

Mando Gets the Blues

If your Significant Other were to dump you and you felt the blues a-coming on strong, the mandolin might not be the first instrument you'd reach for. Unless that were the only instrument you played. No, the mandolin is usually associated with the happy-go-lucky sonorities of bluegrass music due to its light, ringing sound quality. But certain other ingredients of a suitable blues instrument *are* present, including the ability to play **chordal backup** and to produce sweet but piercing **lead lines**.

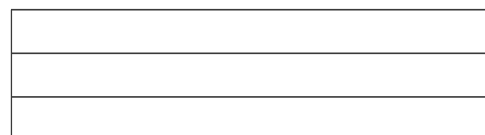
Before we get started, let me say that if you seek more general information about playing the mandolin, you could try my *Mandolin From Scratch* book, but it's not required reading for this book. I'll tell you all you *need* to know as we go along.

Comping the Blues

First things first. Intelligent people argue all day about what DOES and what does NOT constitute the blues. But not many of them would object if we were to start our adventure with a foundational musical structure known as the **Twelve Bar Blues**. Most of our music is partitioned into units of time known as **bars**, or **measures**. Here comes one now:

This bar has 4 beats in it, and this is known as the **4/4 Time Signature**, where there are 4 strong counts, each lasting a *quarter* of the bar. You also see four "+" counts, which are weaker counts that come between the stronger, numbered ones. Each **Quarter note** takes as long as two **Eighth notes** (8 per bar).

This is a Tab diagram...more later...



1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

Fretted stringed instrument like the mandolin can be used to **accompany** ("comp" for short) a voice or some other instrument that is providing a **melody**, or **lead**. And the simplest way for the player to do this is to strum **chords**, combinations of notes (up to 4 on the mando) that provide a blended backdrop, a tonal *matrix*, a harmonized **context** for a melody.

We'll start by strumming chords according to the Twelve Bar Blues format. (I'll give you some chords shortly.) You'll strum a **Downstroke** on each of the numbered counts and a lighter **Upstroke** on the "and" counts.



1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

You can choose from all manner of plastic mandolin picks at your local Plastic Mandolin Pick Emporium. You'll find fat picks, thin picks, pointy picks and rounded picks. No two people agree on the best sort of mando pick, but thinner ones are easier to start with (more forgiving) while thicker picks make a clearer sound. Try a variety; they're cheap enough.