How To Play Blues Ukulele

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Introduction

"Blues on the ukulele? Don't be ridiculous."

That's the reaction you're likely to get from most people. Don't listen to them. There's a long history of blues ukers from 'Papa' Charlie Jackson through Rabbit Muse to players like Jason Arimoto today. More importantly than that, it doesn't matter which instrument you're playing the blues on - or even which notes you're playing - but why you're playing them.

I was discussing the issue of blues on the ukulele with Todd Mauldin - singer/guitarist with The Hellbusters and keen uker - and he quoted Cornel West's response to being asked if he was optimistic about the future:

"I'm a blues man. A blues man is a prisoner of hope. Hope wrestles with despair, but it doesn't generate optimism.   It just generates this energy to be courageous, to bear witness, to see what the end is going to be. No guarantee, unfinished, open-ended. I'm a prisoner of hope. I'm going to die full of hope."

  And Todd added to this:

"A blues man with a ukulele is by definition a prisoner of hope... hope that this little instrument will be able to express the soul of man. I encourage you to approach the blues with your instrument without apology... you may be far removed from "the land where the blues began" and of different economic, social and racial strata than some blues exponents, but that isn't remotely important... since clearly it resonates with you at a deep elemental level, as it does with everybody who has the blues, which is every living human. The freedom and rebellion worked for you. Good! Me, it's the spiritual side, the battle of good and evil in the human heart and soul. Some just dig the rhythm. We own it all in this art and when you know the "why", your individual, specific particular "why", then the "what" is easy."

  So once you've figured out why, the rest of the book will help you out with the easy part of what to play.

1 Blues Chord Progressions

The life of a blues musician isn't an easy one. Your woman done left you. You ain't got nothing left to lose. You wake up in the morning and have to search round for you shoes. But one thing you don't have to worry about is is coming up with chord progressions.

The majority of blues songs are based on a very simple twelve bar pattern containing just three chords. In this chapter, we'll look at how to play this pattern, variations on it, how to stop it getting boring and a variety of other progressions used in styles that grew out of the blues such as country blues and jump blues.

Click the titles to be taken to each section.

1.1 Shuffle Rhythm

The most important rhythm in blues is the shuffle rhythm. This is a simple down-up strum but the down stroke (the first part of the beat) lasts longer than the up strum. This produces a kind of hobbling rhythm - usually referred to as swing time.

Compare the sound of the first part of Example 1 (which you can find in the folder marked 'MP3s') with the second.

The first part is a plain down-up strum with no swing. In the second part, the same chord is played with a shuffle rhythm giving it a much more interesting sound.

Technically speaking, the first part of the beat should be twice as long as the second part (so the first note takes up two thirds of the beat). However, it doesn't help to think in these terms when you're playing it. It's much easier just to get into the groove of it.

In tab, you can tell a song that's played in this way when you see this at the top of the tab sheet:
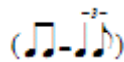
Almost all the examples in this book are played using the shuffle rhythm.

1.2 12 Bar Blues

The vast majority of blues songs (and rock and roll songs) are based on a twelve bar pattern which is repeated. Over time there have been many variations on this pattern.

1.2.1 12 Bar Blues in C

The simplest twelve bar blues looks like this in the key of C:

Example 2
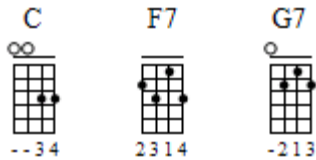

```
| C   | C   | C   | C   |
| F7  | F7  | C   | C   |
| G7  | F7  | C   | C   |
```

Once you get to the end of the pattern, you can go straight back to the beginning or finish up with one strum of the root chord (in this case C) as I do in this example.

I've gone with the C5 chord shape for C. This gives the chord more ambiguity which suits the bluesy sound. But going with the usual C chord will also sound right.

1.2.2 12 Bar Blues in A

This pattern can be played in any key. For example, it would look like this in the key of A.

Example 3

A   D7   E7
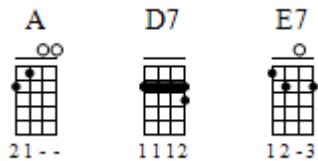
```
| A    | A    | A    | A    |
| D7   | D7   | A    | A    |
| E7   | D7   | A    | A    |
```

1.2.3 12 Bar Blues in Any Key

You can use this pattern to play a twelve bar blues in any key you want. All of them use just three chords which you can insert into pattern like this:

```
|1st chord   |1st chord   |1st chord   |1st chord   |
|2nd chord   |2nd chord   |1st chord   |1st chord   |
|3rd chord   |2nd chord   |1st chord   |1st chord   |
```

So in the key of C the first chord is C, the second chord is F7 and the third chord is G7.

If you are familiar with chord theory, you'll recognise this as a I-IV-V:

```
| I    | I    |I    |I    |
|IV7   |IV7   |I    |I    |
|V7    |IV7   |I    |I    |
```

If you're not into chord theory and that makes no sense to you, ignore it!

The chord sets in each key are:

1st Chord (I)	2nd Chord (IV)	3rd Chord (V)
C	F7	G7
C#	F#7	G#7
D	G7	A7
Eb	Ab7	Bb7
E	A7	B7
F	Bb7	C7
F#	B7	C#7
G	C7	D7
G#	C#7	D#7
A	D7	E7
Bb	Eb7	F7
B	E7	F#7

So if you wanted to play in the key of G:

```
|1st chord=G        |1st chord=G        |1st chord=G        |1st chord=G    |
|2nd chord=C7       |2nd chord=C7       |1st chord=G        |1st chord=G    |
|3rd chord=D7       |2nd chord=C7       |1st chord=G        |1st chord=G    |
```

So you'd get

```
|G          |G          |G          |G              |
|C7         |C7         |G          |G              |
|D7         |C7         |G          |G              |
```

1.3 Variations on the 12 Bar Blues

Over time the twelve bar pattern has been shifted around and added to in a huge variety of ways. Here's one possible variation:

Example 5
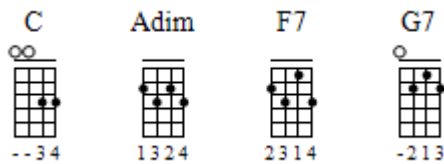

```
| C         | F7        | C         | C         |
| F7        | Adim      | C         | C         |
| G7        | F7        | C         | C    G7   |
```

This contains three popular variations: the F7 in bar 2, the A diminished chord and the G7 (V) chord in bar 12. For the last bar, I'm strumming down once on the C chord before playing the G7. It adds an extra bit of rhythmical interest.

The most common place to find variations in the 12 bar blues pattern is in the turnaround, i.e. the last two bars of the progressions. Here's a turnaround I like to use in the key of A:

Example 6
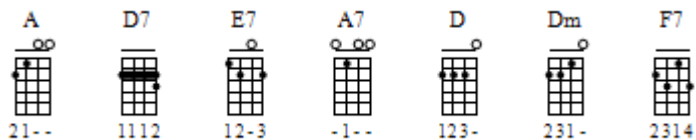

```
| A            | D7           | A            | A            |
| D7           | D7           | A            | A            |
| E7           | D7           | A A7 D Dm    | A F7 E7      |
```

There's a lot going on in the last two bars of that progression. It creates a great run of descending notes, an idea we'll come back to when we look at turnarounds in more depth.

The strumming pattern for the last two bars is quite tricky. Here it is:
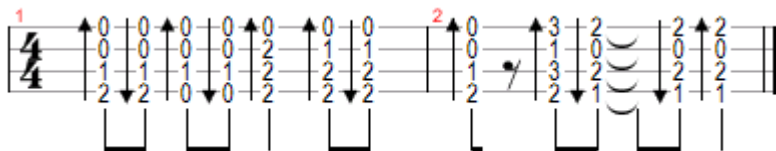
You can mix and match and play around with the patterns and come up with your own variations.

1.4 The Blues Shuffle

With a single chord lasting for up to four bars in a twelve bar progression, it can become a little monotonous. To spice things up a little, it is common to use 6th and 7th chords.

For example, two bars of C might be played like this:

Example 7a
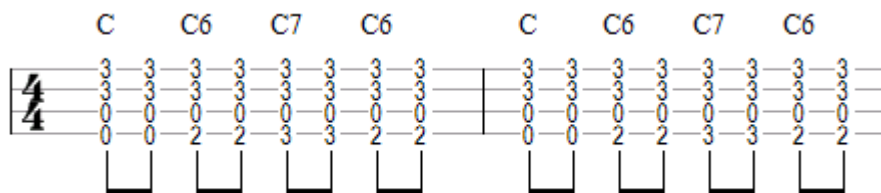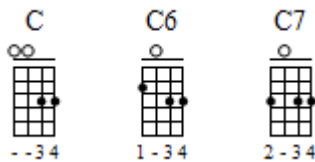
And two bars of F:

Example 7b
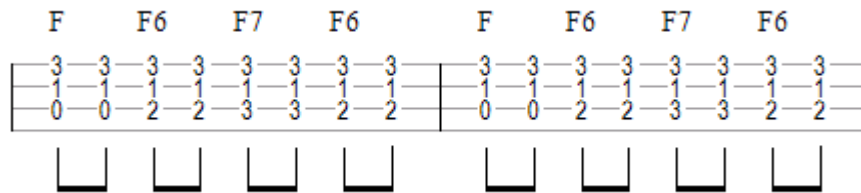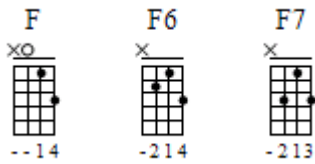
When I'm playing this one, I'm stopping the G string from ringing by bringing my thumb over the neck and resting it against the G string.

Finally, two bars of G:

Example 7c
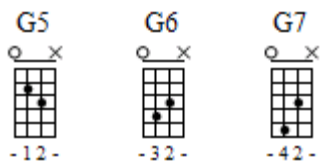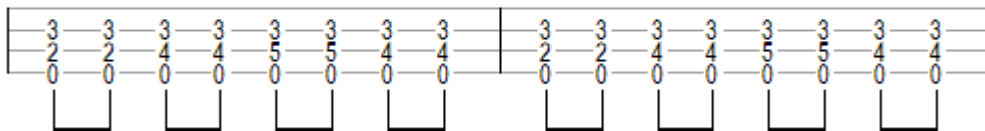
Throw these into the 12 bar chord pattern and you get this:

Example 8

The same thing can be done in any key - you can find a full list of patterns in the folder marked 'Appendix'. For example, it would go like this in A.

Example 9

There are plenty of variations of this pattern around. For example, you could switch back to the original chord between the 6 and 7 chords like this:

Example 10a
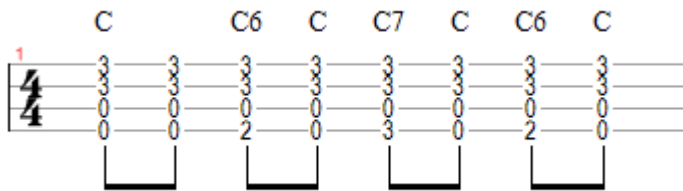
Or change the strumming pattern. This next example creates a little jump in the rhythm by missing out one of the down strums.

Example 10b
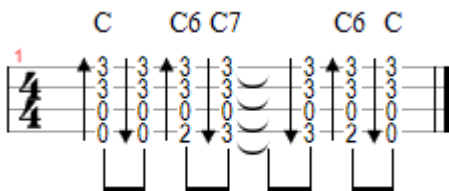
This next example uses a triplet strum. For this one, I strum down with my index finger, down with my thumb then up with my index finger. You can see a demonstration by Lil Rev here.

Example 10c
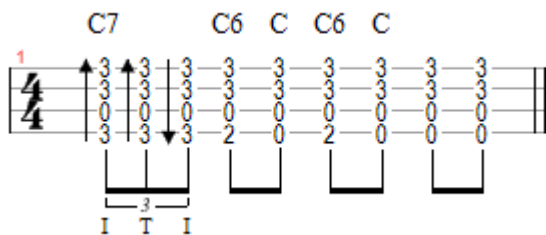
1.5 Other Blues Chord Patterns

The traditional twelve bar has developed over time, mixing with different styles and ideas and changing as it goes along. This section takes a look at some of the ways the 12 bar blues has been adapted.

1.5.1 8 Bar Blues

Not all blues songs are arranged into 12 bar sections, many are 8 bar progressions. Again, there are many variations on this, but here's my favourite.

Example 11

| A | A7 | D7 | Adim | F#m | Bm7 | E7 | E7+5 |
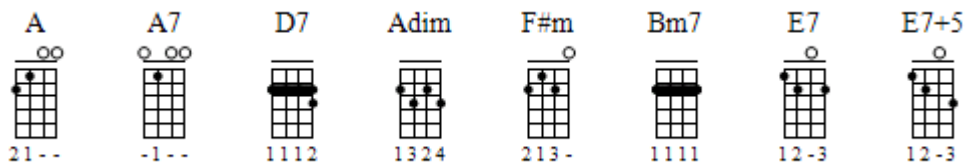
```
| A          | A7        | D7         | Adim      |
| A    F#m   | Bm7  E7   | A    D7    | A    E7+5 |
```

1.5.2 BB King Style Blues

This chord progression in the style of BB King has a few similarities to the 12 bar pattern but has a more jazzy sound to it.

Example 12
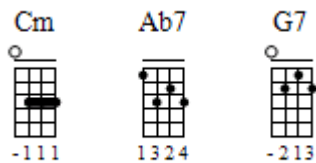

```
| Cm  | Cm  | Cm  | Cm  |
| Ab7 | Ab7 | Cm  | Cm  |
| Ab7 | G7  | Cm  | Cm  |
```

1.5.3 Country Blues

Robert Johnson's *They're Red Hot* (covered by Red Hot Chilli Peppers) and *Your Southern Can Is Mine.* (covered by The White Stripes).

Example 13
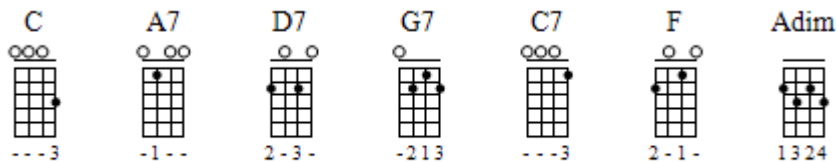

```
| C   | A7  |D7 G7 | C     |
| C   | A7  |D7    | G7    |
| C   | C7  |F     | Adim  |
| C   | A7  |D7  G7| C     |
```

1.5.4 Jump Blues

Jump blues is an uptempo style that combines the blues with jazz, swing and big band music. It had a big revival in the 90s with bands like The Brian Setzer Orchestra and the Royal Crown Review.

Here's a fairly simple take on a jump blues version of the 12 bar blues.

Example 14a
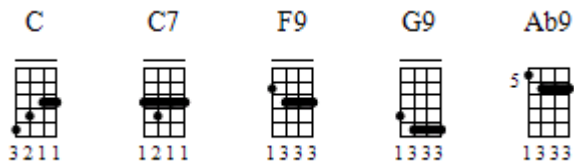

```
| C    | C    | C    | C7   |
| F9   | F9   | C    | C    |
| G9   | F9   | C   F9      | C7 Ab9 G9 |
```

I'm using a *Lust for Life* inspired rhythm and it's a little tricky.

The strum pattern stretches across two bars. The pattern starts with three down strums. You want to keep these strums fairly short. After you've strummed, release the pressure on the chord until it stops sounding (but you're still touching the string) to give it a staccato sound.

After the three down strums, comes three up strums. Then you're down, up, down, up until the end.

Example 14b
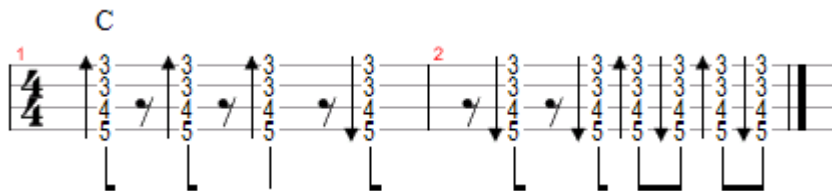
The last few bars are strummed like this.

Example 14c
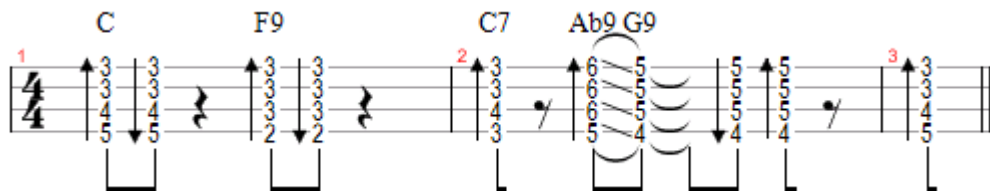
In the second bar, you have to slide down the entire chord shape from Ab9 to G9.

And while we're on the subject of interesting rhythms...

1.5.5 Bo Diddley Blues

If you think having only three chords in a song is a bit minimalistic, you should check out Bo Diddley. Songs like *Hey, Bo Diddley and Bo Diddley* are made up almost exclusively of one chord. The only move in those songs is the occasional move down two frets for a bar or less. He could get away with it because he had some fantastic rhythms.

Here's an example of the Bo Diddley style rhythm

Example 15
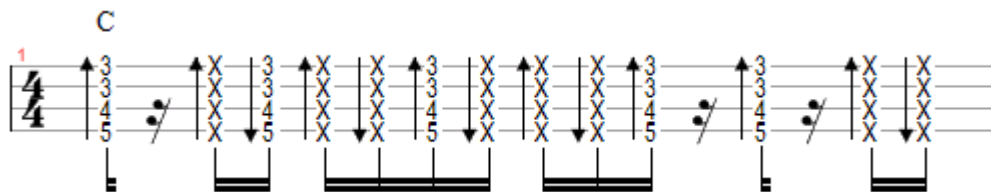
When you're strumming this, it's important to keep your strumming hand moving in a steady up-down rhythm. The up arrows are down strums and the down arrows are up strums (it's confusing, I know).

For the rests (the diagonal line with a couple of dots sitting on it), you strum but don't hit the strings. For the deadened notes (the rows of Xs), you strum but rest your fretboard hand on the strings so they just make a 'chunk' sound.

It doesn't matter too much if you produce 'chunk' where a rest should be or vice versa. But make sure you create the full chords in the right place to make the syncopated rhythm.

Bo Diddley would often throw in the same chord higher up the fretboard and create something like this:

Example 16

Put them both together and you get example 17 (on the next page).

Example 17

2 Blues Riffs

As the blues developed it became increasingly common for blues songs to be based on riffs (short, repeated musical phrase) rather than chords.

Blues musicians such as Muddy Waters and John Lee Hooker - whose styles we'll be covering in this section - extensively used riffs in their songs and were a huge influence on the musicians of the blues revival in the 1960s. So much so that bands reworked old blues songs with riffs - the most successful of these being Cream's electrifying retake of Robert Johnson's Crossroads.

This chapter takes a look at a number of different riffs and shows how you can combine riffs, strums and the 12 bar pattern for the ultimate blues accompaniment.

Click the title to be taken to the section.

2.1 Muddy Waters Style Riff

This riff is a blues classic and has been used and adapted a million times by all sorts of bands. One notable example is AC/DC's *Whole Lotta Rosie*.

At its simplest, and in the key of C, it goes like this:

Example 18
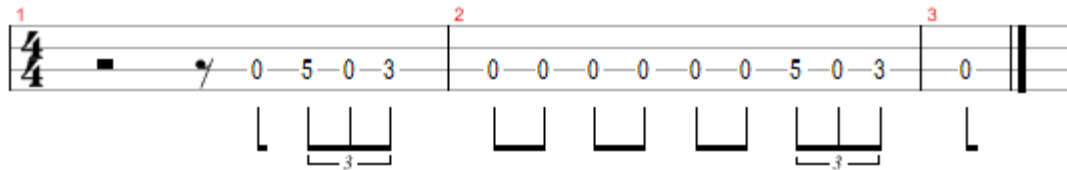
This is a guitar style way of playing it except I use my thumb rather than a pick.

For a version that suits the uke more, you can add some chord notes to flesh out the sound such as this version in G:

Example 19
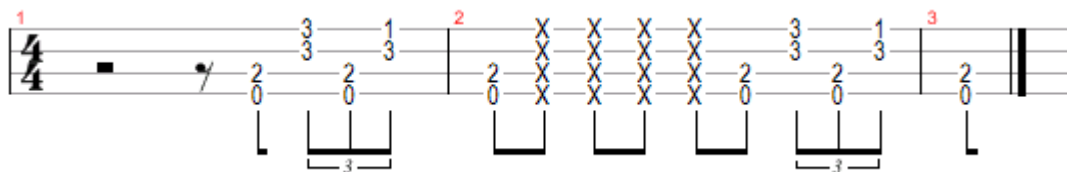
This version also contains deadened notes (the crosses). These are produced by resting your fretting lightly on the strings (just heavily enough to stop the strings ringing) so that it creates a 'chunk' rather than a note.

To pick this one, I use my thumb to strum down on the G and C strings and my index finger to strum up on the E and A strings.

2.2 John Lee Hooker Style Riff

This riff is similar to the Muddy Waters style riff and uses the same set of notes:

Example 20
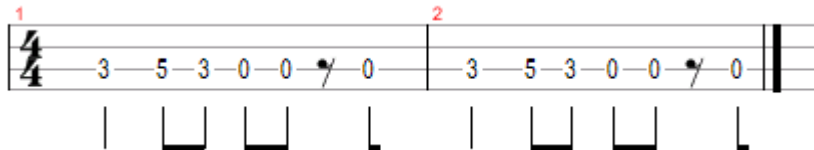
Again, I'm using my thumb to pick this one. But this time I'm also resting the underside of my strumming hand against the string to deaden it slightly.

2.3 Bo Diddley Style Riff

As well as his trademark chord style, Bo Diddley also used riffs in songs like Roadrunner.

Example 21
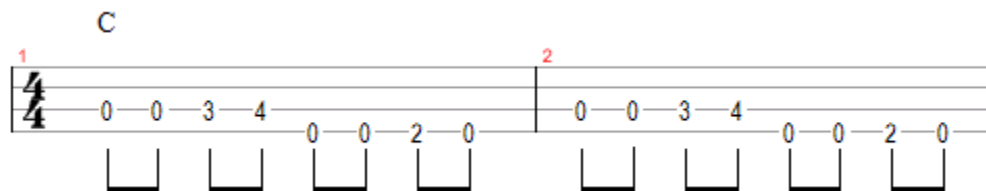
This is one of the few examples in the book not played with a shuffle rhythm.

Riffs can be arranged into the standard 12 bar blues pattern by shifting them up to match the chord changes.

To create a 12 bar pattern from this riff in C, you'd need to move it up five frets so it's in F:

Example 22

F
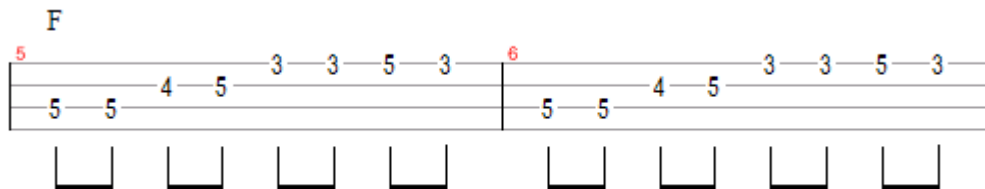
And and up seven frets for G:

Example 23

G
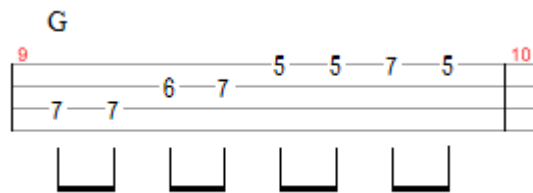
There are a couple of ways you can pick these patterns depending on how fast you want to play them. The easy way is to use your thumb for all the notes. But if you want to play it at a high tempo, you'll have to use your index and middle fingers alternately (making a 'running man' type motion with them).

Putting all the patterns together in a 12 bar format would go like this:

Example 24

2.4 Stevie Ray Vaughan Style Riff

Stevie Ray Vaughan often used riffs similar to the one we look at in the previous example as the basis for his songs such as Pride and Joy. This example is an extension of the last one with the riff ascending in the first bar, then descending in the second.

Example 25a

Moving it up five frets gives you the pattern for the F part of the 12 bar blues.

Example 25b

Rather than just playing the riff in each key, you can mix things up a little by switching between the riff and the chords like this.

Example 26

3 Intros, Outros and Turnarounds

They say every novel needs a beginning, a middle and an end. Equally, every blues song needs a beginning, a miserable and an end.

Luckily for us, blues beginnings, middles and ends are pretty much interchangeable. You can take an intro and use it as a turnaround or, with a slight adjustment, as an outro.

In this chapter, we'll be looking at a few intro and turnaround options from the likes of Robert Johnson and Stevie Ray Vaughan, umpteen different ways to use chromatic notes for your intros and the minor change you have to make to turn these into outros.

Click the titles to be taken to each section.

3.1 Stevie Ray Vaughan Style

This is a fairly simple turnaround based strongly on the chords in the last four bars of a 12 bar progression in A.

Example 27

The last chord in bars one and two sound very discordant on their own. But in the context, and when played quickly, they add movement to the progression.

At the end of this phrase you can either go straight back to the beginning of the 12 bar pattern or you can play an A chord to turn it into an outro.

3.2 Robert Johnson Style

One of the most common feature of turnarounds is a series of descending chromatic notes. It's a trick Robert Johnson used regularly.

These two bars take the place of bars 11 and 12 in the 12-bar blues.

In the key of F:

Example 28
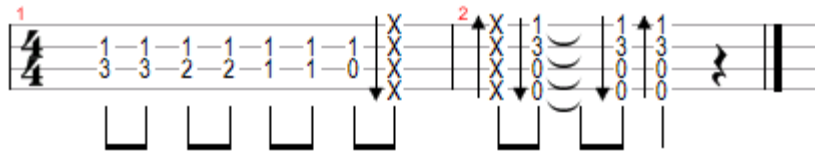
This version you can play just strumming. For the doubled notes I strummed all of them downwards with my thumb. Then used my index finger for the dampened notes and the full chords.

Robert Johnson used extensive fingerpicking for his playing, which would translate to something like this on the uke:

Example 29

Here I'm using my thumb to play the notes on the C string and my index finger to play the notes on the E string. Then I switch to strumming for the chords.

3.3 Descending Turnarounds

There are a huge number of variations on the chromatic descending idea in every key. Here's a basic one in the key of A:

Example 30a

You can play this example in the key of C just by moving everything up three frets.

Example 30b

This strummed version can be adapted in many ways and played finger-picking style like this:

Example 31

In order to pick these examples, I'm using my thumb on the C string, index finger on the E string and middle finger on the A string for the first half. For the E7 chord, I move each finger down a string (so the thumb is on the G string, index finger on the C string, middle finger on the E string and ring finger on the A string). If you need a refresher on notation for fingerpicking, you can find it here.

Another popular variation is this:

Example 32

This version opens up the possibility of creating a little melody on the top string alongside the descending pattern.

Example 33
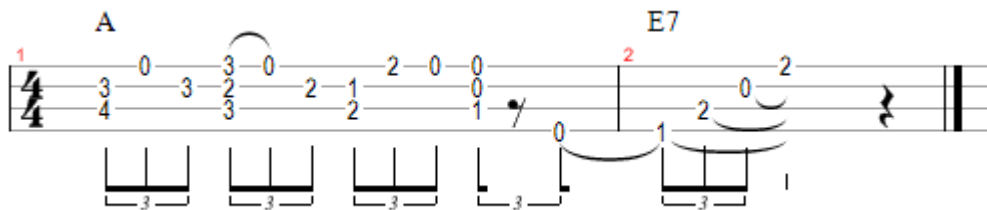
This is a little tricky to play, but it's very effective so well worth practicing.

Using the re-entrant string, you can play this variation of example 29

Example 34
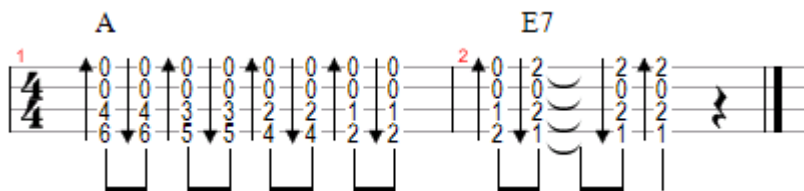
Here you are playing the same notes on the G string as you were on the A string and leaving the E and A strings to ring open - creating a slightly different feel.

You can adapt this for fingerpicking like this:

Example 35a

3.4 Turnaround To Outro

The turnarounds we've looked at so far can be very easily turned into outros. All you have to do is replace the open ended V chord at the end of the phrase (E7 when you are playing in A) with a move to the V chord then back to the home/I chord.

So, you could transform example 35a into an outro like this.

Example 35b

4 Blues Soloing Techniques

It's no secret that the most important aspect of blues soloing is the facial expressions. A lengthy study of BB King will give you full knowledge of such gems as the 'hangdog', the 'oh, that tickles', the 'punched by the invisible man', and the 'bikini wax'.

This chapter goes over some of the less essential techniques used in blues soloing such as bends, vibrato, hammer-ons, pull-offs and slides.

4.1 Blues Bends
4.2 Vibrato
4.3 Hammer-Ons & Pull-Offs
4.4 Slides

Click the titles to get to each section.

4.1 Blues Bends

String bending is an integral part of blues guitar playing. String bending can be used to recreate the sounds of the human voice whether it's wailing and screaming or moaning.

Unfortunately, bending doesn't transfer too well to the ukulele. The nylon strings don't take to bending as well as steel strings do (you'll never hear bent notes in classical and flamenco playing which also use nylon strings) and the narrow neck of the ukulele doesn't leave you much room for bends. But it's such an important part of blues, that you have to at least hint at it.

Bends are played by picking a single note as normal, then pushing the string up towards your head with your fretting finger (making sure that you don't slip onto a different fret). They are tabbed like this:
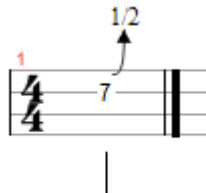
At the top of the arrow is a number. This indicates how much you should bend the note. 1/2 means that you bend the string up 1 fret. In the example above, you pick the note at the seventh fret as usual, then bend the string until it is the same pitch as a note played at the eighth fret. This takes a fair bit of practice to get right, particularly on the uke. Here's a common lick with bends in the key of C.

Example 36
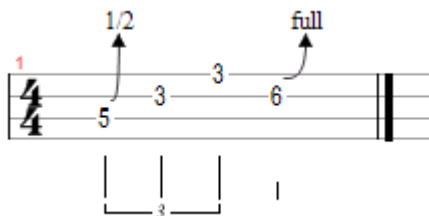
In blues, you'll often hear bent notes along with stable notes.

In example 37 you play both the E and A strings at the seventh fret and bend just the E string.

Example 37
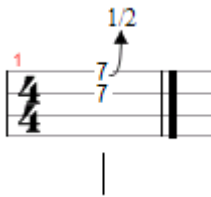
Example 38 is similar but you play the E string, bend it, play the A string (while the E string is still bent), then play the E string again and release the note.
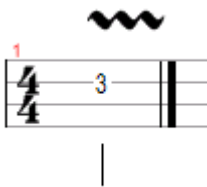
Example 38
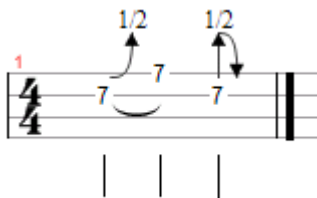
4.2 Vibrato

Vibrato is a tremble that is added to notes, particularly at the end of a phrase. The most common way to produce vibrato is to repeatedly bend and release a note. There's a video of Albert Collins explaining his vibrato technique here.

Vibrato is shown in tab by a wavy line above the note.

Example 39

Varying the amount of bend and the speed will give you different forms of vibrato. BB King, for example, has a very rapid vibrato.

As with bending, controlling vibrato on nylon strings is much more challenging than steel strings. An alternative way of creating vibrato is to rock you finger on the string creating a small movement within the fret. This creates a more subtle form of vibrato.

4.3 Hammer-Ons & Pull-Offs

Hammer-ons and pull-offs are ways of changing frets without re-picking the string.

Example 40
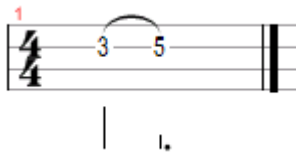
In this example, you play the E string at the third fret as usual then hammer down your index finger at the fifth fret.

Example 41
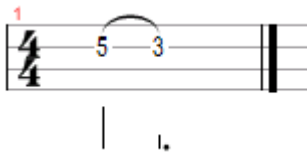
Pull-offs are the exact opposite. First you play the higher note while fretting the lower note as well. Then take your finger off so the lower note sounds.

If you pull the string down very slightly when you release it, you can produce a little extra volume in the string which means you can keep a series of hammer-ons and pull-offs going indefinitely.
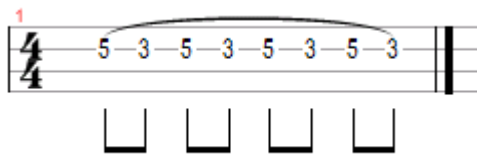
Example 42

Hammer-ons and pull offs are often used as grace notes i.e. very short notes before the note itself. They are tabbed like this:

Example 43
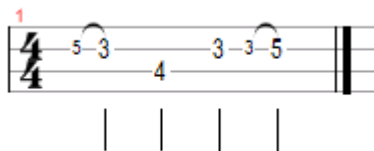
4.4 Slides

Slides make a good substitution for bends on the uke. They are played by picking one note, then sliding your finger up or down the fretboard to the new fret. This can take a bit of practice before you accurately slide to the fret you are aiming for. Make sure you have a firm grip on the neck of the uke.

Slides are tabbed with a diagonal line between the two notes.

Example 44
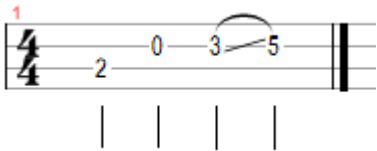
In example 44 there is a slide between the third and fifth fret.

Slides are often used as grace notes in blues at the start of a phrase like this:

Example 45
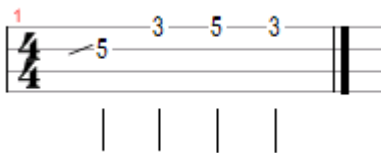
This is a slide in 'from nowhere'. The slide is so quick, it's not clear where it starts. You play it by starting to sliding from two or three frets lower than the target note as soon as, or even slightly before, you pick the note.

With bends being tricky on the ukulele, slides made a great substitute. For example, the large bend at the end of example 36 is quite tricky and could be replaced with a slide to make this:

Example 46
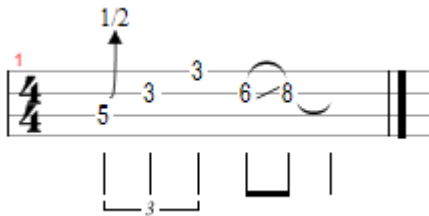
5 Blues Soloing

Almost all blues solos are improvised. However, they are improvised within tight boundaries. The most confusing insult I've ever received was, "That's not improvising, you're just making it up as you go along." As oxymoronic as that seems, there is a truth in it. Improvising isn't just playing anything at all. To be effective, it has to be more focused.

The blues form is one of the most restrictive there is. Most blues solos contain no more than six notes, and many just five.

Every blues player has a set of licks (short musical phrases) that they can pull out during a solo and create variations on. This chapter takes you through three different scales you can use as a basis for your improvising and gives you plenty of licks based on these scales.

5.1 Minor Pentatonic Scale

The pentatonic scale is the most used scale in blues music. As the name suggests, there are only five notes in the scale.

Like all scales, the pentatonic scale is set up according to the distance between the notes starting on the root note of the scale (e.g. C is the root note when you're playing in the key of C).

The C-minor pentatonic scale looks like this in tab:

Example 47
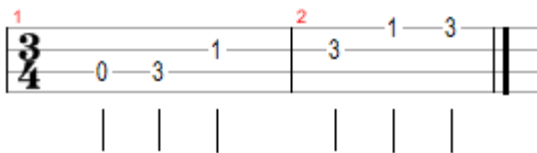
On the mp3, and with all the scales patterns, I start out with the root chord (in this case C) to set the tone for the scale.

And this on the fretboard:
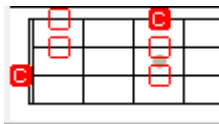
In this diagram, the red squares indicate the notes that fall within the C minor pentatonic with the filled in squares being the root notes. Later on, it's going to be important that you know which notes in the scale are the root notes.

You can use any of the notes in this pattern to solo over a chord progression in the key of C (you can use the backing tracks in the MP3 folder or record your own).

For example, here's the sort of lick you could play using these notes:

Example 48

And here's an example of a turnaround using this pattern

Example 49

5.2 Transposing the Pentatonic Scale

Once you've got the pattern for the C minor pentatonic under your fingers, you use the same shape to play over a blues progression in any key.

The important thing to note is where the root note of the scale is.
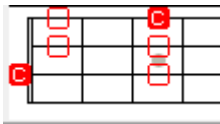
Here, the root note (C) is the first and last note of the pattern.

To play over a chord progression in D, all you have to do is shift the pattern up two frets so the root notes are now Ds (C string second fret and D string fifth fret).
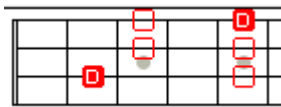
If you wanted to play in F, you'd move the pattern up so the pattern starts on the fifth fret.
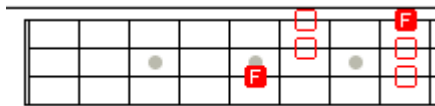
To illustrate the idea, take this very simple (and boring) lick using the C minor pentatonic scale:

Example 50a

```
    C
--1-----1---3-----2--
------3-----------
------------------
------------------

   |   |   |   |
```
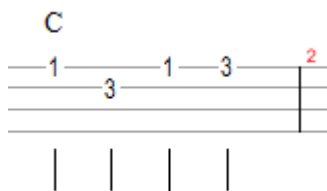
In the key of D, every note in the lick would be two frets higher:

Example 50b

```
    D
--2-3-----3---5---
------5-----------
------------------

   |   |   |   |
```
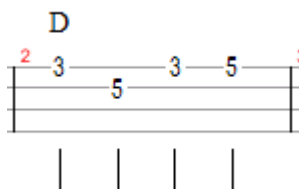
And in F it would be:

Example 50c

```
    F
--3-6-----6---8---
------8-----------
------------------

   |   |   |   |
```
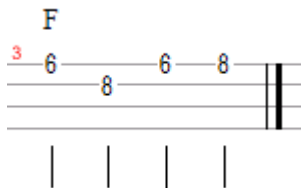
You can find tab for the minor pentatonic scale in every key in the appendix.

5.3 Improvising Tips

5.3.1 Question and Answer Phrasing

Although you can noodle these notes to your heart's content, it's useful to give your improvising some structure. One common technique is to arrange phrases into questions and answers.

When people ask a question, their voice naturally raises towards the end of the sentence. When making a statement, the intonation tends to be downwards (hence Stephen Fry's consternation at the Australian Question Intonation - starts at around 8 minutes).

Mimicking these traits can make blues phrases feel like questions and answers.

Example 51

5.3.2 Short Phrases

When you're improvising, it's best not to let your phrases ramble on and on. A good guide is to keep them around the length of a spoken sentence.

5.3.3 Final Notes

The notes chosen in the example also contribute to the question and answer feel. The last note in the question is a Bb. Bb is not in the C chord, so the the phrase sounds unfinished. The answer, on the other hand, ends in a C note - the root - so it gives the phrase a firm ending.

It's a general rule that if you want a strong ending to a phrase finish on a note in the chord (particularly the root note). So if you're playing in the key of C, playing a C note at the end of the phrase will give the solo a strong finish.

5.4 Self Accompanied Blues

So far these licks have been aimed at playing against some sort of backing. But it's quite possible to incorporate these blues licks into a solo piece.

To make sure that the piece doesn't start to lose focus, always keep track of the chord progression in your head.

In example 52 on the next page, there's a two bar intro then a standard 12 bar blues.

To make sure the chord changes are clear, I add in little snippets of the chords. For example, the first notes of bar 11 are part of the G chord and the first notes of bar 12 are part of the F chord.

It's not always necessary to be quite as explicit as this, but you do have to be clear in your head whereabouts in the twelve bar progression you are.

Example 52

5.5 Minor Pentatonic: Second Position

The minor pentatonic pattern we have been looking at so far is known as the first position - as it starts with the root note of the scale.

Moving up the fretboard and starting with the second note of the pentatonic scale, you get a whole new pentatonic pattern:

Example 53
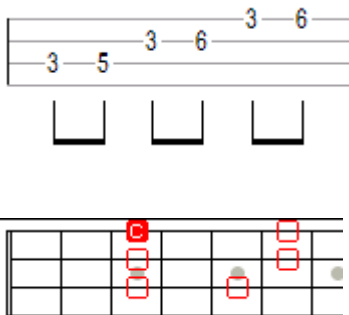
This pattern contains the same notes as the first pattern we looked at but with the notes in a different position on the fretboard e.g. the fifth fret on the C string is the same as the first fret on the E string.

There's a slight difference between patterns and scales. Scales always start and end with the root note, whereas this pattern - and the ones that follow - contain the notes of the scale in any order. The idea is to have these patterns in your mind as you're improvising and select notes from them. Because the pattern itself doesn't start or end with the root note, you need to be careful to emphasize the root note - the ones that are blocked in red.

Playing with the second position patten opens up new sounds and new licks. It is probably the most popular pattern for playing blues licks as it is the first position of the scale on the guitar.

Example 54
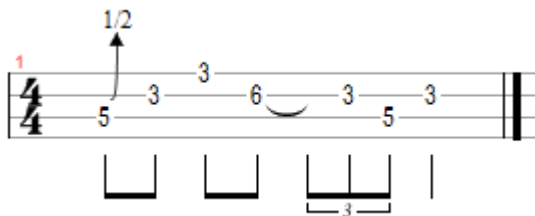
On the mp3 you can hear it played slowly on its own, then up to speed with a backing.

Example 55
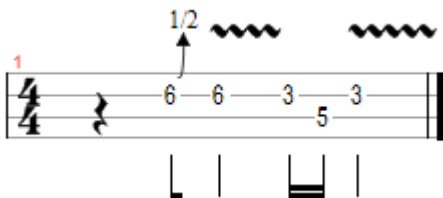
And you can combine notes from this pattern and the first position pattern. Here's a simple example going from the second position to the first:

Example 56
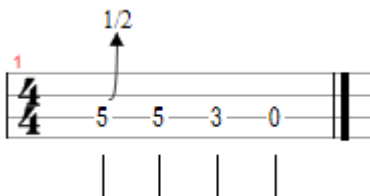
And here's another, slightly more involved, one going in the opposite direction:

Example 57
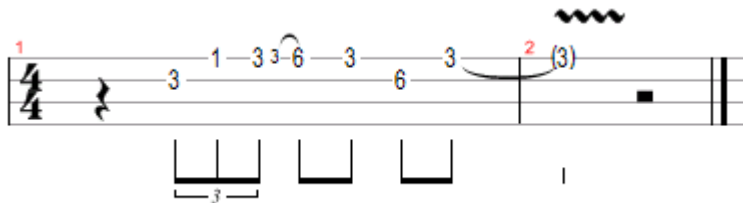
Like the first scale shape, this one can be moved up and down the neck to fit with the key you're playing in.

So D would be two frets higher like this:
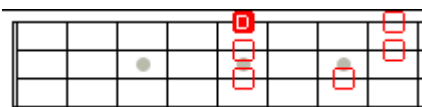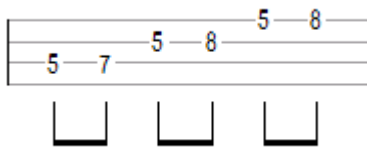
This shape is particularly handy when you're playing in the key of A since you can play any of the strings open.
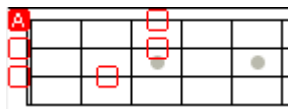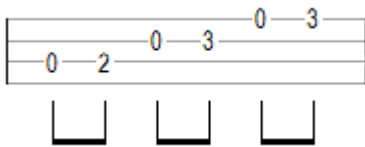
So you can use it to play licks like this:

Example 58
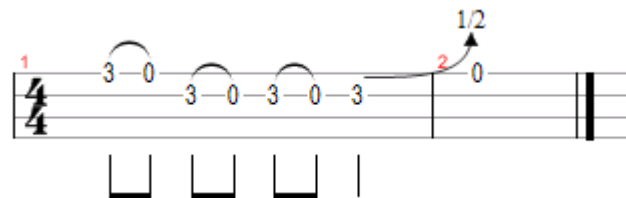
Or this:

Example 59

5.6 Minor Pentatonic: Third Position

Moving up to the next shape, you get this:

Example 60
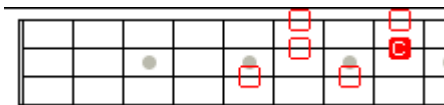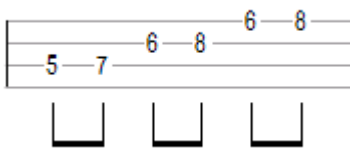
My favourite trick to pull out in this position is a set of hammer ons.

Example 61
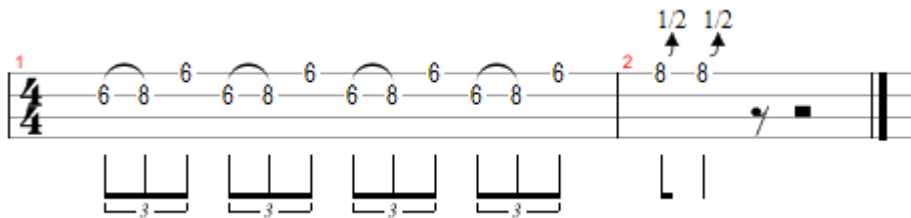
Here's an example of a transition from the second position to the third position.

Example 62
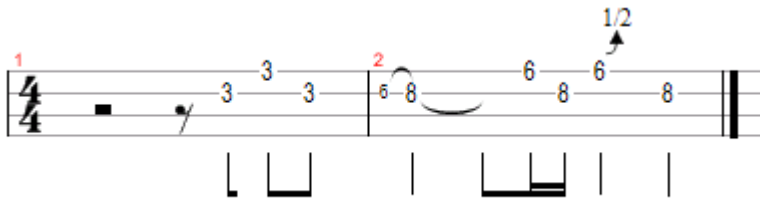
The bend in this example is slightly different as it is done with the index finger. This is a little tougher to do and might take a little practice.

5.7 Minor Pentatonic: Fourth Position

This scale pattern doesn't fall too easily under the fingers, so it's not one I use very often.

Example 63
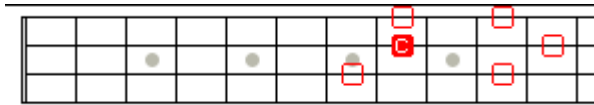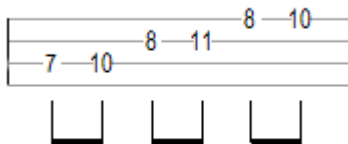
Here's a turnaround idea using this pattern.

Example 64
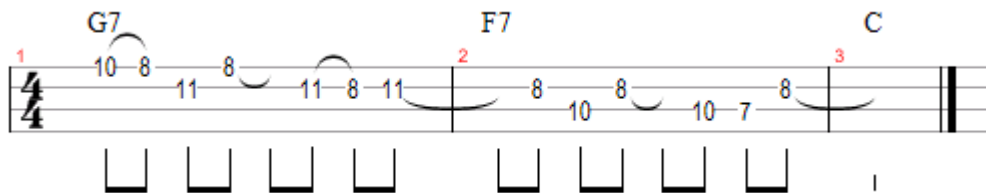
5.8 Minor Pentatonic: Fifth Position

The last minor pentatonic position and one of my favourites to use.

Example 65
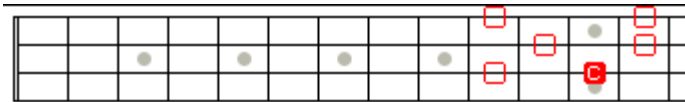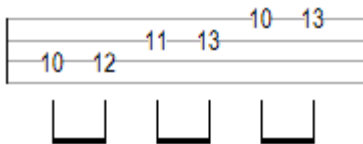
This pattern works well in the key of D where you can use plenty of open notes.

Example 66
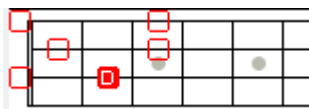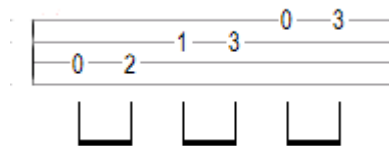
Here's a lick in the key of D using this pattern.

Example 67

This pattern fits with the original, first position pattern to give you this:

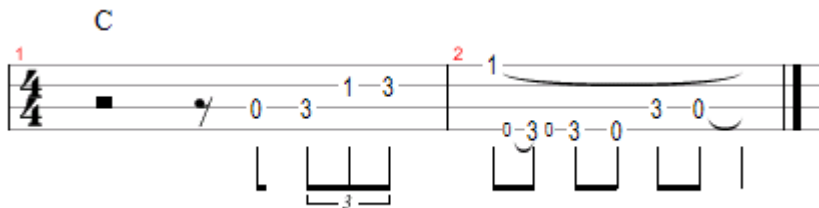So you can play licks that mix these two patterns together such as this.

Example 68

5.9 Using the Re-Entrant String

So far we've been focusing on using the C, E and A strings. The blues was definitely not developed with the ukulele in mind, but I like to use the the re-entrant string to play interlocking question and answer phrases such as this.

Example 69

In this phrase you have the 'question' ending on the A string which is sustained over the answer played mainly on the reentrant string.

5.10 The Blues Scale

Don't panic, you don't need to learn a whole new scale. The blues scale is just the pentatonic with the addition of one extra note. This note crops up between the third and fourth note of the pentatonic scale. This note is the flattened fifth (six frets above the root) and is often referred to as the Devil's note.
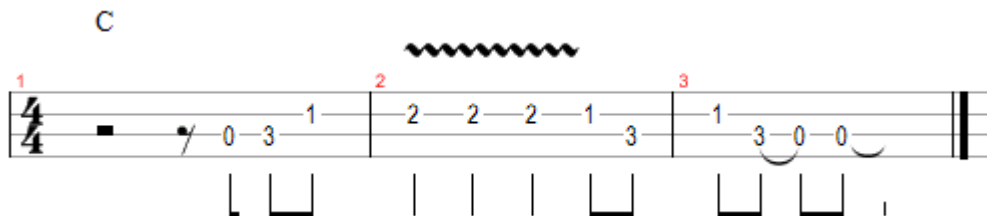
In the key of C, the extra note is F#. This makes the first position C blues scale this:
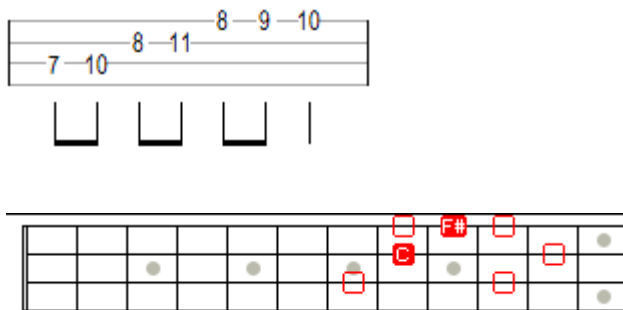
Example 70
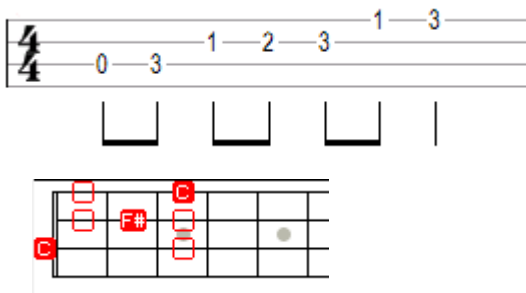
Here's a lick using this pattern:

Example 71

The extra note fits into some of the positions more comfortably than others - you can find a full list of blues scale patterns in the appendix. It fits into the fourth position nicely.

Example 72

And here's a lick using this pattern

Example 73
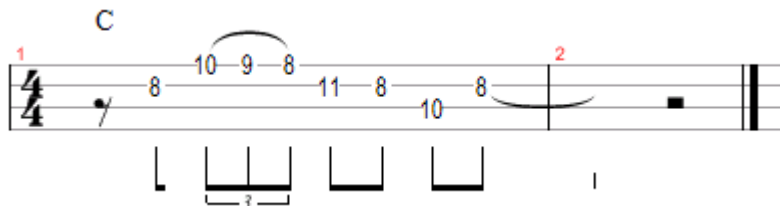
In the same way we did with the minor pentatonic in Example 53, you can use the twelve bar blues and the blues scale together to create a solo blues piece such as this. Again, it's a two bar intro followed by a 12 bar blues pattern.
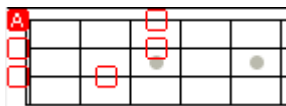
Example 74

5.11 Major Pentatonic Scale

Blues is mostly associated with minor scales, but the major pentatonic scale does get a look in. It is very common for blues phrases to contain notes from both the major and minor pentatonics.

Learning the major pentatonic scale is even simpler than learning the blues scale. You don't have to learn any new shapes or notes. All you have to do is remember that the major pentatonic scale is the same as the minor pentatonic scale for the key three frets lower.
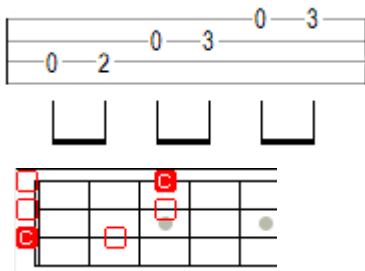
For example, you want to play over a chord progression in the key of C. Three frets below C is A. So the C major pentatonic is the same as the A minor pentatonic.

So you can use this A minor pentatonic shape

As a C major pentatonic shape.

Example 75

The same is true all the way up the neck. Any of the A minor pentatonic patterns will work as a C major pentatonic.

Probably the most famous blues song featuring the major pentatonic is _Hideaway_ by Freddie King and later covered by the Eric Clapton era Bluesbreakers.

Here's something in a similar style.

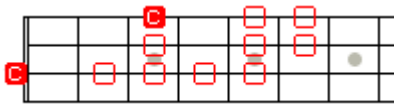Example 76

Once you're familiar with both the minor and major pentatonic scales, you can try combining notes from both of them into a single phrase.

This gives you plenty of notes to choose from. Here's one pattern in the key of C:

And here's a lick using most of these notes.

Example 77

Chuck Berry regularly used notes from both minor and major pentatonic scales in ways like this.

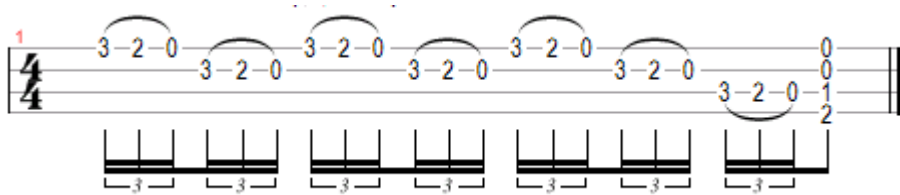Example 78

I'm finishing off this chapter with one of my favourite ways to finish a song, here's an outro - in the key of A - which uses notes from the major pentatonic, minor pentatonic and blues scales. It's one of the most ridiculous licks I've ever played and, therefore, a whole lot of fun.

Example 79

6 Putting It All Together

Now that you've got the skills to pay the bills, you'll want to put everything you've learned together. This final chapter of the book takes a look at a single piece - Example 80 - that covers some of the licks, scales and chord progressions we've looked at.

The piece kicks off with Example 33 used as an intro. Then it moves into a slow 12 bar blues. This part uses the self-accompanied blues ideas with chord strums fitted in between solo licks. To finish off this section, Example 35a is used for the turnaround.

After that, the tempo kicks up and it goes into a blues shuffle. Like the examples we looked at in part 1.4, it contains A, A6 and A7 chords but this time arranged into a two bar pattern. The strumming for this part is just up, down, up, down... for the first eight bars.

In bars 23 and 24 there's a slight difference in the F7 chord. I'm just moving the E7 chord shape up one fret which creates a bluesy and discordant F7maj7.

At bar 27 there's the strumming pattern we covered in Example 14 with the chords transposed - and slightly adapted - into the key of A. The turnaround for this section mixes together the turnarounds from Examples 14 and 6.

For the final 12 bar section we return to the shuffle pattern with a few variations thrown in and Example 79 used as the big finish.

The piece crams in more ideas than you'd usually want to put together, but hopefully it gives you some ideas for building your own pieces.

Example 80

If you have any questions, queries or comments, I'd love to hear from you. You can email me at

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Credits

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