

Spiced Up Blues

Many people ask the question, “How can I spice up some of my back up guitar parts?” Most of the time spicing up parts involves chord substitution. While it is beyond this article to explain chord substitution in full, I hope this introduction to the idea really whets your appetite for it because it really is a lot of fun.

There has always been a fascination among guitarists about substitute chord forms that permeate blues, rock, swing, jazz, and funk music, and those substitutions can get very complicated. In a simplistic form how this lesson works is that you can substitute any dominant 7th chord for a 9th or 13th with the same name because they come from the same chord family. For example G7 can be substituted for G9 or G13th at any time. However, there can be times when they don't fit and you will need to use your ear when applying this principle.

The music example here is a 12 bar blues progression with a blues/boogie/swing type feel that is found in a lot of music performed by artists such as B.B. King, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Brian Setzer, and Robben Ford. Also listen to NZ artists such as Midge Marsden, Bullfrog Rata, Darren Watson, Hammond Gamble, Kokomo, and there are many others.

G13	C9	G13	G7#5
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Count 1 2 + 3 4

Original chords			
G7	C7	G7	G7

C9	G13
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C7	G7	G13	G7
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9

D9 C9 G13 D9

D7 C7 G7 D7

T 5 5 3 3 3 5 5 5 5
A 5 5 3 3 3 4 4 4 4
B 4 4 2 2 3 3 4 4 4

Before you begin, learn the fingerings for the chords that are written beside them on the music notation as some of them might not be familiar to you, but they are not too difficult. Some of these shapes are not what you might see in any chord book because these are the shapes that most of the professionals use and are cut down forms of larger types. All the 9th chords have the same fingering and are just moved to different fret locations, and it is similar for the 13th chords. The G7#5 in bar 4 is a voice leading move (which I will explain in a later lesson) but sounds great in the 4th bar of a blues. Also, the original chords are written below the music notation with the substituted ones I am using on the top.

The strum in this example is the basic “swing” feel with a strum on the beat of “1” and the “+” of 2 as written in the first measure. Make sure to play a downstroke on the first strum with an up stroke on the second.

After you have mastered this feel, try strumming any rhythm you wish for more variation, and keep your *ears open* just in case you hear this style on one of your favourite recordings.

To hear the music for this lesson visit <http://www.guitar.co.nz/spiced-up-blues/>

Kevin Downing is a professional guitarist, teacher, and author. For more great lessons or to study with him in person or over the internet visit www.guitar.co.nz

To see his best selling book *The Secrets of Successful Practising for Guitarists* click here <http://www.guitar.co.nz/products/>

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