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Electric Blues Essentials

LEVEL 1 • Guitar Skills



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7th Chords & The 12 Bar

UNIT 2 • LESSON 1 << PREVIOUS NEXT >>

The Theory

Let's start by looking at the chord construction for the dominant 7th chord, as well as why we tend to use them in the blues. So, to construct a dominant 7th chord you need to take the following notes from any major scale:

R

3

5

b7

The b7th is the key note in the chord, as that note defines the family of dominant chords.

This demonstrates clearly that the chord is based very much on a major chord (with the root, 3rd and 5th being a major chord) and then we bring in a minor element, which is the b7th. This construction creates a totally unique set of chords known as dominant chords. Let's look at an example of that in a chord shape:

Course navigation

UNIT 1

Dirty Blues

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UNIT 2

7th Chords & The 12 Bar

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In unit 2 we dive into the theory that makes up our blues base, the dominant 7th chords and the 12 bar format. For the dominant 7th chords we tackle the theory behind the shapes and then how to play them in 5 positions of the neck.

Lessons:

- The Theory
- Dominant 7th CAGED Chords
- The Track Part 1
- The Track Part 2
- The Track Part 3
- Changing Keys

UNIT 3

Major & Minor Scale

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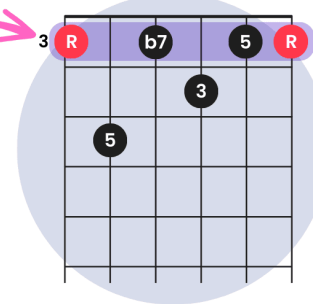
UNIT 5

"Motivational Blues"

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G7 (E shape)

as you can see from the chord diagram, we have the "R" (root), the 5th, 3rd and b7th at various points within the chord. Without the b7th it would just be a major chord!



Dominant chord purpose...

This unique set of chords has a very strong need to resolve. The interplay between the major 3rd and flat 7th creates a sound that has more tension than a major or minor chord, and therefore it is often used to navigate to a resolution. For example, you would often use a dominant chord on the 5th degree of your major scale as it creates a stronger tension, that you can resolve to the root chord again. As we take this theory deeper and deeper, you can use dominant chords to cycle between keys (but we'll get to that in another course!).



“

In the blues, we deliberately want to have a 'tense' sound pretty much all the time, creating little moments

of resolve
all the way
through,
but never
fully
resolving...
Giving the
impression
that the
music can
go round
and round
forever (as
it often
does!)

Dan



This is why we use dominant chords all the way through a 12 bar blues, and this concept is totally unique to the blues. So, with that in mind, let's take a look at the structure of a basic 12 bar.

I	I	I	I
IV	IV	I	I
V	IV	Turnaround	Turnaround

First up, the I, IV and V symbols are Roman Numerals, and they represent 1, 4 and 5. It is important to consider your 12 bar blues a 1, 4, 5 style, as you can then place it into any key you like! When we say 1, 4, 5, we mean that we want you to take a key, for example, A major, and take the 1st chord (A major),

4th chord (D major) and 5th chord (E major). You then make them all dominant 7th chords and finally put them into the format above. Simple! We would therefore get this in the key of A blues:

A7	A7	A7	A7
D7	D7	A7	A7
E7	D7	A7 D7	A7 E7

The turnaround section can take many forms, as you'll discover as we work through this course. This is one possible way of doing it!

Want to understand 1,4,5?

If you're sitting there wondering what a root, 4th and 5th chord is, then that's great! You're about to learn something very powerful in music. Head over to our Harmony course and work through that, then come back to this!



Harmony
Guitar Skills

Round and round we go!

Your first task is to practice this structure, using any dominant 7th shapes you may already know. If you don't know any shapes yet, just listen to the video a few times to get the sound into your head. You can even try listening to a few 12 bar backing tracks on

YouTube or actual records from your favourite blues players. See if you can spot the changes as written above. **NOTE: This is the most standard 12 bar structure, but of course there will be variations to that. We'll tackle a few more of those later in the course.**



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