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## Contemporary Idioms™ APP Etudes Tutorial 2

### **12 Bar Blues, APP Level 2, Getting Closer** (also known as “In Charge”)

In the first video of this CI Piano tutorial series, we learned how to break down the improvising skill for Level 1 students, coaching them toward becoming proficient at improvising with both hands while listening to the backing track. We also stressed that learning the music by rote and ear, relying less on the chart page can accelerate the learning process for students by bypassing the reading, and negating the need to rehearse all four modules of each Etude for the exam.

In this tutorial, we will take a brief look at “Getting Closer” (which is sometimes called “In Charge” on the backing tracks) from APP Level 2 Etudes. It is the first of many examples of a 12 Bar Blues pattern in the APP series. Because of the popularity of this form in western contemporary music, students have likely already played something similar in their repertoire and will have a subconscious frame of reference for it in their ear.

Using the “chart” page, section “E” from module 1, we can see that this 12 bar blues is cast in G major (F sharp key signature). As with other Etudes, learning and rehearsing hands separately, always with the backing track playing will be important - in this case, to hearing the chord changes and learning how to both move and time the changes.

The LH features authentic rootless chords, sometimes called “shell” voicings. Here, students are learning to “comp” in an authentic manner, just as a jazz keyboard player would, with the LH controlling rhythm just below the middle of the keyboard, out of the way of both the bass player (lower) and the solo line (higher).

In the first 4 bars, the tritone F/B provides the outline of the G7 chord (G-B-D-F), with the root and 5th omitted. In bar 5, each note moves down one semitone, giving the outline of C7 (C-E-G-B flat), again with the root and 5th omitted. After returning to G7 in bar 6, moving one semitone up, to F sharp / C, is the outline for D7 (D-F sharp-A-C, with root and 5th omitted). These rootless voicings provide a dissonant chordal outline, allowing more of the solo line notes

from the RH to harmonize more favourably, while teaching the LH how to move very smoothly from chord to chord, without jumping. The classical player may want to think of the functional relationship between the G7 - C7 - and D7 chords as I - IV - V, belonging to the key of G major.

As before, rehearsing the LH alone, with the backing track, helps students get used to counting in 4 beat measures while tracking the chord changes. With older or more experienced readers, I may choose to use the chart page if I feel that reading won't slow them down.

For now, and up to APP Level 5, there are no chord symbols in the Etudes books. I usually leave these out, giving the student less to think about, leaving room in their mind to listen and create. Once the skill is somewhat mastered, you could consider adding chord symbols to the chart for more understanding.

Once comfortable with the LH alone, I also rehearse the RH by itself with the backing track playing to allow the students to experiment with their solo lines. In this example, the 4 note set given at the top right is from the E blues scale. I usually quickly add D and B natural to this note set to give the student more options. In blues, it is common for solo lines to improvise using the blues scale that starts on the relative minor. In this case, we can hear how E blues fits well with G major, favouring e as the tonic note of the scale.

You can use some of the riff ideas from the modules, or I often improvise a solo line while the student learns the LH chords to stimulate and model appropriate responses for the student. I try to let them come up with their own ideas, with little coaching or persuasion, until the task becomes comfortable hands together.

As students get more advanced, we can discuss the concepts of "less is more", or simplifying the LH rhythm to have it "trade" back and forth with the RH solo line. This can be particularly helpful for students who struggle, feeling that they have to keep playing both hands all the time.

You can also encourage students to play RH an octave higher on the repeat, or as an exercise, challenge them to only use 2 or 3 keys from the note set, to create leaner sounding improv lines.

On the exam, the examiner will provide the student with the chart music (from section E) from one of the Etudes to use as a guide - in case they are "readers". Again, students are not expected to follow the notes or rhythms given on any particular module, including the one given on the exam. It is only given to the student to accommodate those that benefit from the visual cues that they may have learned. You can certainly coach students to disregard the

written music on the exam. The goal is to have students create spontaneous responses to the context provided by the backing track with enough flexibility that they do not feel tied to any scripted outcomes.

You can check out our Contemporary Idioms Piano syllabus on our website under the Learning menu / Contemporary / Piano. This is the same page where you will find other video tutorials, as well as all of the backing tracks for the Etudes books for Levels 1 - 8.