



Application of the Alternate Picking Technique on the Bass Guitar Instrument Using the Blues Scale in the Song *Amazing Grace* at POS PI GMI Silangkitang

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the application of the alternate picking technique on the bass guitar using the blues scale approach in the song Amazing Grace at POS PI GMI Silangkitang. The research employed a qualitative approach, with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The focus of this study is on how the alternate picking technique is applied within the context of church music, particularly in the arrangement of Amazing Grace that incorporates blues scale elements. The results indicate that the alternate picking technique contributes to creating more varied, progressive, and expressive melodic patterns while maintaining adherence to the chord progression and fundamental melody of the song. This technique not only enhances the musical dimension of worship but also requires a deep understanding of song structure, music theory, and technical proficiency on the bass instrument. Moreover, the application of this technique serves as both an educational medium and a form of creative expression for church musicians.

Keywords: *application, alternate picking, blues scale, bass guitar, Amazing Grace*

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of contemporary church music has witnessed significant transformations in instrumental arrangement and performance techniques, particularly in the integration of diverse musical elements that bridge traditional hymnody with modern stylistic approaches (Swee, 2015). Among these developments, the bass guitar has emerged as a fundamental component in worship music ensembles, transitioning from a purely supportive role to one that incorporates melodic and harmonic complexity (Miller, 2014). This shift reflects broader trends in sacred music that embrace musical diversity while maintaining theological and liturgical integrity. The alternate picking technique, characterized by the systematic alternation between downstrokes and upstrokes, represents a fundamental skill in contemporary bass performance that enables musicians to achieve greater speed, accuracy, and dynamic control (Liebman, 2018). When combined with the blues scale approach—a pentatonic scale augmented with

characteristic chromatic passing tones—this technique offers unique possibilities for enriching traditional hymn arrangements with soulful, expressive qualities that resonate with diverse congregational preferences. *Amazing Grace*, composed by John Newton in 1772, stands as one of the most recognizable and frequently performed hymns in Christian worship traditions worldwide (Watson, 2002). Its melodic simplicity and theological depth provide an ideal canvas for exploring innovative performance techniques while preserving the hymn's essential character and spiritual message. The application of alternate picking with blues scale elements to this iconic hymn represents an intersection of traditional sacred music and contemporary performance practice.

POS PI GMI (Pos Pelayanan Gereja Methodist Indonesia) Silangkitang serves as the contextual setting for this investigation. As a local congregation within the Indonesian Methodist Church network, it represents a community where traditional worship practices coexist with contemporary musical expressions, providing fertile ground for examining how innovative performance techniques are received and integrated into liturgical contexts. Despite the growing prevalence of contemporary instrumental techniques in church music settings, limited scholarly attention has been directed toward documenting and analyzing the specific application of alternate picking techniques on bass guitar within worship contexts. Furthermore, the integration of blues scale elements—often associated with secular musical traditions—into sacred hymn arrangements raises questions regarding stylistic appropriateness, technical implementation, and congregational reception. Specifically, this study addresses the following questions: 1) How is the alternate picking technique applied to bass guitar performance in the context of *Amazing Grace* at POS PI GMI Silangkitang? 2) In what ways does the blues scale approach enhance or transform the melodic and harmonic content of the hymn? 3) What technical and theoretical knowledge is required for effective implementation of this technique in worship music settings? 4) How does this performance practice function as both a pedagogical tool and a medium for creative expression among church musicians? This research contributes to the limited body of scholarship examining contemporary performance techniques in sacred music contexts, particularly within Indonesian Protestant church settings. The findings provide practical insights for church musicians, worship leaders, and music educators seeking to enrich congregational worship through innovative yet contextually appropriate instrumental practices. Additionally, this study documents a specific case of musical inculturation—the process by which global musical traditions are adapted to local cultural and religious contexts—offering valuable perspectives on the ongoing negotiation between tradition and innovation in contemporary worship. This investigation is delimited to the specific context of POS PI GMI Silangkitang and focuses exclusively on the application of alternate picking technique with blues scale approach in performing *Amazing Grace*. While the findings may inform broader discussions of contemporary church music practice, generalization to other congregational settings, musical traditions, or hymn arrangements should be undertaken with appropriate caution. The study does not address comprehensive historical analysis of the alternate picking technique nor exhaustive examination of blues scale theory, but rather focuses on their practical integration within the specified worship context. This study employed a qualitative research design utilizing a case study approach (Yin, 2014). The qualitative paradigm was selected for its capacity to explore complex phenomena within natural settings, emphasizing depth of understanding over breadth of

generalization (Creswell, 2013). The case study methodology enabled intensive examination of alternate picking technique application within the specific context of POS PI GMI Silangkitang, facilitating rich description and contextual analysis.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research was conducted at POS PI GMI (Pos Pelayanan Gereja Methodist Indonesia) Silangkitang, a Methodist congregation in North Sumatra, Indonesia. Participants included the church's bass guitarist, worship leader, and music team members involved in the arrangement and performance of *Amazing Grace*. Selection criteria emphasized individuals with direct involvement in the musical implementation under investigation and willingness to participate in the research process. Data collection employed three primary methods, consistent with qualitative case study methodology: Non-participant observation was conducted during worship services and rehearsal sessions where *Amazing Grace* was performed with the alternate picking and blues scale approach. Observations focused on technical execution, musical interaction among ensemble members, and congregational response. Field notes documented performance details, contextual factors, and preliminary analytical impressions. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key participants, including the bass guitarist and worship leader. Interview protocols addressed topics including: technical approach and decision-making processes, musical training and influences, theological considerations regarding musical innovation in worship, and pedagogical aspects of technique development. Interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Documentary evidence included musical scores or lead sheets, video/audio recordings of performances, and any written materials related to arrangement decisions or rehearsal processes. These documents provided objective reference points for analyzing technical implementation and musical outcomes. Data analysis followed thematic analysis procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), involving: familiarization with data through repeated reading and listening; generation of initial codes identifying features relevant to research questions; searching for themes by collating codes into potential patterns; reviewing themes to ensure internal coherence and distinctiveness; defining and naming themes to clarify their essence; and producing the analytical narrative integrating themes with research questions and literature. Musical analysis employed standard music-theoretical approaches, examining melodic contour, rhythmic patterns, harmonic relationships, and scale applications. Particular attention was directed toward identifying specific instances of alternate picking technique and blues scale usage, their relationship to the original hymn structure, and their contribution to overall musical expression. Trustworthiness was enhanced through multiple strategies: triangulation of data sources (observations, interviews, documents); member checking, wherein participants reviewed interpretations for accuracy; maintenance of an audit trail documenting analytical decisions; and reflexivity regarding researcher positionality and potential biases. These measures strengthen confidence in findings while acknowledging the interpretive nature of qualitative research. Ethical protocols included obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity where requested, securing permission for audio/video recording, and maintaining respect for the sacred context of the research setting. The

study was conducted with sensitivity to the worship community's values and theological commitments, recognizing that musical analysis cannot be divorced from its religious context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of performance documentation and interview data revealed systematic application of alternate picking technique in specific sections of the *Amazing Grace* arrangement. The bass guitarist employed this technique primarily during melodic fills between vocal phrases, in introductory and concluding instrumental sections, and during verses where textural variation was desired. The alternate picking patterns observed followed several consistent approaches. During ascending melodic passages utilizing blues scale fragments, the bassist initiated phrases with downward strokes on strong beats, alternating systematically through scalar runs. This approach generated rhythmic drive while maintaining tonal consistency. Conversely, descending passages occasionally employed reverse patterns (upward stroke initiation) to maintain the alternation principle, though this proved technically more challenging and was used selectively. The bassist demonstrated particular attention to dynamic control across the alternating strokes. Interview data indicated that achieving equal volume and tonal quality between downward and upward strokes required extensive practice. The participant noted: "Initially, my upward strokes sounded weaker and less defined. I had to consciously practice evening out the attack, especially when moving between strings." The alternate picking technique facilitated precise rhythmic articulation, particularly in syncopated patterns that complemented the hymn's melodic rhythm. Observational data revealed that the systematic alternation enhanced the bassist's ability to execute sixteenth-note patterns cleanly, creating forward momentum during instrumental transitions. This rhythmic precision contributed to ensemble cohesion, providing clear temporal reference points for other musicians.

Blues Scale Application

The blues scale application in this arrangement served multiple musical functions while maintaining the hymn's fundamental character. The specific blues scale employed was constructed on the tonic (G blues scale: G-B \flat -C-D \flat -D-F), selected to align with the hymn's key center. The bassist applied scale fragments strategically rather than utilizing complete scalar runs, thereby preserving the hymn's melodic integrity while introducing harmonic color. Blues scale passages appeared predominantly during:

1. Transitional moments between verse sections
2. Melodic embellishments during sustained vocal notes
3. Call-and-response figures between vocal melody and bass line
4. Final cadential approaches, adding emotional intensity to resolution

Analysis revealed sophisticated harmonic awareness in blues scale application. The characteristic flatted fifth (D \flat in G blues scale) appeared primarily as a chromatic passing tone resolving to either the perfect fourth or perfect fifth, creating momentary tension without destabilizing the harmonic progression. The minor third (B \flat) functioned effectively over the subdominant (C Major) chord, adding color while maintaining harmonic compatibility.

Interview data indicated intentional consideration of these harmonic relationships: "I had to be careful with the blue notes. They add expressiveness, but if I held them too long or placed them on the wrong beats, they would clash with the chords. Timing and resolution were crucial." The blues scale elements introduced expressive qualities associated with lament, longing, and emotional depth-interpretive dimensions congruent with the hymn's textual themes of grace experienced through struggle and transformation. The worship leader observed: "The blues inflections add a kind of soulfulness that connects with the emotional journey of the lyrics. It's not just technical; it communicates something about the grace that meets us in our brokenness."

Musical Outcomes and Aesthetic Impact

The combined application of alternate picking technique and blues scale approach yielded several observable musical outcomes. The arrangement demonstrated progressive melodic development across verses. Initial verses maintained closer proximity to the original hymn melody, with blues scale applications serving primarily as brief embellishments. Subsequent verses incorporated more extensive scalar passages, creating a sense of musical journey and intensification. This progressive approach was described by participants as building emotional and spiritual momentum through the worship experience. The alternate picking technique enabled rapid articulation that created textural contrast with other instrumental and vocal elements. During fuller ensemble sections, the precise, rapid bass figures added rhythmic vitality. During sparse sections, the technique facilitated melodic bass lines that filled harmonic space effectively. This textural flexibility enhanced the arrangement's dynamic range and maintained congregational engagement through musical variety. Despite the technical and harmonic innovations, analysis confirmed that the hymn's essential melodic contour, phrase structure, and emotional character remained recognizable. Participants and observers could readily identify the hymn, indicating successful balance between innovation and tradition. The worship leader emphasized: "We wanted to bring fresh energy and musicality without losing what makes *Amazing Grace* meaningful to our congregation. The goal was enhancement, not replacement."

Pedagogical Dimensions

Interview and observational data revealed significant pedagogical aspects of this technical approach. The successful implementation required integration of multiple skill domains: technical facility with alternate picking mechanics, theoretical knowledge of blues scale construction and application, harmonic understanding enabling appropriate scale usage over chord progressions, and musical sensitivity regarding stylistic appropriateness within worship contexts. The bassist's learning process involved systematic practice routines addressing each domain separately before integration. Practice strategies included: isolated alternate picking exercises with metronome at gradually increasing tempos; blues scale familiarization in multiple keys and positions on the instrument; harmonic analysis of hymn progressions to identify appropriate moments for scale application; and playing along with recordings to develop stylistic sensibility. The development of this approach occurred within a mentoring relationship between the bassist and more experienced musicians outside the immediate church context. Additionally, the church music team functioned as a learning community, with collaborative exploration of

arrangement possibilities and mutual feedback during rehearsals. This communal dimension underscored the social nature of musical learning within church contexts. Beyond the performing musician's development, participants noted educational benefits for the broader congregation. Exposure to diverse musical approaches within worship contexts contributed to musical literacy and appreciation among church members. Some participants expressed that these musical experiences prompted interest in learning instruments or understanding music theory, extending the pedagogical impact beyond the immediate performers.

Creative Expression and Theological Reflection

The application of alternate picking and blues scale approaches served as a medium for creative expression within the theological framework of worship. Participants articulated an understanding of musical creativity as an offering to God and service to the worshipping community. The bassist reflected: "Developing this skill and using it in worship feels like stewarding the gifts God has given. It's not about showing off; it's about bringing excellence and beauty to our corporate worship." This perspective frames technical proficiency and creative innovation as spiritually meaningful practices rather than merely aesthetic or performative concerns. The theological concept of stewardship—faithful use of God-given abilities—provided justification and motivation for pursuing musical excellence. Participants navigated ongoing tension between introducing musical innovations and respecting traditional worship forms valued by the congregation. The worship leader described a deliberate approach: "We introduce new elements gradually and always ground them in familiar frameworks. Using a beloved hymn like *Amazing Grace* as the foundation allows us to explore new sounds while maintaining connection to our heritage." This balance reflects broader dynamics in contemporary worship regarding cultural relevance and theological continuity. The successful integration of blues scale elements—historically associated with secular contexts—into sacred music demonstrates the possibility of cultural synthesis when approached with theological awareness and musical sensitivity. The blues scale's capacity to convey complex emotional states—simultaneously expressing pain and hope, struggle and transcendence—resonated with participants' understanding of Christian spiritual experience. The minor tonalities and characteristic blue notes enabled expression of authentic human emotion within worship, countering tendencies toward exclusively triumphalistic or superficially positive musical affect. One participant observed: "The Christian life isn't all major keys and happy sounds. We experience struggle, doubt, and pain. The blues elements help us bring our whole selves to worship, knowing that God's grace meets us in all of it."

This study's findings illuminate multiple dimensions of instrumental technique application within contemporary worship contexts. The successful integration of alternate picking technique and blues scale approach in arranging *Amazing Grace* demonstrates possibilities for musical innovation that enhances worship experience while maintaining theological and liturgical integrity. The findings support conceptualizing technical musical proficiency as a form of worship stewardship, aligning with theological understandings of gifts utilized for communal benefit (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11). This perspective counters potential dichotomies between technical excellence and spiritual authenticity, suggesting instead that skillful musicianship can facilitate rather than hinder genuine worship when undertaken with appropriate motivation and theological

awareness. Redman's (2002) concept of worship as offering finds practical expression in the disciplined development of alternate picking technique and theoretical knowledge enabling creative application. The bassist's extensive practice regimen represents investment of time and effort motivated by desire to serve the worshiping community, not merely personal achievement. The integration of blues scale elements within a traditional British hymn reflects broader patterns of cultural synthesis in global Christianity. Blues musical language, emerging from African-American experiences of suffering and hope, communicates theological themes consonant with Amazing Grace's message of redemption through trial. This musical syncretism parallels historical patterns wherein Christian faith adopts and transforms cultural forms while maintaining doctrinal continuity (Nettl, 2005). The specific application observed at POS PI GMI Silangkitang contributes to ongoing processes of worship music contextualization within Indonesian Christianity. While blues scales originate outside Indonesian musical traditions, their integration via global popular music influences represents the transnational character of contemporary Christian worship (Ingalls et al., 2013).

Pedagogical Implications

The pedagogical dimensions revealed in this study suggest several implications for church music education. First, effective instrumental technique development requires systematic practice addressing multiple skill domains: mechanical facility, theoretical understanding, harmonic awareness, and stylistic sensitivity. Church music training programs might benefit from explicit attention to each dimension rather than assuming holistic development through experience alone. Second, the role of mentorship and community learning highlighted in the findings underscores the value of apprenticeship models in church music contexts. While formal music education provides valuable foundational knowledge, much practical wisdom regarding worship-appropriate musical expression transmits through relational teaching and communal practice. Third, the educational impact extending to the broader congregation suggests potential for worship music practices to serve unintentional pedagogical functions. Exposing congregations to diverse musical approaches, executed with excellence, may cultivate musical literacy and appreciation that enriches communal worship experience and potentially inspires musical participation. The tension between innovation and tradition identified in this study reflects enduring dynamics in Christian worship. The "worship wars" of recent decades have often positioned traditional and contemporary approaches in opposition. However, this case study demonstrates possibilities for creative integration wherein innovative techniques enhance rather than replace traditional worship forms. Several factors appear to facilitate this integration. First, grounding innovation within familiar frameworks (using beloved hymns as vehicles for new approaches) maintains connection to tradition while introducing fresh elements. Second, progressive implementation-gradually increasing technical complexity across verses-allows congregational acclimatization. Third, maintaining the hymn's essential character ensures continued recognizability and accessibility for congregational participation."Centrist" approaches that honor both innovation and tradition finds practical expression in this arrangement. Neither rejecting all change in the name of tradition nor abandoning traditional forms for novelty, this approach seeks creative fidelity-imaginatively engaging tradition in ways that renew rather than replace it.

Expressive Authenticity and Emotional Range

The blues scale's capacity to convey complex emotional states enriches worship music's expressive palette. Contemporary worship music has been critiqued for emotional superficiality and limited tonal palette, often emphasizing exclusively positive affect. The integration of blues elements introduces minor tonalities and characteristic tensions that enable expression of authentic human experience—including struggle, lament, and longing—within worship contexts. This expanded emotional range aligns with biblical worship models incorporating diverse affective states, from lament psalms to exuberant praise. Theologically, it reflects understanding of God's grace as meeting humanity in brokenness, not only in triumph. The blues tradition's historical roots in African-American experiences of suffering and hope resonate with Christian themes of redemption through suffering, making this musical language particularly apt for theological expression.

Implications for Worship Music Practice

Several practical implications emerge from this study for worship leaders, church musicians, and music team members:

1. Technical development as spiritual discipline: Viewing instrumental proficiency development as worship stewardship can motivate consistent practice and excellence while maintaining appropriate spiritual grounding.
2. Theoretical knowledge as creative resource: Understanding music theory, including scale construction and harmonic relationships, enables creative yet structurally sound musical decisions in worship arranging and improvisation.
3. Progressive implementation of innovation: Introducing new musical elements gradually, grounded in familiar frameworks, facilitates congregational receptivity while minimizing disruption.
4. Theological reflection on musical choices: Intentional consideration of how musical techniques and stylistic elements communicate theological meaning ensures alignment between musical and theological messages.
5. Community-based learning: Fostering mentorship relationships and collaborative learning within music teams enhances skill development while building relational connections.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the application of alternate picking technique on bass guitar using blues scale approach in arranging *Amazing Grace* at POS PI GMI Silangkitang. Through qualitative methodology employing observation, interviews, and documentation analysis, several significant findings emerged. The alternate picking technique facilitated creation of varied, progressive, and expressive melodic patterns characterized by rhythmic precision and textural diversity. The systematic alternation of picking strokes enabled rapid articulation and dynamic control, enhancing the arrangement's musical interest while maintaining ensemble cohesion. Blues scale application introduced harmonic color and emotional depth without compromising the hymn's fundamental character. Strategic use of blues scale fragments, particularly emphasizing passing tones and chromatic approaches, enriched harmonic texture while preserving melodic recognizability. The

blues elements contributed expressive qualities congruent with the hymn's theological themes of grace, redemption, and transformation. The combined technical approach required integration of mechanical facility, theoretical knowledge, harmonic understanding, and stylistic sensitivity. Pedagogical dimensions included structured practice routines, mentorship relationships, and community learning within the church music team. Educational benefits extended beyond immediate performers to the broader congregation, cultivating musical literacy and appreciation. Participants articulated understanding of technical proficiency and creative expression as forms of worship stewardship and offering. The approach balanced innovation and tradition, grounding new elements within familiar frameworks while progressively developing musical complexity. The expanded emotional range afforded by blues scale elements enabled authentic expression of diverse affective states within worship. This research contributes to worship music scholarship by documenting specific instrumental practices within an Indonesian church context, addressing gaps in literature regarding non-Western worship music practices. The study demonstrates practical application of performance practice theory and ethnomusicological approaches, integrating technical musical analysis with contextual and theological considerations. The findings support conceptualizing technical musical proficiency as worship stewardship, challenging false dichotomies between excellence and authenticity. Additionally, the study illustrates cultural synthesis processes in global Christianity, wherein musical elements from diverse traditions integrate into contextually specific worship expressions.

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