we're dealing here with a 15 instead of 16 bar chorus.

07) Blind Baking Beans (van Bergeijk) - instrumental

An instrumental that I still think of as a "Blake Rag". It has evolved enough that it is no longer Blind Blake-ish. All that probably remains is the chord-scheme. Somewhere in the late 70-ies I started playing in C with a dropped D tuning, as this allows you to go higher up the neck with the non-C-chords. It also feels quite liberating if you forget about any thumb-stumbles.

08) Rocking Chair (Carmichael)

I discovered the seldom played verse. This is the ultimate O.A.P. blues. One of the last tunes I recorded in the 70-ies; maybe nice to compare and see how much I've changed: for the good or the bad, I don't care: this is me now. The chair certainly rocks at a much slower pace and at a much older age.

09) Ecky Thumb Drum (van Bergeijk) - instrumental

It all started with a friend of mine playing Slim Harpo's "Scratch My Back" with an irregular thumb pattern. That's when the idea of a "bass-drum-thumb" got foothold. It all comes down to two-finger chord-strumming with the odd three-finger lick thrown in. The term "Ecky-Thumb" is related to "Ecky-Thoomp": the old Lancastrian martial art of spiritual enlightenment, moral cleansing and beating the living daylights out of a person with a black pudding. Only here the victim is one's own guitar, no charcuterie involved.

I have used this type of pattern quite effectively several times for accompanying pop tunes from the sixties. Of course I've also tried to use Ecky-Thumb for bass-drum/snare patterns of one of my favourite drummers: Zig Modeliste of The Meters, but that turned out to be far too difficult for me. I gladly pass that relay stick on to anyone who wants to take Ecky Thumb from here on.
10) **Weekend Boogie** (van Bergeijk)

Yet another type of guitar-boogie, more in the Jerry Reed-style. Some thumb-stumbles here with the index finger on the down beat as Blake probably used to do. Boogie patterns on a guitar seem to work best for me in E or in A with a dropped D tuning; that way you'll have open bass-strings and most of your fingers free for the root and 4th chords. The 5th I think is always a problem, be it usually only for one measure, but then again: a nice invitation for figuring sneaky ways out as well.

This song is about domestic synchronisation; different time frames can really mess up marital bliss.

11) **Water Wagon Moan** (van Bergeijk) - almost instrumental

A bluesy left hand piano pattern (I still think of this as a boogie) against part of a Pops Staples lick over a rhythm & blues chord scheme.

Every now and then I stop drinking for a week or so, just to prove who's at the steering wheel; I believe they call that "denial" in the half-baked professions. Anyway, the lyrics I wrote for this picking pattern didn't work at all, so during such a week on the wagon I decided to discard the words and hum the melody. Lyrics for blues are a tricky thing. They have to be kind of: "My baby left me and it's all her fault". Anything else is easily regarded as o.t.t.

12) **Mama Said So Blues** (van Bergeijk)

A rhythm & blues inspired chord scheme, very loosely based on the chords of "Fishing Blues", but severely "Nola-ed". I have always been influenced by pianists, maybe more so than by guitarists. Especially New Orleans guys like Booker or Rebennack: they've always made the connection for me with classic jazz and therefore effectively opened my window towards post war rhythm & blues. The New Orleans piano styles in my mind have the quality of being chord-based rather than scale-based, which makes it more adaptable to guitar interpretations for guys like me with a rhythm section and therefore a chordal background.

13) **Clotted Cream** (van Bergeijk) - instrumental

A classic blues bass line in Ecky Thumb patterns. Some James Booker influences again. It's just a blues chord scheme, be it a very elongated one.

The bottom line here is more important than the top line, hence the title, as I think of clotted cream as glorified butter underneath some jam. My wife thinks the clotted cream should be on top of the jam. Just turn the scone over and everyone has their way.

14) **Hi Heel Sneakers** (Higginbotham)

The Tommy Tucker classic. There is quite some controversy about the lyrics of the third verse that was edited out of the hit version. Everybody hears something different: I hope I didn't "mondegreen" it.

A lot of two-finger chord strumming here; the approach in my mind is a bit between Lightning Hopkins for the thumb and John Lee Hooker for the, sometimes, almost brushing index finger.
The Notes & Tabs

For every song I've written down the basic patterns. This usually means the first chorus (but with a verse and a four part tune it's almost the whole thing). Transcribing each and every little variation, a matter of chance when playing anyway, is something I gladly leave to others. There's enough material in the following pages to break the back of these tunes. Also this should encourage you to make up your own variations.

I've tried to be as accurate as possible. Most of the time I've managed to write down what I actually played, but sometimes it's what I should have played. I find it silly writing down mistakes I happen to have made.

I tend to use chord-symbols to indicate the function, rather than the accurate chord-name with all it's additions, omissions and other emulsifier-numbers. You will seldom encounter players wearing shirts with numbers over seven. Usually they don't wear a number at all: just a letter is more than sufficient. I've used the regular chord names and symbols. I believe firmly in as short a chord symbol as possible, so "0" for diminished and "Ø" for half-diminished, (m7b5), as they read (and write) so much faster than the spelled out thing. Unfortunately my tab program doesn't allow a "+" for an augmented chord (it thinks it's a "#"), so there you'll have to make do with an "aug".

As the guitar tabs are accompaniment patterns rather than the actual tunes I've named them as such and numbered them according to their order on the cd. You can, and I have, use these patterns for numerous other tunes, so take 'em and use 'em to your heart's delight! Anything else you want to know about these picking patterns: there is an instructional dvd planned to come out on www.TrueFire.com. For information on this and any other form of lessons, keep your eye on: www.TonvanBergeijk.nl.

I never had any patience with working out other people's stuff. After two or three trials I always went for the easier option of: "what else can I do with what I've got so far". So don't be afraid to change as much as you can from the following tabs and to suit it to your own fingers and six-stringed-mind. Guitar playing and making music is supposed to be fun!
# Boogie pattern in E

Arr. Ton van Bergeijk

Chorus

E7
Pickin' Again! -9-
#02 – Jazzy blues in A
Arr. Ton van Bergeijk

Dropped D

Intro

Dm6

Chorus

B7
E7
B7
D7
F#7

B7
E7
A7
D7

A
Bm7
C# m7
F#7
Pickin' Again! -11-
Pickin' Again! -14-

Bridge

B7

C7

B7  B7aug

C#m

#7
Pickin' Again! -15-
Pickin' Again! -16-

#04 – Two chords in A
Arr. Ton van Bergeijk

Intro
A

Chorus
A

A♯0
Pickin' Again! -17-
#06 - Clawing-pattern

Arr. Ton van Bergeijk
#07 - Blake-ish Patterns
Arr. Ton van Bergeijk

Dropped D
#08 - Classic Jazz in dropped D
Arr. Ton van Bergeijk

Dropped D

Rubato
Verse
D7

G
Gm
D

mf

T 2 5 7 6 5 5 3 0
A 2 4 7 6 5 5 5
B 0 5 0 0 5

T 3 0 2 3 4 2 0 3 5 10 7 8
A 4 2 3 4 2 0 3 4 10 7 5
B 0 4 10 0 5

D

T 6 5 3 0 0 2 3 2 0 3 2 0 0 3 3 2
A 5 5 5 4 2 3 4 3 3 0 4 4 2
B 0 0 4
Pickin' Again! -25-

Chorus A3

Gm

D

E7

A7

D

E7

A7

Pickin' Again! -25-
#09 – Bass drum thumb pattern

Arr. Ton van Bergeijk
#10 – Boogie in E, Reed-ish pattern

Arr. Ton van Bergeijk

Intro
B7

Chorus
E

B

A

Pickin' Again! -28-
#11 – Piano bass pattern in A, dropped D
Arr. Ton van Bergeijk

Dropped D
#12 – Nola patterns in dropped D

Arr. Ton van Bergeijk

Dropped D

Pickin' Again! -32-
#13 - Blues bass line in E

Arr. Ton van Bergeijk

Intro

T
A
B

A
B

Chorus

E & up

T
A
B

T
A
B
#14 – Blues in E
Arr. Ton van Bergeijk