

DICTIONARY OF GUITAR STYLES

25 ESSENTIAL LESSONS FOR THE COMPLETE GUITARIST

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What:

The blues lies at the foundation of many forms of rock and represents one of the most widely incorporated styles in modern music. The blues was born from the work songs and spirituals of African-Americans brought to the United States as slaves to work the plantations of the South. It is a call-and-response musical style that was derived from a combination of church music, ballads, field hollers, and jump-ups. Often the singer will sing a line, followed by a guitar which gives voice to a reply.

When & Where:

The blues first arose in the Mississippi area sometime after the Civil War. In the 1920s and 1930s, artists such as Charlie Patton, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Robert Johnson, and Lightnin' Hopkins set the standard for blues. Radio broadcasts of the 1930s also helped spread the style across the South. In the 1930s and 1940s, the blues spread northward to Chicago and later became electrified by artists such as Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf in the 1940s and 1950s.

Who:

Albert King, B.B. King, Freddie King, Robert Johnson, and T-Bone Walker were among the pioneers of the great blues sounds. In the 1960s, Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page, Jimi Hendrix—and later, artists such as Bonnie Raitt and Robert Cray—modernized the blues, fusing its sound with rock. In the 1980s, Stevie Ray Vaughan brought electric blues back into mainstream popularity.

How:

Important elements of the blues sound include a slow tempo, a twelve-measure chord pattern, often a shuffle (triplet-based) rhythm, and specific “blue notes”—the flatted third, flatted seventh, and flatted fifth usually played against a major-key background.

Blues Rhythm

Figure 1 is a twelve-bar blues chord progression in the key of A, which uses a variety of dominant seventh and ninth chords. It incorporates a shuffle rhythm, wherein eighth notes are played unevenly—each downbeat eighth note actually lasts roughly two-thirds of the beat, while each upbeat eighth note is shortened to last only one-third of the beat.

Fig. 1

5

Shuffle feel (♩♩♩)

(elec.)

w/ clean tone

TAB

5

9