

Styles & Genres



American Music: Blues 3: The Blues Scale

THE BLUES SCALE grew out of the American Blues traditions, but became popular in jazz and rock as well for its improvisational qualities. Here is a way of building up these skills.

From D Major to Blues Scale in D

On the left is the D major scale. First, let's cut down the number of notes: discard the 2nd and the 6th notes of the scale (the E and the B).

Now flatten the 3rd and the 7th: the F# becomes an F natural, the C# becomes a C natural. To flatten a note on the mandolin you just move down one fret towards the nut. That's the start of our blues technique.

Add Two More Keys

Now we'll apply the same steps to the G scale:

And to the A scale:



Now we're going to start using the three blues scales, but remember, this is an exercise rather than the easy solution to soloing. Take a twelve bar blues chord structure, and when the chord played is D, "noodle" on the D blues scale. In other words, randomly play notes in the scale, but stick only to these notes. When the chord changes to G, switch to the G blues scale. When the chord changes to A7, switch to the A blues scale. Rinse and repeat.

Your Twelve-Bar Blues Solo

1 D 1, 2, 3, 4	2 D 1, 2, 3, 4	3 D 1, 2, 3, 4	4 D7 1, 2, 3, 4
5 G 1, 2, 3, 4	6 G 1, 2, 3, 4	7 D 1, 2, 3, 4	8 D 1, 2, 3, 4
9 A7 1, 2, 3, 4	10 G 1, 2, 3, 4	11 D 1, 2, 3, 4	12 D 1, 2, 3, 4