

BLUES BASICS

A guitar lesson by Tony Skinner

BLUES MUSIC IS THE MAIN INFLUENCE BEHIND THE GUITAR STYLES OF MANY OF TODAY'S TOP ROCK PLAYERS. THIS LESSON INTRODUCES SOME BASIC BLUES TECHNIQUES TO GET YOU STARTED.

Because so much rock music is derived either directly or indirectly from the blues tradition, getting a good grounding in blues guitar styles is a great foundation for any budding rock player. Since the invention of the electric guitar, many bands, from the Rolling Stones to the Sex Pistols, have built their songs upon a simple blues rhythm (see Exercise 1 and audio tracks). On the recording, the first version is performed slowly in an authentic blues fashion, the second performance is much faster with a straighter rhythm and makes for an instant Status Quo sound. The slightly muted sound is achieved by resting the side of the strumming hand lightly against the strings, near to the bridge of the guitar. Exercise 2 (and audio track) is a complete 12 bar rhythm groove that you can play along with. As only partial chords are used, be very careful not to strum all six strings; use downstrums to strike only the bass strings indicated.

BLUES LEAD

The easy thing about starting to learn lead in a blues style is that it tends to come in small manageable chunks (commonly known as 'licks') that are often repeated. This helps you develop your lead in well-shaped phrases, rather than just playing a long series of notes without any rhythmic structure. As Eddie Van Halen puts it: "Blues is a real tasty, feel type of thing; so I copped that from the beginning. I still use that blues feeling - but just rowdier!"

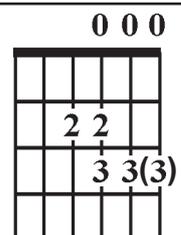
The best scale to begin with is the open position E blues scale (see fretboard below). The demo track contains a solo taken entirely from this scale (Exercise 3 and audio track). Throughout the solo you'll hear the repeated use of 'blues curls' – in which many of the notes are bent ever so slightly sharp by gently pushing the string upwards. Not only does this technique give a great blues sound, but it's also great preparation for the full blown string bends and vibrato that occur in more advanced lead playing.

Once you've got the notated solo under your belt, use the scale to create your own solo. Try and invent some short well-defined licks and try them out to see how they sound against the rhythm groove you have already learnt (Exercise 2). If necessary, adjust them slightly so that they fit with the timing of the rhythm accompaniment. Keep creating more and more licks until you sense that you've really got a feel for the style. After all, as Clapton says: "Blues – it's the root of it all!"

E Blues Scale

[E G A B \flat B D E]

Use this scale to learn the recorded solo and to make up your own. The actual one octave scale ranges from E on the fourth string to E on the first string. The high G note is the second note of the next octave and is a useful extension of the scale.



Exercise 3: Demonstration Track – Lead Part



♩ = 45 $\text{♩} = \text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩}$

E

T 3 3 0 3 0 0 3 3 0 3 0 0 3 3 0 3 0 0

A

B 3 2 0 2 2 2 2 0

A

T 2 2 0 2 2 0 2 2 0 2 2 (3) 0 2 0 3 0 0 3 0

A

B 2 2 0 2 2 0 2 2 0 2 2 0 2 0 3 0

G B7 E B7

T 3 0 2 0 3 3 0 0 0 3 3 0 3 2 0 0

A

B 2 2 0 2 2 0 2 0 2 0 2 0 2 0 2

This solo will be much easier to play if you have already learnt the blues scale, because all the notes used in the solo come straight from the scale (see the fretbox on page 1 of this lesson).