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BLUES GUITAR

101

Classic Licks

Blues Guitar 101 – Classic Licks

Essential Blues Guitar Licks and Phrases

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Glossary of Terms

Music has a language all its own. To help you understand the material in this book, here are common musical terms and definitions.

Arpeggio: The notes of a chord played as single notes, directly outlining a chord in your solos.

Chromatic: Notes or chords that are outside the given key or diatonic progression. Used to create tension and interest in blues songs.

Diatonic: Notes or chords that are found within the given key or diatonic chord progression. Used to resolve chromatic tensions sounds.

Double Stop: Two notes played at once on the guitar.

Form: Term used to describe the length of a song. For example, blues is a 12-bar form. Popular music often uses the AABA form, etc.

Lick: Short musical idea. Also called a riff, line, or phrase.

Riff: Term used to describe a short musical idea on guitar, can be melodic or harmonic. Also described as a lick, groove, line, or phrase.

Scale: The notes of a key played together as a group, such as C major scale, D minor scale, A minor blues scale, etc.

Tonic: Describes the root note of the key you're in, or the resolution chord of the key you're in. If you're in the key of C, the tonic note is C, and the tonic chord is C major.

Turnaround: The section of a song that uses single notes or chords to turn the song back around to the tonic chord, or to the top of the form.

How to Use This eBook

Welcome to Blues Guitar 101 – Classic Licks. It’s great to have you here!

In this eBook, you learn everything you need to understand, play, and build classic blues licks.

You start off by learning how to practice each lick in this book, before diving into the licks themselves, and finally learning full blues solos.

The goal of this eBook is to open your ears, mind, and hands to the sounds that make up the classic blues vocabulary.

Each of these licks has been chosen because it uses essential concepts, scales, arpeggios, and other blues devices.

Start by learning the licks as written, then experiment with them in your solos, and finally create your own licks using the same concepts.

By the time you finish this eBook, you’ll be able play dozens of classic blues guitar licks in many different keys.

And, more importantly, you’ll be able to create your own classic sounding blues licks in the practice room and on the bandstand.

If you’re new to blues guitar soloing, start at the beginning of this eBook and work down from there.

If you’re more experienced, jump around to find the licks you want to study and work the eBook that way.

There’s no right or wrong way to use this eBook, as long as you apply the licks and concepts to your own blues guitar solos.

So, grab your guitar, crank up your amp, and have fun learning essential blues guitar licks!

How to Practice Blues Licks

Before you learn any of the licks in this eBook, take a minute to learn how to practice these licks in your studies.

Learning a lick is one thing, but being able to use that lick in your solos, and making it your own, takes a few more steps.

Check out these three steps to learning any blues guitar lick to get the most out of your time in the practice room.

Licks in Multiple Keys

The first step to learning any blues lick is to get it under your fingers in the key you find it in.

As an example, the lick in bar 1 below is in the key of A, over an A7 chord, so you start with that key first.

When ready, take that lick and play it in other keys around the fretboard to expand the line in your playing.

To do this, look for clues as to how the lick is built and where it sits within the original key.

In this example, the second note of the lick is the root, A over A7 in bar 1, and is built from the Am blues scale.

This means that if you slide up to the Dm blues scale, and the second note of the lick is D, you're now playing the lick in D, over D7.

Here are a few keys to use as an example when learning how to move licks around to different keys in your studies.

The image shows two musical examples of guitar licks. Each example consists of a treble clef staff with a C-clef and a guitar tablature staff below it. The first example is for A7 and D7 chords. The treble staff shows a sequence of notes: A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3. The tablature shows fret numbers: 8, 5, 8, 5, 8. The second example is for E7 and F#7 chords. The treble staff shows a sequence of notes: E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3, F3, E3. The tablature shows fret numbers: 3, 0, 3, 0, 3. Both examples use slurs to indicate phrasing and a double bar line to separate the two parts.

Licks in Multiple Positions

The next step is to take any lick you learn and play it in different positions on the guitar.

This means starting the lick on different strings, as you see in the example below.

Though this is tough to do, it allows you to access any lick you learn in any area of the fretboard in your solos.

This approach increases your vocabulary and opens up your fretboard at the same time.

The image displays two musical examples of guitar licks over A7 chords. Each example consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The first example shows a lick with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, with fret numbers 8, 5, 8, 5, 8, 5, 8. The second example shows a lick with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, with fret numbers 5, 2, 5, 2, 5, 2, 5. Both examples are in C major and feature an A7 chord.

One Lick Over Entire Blues Progression

The last way to practice licks is to play them over every chord in a blues progression, as you can see in this example.

Start by playing the licks exactly as you learned them over each chord in one position.

Then, play the licks in different positions over the chords, and finally be able to alter the licks as you make them your own in your solos.

This last exercise is tough to do.

But, if you worked on the previous exercises in this section, you're ready to tackle the full blues progression with any lick you learn.

A7

8 5 8 5 8 5 8 5 8 5 8 5 8 5 8 5 8

T
A
B

D7 **A7**

13 10 13 10 13 10 13 10 8 5 8 5 8 5 8 5 8

T
A
B

E7 **A7**

3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 8 5 8 5 8 5 8 5 8

T
A
B

Major Blues Scale Licks

You now move on to learning licks from the major blues scale.

As a reminder, these licks are only played over one chord at a time, compared to every chord in a blues with the minor blues scale.

This means that if you have a G major blues scale lick, you use that over a G7 chord in a blues solo.

Then, if you want to play that lick over C7, you have to move it to a C major blues scale position.

This is tough to do when first learning how to apply major blues scales to your solos.

But, not to worry, with a little focused practice you can add these licks, and the major blues scale in general, to your solos with confidence.

Apart from learning these licks, you also explore various ways to add repetition and development to your solos.

Both of these concepts help you develop a mature sense of melody and phrasing with this, or any, scale in your solos.

The first line is a major blues scale phrase that you hear in jazz, blues, country, swing, and other musical genres.

Because it's such a popular lick across genres, it's first in this chapter, and is essential to learn and add to your solos.

If you learn only one major blues scale lick, this is it.

Here, you play the same idea in two different octaves, giving you the option to play either or both in your solos.

Repeating ideas in different octaves adds a sense of melodic development in your playing.

It also allows you to extend your solos without playing anything new, and not sounding repetitive in the process.

After you learn this line, work on this concept further as you repeat lines in different octaves in your solos.

Audio Example 8

The image shows a musical score for a guitar solo in G7. The top staff is in treble clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature is one flat (Bb), and the time signature is common time (C). The solo consists of two measures. In the first measure, the treble clef has a triplet of notes (G4, Ab4, A4) with a bend over the second note, followed by a triplet of notes (Bb4, B4, C5). The bass clef has notes 10, 8, 9, 7, 9. In the second measure, the treble clef has a triplet of notes (G5, Ab5, A5) with a bend over the second note, followed by a triplet of notes (Bb5, B5, C6). The bass clef has notes 17, 15, 17, 15, 17. A '1/2' bend is indicated over the first note of the triplet in both measures.

Here, you bend up from the 2nd note to the b3, the blues note in the major blues scale, as well as repeat the line in both bars.

Often you feel like everything you play has to be new and different than what you played before.

But, repeating ideas in your solos helps establish a connection with the listener, as well as develops a sense of melodic phrasing in your solos.

Work this line as written, then take this concept to your own solos as you repeat ideas to solidify them in your playing.

Audio Example 9

The image shows a musical example for a G7 chord. The top staff is in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The melody consists of two bars. The first bar starts with a G7 chord symbol and contains notes G4, A4, Bb4, G4, F4, E4, D4. The second bar contains notes G4, A4, Bb4, G4, F4, E4, D4. The bottom staff is guitar tablature with strings T, A, and B labeled. The first bar has fret numbers 10, 10, 8, 11, 10, 9, 8. The second bar has fret numbers 10, 10, 8, 11, 10, 9, 8. There are wavy lines above the 8th fret in both bars. An arrow labeled '1/2' points to the first '10' in the first bar, and an arrow labeled 'full' points to the second '10' in the second bar.

In this major blues lick you play the same start to both bars, but end differently in bar 1 compared to bar 2.

This is a common blues soloing technique, and one you can use to extend your ideas, as you don't need two full ideas for two bars.

If you dig this concept, explore it further in your own playing over various blues chord progressions.

Audio Example 10

The image shows a musical example for a G7 chord. The top staff is in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The melody consists of two bars. The first bar contains notes G4, A4, Bb4, G4, F4, E4, D4. The second bar contains notes G4, A4, Bb4, G4, F4, E4, D4. The bottom staff is guitar tablature with strings T, A, and B labeled. The first bar has fret numbers 4, 3, 5, 3, 5, 3, 5, 3, 4, 2. The second bar has fret numbers 4, 3, 5, 3, 5, 3, 5, 3, 8. There is an arrow labeled '1 1/2' pointing to the '8' in the second bar.

Albert King Licks

Though at one time he claimed to be B.B. King's half brother, and at another time was called B.B.'s dad, Albert King has no relation to B.B.

What does bind the two King's together is their ability to create memorable blues guitar solos and their command of the guitar.

Playing a right-handed flying V guitar flipped upside down, as he was left-handed, King brought a style all his own to the blues genre.

In this chapter you learn 5 classic King inspired licks that you can practice and add to your own blues guitar solos.

The first line is based on the Dm blues scale and contains a bend and pull-off, both essential to the success of this line.

Lastly, there's a shake at the top of the bend that brings a vocal quality to that note.

Make sure to bend in tune and then give that note a good shake to create the vocal feeling to start the line.

Audio Example 16

D7

8 8 9 8 6 7 6 7 7

The first two notes of this King inspired line are called a “rake,” where you hit the 3rd and 2nd strings but don’t sound those notes.

Instead, you mute the strings with your fretting hand to give those two notes a percussive rather than melodic sound to start the line.

Rakes are a great way to create new textures and sounds in your solos, and one that many great blues guitarists like King used in their playing.

Audio Example 17

The image shows a musical score for a guitar lick. At the top left, the chord **D7** is written. The score consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a guitar staff. The treble staff shows a sequence of notes: a quarter rest, a quarter note with an 'x' (muted), another quarter note with an 'x', a quarter note with a slur over it, a quarter note with a slur over it, and a quarter note with a slur over it. The guitar staff shows fret numbers: 'x' on the 2nd string, 'x' on the 3rd string, '15' on the 1st string, '13' on the 1st string, and '15' on the 1st string. A wavy line indicates a vibrato effect on the final note. An arrow labeled 'full' points to the '15' fret on the 1st string.

In this lick, you mix both the Dm blues scale as well as the major 3rd interval, F# at the start of the last bar.

This note brings an arpeggio sound to this lick, directly outlining the chord as well as being bluesy at the same time.

Albert King knew the power of a well placed arpeggio note, such as you see here, and so it’s worth taking this concept further in your playing.

Audio Example 18

The image shows a musical score for a guitar lick. The top staff is a treble clef in C major, with a D7 chord symbol above the first measure. The lick consists of a quarter note D4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note E4, and a quarter note D4. There are three triplets: the first triplet is on the notes G4, A4, B4; the second triplet is on the notes B4, A4, G4; and the third triplet is on the notes F4, E4, D4. The fretboard diagram below shows the fret positions for each note: D (8), E (8), F (10), G (10), A (13), B (12), C (10), B (12), A (12), G (12), F (12), E (12), and D (12). A 'full' bend is indicated on the 8th fret D note. Wavy lines above the fretboard indicate bends on the 13th fret A note, the 12th fret B note, and the 12th fret C note.

This lick features 3 large bends, full step and 1.5 step bends, which create a very cool sound, but make the line tough to play.

Go slow, work those bends separately, and when can nail those bends on their own, bring the lick together as a whole.

Big bends, such as King often used, add an emotional quality to your playing, but only if they're in tune.

If you nail a bend, it's the best feeling in the world.

But, if you miss a bend, it can derail your whole solo.

Work these, and other bends, until you can bend them in tune and your playing will hit the next level before you know it.

Audio Example 19

D7

13 13 10 13 10 13 10

1 1/2 full full

In this King lick you mix different rhythms and picking techniques as you outline a D7 chord with the D minor blues scale.

Go slow with this line, make sure the rhythm is tight, and then make sure the bends are solid as well.

Those two items are both the key to this line and the parts that, if not played accurately, cause the lick to fall flat.

Audio Example 20

D7

10 10 8 10 9 8 7 10 8

1 1/2 full