

# Introduction

## Welcome to the Blues

**B**lues music is one of the most expressive forms of music in existence. This highly personal and emotive style is, for many, the perfect vehicle for self-expression, evoking at the same time both a sense of jubilation and a melancholy recognition of the complexities of the human condition. Undoubtedly, the guitar and blues music go hand in hand. This wonderful instrument's dynamic and articulate qualities are stretched to the limit when used expertly within the blues. Each subtle movement of finger on string can be used to coax a beautifully expressive and highly personal sound from the instrument.

## How This Book Works

**E**ach of the eleven chapters in this book includes four complete studies, written in the style of a bluesman, representing a specific genre or musical area relevant to the development of the blues. An analysis of each solo is included as a 'Checkpoint' section, breaking the solo down into bite-size lick-by-lick exercises. In addition, on the basis of your own improvisational skills, you are encouraged to both learn from solo studies and to create your own, and then to file any favourite licks away for future reference.

To accompany each solo study we will also take a look at both technical and conceptual approaches, such as those typical of the genre as a whole and also those that are unique and specific to each individual artist. These are designed to develop progressively, so although you can successfully 'dip' into any study at any point in the book at random, you are encouraged to work through the 'Assignments and Improvisation Tips' sections sequentially from beginning to end.

It is this quest for mastery that is the essence of these exact qualities that you will find here. The aim of this book is to help you to achieve greater technical awareness of the process involved, both technically, conceptually, and emotionally, to produce better blues and to help you to fit in well with stylistic authenticity and with a high level of musical freedom within the blues idiom.

Chapters 2-11 feature a rhythm study typical of each sub-genre, which forms the harmonic and rhythmic basis over which the solo studies are presented. It's crucial that your 'rhythm-chops' are up to scratch, so whilst it's tempting to skip these sections in favour of the more flashy solos, any work in this area will be ultimately rewarded in the overall level of your playing and all-round musicality. Chapters 1 and 11 focus on unaccompanied blues styles and therefore have no rhythm study.

## Using the CD

Each of the complete solo studies is presented on the CD, followed by the rhythm study (for Chapters 2–10). This takes the form of an extended backing track, allowing you to practise each specific solo, rehearse individual ideas, try out the improvisational or conceptual ideas, mix and match sections from the various solos, or simply just to play along and improvise in your own unique style.

With a style as expressive as blues, the printed score frequently does not do the music justice. You are advised to work closely in conjunction with the audio to allow you to really nail such dynamic and

personal articulate and expressive devices such as vibrato, dynamics, tone and delivery. While my goal when recording these tracks was to evoke a little of the spirit of the original artist, feel free to inject your own personality into the solo. You can do what you see fit. I cannot overstate the importance of listening to your development as a soloist. You should spend some time investigating the nuances of this genre yourself, reading up on the details. I've included some lists of listening at the end of the book – those are only just intended as a starting point for your own exploration of the blues genre.

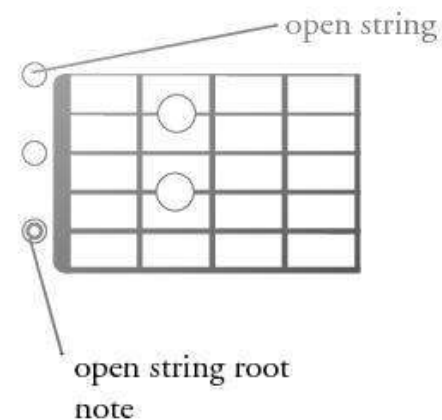
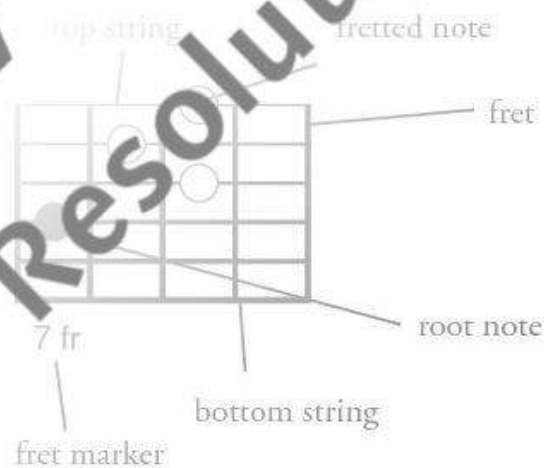
## How to Read Fretboard Diagrams

Throughout this book you will see fretboard diagrams, such as the one shown here, indicating a four-note chord of A7 played on the top four strings across the 7th fret.

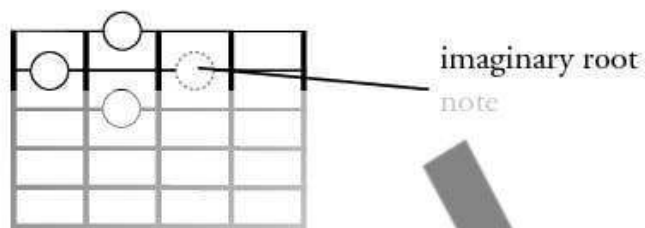
The horizontal lines represent strings and the vertical lines represent frets. Therefore, a rectangular block represents the distance of one fret. Fretboard diagrams can focus on different parts of the fretboard, either the open position, the nut, or higher up the neck. This is indicated either below each diagram or within the preceding text.

Diagrams show you where to place your fingers; symbols and dots showing the location of the root note when using moveable scale, chord and arpeggio shapes.

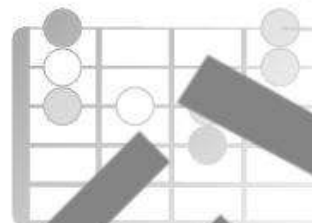
In the open position, open strings are indicated by a circle to the left of the nut, while open strings that are also root notes are indicated by a double circle.



Occasionally you will encounter a fretboard diagram that includes either grey or dashed dots along with black. This can indicate a number of things, such as an optional additional note, a root note that is imagined and not played, or a specific figure that moves through a selection of notes in sequence. All will be explained in the accompanying text and as each diagram is also paired up with both conventional music notation and tablature all should be clear.



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# 1: Acoustic Blues & The Delta

## Key Players

The musical form known as ‘The Blues’ emerged in the early part of the 20th century in the Mississippi Delta; however its origins go back much further, to the field hollers and work songs of the slave plantations, and even further back to the musical traditions of West Africa. Although slavery had been abolished by the turn of the century, large numbers of African-Americans still toiled on the plantations as sharecroppers in conditions not much better than those endured under slavery. Against this backdrop of racial injustice and segregation, music and entertainment played an important role, helping people to cope with the grinding poverty of the time.

Delta blues artists usually worked solo, accompanying themselves on guitar. Harmonica, often using bottleneck and slide guitar, brought a unique intensity, alongside raw, passionate vocal lines.

Notable performers of this style included Charley Patton, Son House and Blind Lemonnier, although the performer whose name was Robert Johnson. Johnson had incredible talent, combining solid blues-based bass and rhythmic accompaniment with intricate and soulful single-note lines. He often used a slide, allowing for the mournful inflections of his vocal style.

## Study #1: Mississippi Fred McDowell

Our first complete study illustrates a typical early blues accompaniment based entirely on dominant 7th chords, following the accepted 12-bar blues sequence now known the world over. This piece is reminiscent of the style of Mississippi Fred McDowell, although many of the

Credit should also be given to the influence of the European Classical tradition, from which we know that the harmonic structure of blues music was established. Indigenous music was a matter of coincidence rather than design. Combining these two elements might not offer Western harmony with the most ideal conditions it could be. The Blues as we know it was

We need to be looking at the playing style of one of the Delta's biggest and most enduring players, and also establishing a number of stylistic considerations and conventions along the way. Although these four studies are intended for solo acoustic guitar, they will work equally well on a clean to slightly overdriven electric guitar. Specific phrases will also function effectively in an ensemble setting. View each study as a potential ‘lick library’, taking note of specific ideas and phrases that you particularly like, filing them away for later use.

As most of the early Delta blues masters performed in a solo setting, the guitar's role was to establish a solid harmonic support to the voice, whilst also providing added musical interest by incorporating fills, chordal embellishments and single-note lines in between the vocals.

moves seen here have become frequently adopted by almost every blues player ranging from Robert Johnson to Eric Clapton.