



Blues Guitar Styles Masterclass

By Andrew Wasson



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Forward: The Blues and Improvisation Ability

Blues can be thought of as one of the foundational ways the practicing improviser can develop skills for improvisation. The style of the blues itself will offer several improvisational ideas as a springboard into many other directions within both blues and other musical styles. Rock, jazz, folk, country and many other forms of music all contain at the very least, 'some,' blues within them.

The reason why blues progressions and the classic, "blues scale," can be used to enhance improvisational skill comes down to the way blues melodies sing with such a lyrical characteristic.

If you can sing a bluesy sounding phrase, then learn to play it and if you do this sort of thing enough, you will in time develop the ability to improvise. And, this ability will not be limited to just blues alone.

How does this all work?

Think of it this way, if you can learn how to whistle in your life you can probably whistle any melody that you can possibly dream up in your musical imagination. Improvising is much like whistling those melodies except you actually play them on your instrument. Your fingers and the guitar are the new tools to get the melody out. Think back to when you learned to whistle... it very likely took awhile to achieve the skill, however in time, it became fluid to conduct with any melody you could imagine.

The Blues and Harmonic Content...

The harmonic content of the standard blues progression uses three main chords. They are the I - IV - V of a major scale harmony. The quality will be either Major or Dominant. The association we have to the typical blues progression is so familiar to us all that it works very quickly and effectively at developing improvisational skills for a music student.

Along with recording and jamming on the rhythm parts of many blues progressions (in all of the popular keys) you **must** listen to the music. B.B. King, John Lee Hooker, Freddie King, and Eric Clapton should not be unfamiliar names. Learn songs by these artists! Sing the melodies as you play them and learn the chord types and basic music theory as well. Practice the songs on your guitar until they become well developed. And most of all, work on your soloing skills over their changes.

Remember, blues is very much the improvisors music. And, developing a solid skill with improvising over the blues progression format will pay off huge when you move into other unrelated styles.



Section One:

Learning Open Chords Popular to Blues Guitar

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Section One: Learning Open Chords Popular to Blues Guitar

Playing blues guitar requires that the guitarist become familiar with several chord types. These chords will range from major and minor triads, to dominant seventh, as well as, minor and diminished seventh's.

In order to develop the fingering and ability to switch one to another easily, many hours of work must go into learning fingerboard patterns for these chords. Along with the geometrical shapes of various chords necessary to this style, is the working knowledge of notes found upon the lower guitar strings. The notes along the 6th, 5th and 4th guitar strings, (and to a lesser extent the 3rd), are important when locating the group of chords known as; "Moveable Chord Fingerings."

We will begin with a group of chord types often called, "Open Chords." In this category we will emphasize the most popular chord found in the Blues, "The Dominant 7th Chord."

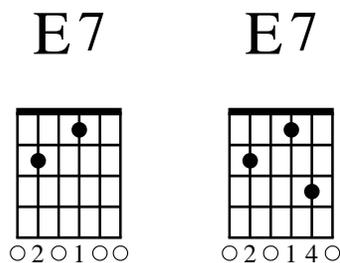
Open Position Dominant 7th Chord Shapes:

In this section we will study a group of the most popular open position Dominant 7th Chords.

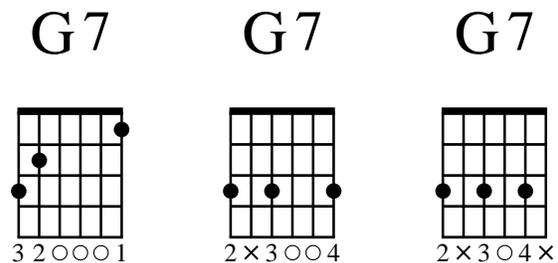
Sixth String Root:

The following chords are popular open chord shapes found off of the 6th string root.

The "E Dominant 7th"



The "G Dominant 7th"



PRACTICE TIPS:

The chord types given above will require time to develop if they are new to you. Be patient. Use a metronome and apply the fingering both physically on the guitar, as well as, in your mind using visualization technique. Be extremely clear on the fingerings, and on the exact strings that your fingers must go to in order to create the correct chord sound.