

The notes used in Blues: 12 bar blues & blues scale

12 bar blues

Blues music is always based upon a chord progression known as the 12 bar blues. This is a 12 bar set of chords that uses primary chords, that is repeated throughout the piece. There are some variations to the 12 bar blues, but the basic sequence is:

I	I	I	I7
I	I	IV7	IV7
V7	IV7	I	I

The origin of blue notes can be traced back to traditional African singing, where certain pitches are sang a little flat. Sometimes these pitches are approached by gliding or sliding into the note.

Blue notes

In the blues, notes are sometimes flattened by a semitone to add expressive effect to the words or melody, or sound more 'blue'. The notes are usually the third and the seventh degrees of the scale.

Blue scale

In jazz music, a flattened 3rd and 7th degree became standard when playing blues, and a 'blues scale' developed. Sometimes the 5th degree is also flattened.

A blues scale is a scale that features a 'blues' (flattened) 3rd and 7th. It is used when playing blues - a melody, riff or improvisation can be created by using just the notes in the blues scale over the 12 bar blues chord progression.

There are several versions of the blues scale:

The minor pentatonic is a blues scale that is often used:



If the flattened 5th is also included, the scale is:



The scale can be made more complex by adding more notes, but there is always a flattened 3rd and 7th used.