

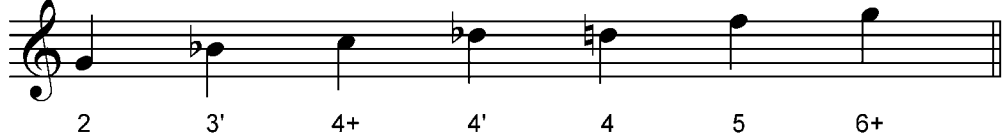


Playing 12 Bars

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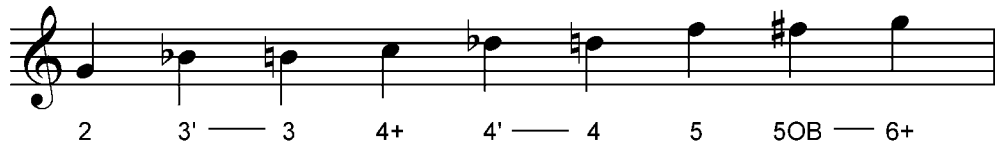
The blues scale may be played over an entire 12 blues chord progression. On a C harp, playing in the cross harp position in the key of G, the notes of the blues scale are:

Ex. 1



The beauty of the blues scale lies in the bent or 'blue' notes. Rather than thinking of each note as a constant pitch, think of certain notes as ranges of pitch. With this in mind, the blues scale becomes:

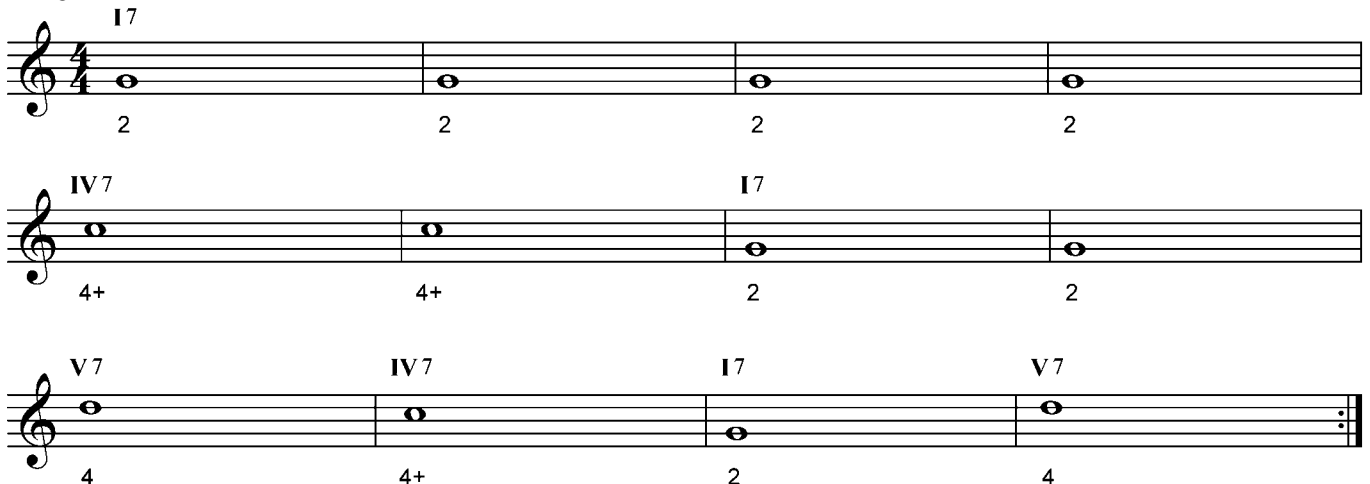
Ex. 2



All of the possible pitches may be played between the notes above with the dashes. For example, a Bb(3') may be bent up to a B(3). In the lower octave, the G(2) may be bent down to the F#(2') and then all the way down to the F(2). Blues harmonica players use the bends to play melodies which move through the I IV V chord progression.

Another approach to playing a 12 bar blues is to play through the chord changes which is also called voice leading. This entails playing melodies which outline how the chord progression moves. It is no coincidence that thousands of tunes were written for the blues changes. The I IV V chord movement works so well because of the relationships between the notes of each chord. Certain notes of each chord create tension and resolution with the notes of the following chord. This will make more sense as an understanding of the chords is developed. Let's start with the roots of each chord. These are the notes the bass player usually covers. Still on a C harp, playing in cross harp in the key of G, the chord changes for a 12 bar blues are:

Ex. 3



Memorize these notes with the jam track without looking at the music or the harmonica notation. The key is to get the pitches in your head. Once you have mastered playing the roots through the 12 bars, add the 3rds. The 3rds refer to the 3rd note in the scale corresponding to each chord.

Ex. 4

Again, memorize this pattern so you can play it without referring to the music or the notation. After you are comfortable playing these notes in time through a 12 bar blues progression, add the 5ths. We are working our way up to playing the arpeggio of each chord. The arpeggio consists of the 1st, 3rd, 5th and flat-7th (b7th) note in the scale which corresponds to each chord.

Ex. 5

Now that you have mastered the roots, 3rds and 5ths, we'll add the b7ths. These are the notes which can create tension in the blues.

Ex. 6

IV7 I7

V7 IV7 I7 V7

After you have mastered the arpeggios for each chord over a 12 bar blues, you should have the sounds of how the blues moves ingrained in your head. These exercises may eventually change how you hear and play the blues. Next, play the same notes, but reverse the order in each measure. For example, instead of playing G B D F in each of the first 4 measures of the G chord, start on the b7th and come down the arpeggio. Play F D B G and do the same for the C and D chords. Once you are comfortable playing down the arpeggios, the next step is to play the inversions of the arpeggios. Instead of starting on the root in each measure, try starting on the 3rd and playing up to the root. This is demonstrated below.

Ex. 7

I7

IV7 I7

V7 IV7 I7 V7

Now the melodies begin to be more interesting while still using only the notes in the arpeggios. After you are comfortable with the 1st inversion, play the 2nd inversion which starts on the 5th and goes up to the 3rd. For the G chord it would be D(4) F(5) G(6+) B(7). Finally, play the 3rd and final inversion of the arpeggio starting on the 7th and going up to the root. The inversions should also be played in reverse order. These steps may take weeks or months to master. Don't get discouraged or overwhelmed. Each new note builds upon previous notes already mastered. You will begin to see relationships between the chords, the notes in their arpeggios, and their inversions. Eventually, you will be able to play the arpeggios up and down beginning on any note in the arpeggio throughout the entire range of the harmonica.

Next, try playing what I call strings of arpeggios through the chord changes. Start on any note in the G chord arpeggio and go up or down the arpeggio. When you reach the bottom or top end of the harmonica, then simply reverse the direction. As you reach the 4th beat or last note in the last G chord in the 4th measure, go to the note in the arpeggio of the C chord that is closest to the last note in the G chord. Play through the C chord arpeggios and then as your reach the G chord again in the 7th measure, play the note in the G arpeggio which is closest to

the note you are currently finishing with in the C arpeggio. Continue this pattern through the V chord as well. Here is one possibility:

Ex. 8

Ex. 8 shows a 12-bar blues progression in 4/4 time. The chords and their corresponding notes and fingerings are as follows:

- Bar 1 (I7):** C major (C4, E4, G4, B4). Fingerings: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6+, 5, 4, 3, 2, 2", 1, 2", 2, 3, 4, 5.
- Bar 2 (IV7):** F major (F4, A4, C5, E5). Fingerings: 5+, 6+, 5+, 4+, 3', 2, 2+, 3', 3, 4, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 2".
- Bar 3 (I7):** C major (C4, E4, G4, B4). Fingerings: 3, 4, 5, 4, 3, 2, 2", 1, 2", 2, 3, 4, 5.
- Bar 4 (IV7):** F major (F4, A4, C5, E5). Fingerings: 5+, 6+, 5+, 4+, 3', 2, 2+, 3', 3, 4, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 2".
- Bar 5 (V7):** G7 (G4, B4, D5, F5). Fingerings: 2', 1, 3", 4+, 3', 2+, 2, 3', 3, 4, 2, 2", 2', 3", 2', 1.
- Bar 6 (IV7):** F major (F4, A4, C5, E5). Fingerings: 5+, 6+, 5+, 4+, 3', 2, 2+, 3', 3, 4, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 2".
- Bar 7 (I7):** C major (C4, E4, G4, B4). Fingerings: 3, 4, 5, 4, 3, 2, 2", 1, 2", 2, 3, 4, 5.
- Bar 8 (IV7):** F major (F4, A4, C5, E5). Fingerings: 5+, 6+, 5+, 4+, 3', 2, 2+, 3', 3, 4, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 2".
- Bar 9 (V7):** G7 (G4, B4, D5, F5). Fingerings: 2', 1, 3", 4+, 3', 2+, 2, 3', 3, 4, 2, 2", 2', 3", 2', 1.
- Bar 10 (IV7):** F major (F4, A4, C5, E5). Fingerings: 5+, 6+, 5+, 4+, 3', 2, 2+, 3', 3, 4, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 2".
- Bar 11 (I7):** C major (C4, E4, G4, B4). Fingerings: 3, 4, 5, 4, 3, 2, 2", 1, 2", 2, 3, 4, 5.
- Bar 12 (V7):** G7 (G4, B4, D5, F5). Fingerings: 2', 1, 3", 4+, 3', 2+, 2, 3', 3, 4, 2, 2", 2', 3", 2', 1.

This string of arpeggios is a melody which weaves through the chord changes. Notice that the b7th of each chord creates tension and then resolves to the 3rd of the next chord. This relationship is one reason why the blues changes work so well. Try composing your own melodies using the notes in the arpeggios. The next step is to leave out the roots and the 5ths and just play the most important notes in each chord, the 3rds and b7ths. The 3rds and b7ths define the chord by determining whether the chord is major, minor, or dominant (we'll speak about this in more detail in later issues). Play only the 3rds and b7ths of each chord over the 12 bar blues jam track.

Ex. 9

Ex. 9 shows a 12-bar blues progression in 4/4 time, focusing on the 3rds and b7ths of each chord:

- Bar 1 (I7):** C major (E4, B4). Fingerings: 3, 5, 5, 3, 3, 5, 2", 3.
- Bar 2 (IV7):** F major (A4, C5). Fingerings: 3', 2+, 2+, 3', 3, 5, 3, 2".
- Bar 3 (I7):** C major (E4, B4). Fingerings: 3, 5, 5, 3, 3, 5, 2", 3.
- Bar 4 (IV7):** F major (A4, C5). Fingerings: 3', 2+, 2+, 3', 3, 5, 3, 2".
- Bar 5 (V7):** G7 (B4, F5). Fingerings: 2', 4+, 3', 2+, 2", 3, 4+, 2'.
- Bar 6 (IV7):** F major (A4, C5). Fingerings: 3', 2+, 2+, 3', 3, 5, 3, 2".
- Bar 7 (I7):** C major (E4, B4). Fingerings: 3, 5, 5, 3, 3, 5, 2", 3.
- Bar 8 (IV7):** F major (A4, C5). Fingerings: 3', 2+, 2+, 3', 3, 5, 3, 2".
- Bar 9 (V7):** G7 (B4, F5). Fingerings: 2', 4+, 3', 2+, 2", 3, 4+, 2'.
- Bar 10 (IV7):** F major (A4, C5). Fingerings: 3', 2+, 2+, 3', 3, 5, 3, 2".
- Bar 11 (I7):** C major (E4, B4). Fingerings: 3, 5, 5, 3, 3, 5, 2", 3.
- Bar 12 (V7):** G7 (B4, F5). Fingerings: 2', 4+, 3', 2+, 2", 3, 4+, 2'.

The 3rds and b7ths of each chord are right next to the 3rds and b7ths of the following chord! The B is the 3rd of the G chord. It is right next to the b7th of the C chord which is a Bb. They are a half step apart which means there is no note between them. The F is the b7th of the G chord. It is right next to the 3rd of the C chord which is an E. The F# in the D chord is right next to the F in the G chord. The C in the D chord is right next to the B in the G chord. All of these 3rds and b7ths are a half step apart.

