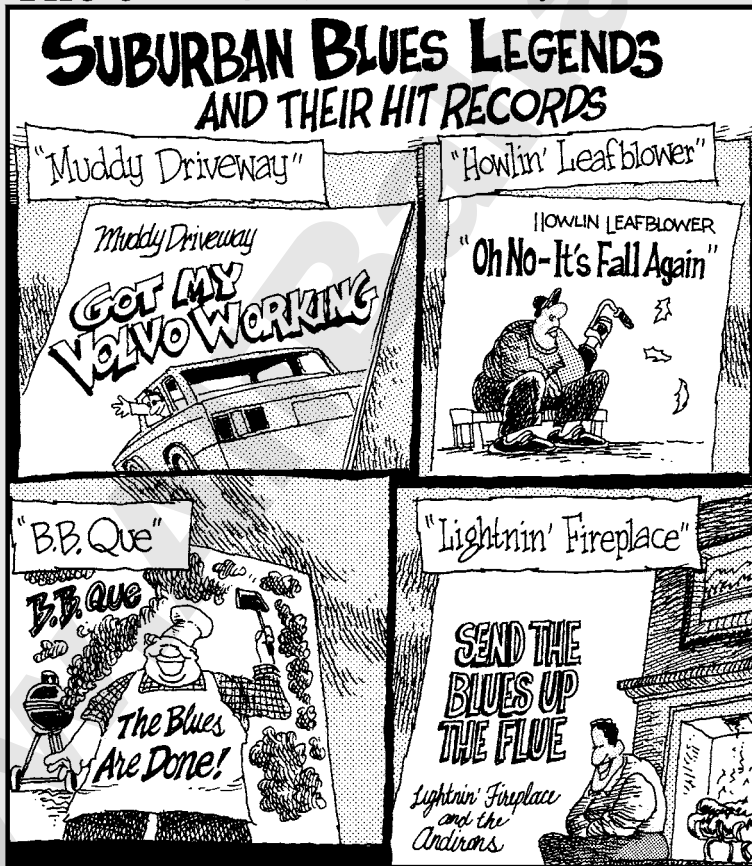


Book IV

Blues Guitar

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



In this book . . .

From its humble beginnings on Southern front porches to the dazzling nightlife of the Chicago blues scene, the blues genre is 100 percent American. The blues went on to influence everything from rock to country. From the early genius of Robert Johnson to B.B. King and the legend of Lucille, we take you on a wide-ranging tour of what the blues is, why it's so great, and how to play it on the guitar.

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Chapter 1

Blues Meets Guitar: A Match Made in Heaven

In This Chapter

- ▶ What defines blues guitar music
 - ▶ How acoustic and electric guitars each make the blues in their own way
 - ▶ The essential gear you need to play the blues
-

The guitar and blues go together like apple and pie. The guitar allows you to sing along with yourself (try that with a flute), and singing is the way the blues started. And a guitar is much easier to bring out on the front porch than a piano. It's also cheaper to own (or make yourself) than many other instruments, and that helped bring blues music to many poor folks — the people who really had the blues.

Because the blues was concentrated in the rural South, in the time before musical instruments adopted electricity, the earliest blues guitar music was played on acoustics. The “Delta blues” style was the first recognized style of the blues and consisted of strummed and plucked acoustic guitars with chords formed as in other forms of folk music.

As the blues developed, guitar makers adopted features that helped bring out the qualities of the blues to even better effect. An electric guitar is played with two hands and leaves your mouth free to sing (as an acoustic does), but electrics, with their skinnier strings, are easier to bend — stretching the string while it's ringing produces a gradual, continuous rise in pitch — and electronic amplification helps project the guitar's sound out into the audience of (often raucous and noisy) blues-loving listeners. In this chapter, you discover in detail why the blues and the guitar make great music together.

Beyond the Delta: Defining the Blues Guitar Sound

Blues guitar can take many forms and has grown dramatically since its humble beginnings in the southern United States. Blues players were traditionally self-taught, and many were illiterate. One of the easiest ways to create different chords was to tune the guitar to an open chord, such as G major or E major, and then use a *slide* — such as a pocket knife or bottle neck — to change chords. In both slide and fretted guitar styles, guitarists would emphasize the driving rhythm of the blues by thumping out steady bass notes on the low strings with their thumb while fingerpicking upper strings for chords, melodic riffs, and fills.

Playing simple chords to back up a blues singer is still a form of blues guitar — as is playing chords with a slide. You can't help but sound bluesy when you move a slide from one position to another to play the different chords in a song, especially if you do it expressively. But beyond this, you can ascribe certain musical hallmarks to the blues that don't make you play any more soulfully but provide you with a deeper understanding when you hear the blues.

The following sections break down the elements of the blues into four musical concepts. Keep in mind that these concepts are the main ones and there are certainly more, but thinking of and listening to the blues while considering these criteria helps in your understanding of this sometimes elusive music form. You may not be able to define the blues, but you know it when you hear it. Or as Sonny Terry says:

Sometimes I want to holler,
Sometimes I want to shout,
Sometimes I want to cry,
But I wonder what about.
I think I got the blues.

The method to the music: Chord progressions

What defines a blues song is the way chords are put together, or the *chord progression*. Although there's such a thing as a jazz chord, there's not really a blues chord (there's no such thing as a classical chord, either). But if you

put certain chords together in a certain way, you can definitely have a blues chord progression. The most common blues progression is the 12-bar blues, which is covered, along with the others, in Chapter 3 in Book IV.

Chords used in blues include major and minor triads (simple, three-note chords), dominant 7 chords — triads with the flatted (lowered by a half step) 7th added — and sometimes even jazz chords (with complex-sounding names like $G13\flat 9/\flat 5$).

The guitarist's language of melody



The blues definitely has a harmonic and melodic language. It even has a scale named after it: the six-note blues scale. If music is described as “bluesy,” it usually means that the melody borrows or enlists notes from the blues scale (nicknamed “blue notes”) rather than the standard major and minor scales that make up other, non-blues styles. Blue notes are the minor 3rd, minor 7th, and flatted 5th (in shorthand, flat 3 or $\flat 3$, $\flat 5$, and $\flat 7$). Figure 1-1 shows the C major scale (the familiar *do, re, mi*, and so forth) with the blue notes shown beneath their unaltered counterparts.

Figure 1-1:
The C major
scale with
blues notes.

C major:	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	(C)
Blue notes:			$E\flat$		$G\flat$		$B\flat$	



When discussing scales, you don't include the octave note, in this case, the second, higher C. That's why it's in parentheses. So a major scale is really a seven-note scale, though in practice musicians usually include the octave eighth note.

When playing the blues, guitarists incorporate aspects of both the major scale and the blue notes to come up with two new scales of their own: the six-note blues scale and the five-note minor pentatonic scale (covered in Chapter 3 in Book III). Figure 1-2 shows both scales in the key of C in letter names and in music notation.

If all this talk of scales, intervals, and flat this and that are making your eyes roll, don't worry. You don't need to know any of this to play the blues or to even hear it. It's a peek under the hood, is all.

C blues scale

**Figure 1-2:**

The six-note blues scale and the five-note minor pentatonic scale.

C minor pentatonic scale



The expression that invokes your senses

One of the best things about the blues — and a huge relief to beginning guitarists — is that the blues isn't all that hard to play, technically speaking. Playing lead or rhythm in most blues songs requires only intermediate technique. What is harder to do — in fact, you never stop figuring out how to do it better — is to play expressively. *Expression* in the blues is what turns craft into art. Check out these ways to make your music more bluesy:

- ✓ **Use bent notes:** Bent notes are notes where the pitch is raised slowly upward in a continuous fashion, and this element is closely identified with the blues.
- ✓ **Make your music shake:** Vibrato is a technique that makes the notes of the music quiver by using left-hand finger wiggling, which gives blues a signature sound. B.B. King is well-known for his expressive and soulful vibrato. Because much of the blues is set to medium tempos, players hold notes for long periods of time. Vibrato is a great way to bring notes to life, so they don't just sit there.
- ✓ **Give it some slide:** If you don't hit notes straight on but rather slide into notes from above and below, you give music a bluesy feel and breathe some life into your notes. Guitarists often draw their inspiration from vocalists and horn players (saxophone, trumpet, trombone, and so on), who exercise the slide technique on a regular basis.
- ✓ **Slur your notes:** Connecting notes through slurs — where you don't restrike the second note with the right hand — is a good way to loosen up your playing in the typical way a blues player does.
- ✓ **Allow the rhythm to flow:** Blues also allows a certain rhythmic liberty to be taken with melodies — especially letting the melody notes deliberately fall after, or behind, the beat. It's been described as lazy, devil may care, or cavalier. Whatever you call it, it sure makes the notes sound more bluesy.

The groove that sets the pace

Groove is often used informally to mean “on the mark” or “in sync with,” but here the term refers to the meter, rhythmic feel, and tempo, and the instruments’ role in providing the accompaniment, or backing figures. Several different grooves exist within the blues:

- ✓ A *shuffle* is a type of groove that uses triplet eighth notes with the emphasis on sounding just the first and third notes played at a medium tempo. “Sweet Home Chicago” is an example of a song in a shuffle groove.
- ✓ A slow 12/8 *blues* (the “12/8” refers to the time signature) is another type of groove that’s also based on three-note groups, but the tempo is slower and all three notes of the beat are pronounced. “Stormy Monday” is a song in a slow 12/8 feel.
- ✓ A straight-four *groove* is where the eighth notes are evenly spaced apart, rather than in the long-short scheme of a shuffle. “Johnny B. Goode” is in a straight-four.

Given the infinite forms of expression the blues takes, it’s nice to know that at least from a technical standpoint, you need to master only a few grooves to play most of the blues music out there.

Dissecting Acoustic and Electric Blues Guitars

Anatomically speaking, guitars come in two sexes: acoustic and electric. Because solid-body electric guitars don’t make sound acoustically but through electronics, like females they have more chromosomal material — er, components — than do acoustics. Some of the functions of these gizmos aren’t even obvious until you plug in and start messing around with them.

About the only thing that can go wrong with an acoustic is that a string breaks. On an electric, more moving and electronic parts are subject to failure, so you have a little more to keep track of on an electric. And all guitars, being made of wood and moving parts, can go out of whack and need periodic adjustment to keep them humming and happy. (Flip to Chapter 1 in Book I for details on all the parts of a guitar — both the acoustic version and the electric kind.)

The practical differences between the two types of guitars is, in sum, that an electric guitar needs to plug in to an amp and have electricity to be heard, but it’s easier to play than an acoustic. An acoustic works with nothing but the fingers nature gave you, and its loudness is limited to a range of a

few dozen feet, and in a quiet environment — unless it is miked, of course. Acoustics can't sustain like electrics can, either, so their lead qualities are more restricted, too. In this section, you get details on both guitars, but take note that the fundamental principles for acoustic guitars, and the way their strings produce notes, apply to electrics as well — the acoustic is that baby's daddy, after all.

The foundation for all guitar playing: Acoustic guitars

In the old days, gut- and steel-string acoustics were used as a means to accompany a singing voice or another melodic instrument, like the fiddle. Gradually the rhythms evolved into single-note figures (riffs), and then finally into a solo instrument, where the guitar would carry the melody. Blues played on the acoustic guitar remains a viable style today, as evidenced by the work of Rory Block, Roy Book Binder, John Hammond, Keb' Mo', and Chris Thomas King, among others. So the first step in playing the blues is to understand how acoustic guitars work and why they're so perfect for playing the blues.

In guitar, the hands perform different functions — unlike, say, the piano or saxophone where the hands work the same way. In guitar playing, the left-hand fingers press down the strings at different frets, which creates different sounding pitches. The right hand actually produces the sound by strumming or plucking the strings. So the two hands need each other, and they must coordinate their efforts so they move together to create chords and single notes in rhythm. In blues guitar playing, unlike large governmental bureaucracies, the right hand must know what the left hand is doing, and vice versa.



Good guitar players, who know the fingerboard, can identify any string/fret location by its pitch (note name), no matter where it falls. The better guitar player you become, the more you're able to look at the neck and quickly see notes and patterns.

Shifting acoustic to overdrive: Electric guitars

As soon as electric guitars were available, blues players of the day made the transition quickly and easily from their acoustic versions. An electric guitar uses the same approach to neck and frets and the way the left and right hands share separate but equally important roles — but it provides some advantages that the acoustic guitar doesn't, in addition to the most obvious one: increased volume through electronic amplification. The amplified electric

guitar certainly changed the music world, but in many more ways than just being able to be heard over the rest of the band. The entire tonal character of the instrument changed, in addition to the way you had to play it.

Technologically speaking, an electric guitar is no more complicated than an eighth-grade science project: A wire (the string) hovers over a magnet (the pickup), which forms a magnetic field. When you set the wire in motion (by plucking it), the vibrating, or oscillating, string creates a disturbance in the magnetic field, which produces an electrical current. This current travels down a cord (the one sticking out the side of your guitar) and into an amplifier, where it's cranked up to levels that people can hear — to say the least.

Naturally, there's a lot more to the way electric guitars make music than this description, but what's significant is that an electric guitar doesn't make its sound acoustically. Even though you can hear the string when the guitar's not plugged in, that's not what the guitar "hears." The guitar converts a disturbance in the pickup's magnetic field to a current. This all-electronic process is different than "pre-electric guitar amplification," which consisted of placing a microphone in front of a guitar.

In an electric guitar, you must use metal strings, because nylon ones don't have magnetic properties. The fact that you need only a metal wire and a pickup to make sound — rather than a resonating chamber — meant electric guitars could be built differently from their acoustic counterparts. And they were played differently, though that took some time to evolve.

Bending strings

As a guitar player, what you notice as soon as you pick up an electric guitar is how easy it is to play. For the blues, as far as physical effort is concerned, electric guitars are much easier than acoustic guitars because

- ✓ The neck is shallower.
- ✓ The fingerboard width is thinner.
- ✓ The strings are lighter than those found on an acoustic.
- ✓ The action, or distance from the strings to the frets, is lower, so it frets almost effortlessly.

But the lighter strings have another advantage crucial to blues playing, other than being easier to play: They're easier to bend. Bending strings just sounds bluesy. It allows electric guitarists to be more expressive in their lead playing, and allows the guitar to better emulate the vocal stylings of blues singers, who use their flexible approach to pitch to sing soulful blues notes. Figure 1-3 shows what it looks like to bend a string on an electric. The string is physically pushed sideways on the fretboard by the left hand, stretching it.

Figure 1-3:
Bending
strings with
your left
hand makes
your guitar
playing
bluesier.



Noticing increased sustain

In the process of electrifying a guitar, blues players noticed something besides the loudness advantage: Electric guitars *sustained* longer. The notes just seemed to hang on longer instead of dying away quickly, as they did on acoustic guitars and banjos before that. As a result of this increased sustain, electric guitars were able to produce more substantial vibrated notes, bent notes, and long notes that held their sound. Along with jazz players, blues players found they could now more closely emulate vocal and horn stylings. A saxophone note, for example, will sound as long as your breath holds out, instead of decaying as an acoustic guitar note does. This change encouraged a more versatile approach to single-note, or lead, playing. Before the electric guitar, the guitar was largely a rhythm instrument, with some notable exceptions, such as the jazz playing of Eddie Lang, Lonnie Johnson, and gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt.

What Your Guitar Needs to Get Your Blues Groove On

To be a well-appointed blues guitar player, you need to have not only your acoustic or electric guitar, but also some other stuff that allows you to play to your fullest. Check out this list:

- ✓ **Picks:** Being able to play with a pick is an important skill in blues playing, and you should learn to play with one before deciding to be a rebel and go without. True, some traditional players of both acoustic and electric blues don't use a pick. They use the unadorned fingers of the right hand to produce all of their blues sounds, from full strummed chords to riffs to leads.
- ✓ **Spare strings:** As far as "string breakage," it's not a question of if, but when. Strings break all on their own, even if you don't play hard or bend them, but blues bending certainly shortens their lifespans. Carry spares so a sudden "string mishap" doesn't shut down your jam for the night. (See Chapter 3 in Book I to find out how to change strings.)
- ✓ **Tuner:** Most guitar teachers will tell you that it should be illegal to allow beginning guitarists to roam the earth without a tuner. These days, the word "tuner" usually means "electronic tuner" — the battery-operated kind that you can plug into (or use the onboard mic, if you're playing an acoustic). An electronic tuner is designed for quick and easy guitar tuning, and you can tune silently to boot. You can use other tuning methods — such as employing a pitch pipe, tuning fork, or the relative method (see Chapter 1 in Book I) — but the recommended way is to use a tuner. Given the distinctive quality of the blues notes, a tuner is an essential tool — and courtesy — for all who appreciate in-tune music.
- ✓ **Effects pedals:** Many blues players get along with just an amp, but most blues guitarists augment their sound with outboard effects — each about the size of a packet of index cards — to get even more sonic possibilities. Effects can make it sound like your guitar was recorded in a recording studio, or produce otherworldly sounds that may have more of a theatrical application than a musical one. But perhaps the biggest use of effects in the blues is to get a distorted sound. An effects pedal gives you this quality at low amp volumes. There are more distortion effects available than any other kind, and they'll keep coming.
- ✓ **Slide:** To play slide, you need a slide apparatus, in the form of a metal or glass tube, bottle neck (you may as well use the beer you cried into), or medicine bottle. Or lots of other things. You can also buy a professional slide. They're not expensive.

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Chapter 2

Playing Blues Rhythm

In This Chapter

- ▶ Mixing up your blues playing: Downstrokes and upstrokes
- ▶ Applying syncopation to your sound
- ▶ Discovering different muting techniques
- ▶ Checking out some classic fingerstyle blues
- ▶ Playing different grooves and feels

Chords don't by themselves convey anything meaningful. They're just raw building materials of music until you arrange and play them in a certain way. For guitarists, the playing part comes when you add in the right hand. By playing chords with the right hand in a certain tempo, rhythm, and strumming pattern, you enter into the world of rhythm guitar — an indispensable part of the blues.

Strumming Along

One of the most basic ways you can play chords is with a strum. *Strumming* involves taking your right hand and, with a pick, thumb, or the back of your fingernails, brushing it across several or all the strings, sounding them all together at once. A strum can be slow, fast, hard, or gentle, or any of the infinite shadings in between. When you strum, bring your hand from the top of the guitar (closest to the ceiling) to the bottom (toward the floor) in one motion, striking the strings along the way.



If you've never played with a pick before, you may find it takes a little time and practice to figure out how tightly to hold the pick when strumming (see Chapter 2 in Book I for more on picks). If you grip it too tightly, the pick gets tripped up in the strings and your right hand doesn't flow smoothly. On the other hand, if you hold the pick too loosely, it may spring out of your fingers when you strike the strings. The important thing is to keep the right hand and arm flowing smoothly while you find just the right grip.

Stroking down . . .

You may not have thought of basic strumming as “executing a downstroke,” but that’s what you’re doing when you naturally strike the strings on a guitar. When you get to more complex strumming patterns — especially ones involving syncopation — you distinguish between downstrokes and upstrokes (see the next section). But for now, focus on the more popular and prevalent downstroke strum.

A *downstroke* (indicated in written music with the symbol ▾) is played with a downward motion of the pick, toward the floor — the way you naturally strike a guitar. You can strum multiple strings or pick an individual string with a downstroke.

. . . And stroking up

An *upstroke* (indicated by the symbol ▴) is played upward, toward the ceiling, in the opposite direction of a downstroke. So instead of dragging your pick down toward the floor, as you do in a downstroke, you start from a position below the first string and drag your pick upward across the strings, from 1st to 6th. This motion may seem a little less natural and comfortable than a downstroke, but with practice, you can perform upstrokes as easily and with as much control as downstrokes.



In an upstroke, you don’t need to worry about hitting all the strings. The top three or four strings are usually sufficient. For example, when playing an E chord with an upstroke, you don’t have to strum the strings all the way from the 1st to the 6th, just up to about the 3rd or 4th string. There are exceptions to this rule, but generally, in the blues, you don’t hit as many strings on an upstroke strum as you do in a downstroke.



Upstrokes don’t get equal playing time with downstrokes. You typically use upstrokes only in conjunction with downstrokes, but you use downstrokes by themselves fairly often in blues playing.

Combining down and up

In certain fast lead passages, upstrokes alternate with downstrokes equally. For fast eighth notes, the strict observance of upstrokes following downstrokes is called *alternate picking*. Alternate picking is the key to playing fast leads smoothly. The best thing is to practice upstrokes as they occur in their natural state — in an eighth-note rhythm in between downstrokes.

Striking to a beat

Regardless of whether your hand moves up or down when it strikes the strings, the important thing to remember is that you're striking in a rhythm — or in sync with the beat. If you strike the strings once per beat, you're playing quarter notes. If you play two strokes per beat, you're playing in eighth notes, which come twice as fast as quarter notes.



If you need help hearing just what the beat is, get a *metronome* — an electronic device that taps out the beat for you. You can buy a metronome at any music store, and many models are small enough to fit right in your guitar case.

Quarter-note striking, beat by beat

Figure 2-1 shows two bars of an E chord with quarter-note slashes. You play four strums for each bar for a total of eight strums. The quarter notes tell you that the strums occur once per beat.

Figure 2-1:
Strumming
an E chord
in quarter
notes for
two bars.



Eighth-note striking, twice per beat

Eighth notes occur twice as frequently as quarter notes in the same tempo, or two for every beat instead of one. In written guitar notation, instead of the slashes shown in Figure 2-1, you now face slashes with *beams* — horizontal lines that connect the stems. Quarter notes have just a stem attached to them; eighth notes have stems with beams connecting them to each other. An eighth note by itself has a flag instead of a beam: ♪.

For the eighth notes that appear in Figure 2-2, you strum twice as fast — twice per beat — as you do for the quarter notes. You can do this easily using only downstrokes at most blues tempos, which are slow to moderate (between 60 and 160 beats per minute). To make things interesting, you change chords and introduce A and B7 into the mix. Note that in the figure, the last note of each bar is a quarter note, which gives you a little more time than two eighth notes would for changing chords. Aren't we nice?

Figure 2-2:
Eighth- and
quarter-note
down-
strokes.



Figure 2-3 combines downstrokes and upstrokes in an eighth-note rhythm. As you practice this passage, keep a relaxed, free-swinging, up-and-down arm motion going. Also work to get equal emphasis on the downstrokes and upstrokes. You may notice that your downstrokes naturally include more and lower strings, while the upstrokes play just the top strings and fewer of them. This is perfectly natural.

Figure 2-3:
Eighth- and
quarter-note
upstrokes
and down-
strokes.



At a moderate tempo, you can easily play Figure 2-3 with all downstrokes, but that variation gives the figure a different feel — more driving and intense. It may be a subtle difference, but playing an eighth-note figure in all downstrokes — versus playing it with alternating downstrokes and upstrokes — is a musical choice, not a technical consideration.

Mixing Single Notes and Strumming

Downstrokes and upstrokes are used for playing single notes, as well as for strumming. Combining single notes with strums is an important part of blues rhythm guitar playing and gives you more options than just strumming. For example, a piano player doesn't plunk down all of her fingers at once every time she plays, and guitarists shouldn't have to strike all the strings every time they bring their picks down (or up).

Because of their instrument's layout, keyboardists play bass notes with the left hand and chords with the right hand. When guitarists separate the bass notes from the chord, they do it with just the right hand, but the principle is the same.

Separating bass and treble: The pick-strum

Separating the bass and treble so they play independently is a great way to provide rhythmic variety and introduce different textures into your playing. In the pick-strum pattern, the *pick* refers to picking the single bass note, and the *strum* refers to the upper-string chord that follows. Both the pick and the strum are played with the pick in downstrokes.

Figure 2-4 is a simple pick-strum pattern that's used in many folk blues and country blues songs. This notation mixes single notes (which appear with normal, rounded noteheads) and rhythm slashes (with the narrower, elongated noteheads).

Track 56

The figure shows two musical staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). It contains four measures of music with chords C, C7, F, and Fm. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). It contains two measures of music with chords C, A7, Dm, G7, and then a final measure with chords C, C7, F, Fm, and C. The notation includes single notes, rhythm slashes, and fingerings (0, 1, 2, 3).

Figure 2-4:
Pick-strum
pattern for
country
blues.

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Playing common pick-strum patterns

Most strumming patterns in blues are either all strums or a pick-strum combination, and which approach you use depends on the instruments in your ensemble at the time. A pick-strum approach is good for solo playing or if you're the only rhythm instrument, because the bass notes fall on different parts of the measure than the chord parts.

If you're playing solo guitar, you play a lot more pick-strum patterns. In a band setting, you usually have a bass player who handles the bass duties, and it's more appropriate to play all strumming patterns so as not to get in his way. The following sections describe two pick-strum patterns for the most common blues feels.

Two-beat or cut shuffle

This is sometimes referred to as a *boom-chick* pattern because the bass note and chords alternate, as shown in Figure 2-5. A two-beat feel is common in other forms of music (Dixieland and big-band jazz, polka, samba, and country), but it has its place in the blues, too.

Track 57

The figure displays two systems of musical notation for a two-beat or cut shuffle feel. Each system consists of three measures. The first system features chords G, E7, and A7. The second system features chords Am7, D7, G, and D7. The notation includes a guitar melody line, a bass line with fret numbers, and a bass line with a 3/2 rhythm pattern.

Figure 2-5:
Two-beat or
cut shuffle
feel.

12/8 groove

This is the slowest pattern of the blues, so it helps to have the bass note play twice on beats 1 and 3, while the chords play on beats 2 and 4, as shown in Figure 2-6.

Track 58

Figure 2-6: Pick-strum pattern in a slow 12/8 feel.

Shuffling the Beats with Syncopated Strumming

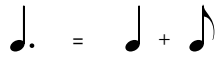
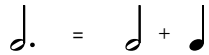
After you develop a feel for strumming in different combinations of quarters, eighths, and 16ths — which come *four* per beat, or twice as fast as eighth notes — you can increase the rhythmic variation to these various groupings by applying syncopation. *Syncopation* is the disruption or alteration of the expected sounds of notes. In blues rhythm playing, you can apply syncopation by staggering your strum and mixing up your up- and downstrokes to strike during different parts of the beats. By doing so, you let the agents of syncopation — dots, ties, and rests — steer your rhythmic strumming to a more dramatic and interesting course.

A bit of notation: Dots that extend and ties that bind

In written music, a *dot* attached to a note increases its rhythmic value by half the original length. So a dot attached to a half note (two beats) makes it three beats long. A dotted quarter note is one and a half beats long — or the total of a quarter note plus an eighth note.

A *tie* is a curved line that connects two notes of the same pitch. The value of the tied note adds to the original, so that only the first note is sounded, but the note is held for the duration of the two notes added together.

Figure 2-7 shows a chart of how dots and ties alter the standard note values of eighth, quarter, and half notes.

**Figure 2-7:**

Dots, ties,
rests,
and other
common
syncopation
marks.

■ whole rest, 4 beats

■ half rest, 2 beats

♪ quarter rest, 1 beat

♪ eighth rest, 1/2 beat

♪ 16th rest, 1/4 beat

Syncopation: Playing with dots and ties

So how do dots and ties actually make syncopation work in a musical context? There are two progressions — one in a straight-eighth feel and another in a shuffle — that you can practice playing in this section. They both have common syncopation figures used in the blues.



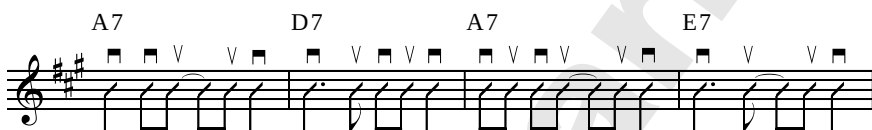
The normal flow of down- and upstrokes is interrupted in syncopation, so it's important to recall which stroke direction to play a note to avoid getting your strums out of sync.

In both Figures 2-8 and 2-9, pay close attention to the downstroke (▮) and upstroke (∨) indications.

- ✓ Figure 2-8 is a straight-eighth-note feel, in the key of A. The use of dots and ties signals a syncopated rhythm. If the tied figures present a problem, practice the figure by first ignoring the ties (in other words, play the tied note).

Figure 2-8:
Straight-eighth progression in A with syncopation.

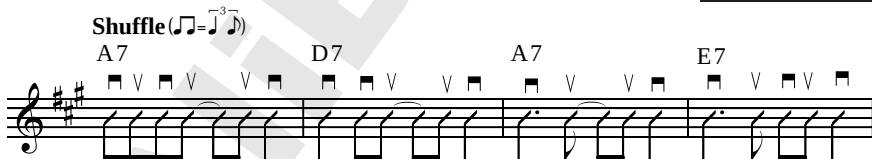
Track 59, 0:00



- ✓ Figure 2-9 is in a shuffle feel in the key of A. A shuffle rhythm divides the quarter note into two eighth notes — but the first eighth note is held longer than the second, producing a swinging, lilting feel. The same syncopation scheme appears here as it did in Figure 2-8, but the shuffle feel makes it fall in a slightly different place in the beat.

Figure 2-9:
Shuffle in A with syncopation.

Track 59, 0:16



Stopping the Strings from Ringing (Just for a Sec)

Listen to blues rhythm guitar and you hear that it's not one repetitive wall of sound, but an open, varied sound with breathing room and subtle breaks. It's these breaks that prevent the chord strums from running into each other and creating sonic mush. The little gaps in sound keep a strumming figure sounding crisp and controlled.

Muting the sound between two chords (left hand)

To create a rhythm guitar part with some breathing space between the notes, you need to stop the strings from ringing momentarily. And we're talking very small moments here — much smaller than can be indicated by a rest symbol in the music. You can stop the strings instantly with the left hand. Letting the left hand go limp is the best and quickest way to stop a string from ringing — far faster and more controlled than anything you can do with the right hand. This is actually a coordinated effort between the two hands, because it can only occur when the right hand plays.

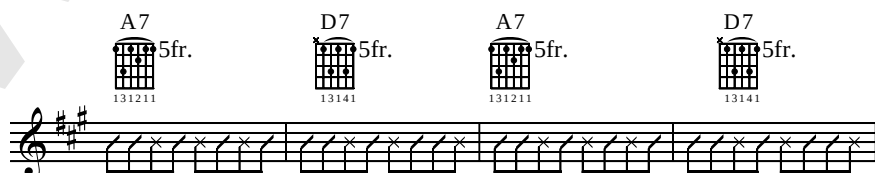
To get the left hand to mute (indicated in written notation by an X notehead) the in-between sound between any two chords, just relax the fretting fingers enough to release pressure on the fretted strings. The strings instantly deaden, completely cutting off the sound. If your right hand keeps going in the established strumming pattern, you produce a satisfying thunk sound as the right hand hits the deadened strings.

The muted strings intermixed with the sounding strings create a percussive and syncopated rhythm. Allowing your left hand to mute means you don't have to stop and start your right hand to produce syncopation. You can keep it going uninterrupted, in alternating down- and upstrokes.

Simulating syncopation with left-hand muting

Left-hand muting gives you the means to control the strings' sound. Figure 2-10 is technically a straight-ahead down-up eighth-note strum in the right hand. But because you employ left-hand muting, the sound seems to cut off in just the right places, creating a syncopated sound. Your right hand isn't performing true syncopation, because it's playing straight through. It's just that some of the notes don't come through audibly.

Figure 2-10:
Left-hand
muting can
simulate
syncopa-
tion.



Track 59, 0:32

Book IV

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Guitar



Guitarists seem to develop left-hand muting naturally, almost as if it isn't a technique you have to learn but a way of playing that is self-evident. So don't try to analyze it too much or slow your playing down as you're learning; just strum and relax and tighten your left hand in the context of a medium-tempo groove. Eventually, your two hands sync up without even thinking about it.

Muting the sound of a note (right hand)

Right-hand muting is entirely separate from left-hand muting and produces a totally different effect. When you mute with your right hand, you still hear the pitch and tone of the vibrating string but in a subdued way — more like a true *mute*, in the musical sense. Right-hand muting keeps the string from ringing freely and reduces the volume and ringing of your strings while still maintaining drive and intensity. This technique is a great way to add dramatic variation to your playing.

Palm mute is another name for right-hand muting. It's executed by resting the heel of your right hand on the strings just above the bridge. If you place your hand too far forward, you completely deaden the strings, so place it just forward enough of the bridge that the strings still sound but are dampened. Keep your hand in position through the duration of the strum.

The *accent* is the opposite of a palm mute: It highlights a strike and lets the resulting sound ring out. To accent a chord, just strike it harder than usual and allow the strings to ring free. An accent is indicated with a > mark, just above or below the notehead.

Palm mutes are usually applied to only one or two strings, because the right hand is restricted when you rest it directly on the strings above the bridge. Figure 2-11 is a rhythm figure where you strike only the lowest two strings of the chord during the palm mutes and the upper strings on the accents. Play this progression by using all downstrokes to add intensity.

Figure 2-12 shows a basic fingerstyle pattern where the thumb drives out a steady quarter note rhythm on the low strings, and the thumb plays chords on the offbeats. Listen closely to the CD to capture the shuffle feel in this figure.

Track 60

Figure 2-12:
Fingerstyle
blues with
quarter-note
bass.

Feels and Grooves: Different Rhythm Styles to Play

Blues consists of a few different *feels* or *grooves* — rhythm styles — and if some songs sound like others, as many say, it’s partly because of the relatively few feels. Table 2-1 is a list of the common blues feels and well-known songs written in that feel (and if you don’t know these songs, find them and listen to them).

Table 2-1 Blues Songs by Groove		
Feel	Song	Artist
Shuffle	Sweet Home Chicago	Robert Johnson, The Blues Brothers
	Blue Suede Shoes	Carl Perkins, Elvis Presley
	Midnight Special	Leadbelly
	Hide Away	Freddie King, Eric Clapton, Stevie Ray Vaughan

<i>Feel</i>	<i>Song</i>	<i>Artist</i>
Straight-four	The Thrill Is Gone	B.B. King
	Killing Floor	Howlin' Wolf, Mike Bloomfield, Jimi Hendrix
	Crossroads	Robert Johnson, Cream
	Born Under a Bad Sign	Albert King, Cream
12/8	Stormy Monday	Allman Brothers, T-Bone Walker
	Red House	Jimi Hendrix
	At Last	Etta James
	The Sky Is Crying	Elmore James, Stevie Ray Vaughan
16 feel	Hard to Handle	Otis Redding, Black Crowes
	Little Wing	Jimi Hendrix, Stevie Ray Vaughan
	Mary Had a Little Lamb	Buddy Guy, Stevie Ray Vaughan

The shuffle groove

The shuffle groove is certainly the most common feel in blues — even more common than the straight-four and slow 12/8 feel. There's one small hurdle to get over: A shuffle feel uses a triplet-based rhythmic division, where each quarter note is divided into three eighth notes, called *triplets*. The typical melodic division is two eighth notes, where the first note is held for the duration of the first two notes of the triplet, and the second eighth note is the third note of the triplet. This yields a lopsided, lilting feel in the eighth-note flow that's the heart of the shuffle sound.

Figure 2-13 is a progression in a shuffle feel. Practice while listening to the CD on this one to make sure that you get the sound of the shuffle.

Track 61

Shuffle (♩ = ♩³)

Chord diagrams for the first system:

- E7: 2 1
- A/E: 2 2 2
- N.C.: 2 1
- E7: 2 2 2
- A/E: 2 2 2
- N.C.: 2 3
- A7: 2 3 4
- A7: 2 3
- A7/6: 2 3 4
- A7: 2 3

Chord diagrams for the second system:

- E7: 2 1
- A/E: 2 2 2
- N.C.: 2 1
- E7: 2 2 2
- A/E: 2 2 2
- N.C.: 2 1
- E7: 2 2 2
- A/E: 2 2 2
- N.C.: 2 1
- E7: 2 2 2
- A/E: 2 2 2
- N.C.: 2 1

Chord diagrams for the third system:

- A7: 2 3
- A7/6: 2 3 4
- A7: 2 3
- A7/6: 2 3 4
- A7: 2 3
- A7/6: 2 3 4
- A7: 2 3
- A7/6: 2 3 4
- A7: 2 3
- A7/6: 2 3 4
- A7: 2 3

Figure 2-13:

The shuffle feel is the most common groove in the blues.

(continued)

(continued)

E7 A/E N.C. E7 A/E N.C. E7 A/E N.C. E7 A/E N.C.

(continued)

The slow 12/8, with groups of three

The *slow* part of the slow 12/8 feel is easy to grasp. The 12/8 is related to the shuffle, because a shuffle is a 4/4 feel based on triplet divisions of eighth notes. But in 12/8, the feel is slower, and the individual eighth notes (they're not called triplets, because their grouping of three is built into the time signature) are given more prominence.



Don't be intimidated by the 12/8 part of this feel. There are 12 eighth notes to the bar, and each eighth note gets one beat. In practice though, the eighth notes are grouped in four units of three each. So it's a lot like 4/4 time with eighth-note triplets on every beat. If it's a slow blues and you can hear note-groupings of three, it's probably a 12/8 feel.

Famous blues songs in 12/8 include T-Bone Walker's "Stormy Monday," covered by the Allman Brothers on their *Live at Fillmore* album. Figure 2-15 is a passage in the style of "Stormy Monday."

A7

D7 3fr.

sim.

A7

D7 3fr.

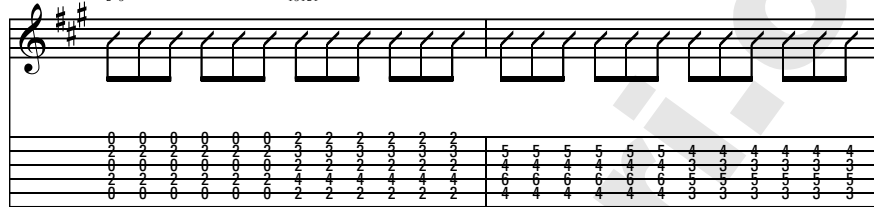
Figure 2-15:
The 12/8 feel
is used for
slow-tempo
blues.

(continued)

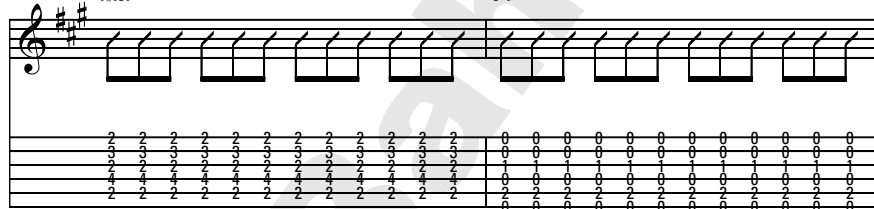
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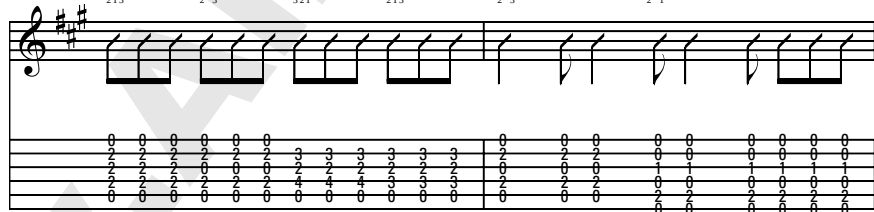








The slow and funky 16 feel

More modern blues grooves include the *16 feel*, which has a slower tempo but funkier sound due to the 16th-note subdivisions. (James Brown's "I Feel Good" and "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" are classic examples of 16th-note-based funk.) "Hard to Handle," written by Otis Redding and covered by the Black Crowes, is a famous example of 16-feel blues. Figure 2-16 is medium tempo, funky groove in a 16 feel.

Figure 2-16 shows three systems of musical notation for Track 64. Each system consists of a treble clef staff with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), a bass clef staff with a 16th-note groove, and guitar chord diagrams above the staff. The first system has four measures with chords A7 (5fr), Ab7 (4fr), A7 (5fr), and Ab7 (4fr). The second system has four measures with chords A7 (5fr), Ab7 (4fr), A7 (5fr), and Ab7 (4fr). The third system has four measures with chords D7 (3fr), Db7, A7 (5fr), and Ab7 (4fr). The bass staff shows a consistent 16th-note pattern throughout.

Figure 2-16:
The 16 feel
is used
for funky-
sounding
blues
grooves.

(continued)

(continued)

Diagram illustrating two musical systems for guitar, each featuring a treble clef staff with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a bass clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#).

System 1:

- Chord diagrams above the staff: A7 (5fr.), A♭7 (4fr.), E7 (5fr.), and E♭7 (4fr.).
- The treble staff contains a melody line with notes and rests, including a triplet of eighth notes.
- The bass staff contains a bass line with notes and rests, including a triplet of eighth notes.

System 2:

- Chord diagrams above the staff: D7 (3fr.), D♭7 (3fr.), A7 (5fr.), A♭7 (4fr.), and E7 (5fr.).
- The treble staff contains a melody line with notes and rests, including a triplet of eighth notes.
- The bass staff contains a bass line with notes and rests, including a triplet of eighth notes.

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Chapter 3

Blues Progressions, Song Forms, and Moves

In This Chapter

- ▶ Distinguishing the primary key families and their chords
 - ▶ Recognizing the structure of a blues song
 - ▶ Connecting structures and keys
 - ▶ Playing intros, turnarounds, endings, and high moves
-

The blues is a welcoming, beckoning music for both listener and performer that says, “Join in and start contributing!” The blues’ repetition and call-and-response qualities — derived from its forebears, the work song and field holler — make it easy for people to join in a song on the fly. Musicians grasp the form quickly, and listeners have an expectation that’s set up by each phrase, which is then satisfied by the lyrics or the chord progression. Best of all, these simple, infectious, and ingenious devices that make the blues relatable are easy to understand and master, and are covered in this chapter.

Blues by the Numbers

You can learn music a lot quicker if you associate chords and keys by their numerical equivalents. In any key, the *root* or *tonic* (the tone that names the key or chord) is called I, and subsequent pitches become II, III, IV, and so on, numbers expressed in Roman numerals. So in the key of C, the numbers are broken down like this:

- ✓ C is I
- ✓ D is II
- ✓ E is III
- ✓ F is IV

And so on.

As keys change, so do the notes, expressed as letter names — but the numbers, or relationships, remain the same, allowing you to treat all keys equally. The number system works well for building chords by intervals, too, but in the blues, you're more concerned with chords formed on the notes of the scale of a key.



If you memorize the basic blues chord formula in numbers (I, IV, V), then you can figure out the progression in any key because the numbers — and therefore the relationships — don't change, no matter what key it's in. Many have realized that because there are only seven letters in music (A through G), you can just memorize the keys without converting numbers to letters. And the more experienced you become, the more your ears take you to the right chord without having to memorize anything. In short: The numbers reveal the underlying structure and are important in understanding the function of the chords.

Musicians often refer to chords by their numerical designation instead of their actual letter name. For example, when a musician says, "In that song, listen to what B.B. does when he goes to the IV chord," you know exactly where in the song that is (bar 5). If the musician had said, "When he goes to the D chord," you'd have to know what key he was in first, and you or the storyteller may not have that information.

Viewing music through these numbers makes the key irrelevant to a blues player. Or more precisely, the key can change all it wants, but the structure doesn't, and that's the important point of the exercise.

Recognizing the Big Dogs: Primary Key Families and Their Chords



Whether you play folk, rock, or blues, sooner or later you notice that certain chords seem to cluster together. If you think of these chords by their numerical assignments, or function, you see this phenomena is common to all keys. In every key, the main chords are the one, four, and five, represented by the Roman numerals I, IV, and V. These groupings of I, IV, V are known as *families*. It's a virtual certainty that whatever other chords you may find in a song, you always have a I, IV, and V. And many songs have *only* these three chords.

Here's an example of how to figure out the I, IV, and V of different keys:

- ✓ In the key of A, A is the I chord. Count on your fingers up to your fourth finger, saying the letters of the alphabet as you go, and you find that the IV chord in A is D. The V chord, then, is E.
- ✓ In the key of C, C is the I chord. The IV chord is F. And the V chord is G.

Try it yourself with other keys, starting on I with the letter that names the key (in the key of G, G is I). Table 3-1 shows common blues keys and their I, IV, and V chords. There are other keys (for example, B and A $\flat$), but these are the most commonly used keys for blues guitar.

Table 3-1 The I, IV, and V Chords in Common Blues Keys

Key	I	IV	V
A	A	D	E
B $\flat$	B $\flat$	E $\flat$	F
C	C	F	G
D	D	G	A
E	E	A	B
F	F	B $\flat$	C
G	G	C	D



For guitarists, some keys and chords lend themselves to certain movements that sound especially good for the blues; other keys are less successful. The following section mixes up the keys so you get familiar with the different families. But the blues is most accommodating to the keys of E and A, especially when using open-position chords.

The Structure of a Blues Song, Baby

It's time to give your hands some direction — to organize sounds into chord progressions and song forms. These larger organizing principles make the blues come alive and build a meaningful experience for the player and the listener. Through them, you watch techniques turn into expressions and patterns into musical messages. In this section, you take the shorter phrases of the right-hand patterns (covered in Chapter 2 in Book IV) and make them into actual songs.



A song is made up of a *chord progression*. The song's form and chord progression are concepts that can be used almost interchangeably, with chord progression describing more often the harmonic architecture of the song. Many people can recognize a song form — such as the 12-bar blues — but as a guitarist, you need to know the corresponding chord progression that makes up that 12-bar form. And you need to be able to identify the actual chords going by, as well as any variations to that form. In the blues, the progression is part of what makes the blues the blues. So, the progression is synonymous with the form. In other words, saying “the blues” implies a 12-bar structure with the chords falling at specific bars within that structure.

A chord progression isn't the only aspect of a song, but it's a pretty important one because it forms the framework or structure that supports the other elements: melody, lyrics, riffs, and the solo sections.

Playing the 12-bar blues

The 12-bar blues is by far the most popular form for the blues. It consists of 12 measures and observes a particular scheme as shown in Figure 3-1.

Figure 3-1:
The 12-bar blues using Roman numerals to represent chords in a key.

Figure 3-1 uses Roman numerals instead of letter names, because the progression is the same in every key. For example, if you play blues in E, then E is the I chord, A is the IV chord, and B or B7 is the V chord. With the corresponding letters substituted for the Roman numerals, the progression looks like Figure 3-2.

Track 65, 0:00

Figure 3-2:
The 12-bar blues in E.



B7 replaces B in Figure 3-2, mainly because B7 is easier to play. Technically, you could play B as a barre chord on the 2nd fret. But the main point is to convey the letter names dictated by the I, IV, and V, so playing either B7 or B is acceptable.

Because the slashes (those /// marks) leave some interpretation in what you're playing, try this exercise with shuffle eighth notes — eighth notes that have a long-short rhythm scheme, explained in detail in Chapter 2 in Book IV — in alternating downstrokes and upstrokes. You hear this version on the CD, so see if you can match the rhythm of the performance on the audio.

If you're a little shaky on the eighth-note strum for Figure 3-2, try first playing this blues with quarter-note downstrokes (also covered in Chapter 2 in Book IV). Don't worry, you're still in sync with the CD, but the guitar on the CD strums twice to your once. After you can play that comfortably, try playing with eighth-note downstrokes in a shuffle feel. And after that, try the alternate-picking approach, which is, not surprisingly, also discussed in Chapter 2 in Book IV.

The quick four

The *quick four* is a variation on the 12-bar blues that occurs in the second bar, where you go to a IV chord — for example, when you go to A in the key of E — for one bar, and go back to the I chord for two bars. The quick four, as shown in Figure 3-3, provides an opportunity for variation and interest in an otherwise unbroken stretch of four bars of the same chord.

Track 65, 0:37

Figure 3-3:
The quick-four change in bar two, in E blues.

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Guitar

The quick four happens almost as often as not in blues songs. Some songs that use the quick-four method include “Sweet Home Chicago” and “Hide

Away.” Songs such as “Hound Dog” and “Johnny B. Goode” don’t use this variation. Most blues guitarists don’t think too much about whether a song has a quick four. They just look at someone else in the band who knows more than they do to see if they’re going to make that move in bar two or not.



The quick four happens very soon after you start the song, so if you’re at a jam session, or are playing along with a song for the first time, you must be on your toes to anticipate its use.

The turnaround

The *turnaround* is the last two bars of the progression that point the music back to the beginning. At the end of the 12-bar blues, you can repeat the progression or end it. Most of the time you repeat the progression to play additional verses and solos. To help get the progression ready for a repeat, you employ a turnaround, which sets up the repeat. At the most basic level, you can create a turnaround by just substituting a V chord for the I chord in the last bar — bar 12.



Practically all songs (blues or otherwise) end on the I chord, called the *tonic* chord of the key, so the substitution of the V chord creates a strong pull that brings the song back to the I chord at bar 1 of the progression. In any music, the V chord sounds like it wants to go back to the I chord. When the V chord occurs at the end of the progression, it tells musicians and listeners unmistakably that “we’re going back around again.” While the most basic application of a turnaround is just playing a V chord in the last bar, to most guitarists, a turnaround presents an opportunity to play a *riff* or *lick* (covered in Chapter 4 in Book IV). Figure 3-4 shows the last four bars of a 12-bar blues with a turnaround bar added.

Figure 3-4:

The turnaround usually has a V chord in the last bar.



The 12-bar blues in song

If you're wondering how musical charts and symbols relate to the actual songs (melody and lyrics), here's the quick version:

- ✓ The 12-bar blues breaks down neatly into three lines of four bars each. These three lines correspond to the vocal phrases.
- ✓ The vocal scheme of the blues is A-A-B. Each letter represents a sentence, complete thought, or phrase of the lyric.

Think of any 12-bar blues, such as "Hound Dog," "Stormy Monday," "Kansas City," "St. Louis Blues," "Easy Rider," or "Corrina, Corrina." Each song has three lines per verse, with the first line repeated. Even though the first vocal line is repeated, it never sounds repetitious, because the chords underneath the lyric and melody change, which provides interest. You can actually sing any of these songs to any 12-bar progression.



You may see the V chord in the turnaround bar with parentheses around it. This method is shorthand for saying that you use the turnaround optionally or whenever you decide to repeat the progression. When you want the progression to end, you ignore the parentheses and continue playing the I chord from the previous bar.

Slow blues

Slow blues is usually a 12-bar blues, but played in 12/8 time, using three strums to the beat. Because of the slower tempo, there's often more opportunity to put in additional chords — especially 9th chords, a common slow-blues hallmark.

Figure 3-5 is a slow 12-bar blues in 12/8 time with its own moves added — moves that consist of adding chords a whole step higher before the main ones. But it's still a 12-bar blues. You can hear a lot of this quality in the playing of T-Bone Walker.



One irony of slow blues is that although the tempo is slower than a shuffle, and the changes come more slowly and are therefore more manageable, the lead playing is often very intricate, especially with regard to rhythm. If you ever get a chance to see transcribed guitar solos in print, look at the ones in a slow 12/8. The notation can get quite hairy!

Track 66

Shuffle (♩=♩³)

N.C. B9 6fr. A9 4fr. N.C. E9 6fr. D9 4fr.

T 7 0 0 6 6 6 7 5 5 5 5

B 0 0 6 4 4 4 6 4 4 4 4

N.C. B9 6fr. A9 4fr. N.C. B9 6fr. A9 4fr.

T 7 0 0 6 6 6 7 0 0 6 6 6

B 0 0 6 4 4 4 6 4 4 4 4 4

N.C. E9 6fr. D9 4fr. N.C. E9 6fr. D9 4fr.

T 7 5 5 5 5 7 7 5 5 5 5

B 0 0 6 4 4 4 6 4 4 4 4

Figure 3-5:
A slow
blues in 12/8
with added
chords.

(continued)

(continued)

Diagram 1: Musical notation for a 4-bar blues progression in A major. The first two bars are marked "N.C." (No Chord). The third bar is marked "B9" and the fourth bar is marked "A9". Fingering diagrams for B9 (1-2-3-4) and A9 (1-2-3-4) are shown above the staff. The bass line is shown below the staff with fret numbers: 0, 0, 6, 4, 6, 6, 6, 4, 6, 6, 6, 4.

Diagram 2: Musical notation for a 4-bar blues progression in A major. The first two bars are marked "N.C." (No Chord). The third bar is marked "F#9" and the fourth bar is marked "E9". Fingering diagrams for F#9 (1-2-3-4) and E9 (1-2-3-4) are shown above the staff. The bass line is shown below the staff with fret numbers: 0, 0, 7, 6, 7, 7, 7, 6, 7, 7, 7, 6.

Diagram 3: Musical notation for a 4-bar blues progression in A major. The first two bars are marked "N.C." (No Chord). The third bar is marked "B9" and the fourth bar is marked "A9". Fingering diagrams for B9 (1-2-3-4) and A9 (1-2-3-4) are shown above the staff. The bass line is shown below the staff with fret numbers: 0, 0, 6, 4, 6, 6, 6, 4, 6, 6, 6, 4.

8-bar blues

The *8-bar blues* is four bars shorter than the 12-bar blues, but the 8-bar blues doesn't really follow a strict form the way the 12-bar blues does. The 8-bar blues encompasses several feels, tempos, and qualities — often an 8-bar blues has more chords in it than just the basic I, IV, and V, making it more “songlike” than a 12-bar blues. Figure 3-6 is an 8-bar blues played with a bass-strum pattern by using a variety of chords.

Shuffle (♩♩=♩³♩)

C C7 F Fm

C A7 D7 G7 C C7 F Fm C G7(barre)

Figure 3-6:
An 8-bar blues that uses various chords.

Straight-four (or rock blues)

Straight-four is sometimes called *rock blues* or *rock feel* and means that you play even eighth notes supported by a heavy backbeat (emphasis on beats 2 and 4, usually courtesy of a cracking snare drum). Most blues is in a non-straight feel, meaning it's either in a shuffle (a long-short scheme that derives from triplets) or a slow 12/8 feel (with three notes to the beat). So a straight-four, which is common in rock, is actually rare in traditional blues.

Some examples of well-known songs in a straight-four include "Roll Over Beethoven," "Johnny B. Goode," and Albert King's "Crosscut Saw." Figure 3-7 shows a straight-four progression in A with a variation on the 5-to-6 move (also called the Jimmy Reed, covered in the next section). This variation has the moving voice occasionally going up to the flat seven. (G in the A chord, C in the D chord, and D in the E chord.)

Track 67

A5 A6 A5 A6 D5 D6 D5 D6 A5 A6 A5 A6 A5 A6 A7 A6

P.M. (throughout)

T
B

D5 D6 D5 D6 D5 D6 D7 D6 A5 A6 A5 A6 A5 A6 A7 A6

Figure 3-7:
A straight-
four
progression
with a
variation.

E E6 E7 E6 D5 D6 D7 D6 A5 A6 A5 A6 E5 E6 E5 E6

Applying Structures to Keys

Although every key is treated equally when discussing function and music theory (see “Blues by the Numbers” earlier in this chapter), the reality is that different keys and chords on the guitar present different moves. What you can do easily in E, you may not be able to do in G, and G has other options that E may not have. These variations are a delight (and frustration!) of playing the guitar. Each key has something idiomatic that can’t be performed comfortably or convincingly in another key. Composers and musicians write and play songs in different keys to exploit these little differences that each key provides.

A move with many chords: The Jimmy Reed move

If you have the basic 12-bar blues under your belt, including the quick four and turnaround bar, it's time to shake things up a bit. (See the corresponding sections earlier in this chapter if you look under your belt and nothing's there.) You can start off with a move that's been a blues and rock staple forever. It's known by many different names, but because this book is a blues book, you can attribute it to one of its most famous practitioners: Jimmy Reed.

The Jimmy Reed move — named after the Chicago harmonica player, singer, and guitarist — involves going from the 5th to the 6th degrees in each chord (the note E in a G chord, A in a C chord). Chuck Berry made this technique famous in a straight-eighth, rock 'n' roll setting in the late '50s and '60s. For now, don't worry about converting numbers to notes for the I, IV, and V chords; just figure out the left-hand part.

To play a “move,” you put your left hand in motion. Figure 3-8 shows the Jimmy Reed move in the key of E, using E, A, and B power chords (for more on power chords, see Chapter 3 in Book II). The chord diagrams are given above the tab, allowing you to think of this move in two ways: as an extra chord inserted in between the ones you already know or as a simple one-finger move in the left hand. Whichever way works for you is the right one!



One of the best things about the Jimmy Reed move is that it works so well in different chords and keys. When played in different keys, the figure preserves the original relationship of the notes in the new key, but because it's in a different key, it just sounds, well, different. Not better or worse, perhaps, just different — and still very cool. It's like singing “Happy Birthday” in the key of G or E $\flat$: You can recognize the melody in any key setting — but the Jimmy Reed move is so much hipper than “Happy Birthday.”

Jimmy's move in G

If you had to play in the key of G, and you wanted to throw in the Jimmy Reed move, it would look like Figure 3-9. This move has a different character and is a little easier to play than the same move in E (discussed previously). The chord diagrams in the figure are presented above the staves, so you can view the move as either a new chord inserted between the ones you already know or as just simply moving a finger over to play a previously open string on beats 2 and 4.

Track 68

Shuffle (♩=♩³)

E5 E6 E5 E6 E5 E6 E5 E6 E5 E6 E5 E6

E5 E6 E5 E6 A5 A6 A5 A6 A5 A6 A5 A6

E5 E6 E5 E6 E5 E6 E5 E6 B5 B6 B5 B6

A5 A6 A5 A6 E5 E6 E5 E6 E5 B5

Figure 3-8:
The Jimmy
Reed move
in E.

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(♩ = ♩³)

G G6 G G6 C C6 C C6 G G6 G G6

G G6 G G6 C C6 C C6 C C6 C C6

G G6 G G6 G G6 G G6 D D6 D D6

Figure 3-9:
The Jimmy
Reed move
in G.

(continued)

(continued)

Chord diagrams for C, C6, G, G6, D, and D6 are shown above the staff. The staff contains a musical notation for a blues progression in G major, featuring a Jimmy Reed move in G. Below the staff is a tablature for the same progression.

Chord diagrams: C, C6, C, C6, G, G6, G, G6, D, D6, D, D6.

Staff notation: A blues progression in G major, featuring a Jimmy Reed move in G.

Tablature: A blues progression in G major, featuring a Jimmy Reed move in G.



In the Jimmy Reed move in G, you have to mute the open string that your finger just left to play the new chord (indicated by an X in the chord diagram).

Jimmy's move in A

The move travels up the neck of the guitar to grab the IV and V chords. This sound is very rock 'n' roll (in a good way), and has a less folksy character than the G progression. The blues move in A has an entirely different feel than the same move in G, yet they're only one letter away — the basis for Chuck Berry's sound and for much of the "boogie" rock 'n' roll played by rockabilly artists of the '50s, '60s, and today.

The sound of sadness: Minor blues

For a different flavor of blues, consider the blues in a minor key setting. Minor keys in music sound sad or menacing or mysterious, and what better way to give the blues a double dose of trouble than to put it in a minor key? Putting the blues in minor also provides some variety. A minor blues doesn't say much about the form, only that it uses minor chords instead of the usual major or dominant-7 chords. A minor blues can be a 12-bar blues with minor chords or a straight-eighth (or non-shuffle feel), 16-bar format (instead of the more common 12-bar format).

"St. James Infirmary" and "The Thrill Is Gone" are two minor blues songs. "The Thrill Is Gone" is a popular format for more contemporary blues, and Figure 3-10 shows a progression more along the lines of this song. Notice the addition of minor 7th chords, which help give a jazzier feel.

Figure 3-10:
A minor blues progression using minor 7th chords.

Accessorizing the 12-Bar Blues: Intros, Turnarounds, and Endings

Intros (short, of course, for introductions), *turnarounds*, and *endings* are all enhancements to the 12-bar blues. They're used to steer the song toward repeats or resolutions and are all related. There are countless variations for these three devices, and they're often reworked versions of each other, where the only difference is how they end.

Intros

An intro often features a solo lick by the guitar, piano, or other instrument (think of "That'll Be the Day" by Buddy Holly). But sometimes the whole band plays the intro, and the guitar is expected to play rhythm guitar (licks and riffs are covered in Chapter 4 in Book IV).

Intros often borrow from their turnaround cousins, because the whole idea is to set up the I chord and the beginning of the progression — the same duties that the turnaround has.

Figure 3-11 shows a basic two-bar intro. The rhythm features a syncopation and then a held note, which creates a musical space (or hole) before the downbeat of the 12-bar progression. This space allows room for a vocal or instrumental melodic pickup — a phrase that starts before bar 1.

Figure 3-11:
A simple
2-bar intro.

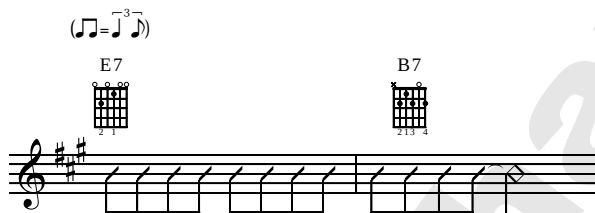


Figure 3-12 is a four-bar intro that is just the last four bars of the 12-bar blues. This intro is popular and is often announced by a musician saying, “Let’s bring it in from the V,” or “Let’s walk it down from the V.”

Figure 3-12:
A four-bar
intro.

Shuffle (♩ = ♩)

B5 B6 B5 B6 A5 A6 A5 A6 E5 E6 E5 E6 E5 B5

Turnarounds

A turnaround bar is a bar, as mentioned earlier, that substitutes a V chord for a I chord in the last bar of the progression — bar 12 in a 12-bar blues (see “Playing the 12-bar blues” earlier in this chapter). A true, full turnaround is, at minimum, a two-bar phrase that goes from the I chord to the V chord. **Note:** Entire books could be written on just turnarounds, but this section covers only a few rhythm approaches.

Figure 3-13 shows a simple two-bar turnaround using the Jimmy Reed move and syncopation.

Figure 3-13:
A two-bar turnaround.

Shuffle (♩ = $\frac{3}{4}$)

A5 A6 A5 A6 A5 E5 E6

Figure 3-14 shows a more elaborate turnaround using one chord for every two beats or five different chords in all: C, C7, F, Fm, and G7 — all in the space of two bars.

Figure 3-14:
A two-bar turnaround with chord changes every two beats.

Shuffle (♩ = $\frac{3}{4}$)

G G7 C Cm G D7

Figure 3-15 is a variation of Figure 3-14, with a chromatic move in the last part. It's also in an unusual key — B♭.

Figure 3-15:
A two-bar turnaround with chromatic movement.

Shuffle (♩ = $\frac{3}{4}$)

B♭ B♭7 E♭ E♭m B♭ E♭7 E7 F7

Endings

Endings are closely related to turnarounds, except for the last part of the last measure. The last measure terminates on a I chord of some type. Figure 3-16 shows an ending that a slow blues often uses — a 9th chord for the final chord of the piece.

Figure 3-16:
A typical
ending for
slow blues.

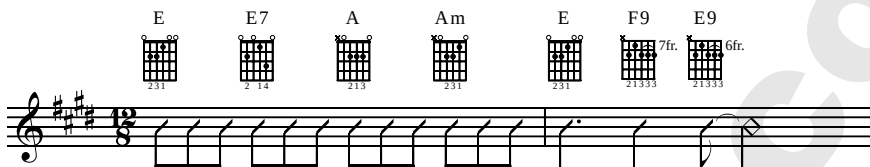
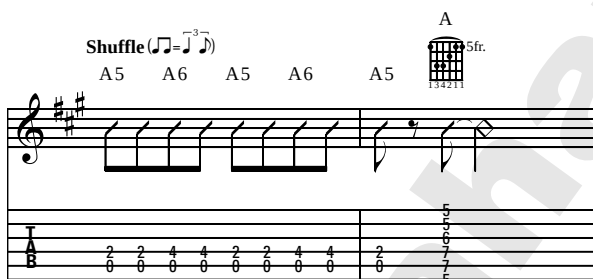


Figure 3-17 is an ending that's typical for medium-tempo shuffle tunes.

Figure 3-17:
A two-bar
turnaround
in a shuffle
feel.

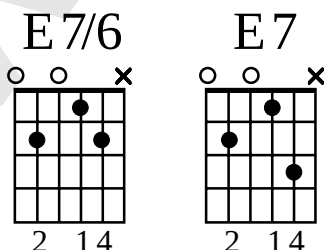


High Moves

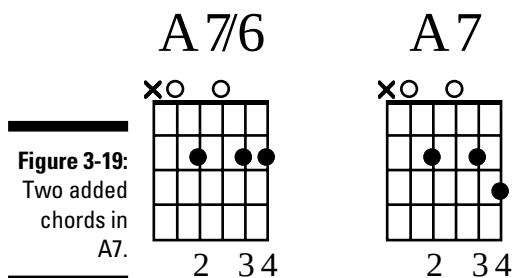
All the moves covered earlier in this chapter take place on the lower strings. But you can play them on the higher strings, too. These strings often involve the same notes that are played in the lower strings (the 5th and 6th of the chord featured in the Jimmy Reed move — covered in “Applying Structures to Keys” earlier in this chapter), but when played up high, it sounds more like a riff than a chord figure. This creates a bridge between chord figures and riffs and licks.

Think of these new, higher moves as chord forms added to your basic eighth-note strumming. As you play these added chords, notice that the sound produces a melodic motif. Figure 3-18 shows the first high-note move in the key of E. The two added chords are E7 chords with your fourth finger of the left hand playing notes on the second string.

Figure 3-18:
Two added
chords in
E7.



Now add two chords to the A7 chord sequence. The notes are the same relative ones you added to the E7 chord — the 6th and the 7th. Figure 3-19 shows the fingering with the added notes played by the fourth finger of the left hand.



For the B7 chord, in Figure 3-20, the fourth finger again plays the added note, but because the finger is already in place — on the 2nd fret, 1st string — you must move it up to the 3rd fret briefly. This may seem a bit awkward at first, and the stretch between your fourth and third fingers may take a while to get smoothly, but it will come in time.

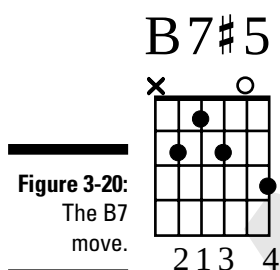


Figure 3-21 shows all three moves in a 12-bar blues. If some of the moves seem difficult, or come too fast, try leaving them out at first. As long as you don't break the rhythm in your right hand and you change left-hand chords where you're supposed to, the blues still sound fine. That's the beauty of the blues: You can play any variation on the basic structure — from simple to complex — and it always sounds good.

Track 70

Shuffle (♩=♩)

E7 E7/6 E7 E7/6 E7 E7/6 E7 E7/6

E7 E7/6 E7 E7 E7 E7/6 E7 E7 E7/6 E7 E7 E7/6 E7

A7 A7/6 A7 A7 A7 A7/6 A7 A7 A7/6 A7 A7 A7/6 A7

E7 E7/6 E7 E7/6 E7 E7/6 E7 E7 E7 E7/6 E7

B7 B7#5 B7 A7 A7/6 A7 A7 A7/6 A7

E7 E7/6 E7 E7/6 E7 E7/6 E7 E7 E7/6 E7

Figure 3-21:
High moves
in a 12-bar
blues in E.

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Chapter 4

Blues Riffs: The Bedrock of the Blues

In This Chapter

- ▶ Mastering the basics: Single-note riffs
 - ▶ Exploring double-stop riffs
 - ▶ Shooting for high-note riffs
 - ▶ Taking your skills to the next level: Mastering rhythm figures
-

It can be tough to find your own blues voice because you can't randomly improvise the blues any more than you can make up baroque or bebop; you have to learn the vocabulary in order to improvise. And the vocabulary for blues includes licks and riffs.

Although related to chords, riffs aren't tethered to chords the way the rhythm-based approach is (Chapter 2 in Book IV discusses blues rhythm). It's always good to know where your riffs spring from — especially if they're derived out of a chord form. But you don't need to grab a chord first to play a riff. In this chapter, you play riffs with a liberated left hand.

When you learn chords, strumming, double-stops, and single-note riffs, you have most of the ingredients necessary to start really developing as a player. In the blues, cloning the greats and doing your own thing is always a delicate balance.

Basic Single-Note Riffs

A *riff* is a self-contained musical phrase, and it can be used to form the basis for a song. Riffs are the bridge between chords and lead guitar. They're usually based on single notes, but they can involve *double-stops* (two notes played simultaneously) and bits of full-chord playing.



You may hear the terms riff and lick used interchangeably in your blues guitar career. But try to think of a riff as more of a structural, repeatable phrase, and a lick as a cliché — that is, a self-contained lead figure that doesn't necessarily have structural importance (like those short, snappy melodic phrases played by blues and country guitarists between vocal lines).

The signature guitar parts in the Rolling Stones' "Satisfaction" and the Beatles' "Day Tripper" are classic examples of riffs. In blues, the crisp, ascending, horn-like melodic bursts in Freddie King's "Hide Away" are riffs, as is the repeating pattern in Bo Diddley's "I'm a Man."

In the next few sections, you look at riffs in order of increasing rhythmic activity, starting with quarter notes, advancing through eighth notes (the straight, shuffle, and triplet varieties), and moving to the more complex 16th-note-based and syncopated riffs (which involve eighths and 16ths). Just as you do when playing chords, you must play riffs with a solid and consistent approach to articulation (attack), rhythm, and dynamics (overall loud and soft) to help keep the drive in the guitar part.



Use a metronome to help keep yourself playing along with the beat, and use a combination of your ears and muscle memory to make sure you strike the strings with the same force for achieving consistent dynamics.

For the low-down bass notes: Quarter-note riffs

You may think you can't do much to groove hard with the boring ol' quarter note, but the quarter note drives a lot of boogie-woogie bass lines. Boogie-woogie and blues are close cousins, and you can always throw in a boogie bass as a variation to almost any medium- to uptempo shuffle. Figure 4-1 shows a common quarter-note boogie pattern that you can play easily with just downstrokes.

Figure 4-1:
A boogie
bass line
in quarter
notes.



The big daddy of riffs: Eighth-note riffs

Most riffs in blues are eighth-note based, so there's a wide range of music you can play in an eighth-note groove. But to start off, jump into eighth-note riffs by taking quarter-note riffs (from Figure 4-1) and doubling them up — that is, play two notes per beat instead of one. Figure 4-2 is a boogie-bass pattern in shuffle eighth-notes.

Figure 4-2:

A boogie
bass line
with double-
struck
eighth
notes.



Another popular riff is the stop-time feel. It features the low notes of the guitar. The entire band plays a figure in unison and stops at the downbeat of each measure in the phrase, like in “Blue Suede Shoes.” This approach is used famously in the Muddy Waters tunes “Mannish Boy” and “Hoochie Coochie Man.” A tribute to the stop-time riff is featured in Figure 4-3.

Figure 4-3:

A stop-time riff in eighth notes.



Figure 4-4 shows a riff in the style of Freddie King’s “Hide Away” — one of the most recognizable eighth-note riff-based songs in the blues repertoire.

Figure 4-4:

An eighth-note riff in the style of Freddie King's "Hide Away."

Shuffle (♩ = 3♩)

E7 A7

0 0 4 2 5 2 4 2 2 0 0 4 5 2 4 2 2

Adding a little funk: 16th-note riffs

Funky blues usually sound that way because 16th notes are in the mix. In a 16th-note groove, the tempos tend to be moderate. But because the beats use 16th-note subdivisions, the groove sounds quite active. Often the bass line and drums (particularly the hi-hat) employ 16th notes to lend support to the scratchings laid down by the guitar. Figure 4-5 is a 16th-note riff on the low strings that you play with strict alternate (down-up-down-up) picking.

Figure 4-5:

A 16th-note riff using alternate picking.

E7 A7 E7 A7

0 3 4 2 2 4 2 0 3 4 2 4 2 0 3 4 2 2 4 2 0 3 4 2 4 2

Throwing rhythm for a loop: Syncopated eighth-note riffs

Although syncopation isn't a huge influence in the blues (compared to, say, jazz, R&B, and funk), it's used sometimes and is always a welcome treat. (For more on syncopation and its mechanisms, flip to Chapter 2 in Book IV.) Figure 4-6 shows a syncopated blues line consisting of a dotted eighth, a tie, and 16th notes.



TIP

If you're practicing the syncopation in Figure 4-6 and it gives you trouble at first, try practicing the line without the tie (so you're playing both notes in the tie). Then, when you're confident with the figure, practice the tie by letting the note ring through.

Figure 4-6:

An eighth-note riff featuring common syncopation figures.



Double the Strings, Double the Fun: Double-Stops (Two-Note Riffs)

Riffs aren't restricted to single notes. In this section, you get to explore double-stops — a technique that doesn't strictly involve single notes. The term double-stop means two strings.



A double-stop applies to all string instruments when two notes are stopped or played together. Even when guitarists don't have to fret a string, they still refer to simultaneous two-string playing as double-stops. But more than just playing two strings (like in the Jimmy Reed figure covered in Chapter 3 in Book IV), double-stop playing implies moving in lock step — and even performing bends, slurs, and vibrato (sliding fretted notes back and forth to make them waver up and down in pitch) on two strings at once.

Part of the versatility of a two-note figure is that it can be played on any two strings — low, high, and in the middle — all for a slightly different effect. When you get tired of playing chords and single-note leads, a two-note riff can be just the ticket to give your playing (and your listeners) a much-needed dose of dual-string diversity.

The 5-6 riff is a blues-rhythm hallmark of going from the 5th to the 6th degree in a chord (such as E to F# in an A chord) and is technically a double-stop, although the string motion doesn't proceed in parallel motion. But the right-hand coordination is the same: You strike two strings as if they're one every time your right hand comes in contact with the strings. The 5-6 riff is also known as the Jimmy Reed move (see Chapter 3 in Book IV). The following sections cover two 5-6 riffs, each in a different feel.

Straight feel

Straight-eighth notes are unusual in blues. But in blues-rock, classic rock 'n' roll, and rockabilly — all closely related to the blues — the straight-eighth feel rules. Straight eighths are spaced equally apart, whereas shuffle eighths follow a long-short scheme.

Figure 4-7 uses linear movement instead of the more static, back-and-forth 5-5-6-6-5-5-6-6. Also think of the riff to Roy Orbison's (and later Van Halen's) "Oh, Pretty Woman" for a classic straight-eighth approach to a low-note riff.

Figure 4-7:

An expanded version of the classic 5-6 move in straight eighths.

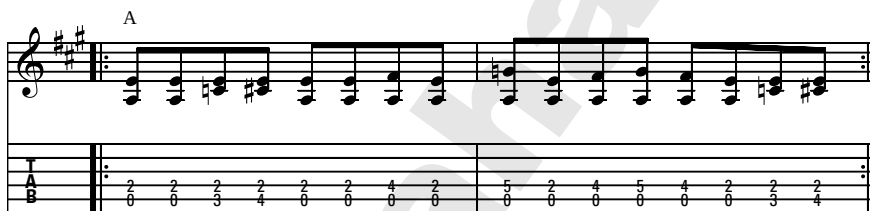


Figure 4-9 is an eighth-note riff with the melody weaving in and out of the low and high strings. This riff, once mastered, is tons of fun to play because it takes your left hand up and down and makes you look like you're really movin' on those strings.

Figure 4-9:
An expanded version of the classic 5-6 move.

Shuffle (♩ = ♩³)

A

High-Note Riffs: The Bridge to Lead Blues Guitar

A high-note riff is very close — in words and in music — to a lick. But if you're mastering all that low-note stuff, you deserve to see what awaits you when you ascend the cellar stairs into the sunshine of high-note, melodic-based playing.

Keith Richards's borrowed trademark: Quick-four riffs

A quick four (in this section) refers to a double-stop riff that you play on the second and third strings within a measure of a I or IV chord. (Don't get this quick four confused with the kind of quick four that happens in bar 2 of a 12-bar blues, covered in Chapter 3 in Book IV.) When you play this riff during a chord, you create a temporary IV chord.

The Rolling Stones' Keith Richards carved out a very successful career exploiting this riff, and he learned from the great American blues masters. Figure 4-10 shows a four-bar phrase where the quick-four riff is applied at the end of each bar of an E and A chord.



Keith Richards's signature riffs in Stones classics like "Brown Sugar," "Honky-Tonk Women," and "Start Me Up" are actually in open-G tuning, which makes the quick four easy to access. Open tunings in G, A, D, and E were used extensively by prewar acoustic guitarists — such as Charlie Patton, Son House, and Robert Johnson — especially for slide.

Figure 4-10:

The quick-four move over open position E and A chords.

Shuffle (♩ = ♩³)

E A

Intro, turnaround, and ending riffs

Intros, turnarounds, and ending riffs fill out the chord structure with melodic figures. As you play the figures in this section, try to hear the underlying structure — the rhythm guitar in your mind — playing along with you. You can play the chords according to the chord symbols above the music, but in this case the symbols identify the overall harmony and don't tell you what to actually play at that moment.



TIP

Intro, turnaround, and ending riffs have very similar DNA, so they can be mutated ever so slightly to change into one of the other two functions. You can easily adapt and add your own flavor to the examples (in the figures) in this section, so take a stab at converting the intro in Figure 4-11 into an ending that borrows from Figure 4-16. These practices get you used to taking other people's ideas and fashioning them into your own. That's how pre-existing riffs and licks get turned into an individual and original voice.

Intro riffs

Figure 4-11 is a snappy, triplet-based intro riff. The lower voice descends while the top voice stays fixed. Try playing this riff fingerstyle or with a pick and fingers.

Track 71, 0:00

Figure 4-11:

A triplet-based intro riff in E.

Shuffle (♩ = ♩³)

E7 B7

Figure 4-12 is related to Figure 4-11 in that the lower voice descends against a fixed upper-note. But here, the notes are played together as double-stops for a more obvious and dramatic harmonic clash of the two notes. This blues lick and the one in Figure 4-13 are borrowed from a famous pop song — Johnny Rivers’s version of Chuck Berry’s “Memphis.” Play this lick fingerstyle or with pick and fingers.

Track 71, 0:11

Figure 4-12:
A double-stop intro riff in E.

Shuffle (♩ = ♩³)

E7 B7

The varying motion of the riff in Figure 4-13 makes it unpredictable and dramatic. The figure shows an all-single-note riff in triplets, ending in a B7 chord that comes on beat 2. The melody here changes direction often and can be a little tricky at first. But we’re confident you’ll get the hang of it with some practice.

Track 71, 0:21

Figure 4-13:
A melodic intro riff based in all triplet eighth notes.

Shuffle (♩ = ♩³)

E B7



The last note of the melody, low B, is actually the root of the B7 chord that you play one moment later. So play that B with your left-hand second finger.

Turnaround riffs

Figure 4-14 can be used as an intro or a turnaround, but here it's cast as a turnaround. This is a double-stop riff in A with a descending lower voice, reminiscent of the playing of Robert Johnson.

Track 71, 0:30

Figure 4-14:

A descending double-stop turnaround riff in A, in the style of Robert Johnson.

Shuffle (♩ = ♩³)

A7

E7

Figure 4-15 is a wide-voiced double-stop riff where the voices move in contrary motion (the bass ascends while the treble descends). This riff is great for any fingerstyle blues in E because it highlights the separation of the bass and treble voices — a signature feature of the fingerstyle approach.

Track 72, 0:00

Figure 4-15:

A turnaround riff in E featuring contrary motion.

Shuffle (♩ = ♩³)

E

B7



If the double strikes in the bass give you trouble at first, try playing them as quarter notes, in lock step with the treble voice.

Combining single notes and chords

One way to get the best of both worlds — the lead and rhythm worlds, that is — is to combine single notes and chords. Many blues players don't make clear distinctions between chord playing, riff playing, or lead playing. Their technique just melds aspects of all these approaches into one cohesive style. And many of them do this while singing! Here are two examples:

- ✓ Stevie Ray Vaughan was a master of this style. He created full-sounding, active, and infinitely varied parts under his vocals as well as when he was just vamping along with the band.
- ✓ Eddie Van Halen, when in rare blues-mode (as opposed to his tapping, metal rock-god mode), was also an excellent practitioner of the integrated single-note-and-chord approach.

Today's students of the guitar tend to look at rhythm versus lead guitar as a black-and-white issue. But the history of blues shows that, until the advent of modern rock (from about the late 1960s on), players didn't really think of guitar-playing in those terms.

Be sure to also listen to the traditional players who sang and accompanied themselves on guitar:

- ✓ Robert Johnson
- ✓ John Lee Hooker
- ✓ Mississippi John Hurt

You hear the best examples of how to combine single notes and chords in those players' styles, and the musical playing is some of the best you may ever hear.

Figure 4-16 is an open-chord turnaround riff in C — the key for fingerpicking country blues like Mississippi John Hurt. The last chord is a treat: a jazzy G7 augmented (where the 5th of the chord, D, is raised a half step to D $\sharp$), which gives the progression a gospel feel with a little extra flavor.

Track 72, 0:12

Figure 4-16:
A turn-around riff in C with a gospel flavor.

Shuffle (♩ = ♩)

Chord diagrams and fingerings:

- C: 3 2 1
- C7: 3 2 4 1
- F: 3 2 1 1
- F $\sharp$ 7: 1 3 2 4
- C: 3 2 1
- G7 $\sharp$ 5: 1 2 3 4

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Ending riffs

Ending riffs are similar to both intros and turnarounds, except ending riffs terminate on the I chord, not the V. Figure 4-17 is a triplet-based riff in 6ths, where the second string isn't played.

Track 72, 0:22

Shuffle (♩-♩-♩)

E

F9 7fr. E9 6fr.

21333 21333

Figure 4-17: A triplet-based ending riff.



You can play this riff with just the pick, but it's easier with fingers or a pick and fingers. The open B string on the last triplet of beat 1 gives you a bit of a head start to get your hand up the neck to play the F9–E9 ending chords.

Figure 4-18 is a low note ending in E, using triplet eighths and a double-stop descending form. This riff is meaty and doesn't sound too melodic because it has more of a low, walking bass feel.

Track 72, 0:33

E

B7

Figure 4-18: A low-note ending riff in E.

Mastering the Rhythm Figure

After you have a handle on the components of rhythm guitar — left-hand chords, right-hand strums, riffs, and combinations thereof — it's time to put them all together in various ways.

Here you can master the rhythm figure, which combines the components of rhythm guitar. In some musical circles, a rhythm figure — usually longer than a riff — describes any repeatable passage of music that forms the basis for a song or section of a song.

Rhythm figures can be as simple as a quarter-note chord strum, an eighth-note boogie pattern, or a wild hybrid containing everything but the kitchen sink, as evidenced by the complex, integrated rhythm work of Magic Sam, Freddie King, Jimi Hendrix, and Stevie Ray Vaughan.

Figure 4-19 is a 12-bar blues that uses chords, single-note bass runs (to bring you in and out of those chords), and single-note riffs that go into flights of blues fancy.

Shuffle ($\text{♩} = \overset{\text{3}}{\text{♩}} \text{♩}$)

E7

A7

E7

A7

E7

B7

A7

E

B7

[illegible]

Figure 4-19:
A rhythm
groove over
12-bar
blues in E.

Chapter 5

Blues Genres: Acoustic, Electric, and Blues-Rock

In This Chapter

- ▶ Hammering out Delta, Piedmont, folk and country, and slide guitar blues
 - ▶ Getting heavy with electric blues
 - ▶ Checking out blues-rock, Southern blues, and the future of the blues
-

Acoustic-guitar blues is one of the earliest forms of blues. Before acoustic blues developed into its own instrumental style, the guitar was just a convenient instrument to play and accompany yourself while you sang. A performer naturally played rhythmically when singing and more melodically in between the vocal phrases. So the guitar style was woven into the singer's approach to accompanying himself on the guitar. Gradually, the guitar went from being just a background instrument into a solo, unaccompanied instrument and then evolved into the different branches of ragtime, country blues, and even rockabilly.

In this chapter, you take a grand tour of where the blues has gone in its long, illustrious journey, beginning with Delta blues, Piedmont blues, country and folk blues, and slide guitar, through electric and blues-rock, and ending with a few of the great up-and-coming blues players of today.

Delta Blues: Where It All Began

The famous *Delta* is an area of northern Mississippi and Arkansas that was agriculturally and musically fertile. When people refer to the “Delta blues,” they describe the music specific to a geographic region and the hard-edged, acoustic blues played by Charlie Patton, Son House, and especially Robert Johnson — its most famous and influential practitioner, who contributed some of the best recorded examples.

Understanding the Delta technique

The Delta blues style is an acoustic, self-contained approach (rhythm and lead combined) used almost exclusively as accompaniment for a singer. The thumb and fingers often play different parts. The thumb plays either steady quarter notes or a shuffle-eighth-note rhythm, especially when the high notes are laying out. The Delta blues liberally uses the minor pentatonic scale. (For more on the minor pentatonic scale, see Chapter 3 in Book III.)

Figure 5-1 is a 12-bar blues in the Delta blues style. The thumb hammers out either quarter notes or shuffle eighths. In the spaces where the vocal rests, high notes are introduced as melodic fills.



Many Delta players use thumbpicks for extra power. For more rhythmic playing, thumbpicks are especially appropriate, even if you don't normally use them. The more experienced players try to incorporate licks and subtle chordal flourishes while keeping an insistent bass going.

The king of the Delta blues: Robert Johnson



Robert Johnson (1911–1938) is universally recognized as the “King of the Delta Blues,” and for good reason. His influence is felt not only through those who followed but also in every student who picks up the guitar with a mind to play the blues. Johnson influenced many aspects of the blues — through his playing, his songwriting, and his aura. No performer has led — or was alleged to have led — a more mythic or legendary blues life. Some people believe that Johnson gained his talent in a deal with the devil; he died young and under mysterious circumstances, and his songs are haunting with chilling themes about the devil and death.

If you've grown up with blues as interpreted by B.B. King, Eric Clapton, Stevie Ray Vaughan, and other modern electric-blues masters, hearing the scratchy, raw recordings of Johnson can be quite startling. Johnson's thin, keening voice, his twangy guitar, and his sometimes irregular meter and quirky phrasing are definitely an acquired taste. But when you make the adjustment, the genius of him in these stark settings is awe-inspiring.

Robert Johnson's music embodied the Delta blues in its finished state. And there was no end to Johnson's innovation. He played with a slide and without, in altered tunings as well as standard, and he shifted from accompaniment to a featured guitar style effortlessly. Only one solo break of Johnson's talent exists on recording. To hear Robert Johnson play his only known recorded solo break, check out “Kind Hearted Woman Blues.”

Track 74

Shuffle (♩ = ♩³)

The musical score is a 12-bar blues in the Delta blues style, written for guitar and bass. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked 'Shuffle' with a note value of 3/4. The score is divided into four systems, each containing a guitar staff and a bass staff. The guitar staff includes chord symbols (E7, A7, B7) and fret numbers. The bass staff includes fret numbers and a 1/4 note mark. The score is a 12-bar blues in the Delta blues style.

Figure 5-1:
12-bar blues
in the Delta
blues style.

Did Johnson sell his soul to the devil?

Almost certainly not. Robert Johnson wasn't always referenced with the devil. The myth only began in 1965 after blues scholar Pete Welding interviewed Son House. House talked about the amazing progress Johnson made on the guitar in such a short time and said, "He must have sold his soul to the devil to play like that."

Eric Clapton and his band Cream perpetuated the myth, perhaps inadvertently, when

they changed Johnson's opening lines of "Crossroads Blues" from "I went to the cross road — fell down on my knee. I asked the Lord above, 'Have mercy — Save poor Bob, if you please'" to "'I went down to the cross road, fell down on my knees, saw the devil. I went up and I said, 'Take me if you please.'"

Johnson played his brand of blues in many keys and in many different tunings, but he's known for his work in the key of open A. Figure 5-2 shows a passage in standard tuning that Johnson frequently used for intros, turnarounds, and endings. The lick in Figure 5-2 is similar to others that are covered in Chapter 3 in Book IV in the key of E. (Don't worry if you haven't looked at that chapter yet.) This figure uses a device called *oblique motion* — a fancy term for when one voice stays the same (the top) and another moves (the lower, descending).

Figure 5-2:
A lick in the key of A in the style of Robert Johnson.

Johnson's style was complex and hard to pin down. Some of his stylistic hallmarks include the following:

- ✓ An insistent bass in quarters and shuffle-eighths
- ✓ Up-the-neck chords
- ✓ Chromatic movement

- ✓ Melodic fills in between vocal phrases
- ✓ Classic turnaround figures

Johnson is one of the few Delta blues players known for his influential song-writing (Willie Dixon, the bass player and performer, is another) and for contributing to the blues repertoire with such standards as “Sweet Home Chicago” and “Crossroads.” Besides composing two well-known hits with “Kind Hearted Woman Blues” and “Terraplane Blues,” many of Johnson’s songs are also historically significant.

The Piedmont Blues: Country Ragtime

The *Piedmont blues* feel is achieved by an alternating bass, where the bass plays on every quarter note, with accents and a root-fifth scheme on the first and third beats. This variation lends a two-beat, or boom-chick, sound. The sound of Piedmont blues is joyous and happy and is generally played more uptempo than Delta blues. The bouncy ragtime syncopations of ragtime piano — and especially the independence of the bass and treble voices — are often emulated in Piedmont blues, which further enhances its infectious, upbeat sound.

Practitioners of Piedmont picking include Blind Blake, Blind Boy Fuller, Barbecue Bob, Reverend Gary Davis, and Blind Willie McTell. Blind Willie McTell (1898–1959), one of the most famous early practitioners from the early Piedmont school, was a virtuoso 12-string guitarist. His “Statesboro Blues” from 1928, though neither his best nor most famous song, is a modern classic as the driving, electric shuffle version recorded by the Allman Brothers Band on *Live at the Fillmore East* in 1971 (the band had learned it from a Taj Mahal record).

Geographically, the “Piedmont” in Piedmont blues refers to the area quite a bit east of the Mississippi Delta, between the Appalachian Mountains and the Atlantic coastal plain, stretching from Richmond, Virginia, to Atlanta, Georgia. Piedmont is often called *country ragtime* because of its lively, driving flavor. This ragtime is different from the piano ragtime of Scott Joplin that you may be familiar with. Ragtime in Joplin’s time was played straight without the shuffle feel of country ragtime.

Figure 5-3 shows the driving, two-beat feel, accomplished through an alternating bass. This method is sometimes called *Travis picking*, after country performer Merle Travis, whose alternating thumb technique was widely popular (see the later sidebar “Country and folk blues had a baby: Rockabilly” for more on Travis). In this passage, in the key of C, the blue notes E^b and B^b figure prominently.

After you practice Figure 5-3 a few times, throw in some variety and mute the lower strings to add contrast between the bass and treble voices. This variation is performed on the accompanying CD.



Figure 5-3:
A bouncy
Piedmont
passage.

Shuffle (♩ = ♩³)

C F C

Figure 5-4 shows a Piedmont style ragtime chord progression. This progression is typical, from the IV chord (F, in the key of C) that acts as the climax. **Note:** The walking bass runs seem to line up perfectly with the chord progression.

Figure 5-4:
A ragtime
chord pro-
gression
with bass
runs.

Shuffle (♩ = ♩³)

C7 F D7/F# C A7 D7 G7 C G7 C

Country and Folk Blues

For acoustic blues that isn't clearly Delta or Piedmont — or that may have elements of both — you can use the adjectives *country* and *folk*. In this case, country means old-time country, as in non-urban. It has nothing to do with Nashville, sequins, or Dolly Parton, but a lot to do with mountain hollers and shotgun shacks. Folk blues is more of a labeling convention, where certain performers, like Leadbelly, were considered folk musicians because they sang folk songs.

The repertoire that comprised country and folk blues was often just a loose mix of folk and popular songs that were given a bluesy treatment by blues-influenced performers. These performers often made no distinction between what was blues or not; they just played songs from any genre that suited

Country and folk blues had a baby: Rockabilly

An important offspring of country blues was the hard-driving, alternate-bass sound that came to be known as *rockabilly*. The style featured blues figures but at a supercharged pace and with a heavy backbeat (provided by a prominent drum sound) and often a heavy use of effects, such as reverb, slap-back echo, and tremolo.

Merle Travis was a rockabilly pioneer, along with Scotty Moore (Elvis Presley's first guitarist)

and James Burton (Elvis's second guitarist). Travis didn't invent the alternating bass sound of rockabilly, but he popularized his own hard-driving approach that featured a I-V-I-V bass motif in an uptempo two-beat feel, called *Travis picking*. Travis and his many followers, including Chet Atkins, Doc Watson, Leo Kottke, and Jerry Reed, made this a staple sound in acoustic playing, and it works well in upbeat blues.

their performance style. Audiences didn't notice, either. For example, no one could have led a more emblematic blues life than Leadbelly, yet his best known song was a waltz-time folk ditty called "Irene Goodnight."

Country and folk-style blues often includes an instrumental melody, usually syncopated on top of an alternating bass line. The guitar imitates the piano-based ragtime style of Scott Joplin's days. The key of C is the favorite for many country and ragtime blues songs. Ragtime chords in the key of C include E7, A7, D7, and G7, all of which fall nicely in open position and offer fingerpickers many options for bass runs, open strings, hammer-ons, and pull-offs.

For the audiences that found the Delta sound a little too dark or stark, country and folk music brought more tuneful melodies with a bluesy treatment that was more enjoyable. People who brought about this mix included Mance Lipscomb, Big Bill Broonzy, Reverend Gary Davis, and Mississippi John Hurt. Like Piedmont blues, these styles feature a lively, relentless, alternating bass line, and the songs themselves are drawn more from the folk repertoire than from the 12-bar blues arena.

The best way to understand country and folk blues is to listen to these styles. Songsters like Mississippi John Hurt wrote with a bouncy ragtime style and recorded famous songs such as "Candy Man Blues" (full of double meanings), "My Creole Belle," and "Make Me a Pallet on Your Floor." These lively songs featured Hurt's ingenious ragtime work and had a good blues backstory.

Figure 5-5 is a song that features a melody on top of an alternating bass pattern, similar to Mississippi John Hurt's style. Pay attention to the way his confident, driving bass notes (played with the thumb) contrast the high-note syncopated melodic figures (played with the fingers).

Track 76

Shuffle (♩ = $\frac{3}{4}$)

C G7 C C G7 C

F C

G7 C F C C/E E♭°7 G7/D C

*C III

Figure 5-5: Country blues with a melody on top of an alternating bass.

*Barre at 3rd fret.

Quintessential Blues: Slide Guitar

Slide guitar may have become a stylistic choice over fretted guitar out of necessity by players who didn't have the skills or patience to fret the guitar and found it easy to slide a smooth, rounded object over the strings to achieve a similar effect. But for the greatest practitioners, such as Charlie Patton, Sylvester Weaver, Blind Willie Johnson, Son House, and Robert Johnson, slide

guitar was an unparalleled mode of expression evocative of the human voice as well as the wail of train whistles — a sound near and dear to country blues guitarists. Slide guitar is a staple of the acoustic blues guitar sound, unlikely to ever be imitated by synthetic, digital means.

The tools that let you slide

Early, rural-dwelling slide players used anything they could find to produce the slide effect. The edge of a pocket knife, a length of pipe, a section of bone from a ham or beef shank, or a medicine bottle were among some of the top “tools” used. The most popular and effective was a broken bottle neck (filed or fired to eliminate the sharp edges). Slide blues guitar is sometimes called *bottleneck guitar*.

These days, you’re likely to acquire your slippery weapon of choice by going to a music store and selecting from the prepackaged slides in the display case:

- ✓ Metal slides, especially those made from brass, are heavier (they have more mass), bolder sounding, and provide better sustain, but they’re more difficult to master.
- ✓ Glass slides are light and have a rounder, mellower tone.

The sliding technique

Many Delta players combined slide technique with fretting, often having the slide play the melodic portions while their fretting fingers played chordal figures or kept the bass line going. This technique dictated the wearing of the slide on the fourth finger (the pinky). Follow the steps below to perfect your slide technique:

- 1. Slide an object like a glass or metal tube over a left-hand finger (usually the third or fourth).**
- 2. Rest the slide on the strings (not pressed down), directly over the fret wire.**

Resting the slide on the strings and playing over the fret (instead of behind it as you do when fretting) takes a little finesse, but eventually, your *intonation* (the ability to play pitches in tune) and *tone* (the right pressure that produces rattle-free sustain) will improve.

- 3. Change pitch by gliding the slide along the string.**

This process produces a smooth, continuous change in pitch (sometimes called a glissando, or portamento, which is more correct).



At first, your slide playing may sound clanky and rattly as you move the slide around. You can improve your sound by using one of two techniques:

- ✓ Dampening (or muting), which involves placing your unused left-hand fingers lightly on the strings behind the slide (toward the nut)
- ✓ Employing right-hand palm mutes



Slide guitar is physically easy in one sense. You just drag a slide over the strings, and you can instantly hear the effect, right? Well, it can be difficult to get it under control to play in tune and keep the accompanying buzzing and rattling artifacts to a minimum. Slide guitar doesn't require left-hand strength the way normal acoustic guitar playing does, but it does require finesse. Focus on intonation first, rhythm second, and dampening third. Also, it can be instructive to check your intonation with an electronic tuner — an advantage you have over someone like Robert Johnson.

Tuning for slide guitar

Slide guitar can be played in standard or open tunings, but standard may be easier because your melodic instincts don't have to be translated to the altered tuning of the guitar. However, in standard tuning it's quite a challenge for a beginning slide guitarist to mute the unwanted strings that can create a sour, dissonant sound, as opposed to the chordal harmony of open tunings. So standard tuning presents more of a technical challenge, while open tuning presents a "thinking" challenge as you translate your instincts to fit a different tuning. The solution? Play both ways! The following sections explain what you need to do.



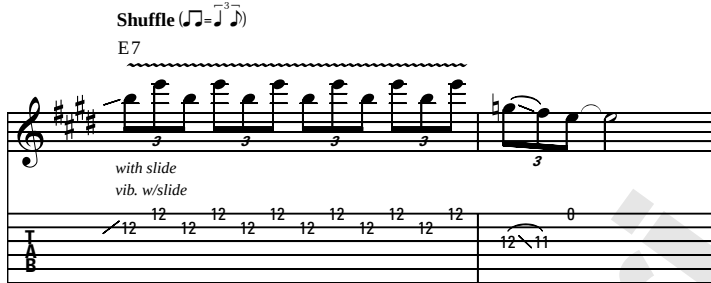
Open tunings favor the technical side of common blues licks. And the main tunings, open E and open A (which are the same, relatively speaking, as open D and open G), each have their specific idiomatic licks. Don't press too hard when applying the slide or the strings will buzz against the fret wire and fingerboard. Try to keep the rattle noise to a minimum when going from open strings to slide-stopped strings.

Standard tuning licks

Standard tuning and open E tuning both feature the root of the chord on the top string and an interval of a 4th between the 1st and 2nd strings. The lower note is the 5th of the chord and makes for powerful-sounding licks, as Figure 5-6 shows. The passage isn't difficult, and the slide doesn't do that much. But what it does is very effective, even in small doses.

The lick in Figure 5-6 is the characteristic sound of one of the most famous slide sounds of all time: "Dust My Broom" — a song originally by Robert Johnson with conventional fretting but covered in the most famous version by electric slide player Elmore James.

Figure 5-6: A standard-tuning slide lick in the style of “Dust My Broom.”



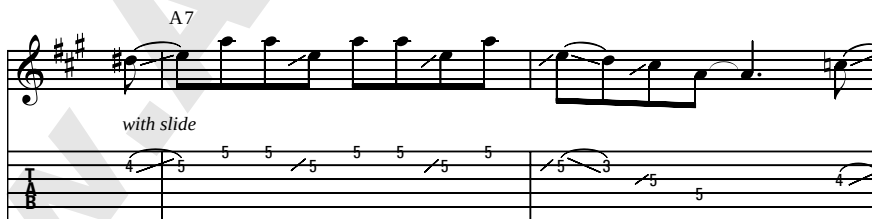
Open E and open D tuning

Open tunings have many technical advantages over standard tuning. The most prevalent is that an open tuning provides a major chord across all six strings, so holding the slide straight across at any fret yields a chord on any set of strings.

Open E (E, B, E, G[#], B, E, low to high) is close to standard tuning because the top two strings are tuned the same, and many blues slide licks lie well in this tuning, because they require only slight movement of a couple of frets above or below to play an entire passage.

Open D is the same as open E but tuned a whole step (two frets) lower (D, A, D, F#, A, D). Elmore James and Duane Allman (one of the greatest blues-rock slide guitarists and founder of the Allman Brothers Band) played in open E. Figure 5-7 shows a typical lick in open E.

Track 77



*Open E tuning: E B E G# B E, low to high.

Figure 5-7:
A slide lick
in open E.



Open A tuning

In open A, the strings are tuned E, A, E, A, C#, E, low to high. The root of the chord on the 5th string provides a major chord on the top three strings. Having a minor 3rd interval between the top two strings allows for some idiomatic blues moves, especially the chromatic descending lick in 3rds.

The Birth of Classic Electric Blues

Early electric guitars, even ones with pickups, weren't much different from acoustic guitars in construction, but gradually the manufacturing approaches diverged to produce two entirely different species. And along with the evolution of the electric guitar, so followed the electric blues guitar player's technique.

Today, of course, the electric guitar in blues (as it is in other genres) is far more popular than its older, acoustic counterpart. Think of the biggest blues guitar names playing today — Eric Clapton, B.B. King, Buddy Guy, Bonnie Raitt, Robert Cray. All are electric blues players. The acoustic-blues players of today — Rory Block, John Hammond Jr., Taj Mahal, Keb' Mo', Corey Harris, Roy Book Binder, and Bob Brozman — are no less talented, but don't enjoy household-name status.

The rise of the electric guitar in blues

At first, early electric guitarists simply played the way they always played when playing acoustic and appreciated the benefits of not having to play harder to play louder (instead they just turned up the amp). But as techniques developed, players began to understand that the electric was an entirely different instrument from the traditional acoustic, or "Spanish" guitar. Musicians started adjusting their techniques — and their whole approach to music — to suit the new medium. With a guitar that could hold its own with other principal instruments on the bandstand, guitarists now focused more on melodic and lead playing.

When pickups were developed, guitarists leapt at the opportunity to have at least a fighting chance to be louder. The new electrified sound allowed guitars to take the spotlight as the featured instrument. Searing slide solos, sustained string bends, and a more instrumentally virtuosic approach were the order of the day, fueled by restless musicians anxious to infuse this previously rural sound with urban postwar energy.



Increased sustain is probably the number-one advantage of electric guitars, allowing long, fluid, horn-like melodic lines. Overdriving an amp into distortion creates the illusion of even longer sustain because the signal is clipped and compressed, with a steady volume level until it decays.

The earliest electric pioneer: T-Bone Walker



Although electric guitarists became a dime a dozen after electrics became affordable, one name stands alone as the early voice of electric blues guitar: T-Bone Walker. He is one of the most influential blues guitarists of all time because he bridged the gap from acoustic country blues into the urbanized, electric sounds of Memphis, Kansas City, and Chicago. Walker's style and musical sensibilities were sophisticated and jazzy, and he was a versatile and skilled musician. He incorporated jazz-type harmony and phrasing in his playing, using 9th chords in his rhythm playing and crafting lead lines that were melodically and rhythmically complex.

Figure 5-8 shows a passage in the style of Walker's "Call It Stormy Monday" — his own tune and one where he really stretched out, taking the blues to places other melodic players of the day had never been. He achieved this end by throwing in unusual (for the time) string bends, jazzy phrases, and a harmonic sophistication his Delta counterparts would hardly recognize. But it was all grounded in the blues vocabulary.

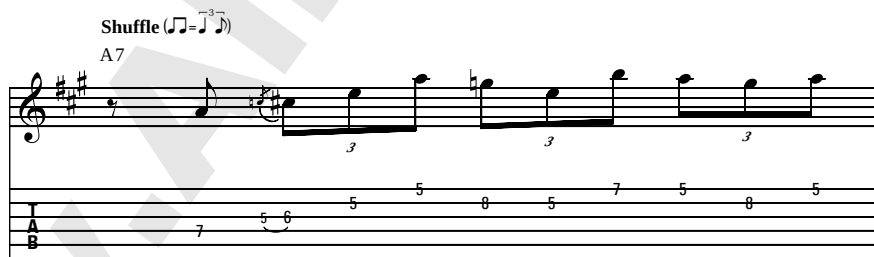
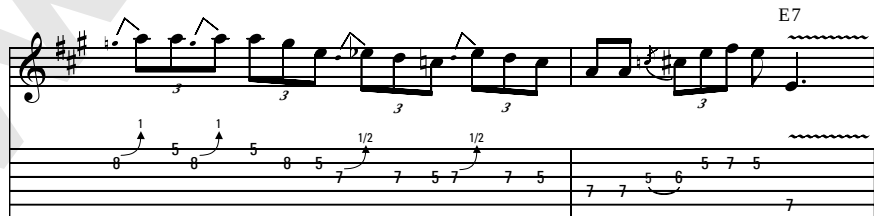


Figure 5-8:
A slow blues in the style of T-Bone Walker.



Walker influenced countless players, including Muddy Waters, Eric Clapton, Otis Rush, Magic Sam, Buddy Guy, Albert King, Albert Collins, Freddie King, and B.B. King. His showmanship, such as playing the guitar behind his head, was also imitated by many players.

Electric Blues' Sweet Home: Chicago

Many people think they know what Chicago blues is, but the more they discover the diverse influences, overlapping associations, time periods, and even the geography of the city, the more they realize what an open issue the notion of Chicago blues is. Still, if you just try to enjoy the music without engaging in too much analysis, you realize how important the Windy City is to the development of the blues.

Before World War II, important performers included Big Bill Broonzy, Tampa Red, and Memphis Minnie, who played electrically and acoustically. In the postwar period — and after T-Bone Walker's electric influence was felt by all who heard him — the Chicago scene, fueled by an influx of southern talent, took off. Table 5-1 shows some of the important blues guitarists who called Chicago home.

Table 5-1 Chicago Blues Players		
<i>Artist</i>	<i>Style</i>	<i>Association</i>
Big Bill Broonzy (1893–1968)	Acoustic folk blues	Friend to Muddy Waters
Tampa Red (1900–81)	Electric, slide, hokum	Influenced Muddy Waters, Elmore James, and Robert Nighthawk
Robert Nighthawk (1909–67)	Acoustic, electric	Delta influence; the slide link between Tampa Red and Earl Hooker
Howlin' Wolf (1910–76)	Electric	Delta influence in the direct lineage back to Charlie Patton ("Founder of Delta Blues"); Muddy Waters's contemporary and sometimes-rival
Muddy Waters (1915–83)	Electric, slide	Delta influence; leader of the first generation of postwar Chicago scene for decades

<i>Artist</i>	<i>Style</i>	<i>Association</i>
Elmore James (1918–63)	Electric, slide	Delta influence; the most influential electric slide guitarist of the time, and a contemporary of Robert Johnson
Earl Hooker (1930–70)	Electric lead, slide	Delta influence; followed Tampa Red and Robert Nighthawk; influenced B.B. King, Buddy Guy, Jimmy Page
Otis Rush (b. 1934)	Electric lead	Second generation Chicago; West Side sound; influenced Clapton, Stevie Ray Vaughan, and Peter Green; played “upside-down” guitar
Buddy Guy (b. 1936)	Electric lead	Second generation Chicago; West Side sound; backed Muddy Waters, among others; had a long association with harp man Junior Wells; influenced Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton
Magic Sam (1937–69)	Electric, fingerstyle	Second generation Chicago; West Side sound; influenced Robert Cray

The fertile postwar Chicago scene had several players, led primarily by the bigwigs in the following sections.

Muddy Waters, leader of the pack

Born in Jug’s Corner, Mississippi, in 1915, Muddy Waters (birth name McKinley Morganfield) came north to Chicago in 1945 and became the leader of Chicago’s South Side blues scene. A large and imposing man, Waters dominated the stage, the scene, and the entire city in all things blues. He had talented contemporaries, like Howlin’ Wolf and Sonny Boy Williamson II, but no single person is more associated with the Chicago sound than Muddy. He had everything:

- ✓ A guitar style that included percussive, stinging single-note Delta riffs
- ✓ An aggressive, bone-chilling slide technique
- ✓ A big, raspy singing voice
- ✓ A commanding stage presence
- ✓ A long and prolific performing and recording career

He played acoustic in Mississippi and electric in Chicago, single-handedly leading the charge to bridge the two styles. Figure 5-9 shows an electric guitar passage in the style of Muddy.

Shuffle (♩ = ♩³)

E7

Figure 5-9: A passage in the style of Muddy Waters.

Elmore James, slide guitarist extraordinaire

Elmore James was a Chicago-based blues player known for his electric slide work. James recast the signature lick from Robert Johnson's "I Believe I'll Dust My Broom" from conventional fretted playing to slide and recycled it many times in his other compositions. James's techniques with an electric guitar and his explosive assault on the strings turned "Dust My Broom" into a piece of blues immortality (his version is known by the shortened version of the title). James's slide lick is the first lick you need to learn; its importance is matched only by its accessibility, and it's what'll get you kicked out of the South Side if you don't play it correctly. James's "Dust My Broom," performed in open D tuning (D, A, D, F#, A, D, low to high), is shown in Figure 5-10.

Magic Sam, a man who marched to the pluck of his own pick

Magic Sam (birth name Sam Maghett) was born on February 2, 1937, in Grenada, Mississippi, and was one of the architects of Chicago's West Side sound. Sam played in a unique style, a punctuated fingerpicking approach, dosed with amp tremolo and exhibited in such tunes as his debut single, "All Your Love." His nickname

"Magic" derived from his last name. For many, Sam's one-of-a-kind style, great voice, and singular performing persona made him the favorite of the West Side. Tragically Sam died at age 32 of a heart attack and didn't enjoy the fame and notoriety of some of the other figures of his time, such as Buddy Guy and Otis Rush.

Track 78

Shuffle (♩ = ♪ = ♪)

D7

with slide

*Open D tuning: D A D F# A D, low to high.

Figure 5-10:

A lick in the style of Elmore James's "Dust My Broom."

Otis Rush: A soulful player with a flair for vibrato

Born in Philadelphia, Mississippi, in 1934 as one of seven children, Otis Rush learned to play the guitar left-handed and upside down, like Albert King. Rush

was exposed to Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf, but he also listened to B.B. and Albert King, who deeply influenced his lead approach. His first single, Willie Dixon's "I Can't Quit You Baby," made it to the top ten on Billboard's R&B chart.

"I Can't Quit You Baby," as well as the rhumba-flavored "All Your Love" and the minor-key songs "Double Trouble" and "My Love Will Never Die," show Rush's smooth, soulful single-string work and stinging vibrato.

Buddy Guy, the father of blues-rock

Buddy Guy, more than his contemporaries, seemed to foreshadow the blues-rock movement through his stage show. (Blues-rock is covered in more detail later in this chapter.) He played loudly and infused his playing with whammy-bar antics, distortion, and feedback. Guy influenced the early British blues-rock greats Jeff Beck, Eric Clapton, and the Rolling Stones, and toured the United Kingdom in 1965, sharing a bill with the Yardbirds. Stevie Ray Vaughan once said, "Without Buddy Guy, there would be no Stevie Ray Vaughan."



Guy is perhaps the single most important performer (trained by Waters and Howlin' Wolf) to bridge the Chicago sound with blues-rock. Through his exceptional talent and longevity, he has become a living legend whose albums have won Grammy Awards, and he's received the praises of later greats such as Eric Clapton, who calls Guy his "favorite blues axe man." Figure 5-11 is a passage that captures the essence of Buddy Guy's fiery and virtuosic style.

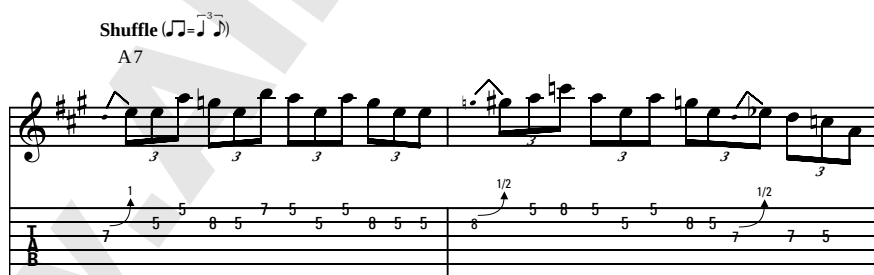
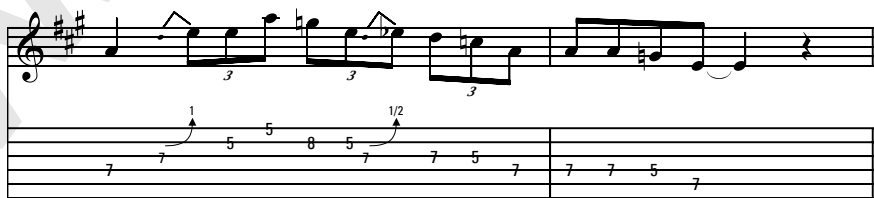


Figure 5-11:
A passage
in the style
of Buddy
Guy.



The Blues Sounds of Texas

As the blues grew up, it developed its own regional flavors beyond the already established locales of the Delta and Piedmont. So of course, Texas, being such a large and diverse state, has a sound and culture all its own when it comes to the blues. Of all the big blues regions, Texas, by virtue of its size and blues hotspots like Austin, Houston, and Dallas, still retains a meaningful connotation.

And speaking of the Lone Star State, when you say “Texas shuffle” to people attuned to the regional dialects of the blues, they instantly think of the many attributes of the shuffle:

- ✓ **Rhythm:** The rhythm section swings harder, influencing the lead guitarists’ approach to their solos.
- ✓ **Swing:** The Texas shuffle has more swing than the slow grind of a Delta blues or the bouncy ragtime of the Piedmont.
- ✓ **Harmonic richness:** This genre also has a wider variety of notes (the major 3rd, major 6th, and chromatic neighbor tones) than the minor pentatonic or six-note blues of Delta players.

Any great blues musician knows a Texas shuffle. Figure 5-12 is a solo in a Texas shuffle setting. It incorporates a wide vocabulary of notes in the lead part. Note the liberal use of the sweet notes — the major 3rd and major 6th of the chords underneath.

Track 79

Shuffle (♩ = 3♩)

A7 D7

A7

Figure 5-12:
A classic Texas shuffle.

Famous early performers to come out of the Lone Star State include Blind Lemon Jefferson, Lightnin' Hopkins, T-Bone Walker, Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, and Albert Collins. They performed vastly different music from one another, but all are connected through history and influence. A later generation of Texans includes several of the all-time greatest blues players of the post-Chicago heyday.

Johnny Winter, a Texas blues-rock titan

Blues-rock guitarist Johnny Winter exploded out of Texas in 1968 and proceeded to become one of the top concert draws of the early '70s. Winter was a virtuosic soloist who played with a thumbpick, and his speedy leads lit up a number of gold albums.

You can hear him trade red-hot blues leads with co-guitarist Rick Derringer on the 1971 cover of B.B. King's "It's My Own Fault." To play like Winter, develop the best blues vocabulary you can and work on making any phrase fit in any groove — straight, shuffle, or 16th-based, fast and slow.

Billy Gibbons and ZZ Top

The power trio ZZ Top is a powerful mix of Texan music and the blues. Guitarist Billy Gibbons isn't a high-speed player like Johnny Winter, but his slow, smoldering solos helped set the standard for "soulfulness" in the rock guitar world.



Gibbons is a masterful blues player with a well-rounded playing approach, but he's best known for his edge-of-the-pick (also known as *pinch*) harmonics. To play a pinch harmonic, follow these steps:

1. **Grasp your pick so only a small piece of the tip can be seen from between your thumb and index finger.**
2. **Just as you strike the string, give the pick a little forward twist, almost digging into the string and touching the flesh of your finger to the string, to stop or mute it slightly.**

This technique takes some practice and getting use to, but the resulting note should have a harmonic (a high, bell-like sound resulting from the string being partially stopped) in it.

3. **Add plenty of distortion to help the effect "read" better.**



Gibbons's fat lead tone is legendary among rock players. He's particularly famous for using a flametop 1959 Gibson Les Paul Standard lovingly named "Pearly Gates," as well as a pink late-1950s Strat given to him by Jimi Hendrix, which greatly contribute to that tone. But did you know that he doesn't pick with a plastic piece, but with a real Mexican peso? Just a cool fact to know.

Stevie Ray Vaughan, the greatest modern bluesman of them all

Austin's legendary Stevie Ray Vaughan burst into the spotlight in 1983, first on David Bowie's *Let's Dance* album, and then on his solo debut, *Texas Flood*. Stevie Ray could channel Jimi Hendrix's Strat attack — he would often perform "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)" and "Little Wing" as a tribute — but he developed his own style that brought the Stratocaster back as the definitive blues-rock instrument.

Vaughan blew minds with both a blistering blues technique as well as the fattest guitar tone imaginable. He achieved his tone by using a combination of classic Fender, Marshall, and Dumble tube amps, pumped up with an Ibanez Tube Screamer TS-808 overdrive pedal, as well as a vintage Strat set up with heavy-gauge strings. He also tuned down a half-step, which contributed to his sound's girth.

Stevie Ray died in a helicopter crash in 1990, just after performing with Eric Clapton, but young guitarists are still mystified at how he achieved his one-and-only Strat sound, heard in such classics as "Pride and Joy," "Crossfire," and "The Sky Is Crying."

Vaughan's playing style was unique, evolved, and identifiable, with an integrated chord-and-single-note approach for rhythm as well as over-the-top lead playing that sounded on the verge of losing control (which he never did). To emulate the style of Vaughan, put heavy strings on your guitar, build up your arm strength, and combine melodic licks and riffs with open-position, jazz, and barre chords. (Listen to Figure 5-13 to hear how Stevie also threw tasty little chordal riffs into his solos — a hallmark of Texas blues guitar.) You must also play with complete authority, whipping off rhythm figures and lead lines with equal abandon.



Stevie Ray's brother, Jimmie Vaughan, is also an extraordinary blues guitarist, known for his work with the Fabulous Thunderbirds.

Shuffle (♩=♩³)

E

V V etc.

A

E

B7

A

E

B7

Figure 5-13:

Stevie Ray
Vaughan
often com-
bined chord
vamps with
his leads.

Four Blues Giants: Three Kings and a Collins

Beyond the important regions, cultural developments, and trends in blues, individual performers often launch a trend in music. You'd be hard-pressed to find any single more influential individuals than the four giants of blues guitar covered in this section.

Albert King, the upside-down string bender

Mississippi-born, Arkansas-raised Albert King was a big man who squeezed the strings of his guitar into heartfelt submission. Because he played left-handed, upside-down guitar (where the low E string was closest to the floor), Albert's style was unorthodox, especially his approach to bending strings. He pulled the strings of his signature Gibson Flying V down toward the floor, which in part accounted for his unusual, expressive sound.

When Albert King was living in St. Louis in the late 1950s and then Memphis, he recorded for Stax Records and enjoyed real success, gaining visibility in both the blues and rock arenas. His soulful sound and R&B arrangements produced his best-known songs of the era, including "Laundromat Blues," "Cross Cut Saw," and "Born Under a Bad Sign," all of which placed on the pop charts. King influenced many guitarists, including Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, Mike Bloomfield, Stevie Ray Vaughan, and Robert Cray.

B.B. King, the blues' king of kings

If you know only one name in the blues, it's probably B.B. King. B.B. is the rightly anointed, undisputed king of the blues. He has a deep, historical connection to the Delta performers and trod the early club circuit in the southern United States.

Born Riley B. King in 1925 in Indianola, Mississippi, B.B. King began to gain success in his early 20s in his adopted town of Memphis, playing clubs and appearing on radio. His on-air persona was "the Beale Street Blues Boy," eventually foreshortened to "B.B.," and he started recording in earnest in 1949 (only one year after Muddy Waters made his first recording in Chicago). B.B. soon had his first national R&B hit with "Three O'clock Blues" in 1951.

Burning for Lucille

Lucille is the name B.B. King gives his main guitar (now a Gibson B.B. King signature edition, modeled after the ES-355). The story goes that King was playing in an Arkansas club when a fight broke out between two men over a woman. During the brawl a pail of kerosene that was being used to heat the club was knocked over, setting fire to the room. After escaping

outside, King realized that he had left his guitar inside and rushed back into the burning club, risking his life to retrieve his axe. He later learned that the name of the woman the men had been fighting over was Lucille, and so King named his guitar Lucille and has since named many of his guitars in her honor.

B.B. King has it all: a soulful delivery, chops to burn, a vast vocabulary of blues licks in a variety of genres, and an inexhaustible reservoir of expressive techniques. He's perhaps most often cited for his vibrato, which is effortless and heart-rending. Figure 5-14 shows an example of how B.B. executes his brand of vibrato over a minor blues. To play like B.B., work to make every vibrato count, no matter how brief. That means applying a different intensity (rate of bend and depth of bend) to the note, based on the tempo and feel of the groove.

Freddie King, a two-pick man

Freddie King was a Texas-born guitarist who played with a plastic thumbpick and a metal fingerpick, in a two-finger fingerpicking style that he said he learned from Muddy Waters sideman Jimmy Rogers and Jimmy Reed sideman Eddie Taylor. His early influences included Lightnin' Hopkins and saxman/jump blues star Louis Jordan, but he's influenced others, too: Jeff Beck, Keith Richards, Jerry Garcia, Peter Green, Kenny Wayne Shepherd, and John Mayer.

Freddie's family moved from Texas to Chicago in 1950, when he was 16, and there he sneaked into clubs to hear the greats of that era: Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf (who took a liking to him), and Elmore James. He began recording as a sideman in the '50s while working in a steel mill.

Freddie King's best-known song is the instrumental "Hide Away," recorded in 1961, which was covered by John Mayall's Bluesbreakers with Eric Clapton, and Stevie Ray Vaughan — and every blues cover band in North America and Europe. Following the success of this tune, which placed on the pop charts as

well as the R&B charts, Freddie followed up with more instrumentals, including “San-Ho-Zay,” “The Stumble,” and “Side Tracked.”

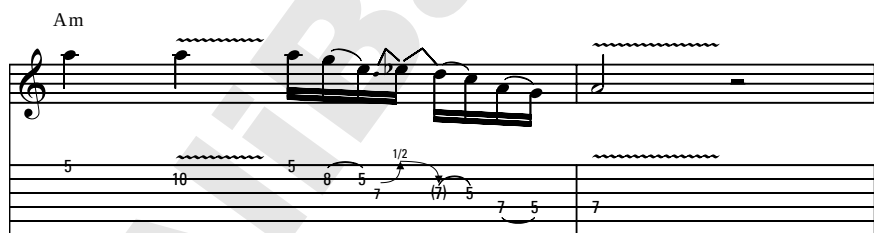
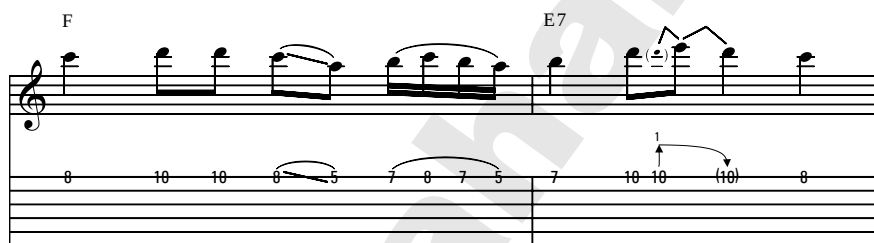
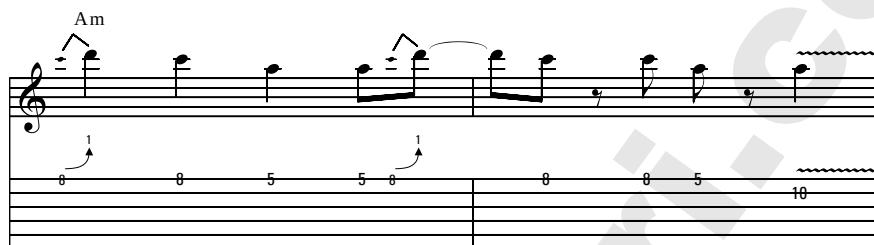
Figure 5-15 shows a lick in the style of Freddie King’s “Hide Away.” Keep the approach light and crisp, as Freddie did, and play “on top of” (or slightly ahead of) the beat to capture his sound.

Am

Dm

Figure 5-14: The blues lead style and hallmark vibrato of B.B. King.

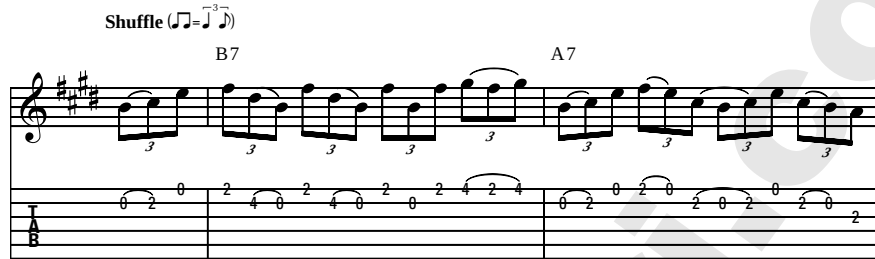
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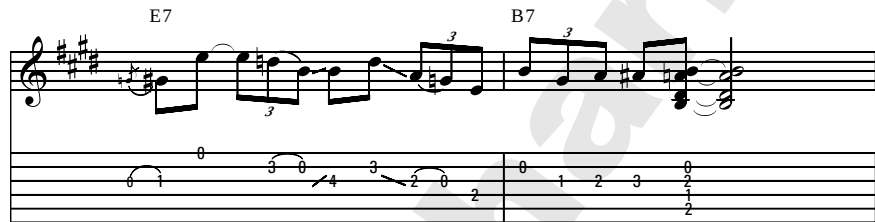
Albert Collins, master of the Telecaster

Albert Collins was an accomplished showman and a fierce guitarist. Born in 1932, in Leona, Texas, he received his initial musical training on the keyboards, but he soon picked up the guitar and started hanging out in Houston clubs and absorbing the influence of his Texas-based idols, Clarence “Gatemouth” Brown, Lightnin’ Hopkins (a distant relative), T-Bone Walker, and John Lee Hooker.

Albert Collins concocted a unique recipe for playing guitar, consisting of a Fender Telecaster, a capo (which was often strapped on at the 5th, 7th, or even 9th frets), unorthodox tunings, and a stinging fingerstyle approach that

**Figure 5-15:**

A lick in the infectious, melodic style of Freddie King.



fairly snapped notes out of the guitar. The essence of Albert Collins's style was his aggressive attack, piercing sound, and staccato phrasing. Plus he often tuned to an open minor chord.

Albert Collins had a string of instrumental hits in the late '50s and early '60s whose titles all had a "chilled" theme to them ("The Freeze," "Sno-Cone," "Icy Blue," and "Don't Lose Your Cool"). These songs earned him the nickname "The Iceman." In 1962, he released "Frosty," which became a big hit.

Blues-Rock and Southern Blues

The year 1965 was one of the most important years in popular music history. It was the year of Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone," and the Rolling Stones' "Satisfaction." For guitarists, it was also the beginning of a vast blues revival. Suddenly, mid-'60s electric guitarists on both sides of the Atlantic began re-exploring the blues and the roots of rock 'n' roll, along the way inventing an exciting, influential genre called *blues-rock*.

What traditional electric blues gave to the emerging style of blues-rock was widespread use of string bends and finger vibrato in composed melodic lines and improvised solos. Before the influence of blues, rockers in the '50s could

buy only heavy-gauge guitar strings, but '60s blues-rockers learned how to bend new, lighter-gauge strings, develop a strong vibrato, and hold long, sustained notes. These blues techniques gave rock guitar leads a more human, vocal-like quality.

This new level of expression also gave birth to the “guitar hero.” By the end of the 1960s, guitar gods like Eric Clapton, Michael Bloomfield, Jimi Hendrix, Jeff Beck, and Jimmy Page had become the gold standard of blues-rock currency. But these guitarists went beyond just bending strings — they also employed high-powered amplifiers, such as the fabled Marshall stack, to play blues guitar at previously unheard-of volumes, and infused their tone with tube overdrive, fuzzbox distortion, and the deep funk of wah-wah pedals.

When rock 'n' roll began in the mid-1950s, it was essentially a blend of R&B and jazz chord changes with country rhythms. Later, pop entered the genre via catchy tunes and more sophisticated lyrics. But the blues had only a negligible influence in a world of sweet and boppy melodies of the day — until one very stylish, duck-walking performer burst onto the scene: Chuck Berry. And following Berry was a whole movement of first British and later American artists who brought the blues to the world's screaming teens.

You can read about Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy Page, and other bluesy rock guitarists in Chapter 6 in Book III, which focuses more on rock than blues. Here, though, you can read about a decidedly more bluesy type of rock: southern rock.

Like the blues itself, there are few forms of popular music as quintessentially American as southern rock, which hails largely from the southeastern corner of the United States (notably Georgia and North Florida). Launched by the Allman Brothers Band, southern rock was the purest blues-rock sound ever created. The genre melded blues, country, gospel, and heavy rock. In all, the '70s southern rock sound had dozens of hot blues-rock players: The Outlaws (“Green Grass and High Tides”); The Marshall Tucker Band (“Can’t You See”); and the fusion-fueled Dixie Dregs, featuring bluesy guitar virtuoso Steve Morse (“Take It Off The Top”).

The Allman Brothers (especially Duane)

The original Allmans featured two excellent guitarists, Duane Allman and Dickey Betts. Both men could play the heck out of a 12-bar blues, but in Duane's brief career, he shined most on slide guitar (see Figure 5-16 for a slide solo, Allman-style). Allman's stylistic hallmarks were rapid up-and-down

slides into and out of eighth notes, plus a penchant for throwing in large, unexpected melodic leaps to keep listeners on their toes. His exceptional slide work can be heard all over the famous *At Fillmore East* live album from 1971, especially on the blues masterpiece “Statesboro Blues.” He died shortly thereafter, but his slide work was so ahead of its time that he set the bottleneck standard for the next 25 years.

Shuffle (♩ = ♩³)

D7

*Open E tuning: E B E G# B E, low to high.

Figure 5-16:
A slide riff
in the style
of the great
Duane
Allman.

Lynyrd Skynyrd

Lynyrd Skynyrd became the next southern supergroup, thanks to the 1974 smash, “Sweet Home Alabama.” Skynyrd had three fine guitarists: Ed King, Gary Rossington, and Allen Collins. Rossington and Collins can be heard tearing up

the concert favorite “Freebird.” King is notable for a squealing, edgy tone (thanks to an electronic compressor) and for punching up the blues bends dramatically. King’s solo in “Freebird” is inspired, yet controversial, because many claim that it’s “in the wrong key.” The song (whose first chord is D) is actually in the key of D. King himself admitted that he approached the solo as if it were in G, but most people agree the song is in D. Yet the solo seems to work anyway, and the song and King’s solo both go down in history as one of the great events for guitar.

Blues in the 21st Century

Today’s music scene may be dominated by computers and digital downloads, but happily, blues-rock, like traditional electric blues, has carved out a path and proceeds on its journey into the 21st century.

John Mayer and other new kids on the blues block

Among the brightest lights of the new millennium is singer-songwriter John Mayer, who fuses the best of Jimi Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan into a stunning Strat style. Listen to “Route 66” from the *Cars* film soundtrack to hear this young picker play a joyous blues solo and throw down a wad of chunky chord work.

A few other young guns of modern blues worth checking out include the hot-pickin’ Joe Bonamassa (“Travelin’ South”), Kenny Wayne Shepherd (“Blue on Black”), and Henry Garza of Los Lonely Boys (“Heaven”). Coincidentally, or not, all of them play Fender Stratocasters, just like their blues-rock idols, Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, and Stevie Ray Vaughan.

Allman Brothers redux: Warren Haynes and Derek Trucks, keepers of the flame

More than 35 years after their debut, the Allman Brothers are still a top concert draw, and the band’s guitarists — Warren Haynes and Derek Trucks — have a huge part in the group’s success.

- ✓ Haynes, who’s been in the band longer than Duane Allman was, is a wizard at both straight soloing and the Duane Allman-style slide. To play slide like Haynes, keep your guitar in standard tuning and transcribe all Duane’s moves (who played in open E) into standard tuning.

- ✓ Trucks, meanwhile, has taken bottleneck to a whole new dimension, infusing it with Indian music and bebop jazz influences from sax legend John Coltrane and trumpeter Miles Davis. You can hear both Derek and Warren just tearin' it up on "Firing Line" from the Allman Brothers album *Hittin' the Note*. To play like Trucks, you need to wear a slide and brush up on your bebop vocabulary. (If you want to check out Coltrane and Davis, get a copy of *Jazz For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, by Dirk Sutro [Wiley].)

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