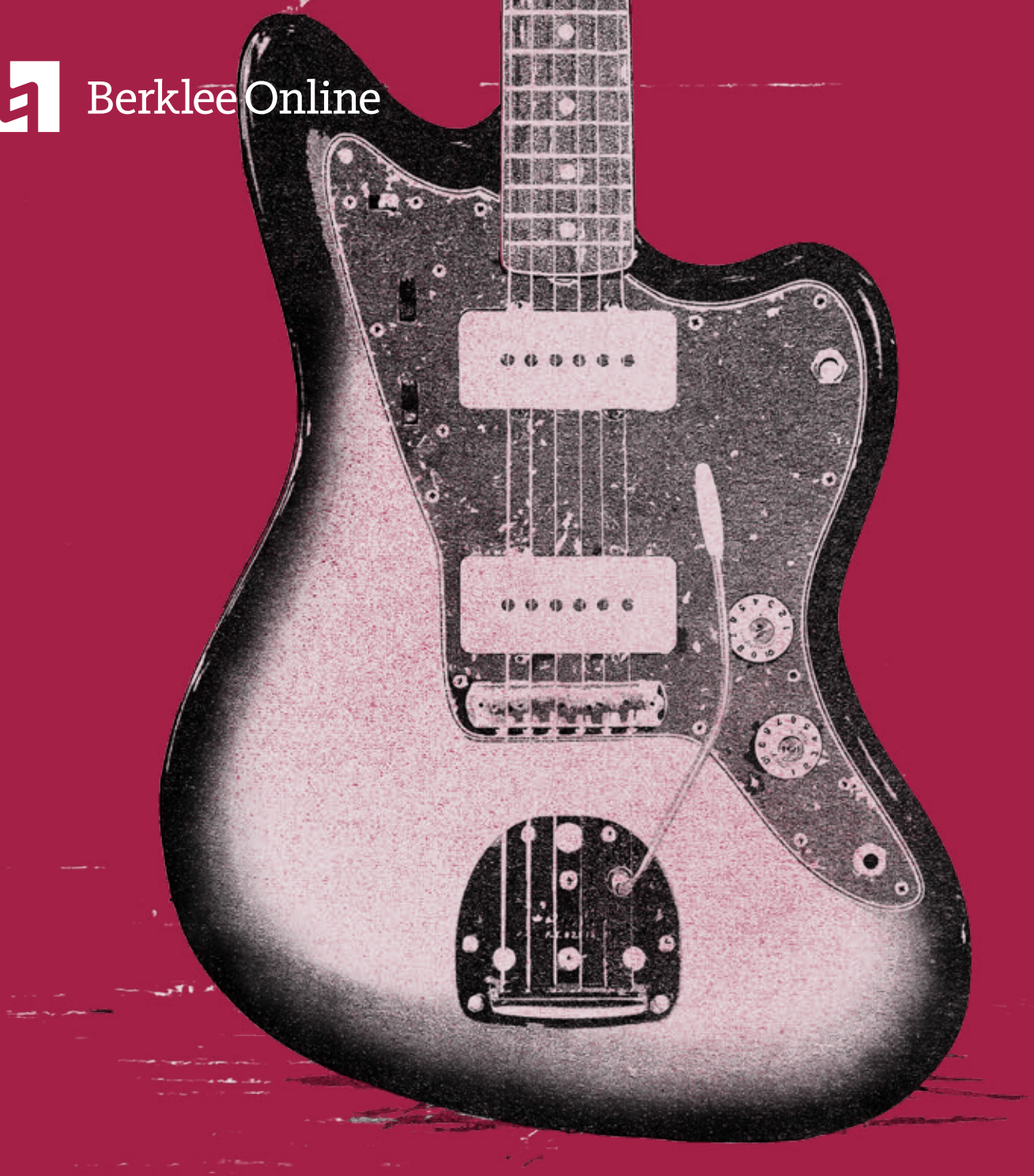
Berklee Online



GUITAR

DEGREE HANDBOOK

GUITAR
DEGREE HANDBOOK

From basics like chords and scales to nuances like improvisation techniques, form, control, and inflection, Berklee Online's Bachelor of Professional Studies degree in Guitar will take your guitar playing to the next level. Few accomplished guitarists have reached their peak alone, and Berklee's faculty is unparalleled when it comes to delivering the personalized instruction and feedback that will help you turn the fretboard into a playground packed with unlimited possibilities.

FEATURED LESSONS
From the online Bachelor of Professional Studies Degree in Guitar

3 Guitar Scale Basics
From the online course *Guitar Scales 101* by Larry Baione

6 Playing and Understanding Triads
From the online course *Guitar Chords 101* by Rick Peckham

9 Rhythmic Variation
From the online course *Funk/Rock and R&B Guitar Soloing* by Thaddeus Hogarth

12 Basic Blues Forms
From the online course *Blues Guitar* by Michael Williams

15 Meet the Authors

18 How Berklee Online Works

Guitar Scale Basics

From the Online Course *Guitar Scales 101*

by Larry Baione

Chair, Berklee College of Music Guitar Department

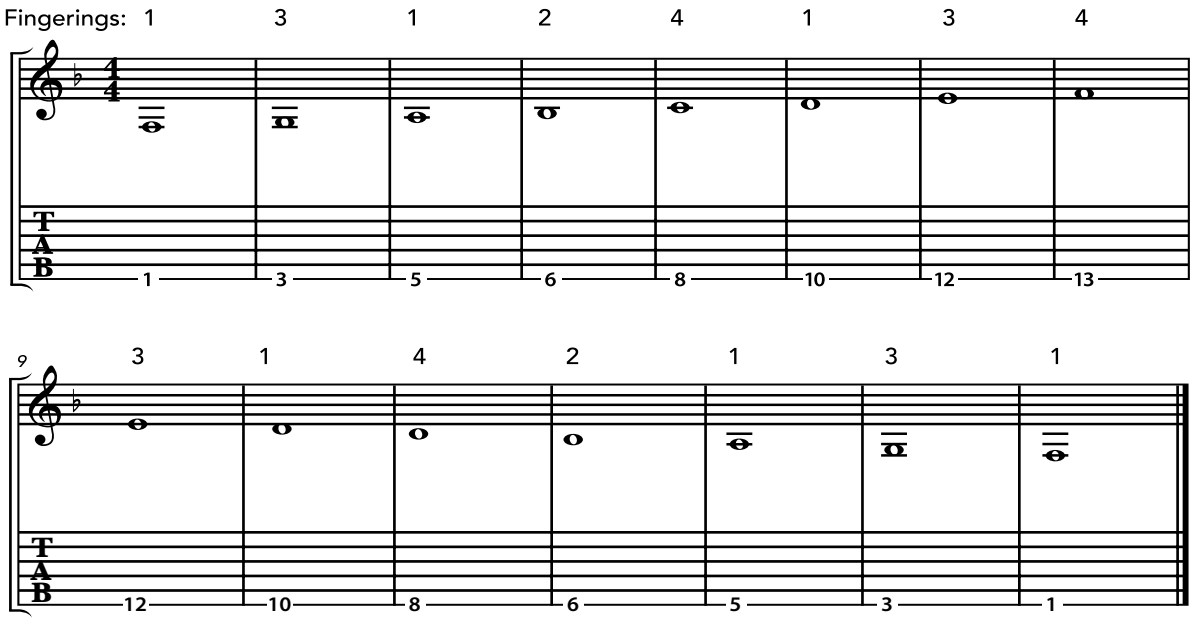
Scale study is fundamental to guitar mastery, no matter what style you play. Learning scales benefits our technique, knowledge, and navigation on the instrument. It helps us organize that ambiguous guitar fretboard. Anyone can easily see the C major scale on the piano, but it is a different story on the guitar. Simply stated, scale study gives us knowledge of the fretboard and develops our technique.

Learning scales helps us prepare to play tonal music. Most music we hear (and perform) has tonal centers, also known as keys. The key of a piece of music is derived from the scale from which the melody and harmony are derived.

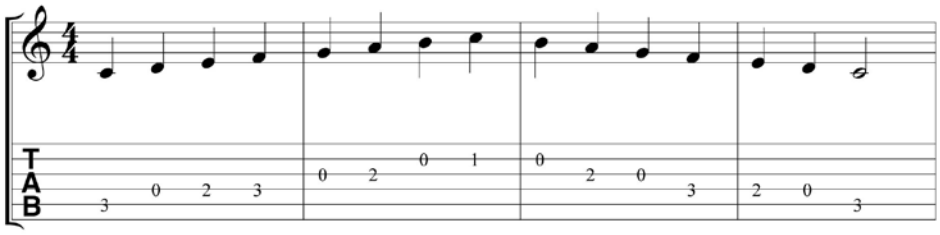
Let's start by looking at the major scale. A major scale is a succession of notes consisting of a pattern of half and whole steps that create that familiar sound of "Do Re Mi Fa Sol La Ti Do."

The word "step" refers to the distance between notes. On the fingerboard, a half step is equal to the distance of one fret, and a whole step is the distance of two frets. A whole step is made up of two half steps.

F Major Scale on the 6th String



C Major Scale (Open Position)



The major scale begins with the starting note (which also corresponds to the name of the major scale) and follows this pattern of both whole steps (W) and half steps (H): WWH WWWH. For example, the C major scale starts on the note C, and can be built using this pattern of whole and half steps.

You can play a major scale from any note by using the WWH WWWH formula. Remember, one fret on the guitar is a half step, and two frets is a whole step. So, if you start on the first string and play the note on the first fret (the note F) and move up on the same string two frets for every whole step and one fret for every half step, you will have played the F major scale up the fingerboard.

You can start on any note and move up the fingerboard on the same string (as long as you do not start too high up the neck) and play a major scale by using this "step method." You may not know the names of the notes of the major scales, but try playing a major scale up and back down starting on any note.

You just played the major scale up the fingerboard, on one string. You may notice that it takes up a lot of area on the guitar. The one-octave major scale takes twelve frets to play. This is just one way to play a scale. We can play a major scale more efficiently by using more than one string. To play a scale within a smaller area of frets, you can play across a number of strings.

Above is the C scale starting on the fifth string, third fret, ending on the second string, first fret. Notice the small area of the fingerboard that is used.

You are playing in first position on the fingerboard. This brings us to a very important concept: positions on the guitar.

Guitar Hand Positions

First Position

Fifth Position

Second Position

Seventh Position

What is a position? A position is defined as the fret in which your first finger plays. First position is where your first finger plays everything in the first fret. Second position is where your first finger plays everything in the second fret.

Pat yourself on the back as you have already played the C Major Scale in first (open) position! However, learning to play scales in all of these positions, in addition to the first position, is crucial to advancing as a guitar player.

Learn more in Guitar Scales 101
online.berklee.edu/courses/guitar-scales-101

Playing and Understanding Triads

From the Online Course *Guitar Chords 101*

By Rick Peckham

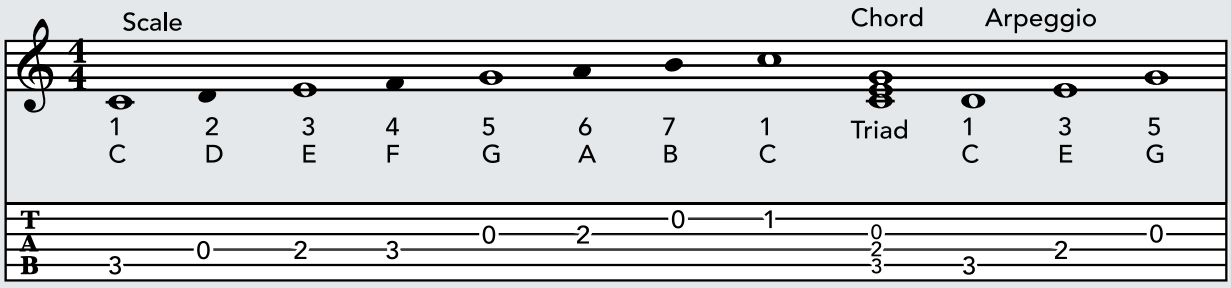
The longer I've played the guitar, the more it's become clear that chordal playing and melodic playing on the guitar amount to two sides of the same coin. The more time I've spent working with chords—all of the variations and possibilities—the easier it has become to look down at the fretboard while playing and see more options. A clear understanding of chordal shapes on the guitar leads to a thorough understanding of the instrument.

A chord is a set of three or more notes played simultaneously. If the notes are played one after the other, it is called an arpeggio.

Triads are three-note chords. They are built upwards in intervals of thirds from a fundamental note, called a root, which is like the tonic of a scale. The major triad includes the tonic, third, and fifth of the major scale built on the triad's root.

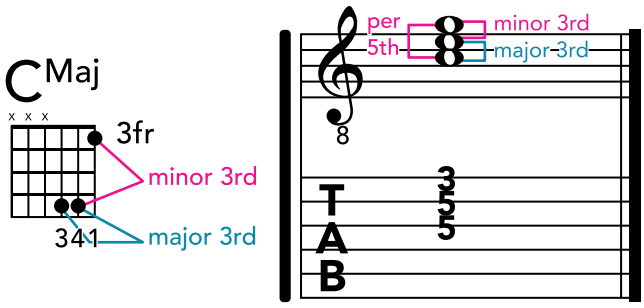
Each of these notes is described by a number corresponding to its scale degree (or interval) away from the root: 1, 3, 5. These numbers are referred to as "functions," as in "E functions as the third of a C major triad."

Play the following C major scale, triad, and arpeggio now:

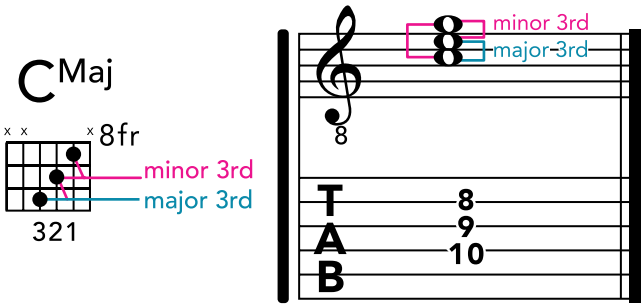


Triads serve as a foundation for a basic understanding of harmony.

The C major triad is spelled C-E-G. In the key of C, notes 1, 3, and 5 of the C major scale provide you with the notes of the C major triad. Another way to think of triads is in terms of intervals. From the root, the major triad has a major third and a perfect fifth. It can also be seen as a major third (C to E) underneath a minor third (E to G).



Chord block graphic of
C major triad in third position



Chord block graphic of
C major triad in eighth position

On the second set of three strings, and 2-3-4, the major third interval has the upper note one fret below, and the minor third between 2-3 has the same visual spacing.

In contemporary, jazz, and popular music, chords frequently move in intervals of a fourth up (or a fifth down). If we move from chord to chord by intervals of a fourth, we arrive at what is called the cycle of fourths, also known as "cycle 4," shown on the page that follows. A cycle is defined as a series of events that recur regularly and usually lead back to the starting point. If you start at any note and continue around the wheel to the note that is up by a fourth, you will eventually end up back at the same note. In so doing, you will have covered all twelve notes in the chromatic scale, without repetition.

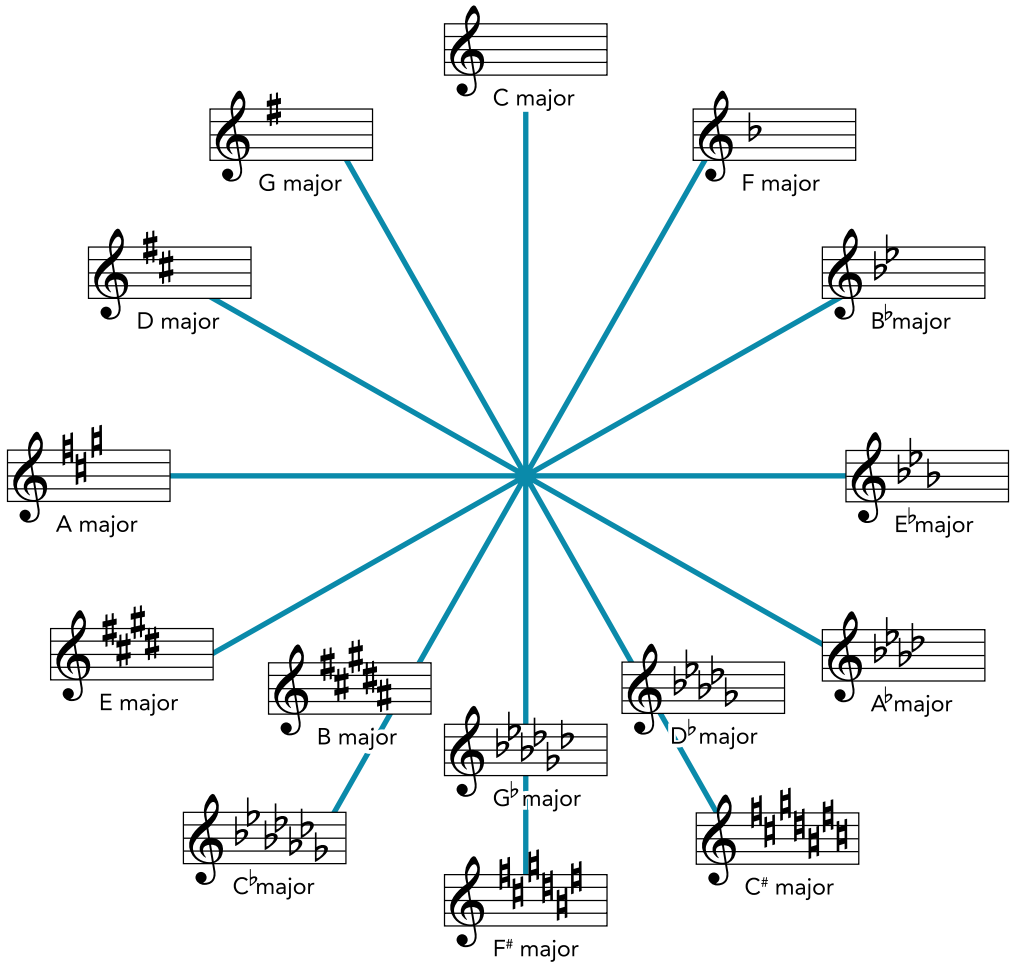
This serves as a useful reference to allow you to take anything through all twelve keys. Although not as intuitive as half-step motion on the guitar neck, knowledge of this set of key relationships will prepare you to play the countless songs whose chords move in intervals of fourths, including thousands of blues, rock, R&B, and jazz tunes.

Suggestions for Practice

To get used to the sound of the major triad, try playing major triads up the fretboard, one fret at a time, on the top string set 1-2-3. While difficult to execute on most musical instruments, moving up one fret at a time (also called "in half-steps") on the guitar neck is one of the easiest ways to accustom yourself to a voicing shape.

Play major triads in all twelve keys, moving up the fretboard one fret at a time, in half steps on the first set of three strings.

Cycle of Fourths



Learn more in Guitar Chords 101
online.berklee.edu/courses/guitar-chords-101

Rhythmic Variation and Development

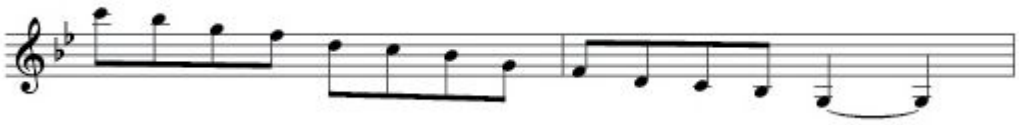
From the Online Course *Funk/Rock and R&B Guitar Soloing*

By Thaddeus Hogarth

When you play a scale note after note, your solos will sound more like exercises than music. Space in a solo is as important as the notes that we play. Additionally, playing notes at random from a scale might not be enough to create an interesting musical idea. There are a few ways to make your musical idea more interesting:

1. Add rests.
2. Use a series of uniform rhythmic modifications within a solo line/melody. This creates a sense of development of the melodic line.
3. Effective use of rhythm can turn a simple scale into an interesting solo line.

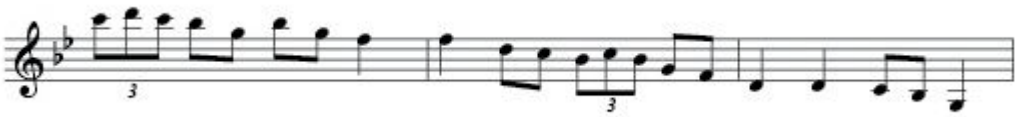
Let's start with the simple, descending minor pentatonic:



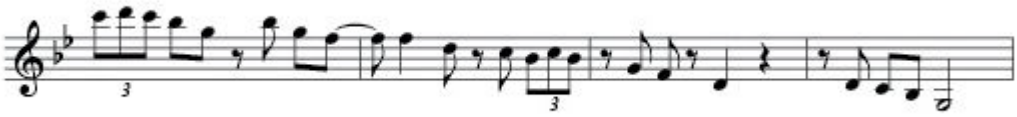
Now let's add **different note rhythms**. In this example, we will simply use the rhythmic pattern or motif of a quarter note followed by two eighth notes. Already you can hear that the scale takes on a more musical quality.

Add a **triplet** at the beginning of each measure. In this case the triplet is somewhat ornamental since it adds a note above from the scale and does not change the overall melodic feel of the line.

Next, try adding the element of repetition. In this case we are repeating both notes and sequences of notes in a few different places. The element of repetition is important in developing a melodic solo line.

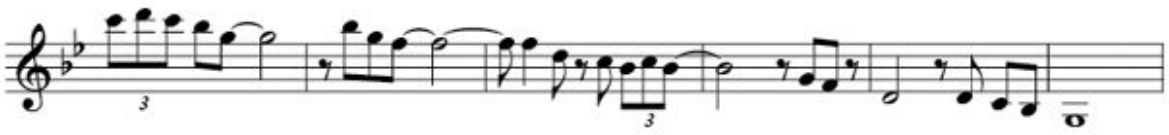


Now we'll **displace** some of the notes in the line by adding rests. As we saw earlier, space in a solo is as important as the notes that we play.



To further develop this line, we'll add **sustain**, or tied notes in various places. At this point, it is safe to say that sustain works best when the chosen note is a chord tone (1, 3, 5, or 7). Still, as one develops as a soloist, there are many situations where tensions (non-chord tones) will work.

As you can hear, the final, modified line sounds more musical than our original descending scale.



This simple method utilizing these techniques is a way to create interest in your solo ideas. At this point, of course, the process is somewhat mathematical. However, as you progress, the goal is to get this to a point where it is intuitive.

Here is a review of the concepts we have covered:

- Use of **different note rhythms** (quarter, eighths, sixteenths)
- Use of **triplets,** or other ornamental rhythms
- Use of **repetition** of notes or of a segment
- Use of **rhythmic displacement** using rests
- Use of **sustain**, or tied notes

Basic Blues Forms

From the Online Course *Blues Guitar*

By Michael Williams

Since the blues' earliest days, around the turn of the 20th century, the guitar has been a preferred instrument of accompaniment for blues performers. A few circumstances contributed to its popularity and prevalence over the past 100+ years. The acoustic guitar produces a wide range of textures and sounds for rhythm playing and soloing that are ideally suited for accompanying the human voice. Many bluesmen first picked up guitar simply because one was available from a friend or family member. History has shown that the guitar was well suited for a blues musician's nomadic lifestyle, since it was relatively easy to travel with.

Let's start by looking at the most popular blues form, the 12-bar blues progression. Variations of the 12-bar blues are the basis for much of the music in rock, jazz, folk, and pop.

A basic I IV V 12-bar progression can consist of as few as three chords: I, the tonic chord; IV, the subdominant chord; and V, the dominant chord. For example, in the key of C, the chord progression would be C, F, G. In blues progressions, those chords are often played as (4-note) dominant-7 chords: C7, F7, and G7. This progression may look something like this: (see chart on pg. 13)

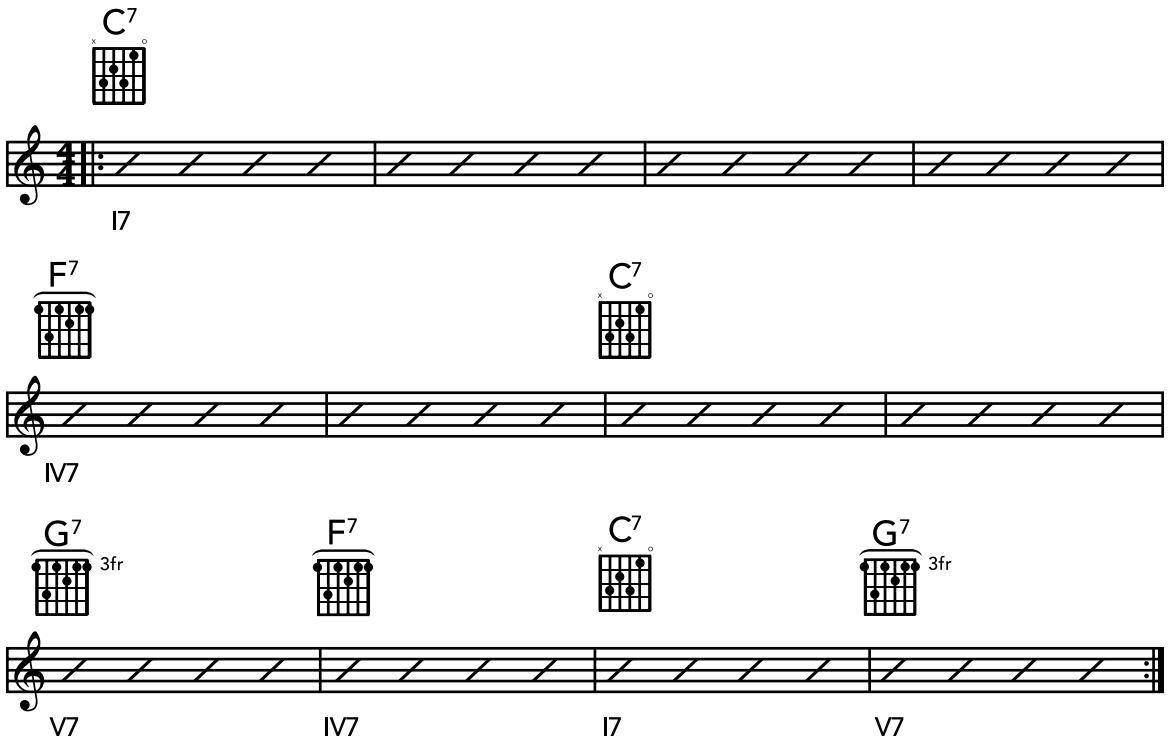
This is a typical I-IV-V blues with the "long change," also known as the "long I," which means that it starts with four bars of the I chord, followed by the

IV chord in bars 5 and 6. Measures 7 and 8 return to the I chord, and then the V chord is played in bar 9, followed by the IV chord in bar 10. The I chord returns in bar 11, and then the V chord completes the progression in bar 12, and takes it home again as it repeats back to the top at measure 1.

Turnarounds, which are fills that are played by the soloist and/or by rhythm section players such as the rhythm guitarist, are generally played over the last two bars (measures 11 and 12) of each chorus. The turnaround is a very important component of the blues progression. Each turnaround functions as a transition into the next chorus; it complements the vocal line or melody, and provides forward momentum for the flow of the song.

Thousands of songs have been recorded that were derived from these 12-bar blues progressions. Try naming ten songs in blues, jazz, rock, or any other styles of music that are based on 12-bar song forms.

12-Bar Blues: Long Change Progression



Practice Tip

Play this 12-bar progression as many times as it takes to really have its sound in your ears. Listen especially for the "pull" that the V7 creates towards the I7. This progression is prevalent in all genres of music and knowing it well will help you in many musical situations.

Learn more in Blues Guitar
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Meet the Authors

Larry Baione

Larry Baione is Chair of the Berklee College of Music Guitar Department. Baione has been a faculty member since 1974 and has been Chair since 1990. He has studied with Lenzy Wallace, Mick Goodrick, Bill Harris, William Leavitt, Bucky Pizzarelli and Jim Hall. He received his Bachelor of Music from Berklee and his Master of Music from the New England Conservatory.

Larry's Online Courses

Guitar Scales 101

This course will help you organize the often-ambiguous guitar fretboard and provide you with the knowledge to confidently navigate the instrument and develop your technique. The course begins by looking at the major and pentatonic scales, and how these scales work at different points up the neck. You'll then learn to construct and play blues, Dorian, and Mixolydian scales in all keys, and apply these scales to performance-based weekly musical examples and practice exercises. In addition, you will be studying the harmonic minor and melodic minor scales and modes.

Rick Peckham

Rick Peckham is an internationally known jazz guitarist, clinician, composer, and writer. He has performed with George Garzone, Jerry Bergonzi, Mike Gibbs, and Dave Liebman, and recorded the album *Stray Dog* as a member of the notorious jazz collective Um, led by trombonist Hal Crook and occasionally featuring organist John Medeski. His most recent recording *Left End*—a set of original compositions mixed with collective improvisations—was recorded with drummer Jim Black and bassist Tony Scherr.

Rick's Online Courses

Guitar Chords 101

Guitar Chords 101 presents Berklee's approach to the construction of chords, a method that focuses less on the shape of an individual chord, and more on the notes that the chord is based around. Students will learn to construct and play triads and basic 7th chords, as well as look at inversions and different chord voicings -- the basic foundations guitarists use to write or perform in any number of different styles.

Guitar Chords 201: Chord Melody and Inversions

Building on the foundation of *Guitar Chords 101*, this course is the next level in Berklee's world-famous approach to guitar study, one in which players focus on the individual notes that make up a chord, rather than on the chord's shape. Guitar Chords 201 provides essential technical training that will improve your style, intonation, technique, time feel, and tone.

Meet the Authors

Thaddeus Hogarth

Born in the U.K. and raised in the West Indies, Thaddeus Hogarth is an associate professor in the Guitar department at Berklee College of Music. A two-time winner of the Independent Music Award for R&B/Blues (2001, 2006), he has been a prominent guitar player and singer-songwriter in the New England music scene since 1990, when he graduated from Berklee. He leads his own group, the Thaddeus Hogarth Band, featuring David Buda on bass, Joey Scrima on drums, and David Sparr on keyboards. They have shared the bill or stage with such legends as Tower of Power, Average White Band, James Montgomery, Fred Wesley, and Johnny Winter.

Thaddeus's Online Courses

Funk/Rock and R&B Guitar Soloing

Funk/Rock and R&B Guitar Soloing teaches the tools and effective soloing techniques of the legendary funk guitarists: the appropriate scales, the best use of effects (such as wah-wah, overdrive, distortion, and fuzz), and the rhythmic and melodic development that work together to create an authentic funk-based solo and sound.

Michael Williams

Michael Williams has been active as a blues and jazz guitarist around New England since 1987. He has performed extensively throughout the United States and Canada as a member of Grammy winner James Cotton's blues band, and with many other artists, including David "Fathead" Newman, Mighty Sam McClain, the Bruce Katz Band, Sugar Ray Norcia, Darrell Nulisch, Toni Lynn Washington, Michelle Willson, Jerry Portnoy, the Love Dogs, blues piano virtuoso David Maxwell, and his own band, Michael Williams and Friends.

Michael's Online Courses

Blues Guitar

This course begins by teaching the 12-bar blues harmony, basic rhythm guitar technique, and the pentatonic and blues scale in the open position up the neck. You'll learn to incorporate some of the nuances of the masters into your playing—from doubling the bass over a shuffle in the style of Buddy Guy, to combining major and minor pentatonic scales in the style of B.B. King and T-Bone Walker. Through call and response exercises and playing in other grooves and tempos, you'll learn to pace your solos to create tension and release.

Advanced Blues Guitar

Take your rhythm playing and soloing techniques to the next level by studying the signature phrases and techniques performed by many of the greatest guitarists in electric blues. With legends such as Albert Collins, Albert King, B.B. King, Otis Rush, Magic Sam, Robert Cray, Stevie Ray Vaughan, and Robben Ford as your guides, you will learn how to play rhythm guitar parts and solos over a variety of blues progressions, grooves, and tempos, in styles such as shuffles, funky blues, blues/rumbas, blues/rock, soul, and slow blues.

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