

BLUES LICKS

CASEBOOK

by Dave Rubin and Matt Scharfglass

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Project Managers: Aaron Stang and Dave Rubin

Project Coordinator: Yoni Leviatan

Book Art Design: Carmen Fortunato

Technical Editor: Albert Nigro

Engraver: Rosario Ortiz



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WARNER BROS. MUSIC

CANADA: 40 SHEPPARD AVE. WEST, SUITE 901
TORONTO, ONTARIO, M2N 6K2
SCANDINAVIA: P.O. BOX 50, NORDSTRAË 16 5
S-162 11, DANDELING, SWEDEN
SUDBORÅ, P.O. BOX 919



Carisch

ITALY: VIA CARISCHI, 10
20126 S. CILLANO (MI) (MI) 02
ZONA INDUSTRIALE SESTO CALENDE
SPAIN: MADRID, 20
SANTA BARBARA

ITALIA: VIA CARISCHI, 10

FRANCE: 20, RUE DE LA VILLE, 92009 PARIS



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Introduction

Where would we be without the blues scale? Lost in Perry Como-land, that's where. All consonant diatonic tones to soothe our senses like a warm bath. No bracing ♭3rds or "blue notes," those intriguing microtones that occupy the magic space between the ♭3rd and major 3rd and the ♭7th and major 7th. Rock 'n' roll that all sounds like Abba. Scary thought, isn't it?

But we do have the blues scale, and it infuses blues, rock, jazz—virtually all forms of popular music—with vitality and emotion that resonates deep into our souls.

Learning to use any scale properly is like learning to speak a new language. First you need to know the alphabet, followed by words and sentences or phrases. The notes of the scale are the musical alphabet, and the licks are the musical words and phrases. The analogy is even more apt with the blues since the originators of the genre attempted to imitate the sound of blues singing on the harmonica and, more importantly, the guitar.

The Blues Licks Casebook, like the other publications in this series, is meant to be a quick guide to carry in your guitar case for instant reference. Need to refresh your blues vocabulary or pick up some new licks on the spot? Go no further. You will find 60 killer classic blues licks, all with first-rate pedigrees from the world of the blues guitar masters. Have fun.

Using the Blues Boxes

The most basic blues scale (also known as the minor pentatonic) lays on the fingerboard in such a manner that it fits into five compact patterns called “blues boxes.” As opposed to the way the majority of jazz and classical guitarists approach the modes, only the root position begins with the root note as the lowest note in the scale. The reason for this is that jazz and classical guitarists tend to work from arpeggios, while blues and rock guitarists usually play shorter licks or riffs, that they join together to form solos.

Any of the blues boxes can be used at any time in the appropriate song and key; plus they can be combined and attached to each other to form more extensive patterns.

Here are some tips for using and appreciating each box:

Root Position: Everybody’s favorite box for starting a solo and playing fills. The circled note is the added major 3rd (C#). Licks with this note should be used exclusively over the I chord in major key progressions because it establishes major tonality.

Albert King Box: After he signed with Stax Records in 1966, King Albert played almost exclusively in this position—a fact not lost on Stevie Ray Vaughan! Though it functions well over the I, IV or V chords, it is especially cool over the IV chord. Often this would include the \flat 5th (E \flat) as shown in Ex. 6. Check out Ex. 7 where the \flat 5th (E \flat) is included as a “passing tone.”

B.B. King Box: In the late sixties B.B. became enamored with this position. He would anchor his index finger on the root note (string 2, fret 10) and build licks with notes on strings 1, 2 and 3 that were in close proximity. The circled note is the 6th (F#) that also functions as the major 3rd over the IV chord. Use accordingly!

4th Box: As with the other positions, the 4th Box can be applied to all the chord changes. However, due to the location of the 5th (E) on strings 1, 4 and 6, it is particularly handy over the V chord.

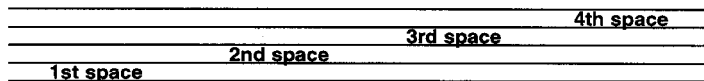
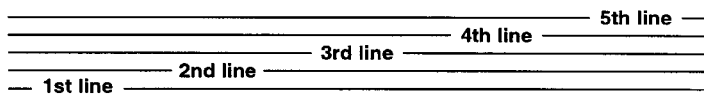
5th Box: The least-used position in the blues scale, the 5th Box is useful for starting a phrase *below* the root position and then moving up to it for resolution or more riffing. However, if the 2nd (B) and 6th (F#) are included as in Ex. 4 and 9, this box becomes more valuable for indicating major or dominant tonality over the I chord.

MUSIC NOTATION

There are seven natural notes. They are named for the first seven letters of the alphabet: A, B, C, D, E, F, G.

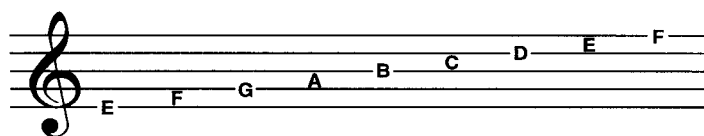
After G, we begin again with A.

Music is written on a **staff**. The staff consists of five lines with four spaces between the lines:

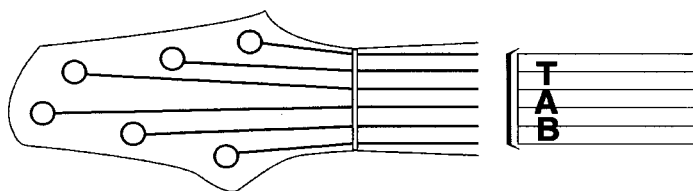


At the beginning of the staff is a treble or G clef. (The treble clef is known as the G clef because it encircles the 2nd line G.) The clef determines the location of notes on the staff. All guitar music is written on a treble clef.

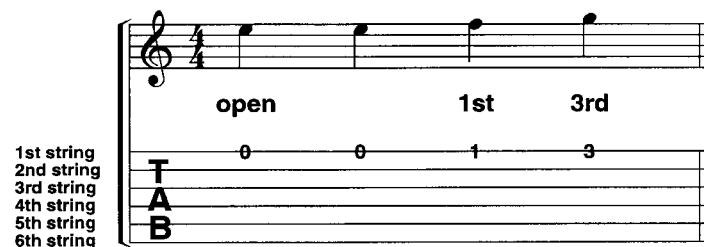
The notes are written on the staff in alphabetical order. The first line is E:



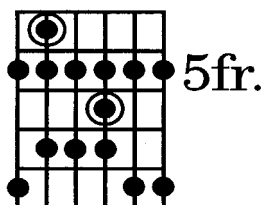
Tablature is a type of music notation that is specific to the guitar; its use dates back to the 1600s. Tablature illustrates the location of notes on the neck of the guitar. Tablature is usually used in conjunction with a music staff. The notes and rhythms are indicated in the music staff; the tablature shows where those notes are played on the guitar.



The location of any note is indicated by the placement of fret numbers on the strings.

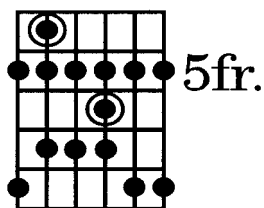


Root Position #1



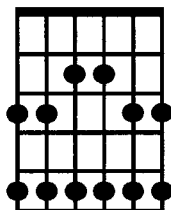
Musical notation for Root Position #1. The top staff is in 4/4 time with a treble clef. It contains a melodic line starting with a quarter note on the 5th fret, followed by a quarter note on the 4th fret, a quarter note on the 3rd fret, and a quarter note on the 2nd fret. A slur covers the first two notes, with the label "grad. bend" below it. A triplet of three eighth notes is marked with a "3" below it. The bottom staff is a guitar tablature labeled "TAB" on the left. It shows the fret numbers: 7, 5, 7 (7), 5, 7, 5. A slur covers the first two frets (7 and 5) with a "1" above it. A triplet of three eighth notes is marked with a "3" above it. Wavy lines at the end of both staves indicate vibrato.

Root Position #2



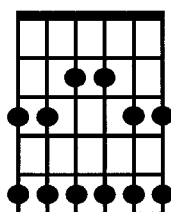
Musical notation for Root Position #2. The top staff is in 4/4 time with a treble clef. It contains a melodic line starting with a quarter note on the 5th fret, followed by a quarter note on the 4th fret, a quarter note on the 3rd fret, a quarter note on the 2nd fret, a quarter note on the 1st fret, and a quarter note on the 5th fret. A slur covers the first two notes, with a "3" below it. A triplet of three eighth notes is marked with a "3" below it. The bottom staff is a guitar tablature labeled "TAB" on the left. It shows the fret numbers: 7, 8, 7, (7), 5. A slur covers the first two frets (7 and 8) with a "1" above it. A triplet of three eighth notes is marked with a "3" above it. Wavy lines at the end of both staves indicate vibrato.

5th Box #1



Musical notation for 5th Box #1. The top staff is in 4/4 time with a treble clef. It contains a triplet of eighth notes on the 5th fret, followed by a quarter note on the 6th fret, and a dotted quarter note on the 5th fret. The bottom staff is a TAB staff with the following sequence: fret 5, triplet of fret 3, fret 5, triplet of fret 5. Wavy lines above the notes indicate vibrato.

5th Box #2



Musical notation for 5th Box #2. The top staff is in 4/4 time with a treble clef. It contains four groups of eighth notes, each group consisting of a triplet of eighth notes on the 5th fret followed by a single eighth note on the 5th fret. The bottom staff is a TAB staff with the following sequence: triplet of fret 5, triplet of fret 5, triplet of fret 5 followed by a slash and fret 5, triplet of fret 5, triplet of fret 5 followed by a slash and fret 5, triplet of fret 5, triplet of fret 5 followed by a slash and fret 5, triplet of fret 5, triplet of fret 5 followed by a slash and fret 5, triplet of fret 5, triplet of fret 5.