

PERFORMANCE 3

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GUITAR PERFORMANCE 3

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Chapter 1: Delta Blues and the History of the Blues

The blues, one of the most popular, influential and enduring Western musical forms, developed in African-American communities of the Deep South during the 19th century. Often, slave laborers forced to perform grueling repetitive work in plantation fields would sing in rhythm to help alleviate the tedium. Workers in neighboring fields echoed with answering phrases (called “field hollers”) creating a loose call-and-response form: a musical device still prevalent in blues, jazz, rock, and gospel music today. Forced to endure horrific living conditions, many early blues musicians sang of their troubles; there is reason to believe the term “the blues” derived from “the blue devils,” a slang phrase for troubles or depression.

Lacking formal training, early blues practitioners created a unique musical language based on elements of traditional African music combined with the basic tenets of European classical harmony. Melodically, blues scales differed from conventional major and minor scales by incorporating both raised and lowered thirds and sevenths, and a diminished fifth (tritone). These notes have come to be known as *blue notes* and—although new and foreign-sounding to Western ears at the time—they are now a standard part of popular music vocabulary.

Play through Ex. 1.1, an E scale containing multiple blue notes not found in a traditional major scale, including the minor third, the diminished fourth and the minor seventh.

Ex. 1.1

R m3 M3 4 °5 5 m7 M7 R m3 M3 4 °5 5 m7 M7 R

T
A
B

0 3 4 0 1 2 0 1 2 0 1 2 3 0 3 4 0

0 3 4 0 1 2 0 1 2 0 1 2 3 0 3 4 0

Reports of blues music being played in and around Clarksdale, Mississippi and other areas of the Deep South began to surface at the turn of the 20th century. The first blues sheet music was published in the early 1900s, and in 1920 Mamie Smith's “Crazy Blues” marked the first recording by an African-American blues singer. In the 1920's and '30s, several musicologists traveled to the Mississippi Delta region to make field recordings of local musicians such as Huddie “Lead Belly” Ledbetter and Henry Thomas. W.C. Handy was a classically trained musician who helped popularize the blues by transcribing and orchestrating it for more formal performance. His signature song “St. Louis Blues” was enormously popular and helped bring blues music to a larger mainstream audience, although the blues he presented was a tamer, more polished version than the original African-American blues.

During the first half of the 20th century, the technology for recording grew rapidly, and there exists a treasure trove of early recordings by artists such as Blind Lemon Jefferson, Tampa Red, Lonnie Johnson, Charley Patton and Son House. One of the most heralded performers from this era was singer/guitarist Robert Johnson. Although Johnson was not particularly prolific (he only recorded 39 songs over two separate sessions), his music displays remarkable skill and artistry. Coupled with his mysterious life and death at the young age of 27 and the revival of his compositions by bands such as Cream, The Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin, he has been posthumously granted legendary status. Johnson, along with contemporaries like Willie Brown and Mississippi John Hurt, played in a style that would come to be known as *Delta blues*. Delta blues was generally performed by solo musicians or duos, with emphasis on guitar, vocals and harmonica. The songs were often narrative in nature, with a loose structure and direct interplay between vocals and guitar.

NOTE: Another melodic feature of blues music was the incorporation of slurs, slides and glissandos between notes. Although originated vocally, these emotive pitch fluctuations can be accomplished on guitar through the use of string bends and finger slides, as well as the incorporation of a bottle-neck slide worn on a fretting-hand finger. These techniques are discussed in-depth in the Guitar Technique courses. Also, there is a separate course dedicated exclusively to slide guitar. Although slide guitar was a common in the Delta blues style, it won't be discussed in detail here.

The 12-Bar Blues Form

In modern music, the term “the blues” refers both to a particular 12-bar musical form as well as to all the basic stylistic elements generally associated with blues music. The term “12-bar blues” is indicative of a specific musical form that is 12 measures in length and is built around the I, IV and V chords—the three principal chords in any key.

The 12-bar blues can be viewed as having three distinct lines or phrases each four bars long, harmonized as follows:

Ex. 1.2

Ex. 1.2 illustrates the 12-bar blues form with three lines of four bars each. The chords are indicated above the staff:

- Line 1: I, (IV), I, I
- Line 2: IV, IV, I, I
- Line 3: V, (IV), I, (V)

(Note: The 12-bar blues is a general form; the chords in parenthesis are some of the most common variations but are not always played.)

Dominant Chords and the Turnaround

One distinct harmonic attribute of blues music is the incorporation of non-diatonic chord-tones into its harmonic structure. Most often, the I, IV and V chords are all voiced as dominant 7 chords.

Ex 1.3 below shows a 12-bar blues pattern in the key of A. In this example **I = A7 IV = D7 V = E7**

Ex. 1.3

Ex. 1.3 illustrates the 12-bar blues form in the key of A, using dominant 7 chords. The chords are indicated above the staff:

- Line 1: A7, D7, A7, A7
- Line 2: D7, D7, A7, A7
- Line 3: E7, D7, A7, E7

Play through the 12-bar blues form until you can feel the changes intuitively. Being able to improvise on the blues means always having an underlying understanding of where you are in the form at any given moment. The V7 chord in the last measure acts as a signal that we are returning to the top of the form again. For this very reason, it is usually referred to as a turnaround. The 12-bar form can be repeated numerous times as an underpinning structure for improvisation. After the final *turnaround*, simply end on the I chord.

Shuffle Rhythm and Swung Eighth Notes

Stylistically, the blues is noted for incorporating a bouncy eighth-note rhythm called a shuffle or swing rhythm. Shuffle rhythms are based on a triplet subdivision of the beat. This means we are placing three evenly-valued notes in the same space as two evenly-valued notes, essentially dividing each beat by three instead of two. In *Guitar Performance 1, Unit 9*, you learned that a measure of eighth-note triplets is counted "1-trip-let 2-trip-let 3-trip-let 4-trip-let" and each triplet is written as three eighth notes beamed together labeled with a "3."

Ex. 1.4

Now, for the shuffle rhythm we are counting pairs of eighth-notes on the first and third eighth note of each triplet grouping as follows ; ONE-(trip)-LET, TWO-(trip)-LET, THREE-(trip)-LET, FOUR-(trip)-LET. Technically, this would be written out as a bracketed quarter note and eighth note with a 3 above, as in Ex. 1.5.

Ex. 1.5

Most often, swing rhythm is notated as straight eighth notes with the indication at the beginning of the music that two eighth notes are equal to the first and last partials of an eighth-note triplet. Also, instead of counting ONE-LET, TWO-LET etc. we can count ONE-&, TWO-&, or ONE-AH, TWO-AH. Essentially, a pair of straight eighth notes divides the beat up in half, whereas a pair of swung eighth notes in shuffle feel gives the first eighth note two thirds of the beat, and the second eighth note one-third.

Ex. 1.6

Chapter 2: Performance Notes

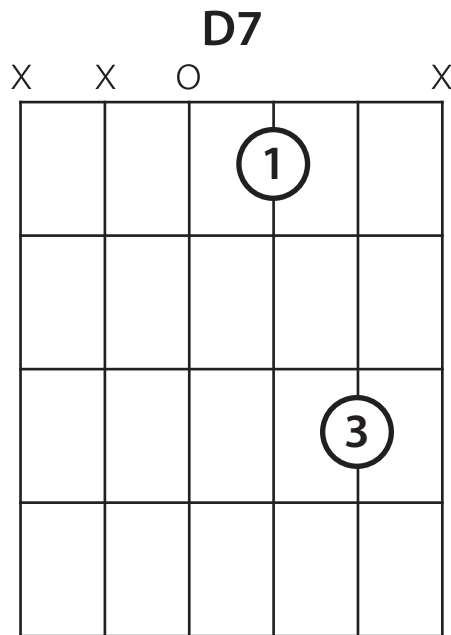
Our Delta blues play-along chart is meant to be played by a solo guitar—preferably a steel-string acoustic guitar—using the fingers of the picking hand. In some instances, fingerings have been suggested, but since the Delta blues style is less regimented and more improvisational than the Travis picking style learned in *Guitar Performance 2*, feel free to experiment with your own fingerings. Also note that the thumb is providing a steady bass note on the open strings throughout. You may want to experiment with a thumb pick or a hybrid picking approach.

By setting this song in the key of A, the three lowest strings of the guitar provide the bass notes for the I (A7), IV (D7) and V (E7) chords. Although there are essentially only three chords in this song, several different voicings are used to add variety. (We can think of A^o7 and D9/F# as variations on A7, and D7 respectively.) Take some time to familiarize yourself with the chord charts below.

Ex. 1.7

The image displays six guitar chord diagrams arranged in two rows of three. Each diagram is a 4x4 grid representing the strings and frets. The diagrams are as follows:

- Top Row, Diagram 1:** Labeled **A7**. Fret 7. String 1 (high E) is muted (X). String 2 (D) has finger 1. String 3 (G) has finger 2. String 4 (B) has finger 3. String 5 (D) has finger 4.
- Top Row, Diagram 2:** Labeled **A7**. Fret 5. String 1 (high E) is muted (X). String 2 (D) has finger 1. String 3 (G) has finger 2. String 4 (B) has finger 3.
- Top Row, Diagram 3:** Labeled **A^o7**. Fret 4. String 1 (high E) is muted (X). String 2 (D) has finger 1. String 3 (G) has finger 2. String 4 (B) has finger 3. String 5 (D) is muted (X).
- Bottom Row, Diagram 1:** Labeled **A7**. Fret 6. String 1 (high E) is muted (X). String 2 (D) has finger 1. String 3 (G) has finger 2. String 4 (B) has finger 4.
- Bottom Row, Diagram 2:** Labeled **D9/F#**. Fret 7. String 1 (high E) is muted (X). String 2 (D) has finger 1. String 3 (G) has finger 2. String 4 (B) has finger 3.
- Bottom Row, Diagram 3:** Labeled **E7**. Fret 7. String 1 (high E) is muted (X). String 2 (D) has finger 1. String 3 (G) has finger 3. String 4 (B) has finger 4.



Like many Delta blues compositions, this song is played at a slow tempo with a laid-back, laconic feel. It is not stylistically inappropriate to vary the tempo and elongate phrases for a tempo rubato effect. ("Rubato" is derived from the Italian word for "robust": it means to deliberately make alterations in the tempo for dramatic enhancement.)

The song starts with a four-bar intro based on a D-shaped voicing of an A7 chord in seventh position. For the A^o7, you are simply lowering the three highest notes a half-step each. The intro ends with an arpeggio on the V7 (E7) chord.

Ex. 1.8

♩ = 68-72

♪ = $\overset{3}{\curvearrowright}$

Intro

A7 A^o7 A7 E7

mp Hold chord etc. $\overset{3}{\curvearrowright}$

T 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 10

A 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 9 9

B 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 0

The first eight bars of the 12-bar section consist largely of block chords articulated with multiple picking hand fingers. They have been notated as straight quarter notes, but feel free to embellish the rhythms after you can play through the piece comfortably.

Ex. 1.9

Verse

	A7				A°7				A7							
T	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	8	8	8	8
A	6	6	6	6	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
B	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	7	7	7	7
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

	D9/F#				D7				A7							
T	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	2	5	5	5	5	8	8	8	8
A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
B	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	5	5	5	5	7	7	7	7
	2	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

A syncopated rhythm has been notated for you in the four-bar turnaround at the end.

Ex. 1.10

To Coda

	E7				D7				A7				E+	
T	9	9	9	9	7	7	7	7	5	5	5	5	5	5
A	7	7	7	7	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
B	9	9	9	9	0	5	5	5	0	5	4	3	2	6
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Bars 17-28 are a transcribed solo on the 12-bar blues form. Note the use of bends, slides and vibrato as well as the incorporation of the open-string bass notes to provide the overall structural harmony. Again, after you are comfortable with the written chart, you are encouraged to improvise on your own.

Because you are providing both melodic interest and harmonic structure, try to visualize and highlight the underlying chord shapes/chord tones.

Ex. 1.11

Solo

A7 D7 A7 A7

T
A
B

12 12 12 12 12 12
13 13 13 13
0 0 0
0 0 0
0 0 0
8 9 9 8 7 6
5 6 8 6

~ = vibrato

D7 A7

5 5 5 5 5
5 5 5 5 5
0 0 0
0 0
0 0
7 (7) 5 7 5
5 6 8 5 7 5
0 0
0 7 5 7
0 0

E7 D7 D.S. al Coda

0 3 0 3
1 1
0
2 0 1 0 2
0 0 2
2 2
5 5 5 5
5 8 7 6
0 0 0 0
15 15
16 16
0 0