

Blues Lead Playing

Now that we've set up the chordal backdrop for the blues, let's see about *improvising leads*.

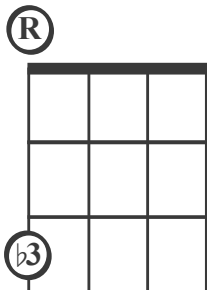
When you're sitting in on a blues jam, and all eyes turn to YOU, whatcha-gonna-do? Me? I get up and go grab some more chips and dip. From the corner Piggly-Wiggly, because that's why they invited me. But YOU, you need to be able to *take a solo*.

First thing is, don't panic. At the very least, all you *need* to do is to be certain of the key and then robotically play *any of the notes in any order* of the corresponding **Pentatonic Minor Scale** until they tell you, okay, you can stop now (which is usually after one complete verse of a Twelve Bar Blues, two if they liked it).

I'm only joking a little. You can't make a mistake if you just stay on the path. Now, they won't crown you next King or Queen of the Blues, but you won't embarrass yourself, either. The ability to churn out *interesting* solos starts with knowledge of the basic vocabulary and an adventurous spirit, and I can surely help you develop the first of these, maybe the second.

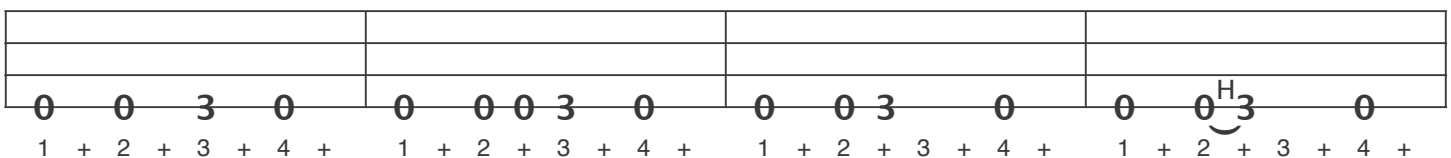
We start with the **Key of G** and the **G Pentatonic Minor Scale** (we like the open notes).

Key of G: Lower Octave



There are *two octaves* of notes that you can reach in any position on the neck, but let's first consider the notes in the **lower octave**, and let's just add those notes to the **Root Note** (on the open 4th string) *one at a time*. It's really the best way to get an appreciation for each degree of the scale. (We'll refer more to scale degrees than to the letter names of the notes to make it easier to transpose to other keys.)

So we get the **Root** and the flatted-**3rd** to start. Not a lot you can do with that, but more than you'd think. Use the 2nd finger on the flatted-**3rd**. Here are some short phrases:



In the 1st bar, there are 4 Quarter notes [*crick-et.....crick-et.....*]. In the 2nd bar we substitute 2 Eighth notes, and that livens thing up a bit. But look at the 3rd bar: That "3" is what's known as a **syncopated** note, one that starts on the offbeat and rides over the next beat. NOW I'm hearing the blues! And the 4th bar has a **hammer-on**; just hammer it on, you know?! (Make it a sharp attack; you want the hammered note to ring out, not dump out.)