

Styles & Genres



American Music: Blues 1: 12-Bar Blues

TWELVE-BAR BLUES is a popular form of music, especially with guitarists; it's quite easy to learn, and great fun! It follows a certain formula based on twelve "units" (or bars) and is quite recognisable when heard. A basic form of this formula can be expressed like this:

I is the root note of the key you're in, so if you're playing the blues in "C", the chord is C major.
IV is the fourth note of the scale - 4th note in the C scale is F, so the chord is F major.

V is the fifth note of the scale - G, so the chord played is G. (The V chord is very often played in its "7th" form, so you would play a G7.)

Therefore, applying the formula to the C scale, you would get this:

There are lots of slight variations to the formula, but that's basically it. Try the following sequence playing four strums for each unit:

1	2	3	4
I	I	I	I7
5	6	7	8
IV	IV	I	I
9	10	11	12
V7	IV	I	V7

1	2	3	4
C	C	C	C7
5	6	7	8
F	F	C	C
9	10	11	12
G7	F	C	G7

1 2 3 4

5 6 7 8

9 10 11 12

Twelve-Bar Blues