

Double-Stop Fiddle Licks

Glenn Weiser

The sweet sound of the fiddle playing a solo in two-note chords was often heard in the early days of country music, when fiddle was usually the lead instrument.

But as country went electric, the pedal steel, which could also play two-part leads, came to the fore. Much has been written for electric guitarists on how to play pedal steel licks, but many of these techniques are impossible on the acoustic guitar because of the string bends involved. If you play a flattop and want to learn some of these classic two-note lines, double-stop fiddle licks are the prime source. Because they can be a valuable change-up from the running eighth notes typical of bluegrass guitar, I'd like to show you several two-part phrases,

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explain how they work, and put them all together in a version of the famous old-time hymn "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

The practice of fiddling on two strings originated in Ireland and Scotland. There are a couple of theories about how the style evolved. One school contends that fiddlers were imitating the bagpipes by playing the

melody on one string and using the other as a drone, but others say that the fiddle players added the second string merely to be loud enough to be heard by dancers.

Originally, the Scots-Irish settlers in America sang unaccompanied ballads and used the fiddle for dancing. But as time passed, banjos and later guitars started backing up the fiddle, and eventually the strands of dance music, balladry, and har-

mony singing were woven together into string band music. As it began to be used to accompany songs, the fiddle evolved from playing melodies with drones to double-string harmonies.

UNDERSTANDING HARMONY

Before we try some of these harmonies on guitar, though, we should talk a little about harmony itself. Let's start with the idea that a song usually consists of a melody accompanied by chords that harmonize it. Each note in a melody can be harmonized by a chord, and, roughly speaking, a two-part harmony is the melody note with another note of the harmonizing chord played at the same time. In theory, though, you need at least three different notes to establish the identity of a chord, which is why two-note chords are more correctly termed *intervals*.

Intervals are named by the distance in steps between the two notes. There are two kinds—*melodic*, which is when the two notes are played separately, and *harmonic*, when they are played together. In the C-major scale, the root note C and another C are a *unison*, from C to D is a *second*, from C to E a *third*, from C to F a *fourth*, and so on until you get to the octave interval, from C to the next C up. Intervals of more than an octave are called *compound intervals*.

Two intervals of the same name can be larger or smaller depending on how many steps are involved. A minor second equals the distance of one fret on the guitar; a major second, two frets; a minor third, three frets; a major third, four frets; a perfect fourth, five frets; an augmented fourth or diminished fifth, six frets; a perfect fifth, seven frets; a minor sixth, eight frets; a major sixth, nine frets; a minor seventh, ten frets; a major seventh, 11 frets; and an octave, 12 frets.

Seconds, thirds, sixths, and sevenths are termed *major* or *minor*, fourths *perfect* or *augmented*, fifths *perfect* or *diminished*,

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Ex. 1

The musical notation for Ex. 1 consists of two systems, each with a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The first system shows seven intervals: Minor 2nd (6-9), Major 2nd (5-7), Minor 3rd (5-7), Major 3rd (2-5), Perfect 4th (3-7), Augmented 4th (4-10), and Diminished 5th (3-7). The second system shows six intervals: Perfect 5th (5-10), Minor 6th (10-7), Major 6th (2-9), Minor 7th (5-12), Major 7th (4-11), and Octave (5-5).

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Ex. 2

G

Oblique Motion

Ex. 3

G7

Contrary Motion

Ex. 4

C

Similar Motion

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Ex. 5

Ex. 6

Ex. 7

Swing (♩=♩♩)

and unisons and octaves *perfect*. The augmented fourth and diminished fifth are the same interval: a tritone, or three whole steps. Unisons, thirds, perfect fifths, sixths, and octaves are *consonances*, or *harmonious intervals*, and seconds, fourths, diminished fifths, and sevenths are the *inharmonious dissonances*.

When an interval is turned upside-down (moving the lower of two notes up an octave so it becomes the higher note, for example), it is said to be *inverted*. Seconds become sevenths (and vice versa), thirds become sixths, the perfect fourth becomes the perfect fifth, and the augmented fourth remains a tritone but changes in name to a diminished fifth. Also, major intervals become minor and vice versa.

Let's look at these intervals on the fretboard. Example 1 on page 62 shows several common fingerings. Because the guitar is mostly tuned in fourths, many fingerings are the same on more than one pair of strings. Note that the fingerings on strings two and three are unique to that pair only. If you're a flatpicker, you'll have to pinch with your pick and middle finger when playing two strings that are not next to each other.

SWITCHING INTERVALS

Voice leading is the term for how one interval moves to another, and in music theory this is governed by a host of rules. It is useful to know some of the most important rules for a couple of reasons—you'll find that double-stop licks often (but not always) follow them, and, if you want to work up parts on your own, it will help you avoid the harsh sounds that can occur when these rules aren't followed. (By the way, these rules also apply to duet singing.)

First, there are **three** kinds of motion from one interval to another: *oblique*, *contrary*, and *similar*. The melody may be in either voice.

In **oblique motion** (Example 2), one voice remains stationary while the other moves (this is common in the melody-and-drone style of fiddling). In **contrary** motion (Example 3), the voices

move in opposite directions. In **similar motion** (Example 4), both voices move in the same direction. When both voices move in the same direction by an equal number of steps, it's called *parallel motion*. Parallel perfect fifths and octaves (as shown in Example 5) are traditionally forbidden. This is because parallel fifths have a quality that is thought to be harsh and therefore inharmonic, and parallel octaves are considered to compromise the independence of the voices. Parallel thirds and sixths, on the other hand, are common (see Examples 6 and 7). Parallel perfect fourths are allowed in three or more parts if supported by the third below (Example 8, page 64). Frowned on for the most part are *hidden* fifths and octaves (Example 9), which occur when an interval approaches a fifth or an octave not of the same chord by similar motion (they're usually allowed in three or more parts if the upper voice moves by a step).

A consonance may be followed by another consonance, but a dissonance should resolve to a consonance (Examples 10 and 11). Another rule is that the voices should not cross each other (Example 12). For example, the lower note of an interval should not rise above the higher note of the previous interval. Also avoided is *cross-relation*, which happens when a root-position V chord with the third in the high voice is followed by a root-position IV chord with the fifth in the high voice, accentuating an undesirable tritone interval between the treble of the V chord and the bass of the IV chord (Example 13). In general, it is considered best to lead the notes of one chord to those of the next by the shortest possible route. And to cap it off, you're allowed to break the rules when doing so will achieve greater musical interest (for more on all this, read *Harmony*, by Walter Piston, published by Norton).

In "What A Friend We Have in Jesus" on page 65, you'll find some licks that show these principles at work. The intervals and implied chords are analyzed for you.

To prepare yourself to play the solo, you'll need to learn the seven moveable chord forms shown on page 64, which contain

What a Friend We Have in Jesus

Music by Charles Converse, arranged by Glenn Weiser

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(F) (G) F C

4th 4th 4th 3rd 4th 3rd 4th 4th 6th 6th 3rd 3rd 5th 4th 6th

G (C) (C) (F) (C⁷) C (F) (G) F

4th 4th 3rd 4th 6th 5th 4th 4th 4th 4th 3rd 4th 3rd 4th 4th 6th

C G (C) C G (G⁷) (C) G⁷

6th 3rd 3rd 4th 5th 6th 3rd 3rd 3rd 3rd 3rd 3rd 7th 5th

C F C (F) G (D) G (C) G⁷ (G⁷) C

3rd 3rd 6th 6th 5th 6th 6th 6th 5th 4th 3rd 3rd 3rd 3rd 3rd 3rd

(F) (E7) F C (G7) (G) C

6th 5th 6th +4th 3rd 3rd 3rd 6th 6th 6th 6th 6th 6th 6th Oct.