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## SONGS BY CATEGORY

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# INTRODUCTION TO BLUES HARMONY

One of the most important goals of this book is to help you improvise over the chord progression (or *changes*) of the blues. The first step to understanding chord progressions is harmony

## Diatonic Harmony and the Blues

The notes of a major scale define the notes and chords for a key. If we number each note in the scale and build a chord on each one, we get the *diatonic harmonies* of the key. Roman numerals are used to express the numbers for these chords. As you'll see below, the most basic 12-bar (12 measure) blues uses just the three *primary chords*, which are I (1), IV (4), and V (5), and they are all usually dominant 7th chords (1-3-5-7). In diatonic harmony, the dominant chord is found on the fifth note of the key, so A7 is the V7 of D Major, D7 is the V7 of G Major and E7 is the V7 of the key of A Major. In the blues, the chords used in the progression are usually all dominant 7th chords even though they sometimes include notes not in that key. Roman numerals are still used to number each of the notes of the scale, and to identify each chord in that progression.

Roman Numerals	
I or i.....	1
II or ii.....	2
III or iii.....	3
IV or iv.....	4
V or v.....	5
VI or vi.....	6
VII or vii.....	7

## Major Blues

Here is the basic major 12-bar blues form expressed in Roman numerals and chord names in the key of A:

I7	I7	I7	I7	IV7	IV7	I7	I7	V7	IV7	I7	V7
A7	A7	A7	A7	D7	D7	A7	A7	E7	D7	A7	E7

Here it is in music notation and TAB:

	I A7			IV D7		I A7		V E7	IV D7	I A7	V E7
T	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
A	6	6	6	6	7	7	7	7	7	6	6
B	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
B	7	7	7	7	5	5	5	7	5	7	7
B	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	7	5	7	7

## Playing Scales Over Blues Changes—Targeting

The I chord for the blues in the key of A is A7. Because the 7th of that chord is not found in the A major scale the A major scale won't work when you solo. Instead, you will need to use the A Mixolydian mode which has the same notes as the A major scale except the 7th, which is lowered a half step. The formula for a Mixolydian mode is 1-2-3-4-5-6- $\flat$ 7, which always works with an A7 chord.

	D Major Scale	A Mixolydian mode	A Major Scale									
T		4	6	7	5	7	8	5	7	9	10	
A		4	6	7	5	7	8	5	7	9	10	
B	5	7	4	5	7	4	6	7	5	7	4	5
B	5	7	4	5	7	4	6	7	5	7	4	5

## Overview

One of the most important blues styles to master is the *slow blues*. Every major performer of blues has their own slow blues style, from B. B. King to Jimi Hendrix, and from Freddie King to Robben Ford. Developing this sound takes time and maturity. As your playing develops, you'll learn when to use space, and when to really wail; when to play simply and meaningfully by limiting yourself, and when to cry or unleash.

The feel of this tune brings up a new concept of time. Each beat in the rhythmic current is subdivided into three parts with four beats in each measure, which is notated in  $\frac{12}{8}$  time. If you aren't used to reading in this time signature, it is basically felt as  $\frac{4}{4}$  but with a *swing feel* (it has a triplet feel). When counting  $\frac{12}{8}$ , don't feel all 12 eighth notes equally. Rather, emphasize the eighth notes, 1, 4, 7, and 10, which represent the four dotted-quarter-note pulses.

- General form: I-I-I-I-IV-IV-I-I-V-IV-I-V
- Key: B $\flat$  Major
- $\text{♩} = 60$  BPM

### Listening Suggestions

#### B. B. King: "Sweet Sixteen"

This is from the classic album *Live in Cook County Jail*.

#### Jimi Hendrix: "Red House"

Jimi plays a slow blues like no other. Check out the *Stages* albums, discs 2 and 3, for his phenomenal control of dynamics and contrast between subtle and screaming.

#### Elmore James: "It Hurts Me Too"

Elmore James was a fantastic, singer, guitarist (especially with slide), and songwriter.

## Soloing

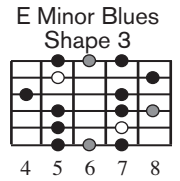
Try all the licks with different *dynamics* (varying the volume from loud to soft): soft and quiet, medium volumes, and hard and loud. Use three different harmonic concepts on this song:

1. *Target Every Chord*: Play all Mixolydian, major blues, or dominant pentatonic off the root of each chord.
2. *Major vs. Minor*: For the B $\flat$ 7 chord, play the B $\flat$  Major Blues scale, but for E $\flat$ 7 and F7, play the B $\flat$  Minor Blues scale.
3. *All Minor*: Play the B $\flat$  Minor Blues scale for the B $\flat$ 7 and E $\flat$ 7 chords, and play F Minor Blues for F7.

	Shape 1	Shape 2	Shape 3	Shape 4	Shape 5
B $\flat$ Minor Blues					
E $\flat$ Dominant Pentatonic					
F Dominant Pentatonic					
B $\flat$ Major Blues					

### Lick for Shape 3

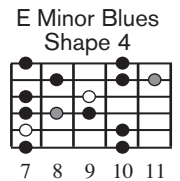
This lick uses the Dorian sound against a dominant chord. By adding 2 (F#) and 6 (C#) to the minor blues scale (Shape 3, in this case), you gain extra emotion and a mood that works really well within the blues. The half-step bend at the beginning and the vibrato on every held note will help bring this lick to life.



3 3 1 3 2 1 3 1 3 1 2 1 4 1 4 2 3 1 4 4 3 1 4 2 2 4 1

### Lick for Shape 4

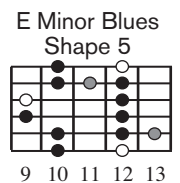
Here is a classic blues lead technique built around Shape 4. Bend the 2nd string up and then fret a note on the 1st string with your 4th finger. As the lick evolves, the top note on the 1st string changes. You can choose to play these notes separately, or hold them over each other to create double stops. Once you get this lick down, try moving it around as well to adapt it to some of the other shapes.



3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 1 2

### Lick for Shape 5

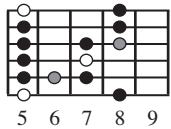
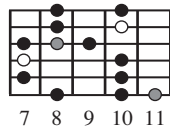
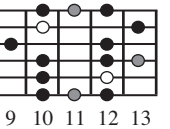
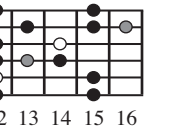
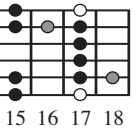
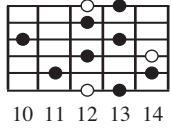
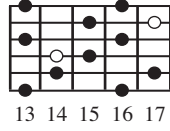
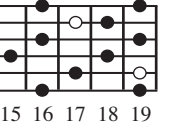
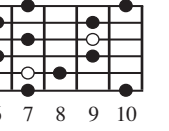
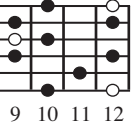
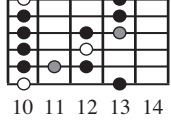
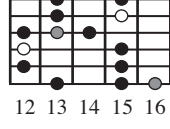
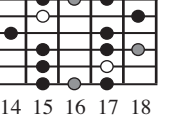
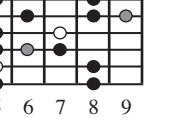
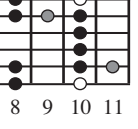
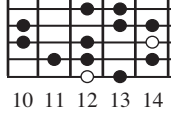
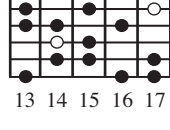
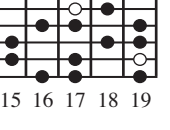
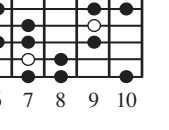
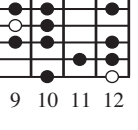
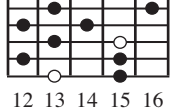
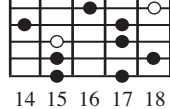
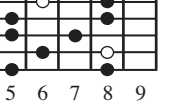
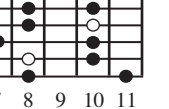
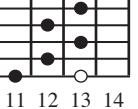
Here's a classic fast lick that you can milk by repeating it for a good portion of a 12-bar chorus. It works best here in Shape 5, but see where else on the fretboard you can play this lick—try it in different positions and using different shapes.



2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 1 3 1 3 3 4 1

## Soloing

This is the first time we've encountered a minor blues tune, which is an important style within the blues repertoire. Here, the *i* and *iv* chords are minor, and the *V* and *b*VI are dominant. While it is possible to solo over the form using the A Minor Blues scale since the tune is in A Minor, it is much better to focus on making the changes. For the *i* chord (Amin7), play an A Minor Blues scale. For the *iv* chord (Dmin7), play a D Minor Blues scale. Any of the licks you play in the home key (A Minor) can be transposed up five or down seven frets to create a D Minor Blues lick. For the *V* chord, play E Phrygian Dominant (which is A Harmonic Minor starting on E), or the E Minor Blues scale. Another great option for the *V* chord is the E Dominant *b*9 Pentatonic scale, which gives you some nice color tones but still has leaps for phrasing in a bluesy style. For the *b*VI chord (F7), play either an F Major Blues scale or an F Dominant Pentatonic. Since these tonalities are a bit new to you, this form is 16-bars long and spends a bit more time on the *V* chord, which will give you time to work out your *V* chord ideas.

	Shape 1	Shape 2	Shape 3	Shape 4	Shape 5
A Minor Blues					
E Dominant <i>b</i> 9 Pentatonic					
D Minor Blues					
E Phrygian Dominant					
F Dominant Pentatonic					

15 CLARKCO PARK BLUES

Track 15 (Full Mix)  
Track 15A (Minus Guitar Lead)

Quitman, Mississippi  
(Southern Blues in G Minor)

♩ = 100  
Gmin7

SL H P P SL SL P

6-8 5 6 5 3 5 3 5 5 6 5 3 5

3-3 3 4 3 1 3 3 1 3 3-3-3 1 3

Cmin7

SL SL P SL H P H P H P H P SL

3 5 6 5 3 6-8 8 11 8 11 8 11 8 11 8 (8)

5 3 5 5 5 6 5 3 5 5 3-3 1 3 1 3 1 3 1 3 1

Gmin7

D7

SL SL P SL SL P H P

3 5 6 5 3 3 5 6 5 3 5 3 6 5 (5) 3

5 5 5 6 5 3 5 5 5 3 3 1 3 3-3-3 1 3 3 3 1 4 3 1

Cmin7

Gmin7

D7

H P

3 6 5 (5) 3 3 5 3 5 5 3 5 5 (5)

3 1 4 3 1 3 1 3 1 1 3 3 1 3 3 3

Roadmap

Nine total choruses: intro groove, head, horn line1, guitar solo, keyboard solo (two chorus), guitar solo (two choruses), head.