

Playing the Blues (The Feeling)



What is the blues? There are so many answers...we'll deal with three common ones that you can use all together to make a really bluesy song: (1) a feel, (2) a format, and (3) a set of notes.

1: The Blues is a feeling...

The whole idea of the blues is about singing/playing about your problems so you can feel better about your problems. Just check out the lyrics to the song "Blues Man" by B.B. King on the right. When you play the blues, it helps to put yourself in that mindset.

There are repeating phrases; usually simple and short. It's not a time to show off—it's a time to put the depths of your soul into each note. There are long pauses between each phrase. Often times slight changes in the lyrics are the only thing separating one chorus from another.

"Blues Man"

I've traveled for miles around
It seems like everybody wanna
put me down
Because I'm a blues man
But I'm a good man,
understand

I went down to the bus station
Looked up on the wall
My money was too light, people
Couldn't go nowhere at all
I'm a blues man
But a good man, understand

The burdens that I carry are so
heavy, you see
It seems like it ain't nobody in
this great big world
That would wanna help old b.
But I will be all right, people
Just give me a break
Good things come to those who
wait
And I've waited a long time
I'm a blues man but a good
man, understand

Playing the Blues (Blues Format)

The most common blues format is called a "12-bar blues." It's 12 measures long and uses all dominant chords (a type of 7 chord) You can play it in any key, using just the 1 chord, the 4 chord, and the 5 chord (all dominant, of course).

The example below is in the key of "C", where the C7 is the 1 chord, the F7, is the 4 chord, and the G7 is the 5 chord.



2: The Blues is a format...

Chord progression 1: C7

Chord progression 2: F7, C7

Chord progression 3: G7, F7, C7

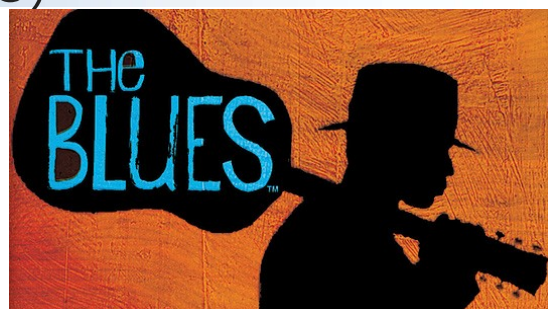
There have been hundreds of variations on the blues form, but they all boil down to that basic one above. Probably the most common variation is the one below (the added chords are underlined.)

Chord progression 4: C7, F7, C7

Chord progression 5: F7, C7

Chord progression 6: G7, F7, C7, G7

Playing the Blues (Blues Scale)



Here's a set of notes that will instantly improve your blues solos—it's called the blues scale:

The blues scale can be found using the major scale. Here are the steps:

**Take out the 2nd note and the 6th note.*

**Lower the 3 by a half step.*

**Add the notes that are a half step above the 4, and a half step below the 7.*

The result is a major scale where you play :

1, lowered 3, 4, raised 4, 5, lowered 7, and 7

OR...you can just cheat off of the chart on the right.

3: The Blues is a scale...

Major Scale							Blues Scale						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	$\flat 3$	4	$\sharp 4$	5	$\flat 7$	7
C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C	$E\flat$	F	$F\sharp$	G	$B\flat$	B
$D\flat$	$E\flat$	F	$G\flat$	$A\flat$	$B\flat$	C	$D\flat$	$F\flat$ (E)	$G\flat$	G	$A\flat$	$C\flat$ (B)	C
D	E	$F\sharp$	G	A	B	$C\sharp$	D	F	G	$G\sharp$	A	C	$C\sharp$
$E\flat$	F	G	$A\flat$	$B\flat$	C	D	$E\flat$	$G\flat$	$A\flat$	A	$B\flat$	$D\flat$	D
E	$F\sharp$	$G\sharp$	A	B	$C\sharp$	$D\sharp$	E	G	A	$A\sharp$	B	D	$D\sharp$
F	G	A	$B\flat$	C	D	E	F	$A\flat$	$B\flat$	B	C	$E\flat$	E
$G\flat$	$A\flat$	$B\flat$	$C\flat$ (B)	$D\flat$	$E\flat$	F	$G\flat$	$B\flat\flat$ (A)	$C\flat$	C	$D\flat$	$F\flat$ €	F
G	A	B	C	D	E	$F\sharp$	G	$B\flat$	C	$C\sharp$	D	F	$F\sharp$
$A\flat$	$B\flat$	C	$D\flat$	$E\flat$	F	G	$A\flat$	$C\flat$ (B)	$D\flat$	D	$E\flat$	$G\flat$	G
A	B	$C\sharp$	D	E	$F\sharp$	$G\sharp$	A	C	D	$D\sharp$	E	G	$G\sharp$
$B\flat$	C	D	$E\flat$	F	G	A	$B\flat$	$D\flat$	$E\flat$	E	F	$A\flat$	A
B	$C\sharp$	$D\sharp$	E	$F\sharp$	$G\sharp$	$A\sharp$	B	D	E	$E\sharp$ (F)	$F\sharp$	A	$A\sharp$