



Music Musings No.11: Playing the Blues

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Playing the eight and twelve-bar blues

In Music Musings No. 10, we learned to play the C, F and G blues scales in the right hand (R.H.) while playing the C, F and G chords in the left hand (L.H.). Now we're going to put this to practical use -- by playing the BLUES!

Blues tips & tricks:

1. Blues progressions (groups of chords) use the 1, 4 and 5 chords (In the key of C, these would be C, F and G chords).
2. The 7th is added to EACH CHORD (see Music Musings 8 for how to add a 7th note to a chord) to make things sound a bit sassier. However, the basic 1, 4 and 5 chords still have the same functions.
3. Blues go round and round!: In the example below, the progression starts on the C7 (the 1 chord), and ends on the G7 (5 chord), which acts as a turnaround so you can start over again -- and again -- and again!

Play the 8 bar blues below . . .

Count 4 steady beats per measure. Play each chord on beat one of each measure and hold for 4 counts. (Note: In measure 2, play the C chord again.) At first, just play the basic C, F and G chords where indicated (leaving out the 7ths for now). Make sure they beat is strong and heavy, like lead boots! Play through it 4 or 5 times, until you have the feel of it.

Eight-bar blues progression - key of C

. . . then add the blues scale

Remember the C Blues scale we learned in Factsheet No. 10? Here's a nifty secret to playing the blues: You can play just one blues scale for all 3 chords in a blues song! For example, play the C Blues scale with your right hand in EVERY MEASURE in the Eight-bar blues shown above (while playing the chords with your left hand). Play 2 notes of the blues scale for every beat (e.g. 1 - and - 2 - and - 3 - and 4 - and etc.)

C Eb F F# G Bb C Bb etc..

C Blues Scale (play w/ Right hand)

The C Blues scale sounds good with the C, F, and G chords. Nifty, eh?

BLUES TIP: The 8 and 12-bar blues progressions in this factsheet are in the key of C, using the 1, 4 and 5 chords in the key of C. However, you can play the blues pattern in ANY KEY, as long as you know the 1, 4 and 5 chords in that key, and how to build a blues scale based on the 1 chord. Try playing the 8 bar blues in the key of G (Using G, C and D as your 1, 4 and 5 chords and the G blues scale)

8 BAR BLUES ||: I | I | IV | I | V | IV | I | V :||

Key of G: ||: G | G | C | G | D | C | G | D :||

Key of D: ||: D | D | G | D | A | C | G | D :||

. . . now add the fancy stuff!

1. Play 7th chords in the left hand, instead of straight C, F and G chords. See Music Musings No. 8 for details.

---> note: MIX UP THE NOTES of the chord to make them easier to play. Playing the notes of a chord with the note that the chord is named after is called "root position"). For example:

CHORD	NOTES OF CHORD (Root position - name of chord is on the bottom)
C7	-- C - E - G - Bb
F7	-- F - A - C - Eb
G7	-- G - B - D - F

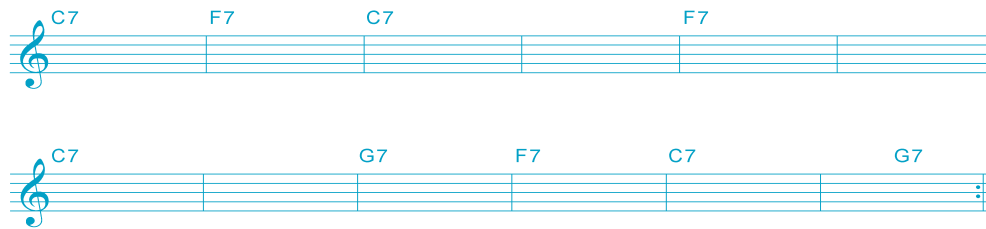
Taking the same 4 notes and playing them in a different order (without the root note/ name of chord on the bottom) is called playing the chord in a different INVERSION. This is done to make it easier to change from one chord to the other.

CHORD	ORDER OF NOTES (from left to right - played in an inversion)
C7	-- G - Bb - C - E
F7	-- A - C - Eb - F
G7	-- G - B - D - F (← still in root position; easier to change from C7 and F7)

. . . and then play the 12-bar blues

The 12 - bar blues is similar to the 8 bar blues. It uses the same 3 chords (C, F and G), and has a similar progression, but has 12 bars (of 4 beats each) instead of 8. Try playing the 12- bar blues below, using the same ideas you used with the 8 bar blues:

Twelve-bar blues progression - key of C



Blues patterns can vary slightly, but they usually always have the same 3 chords (1, 4 and 5 chords), beginning with the 1 chord, moving to the 4, back to the 1, then from 5 to 4 to 1 to 5 again. There are also blues using minor chords, but we'll cover those in another factsheet!

. . now add some more fancy stuff!

Instead of playing the C blues scale for all 3 chords, try playing the specific blues scale related to each chord (C blues scale while on the C chord; F blues scale with the F chord, and the G blues scale with the G chord).

THE BLUES SCALE notes that go with the C, F and G chords:

BLUES SCALE NUMBERS	1	b3	4	#4	5	b7	(8)
C BLUES SCALE NOTES:	C	Eb	F	F#	G	Bb	C
F BLUES SCALE NOTES:	F	Ab	Bb	B	C	Eb	F
G BLUES SCALE NOTES:	G	Bb	C	C#	D	F	G

. . . THEN, start to improvise (make up melodies and ditties) using these scales.

. . . THEN, if you're feeling really brave, play an easy boogie bass instead of each chord in the left hand with the corresponding blues scales in the right hand! Wahoo! Now you're REALLY PLAYING THE BLUES!