

## The Blues

The **Blues** are at the heart of all American music. It has influenced Country, Rock, Folk, Jazz, Bluegrass and just about every form of American music we listen to today.

The **Blues**, is a *chord progression*, a *scale*, a *feeling*. This workshop covers all three.

### A "Blues" Chord Progression


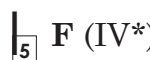
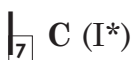

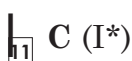
The most common form of a blues chord progression is twelve measures in length containing three four measure sections using the primary chords of a key. The primary chords of a major or minor key are the I\*, IV and V chords.

While other measure lengths are possible, such as eight and sixteen measures, the twelve measure form is the most common.

- 4 measures of the **I** chord
- 2 measures of the **IV** chord
- 2 bars of the **I** chord
- 2 measures of the **V** chord
- 2 measures of the **I** chord

**Totaling 12 measures**

Here is a common twelve measure blues chord progression in the key of C major.

 C (I)					
 F (IV*)			 C (I*)		
 G7 (V*)			 C (I*)		

### What make a Blue Progression a Blues Progression?

Measures one, five, seven, nine and eleven are critical measures where the I, IV and V chords **MUST** appear or their direct diatonic substitutions for a progression to remain a blues progression.

\* These uppercase roman numerals correspond to the chord's function with in its major or minor tonality. See the author's book **Harmonic Analysis for Scale Selection and Chord Substitution** for more information.



### 7th Chords?

This is a basic I IV V blues chord progression in the key of C major. The I, IV, and V refer to the chord's function within its scale or tonality.

G C E A TUNING

D G B E TUNING

F C

G C



## 7th Chords?

It is common for the I, IV and V chords to be 7th chords.

**GCEA TUNING**

**DGBE TUNING**

4/4

4/4

8

C7

8

C7

F7

C7

5

6

7

8

F7

C7

G7

C7

9

10

11

12

G7

C7



### Quick Four?

To break up the monotony of six measures of a I chord when the progression is repeated. A V chord is added to measure twelve turning the progression back to the I chord. A IV chord is added to measure two, returning to the I chord in measure three. This change is often referred to as a “Quick Four” change. A IV chord can also be added to measure ten.

Chords can be major triads or 4-part seventh chords.

The diagram shows a 12-measure progression for the 'Quick Four' concept in two tunings: GCEA and DGBE. The progression is as follows:

- Measure 1: C7 (open)
- Measure 2: F7
- Measure 3: C7 (3fr)
- Measure 4: C7 (5fr)
- Measure 5: F7 (5fr)
- Measure 6: F7
- Measure 7: C7 (3fr)
- Measure 8: C7 (5fr)
- Measure 9: G7 (7fr)
- Measure 10: F7 (5fr)
- Measure 11: C7 (3fr)
- Measure 12: G7 (3fr)



A substitution in measure four treats measure five as a temporary tonic or I chord. The C7 is acting as a V of IV *Secondary Dominant\** chord and can be preceded by its II chord. A diatonic *expansion* substitution, II for IV in measure nine is created by moving the V chord to measure ten. This same substitution has been applied to measure twelve.

A more harmonically active turnaround has been added to measures eleven and twelve and will be used, or a variation for the remaining examples.

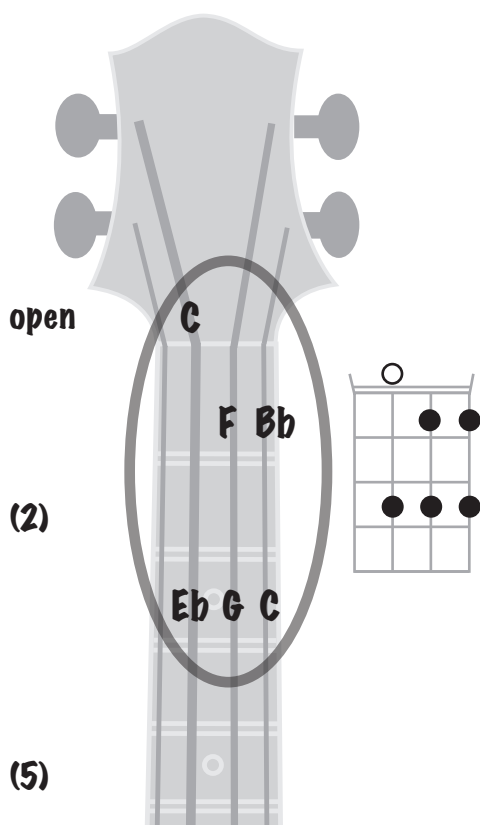
The musical score is written in 4/4 time and consists of two systems of staves. The first system uses GCEA tuning and the second system uses DGBE tuning. Each system contains two staves: a treble clef staff with chord diagrams and a bass clef staff with rhythmic notation (diagonal lines). Measure numbers 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 are indicated below the staves. Chord diagrams are provided for various chords, including G, C7, F7, Gm7, DM7, and G7, with fret numbers (3fr, 5fr) indicating fingerings. The score illustrates harmonic substitutions and a turnaround sequence in measures 11 and 12.



### C Blues Scale

Sometimes referred to as a Minor Pentatonic scale a C Blues scale contains the notes: C Eb F G Bb C' and works over the following basic chords: C Cm C7, F Fm F7, G Gm G7, Eb, A, Bb.

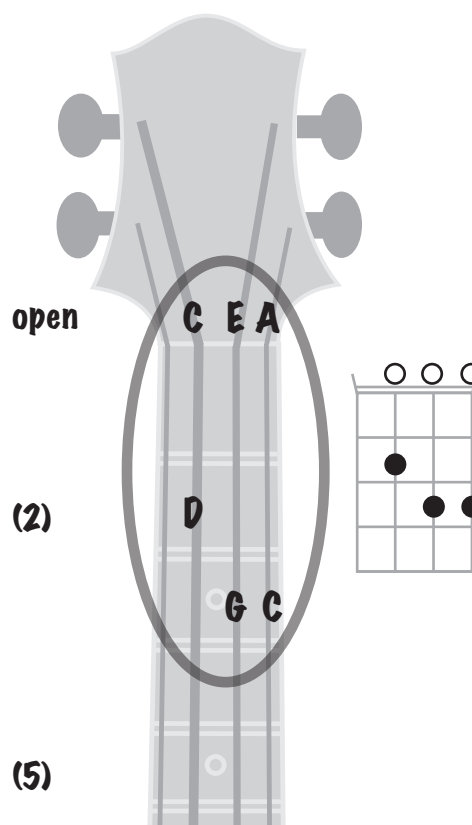
Below is an open position C Blues scale.



### C Pentatonic Scale

Sometimes referred to as a Major Pentatonic scale a C Pentatonic scale contains the notes: C D E G A C' and works over the following basic chords: C Dm Em F G, G7 Am and Bb.

Below is an open position C Pentatonic scale.



Both scales contain the primary chords for a C blues: C F G and G7. Both scale can be used to improvise over a C major blues progression of C F and G or G7. For a minor blues were the I and IV chords are minor the blues or minor pentatonic scale great.