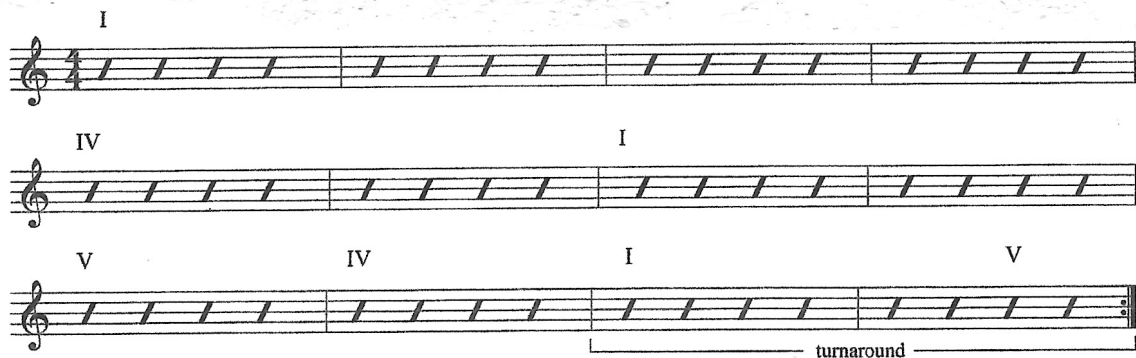


Learning the Blues: The 12-Bar Blues Form

The 12-bar blues has become synonymous with blues music and is the basis for an incredible repertoire of jazz, country, rock and roll, and other forms of popular music. The 12-bar blues is a musical building block that can be used to provide moving and exhaustive performances.

The elegant logic unique to the blues genre are the I, IV, and V chord changes. When words are added and sung, they can acquire from these changes an ironic inflection that can be humorous, sarcastic, or sad.

The I chord (measures 1-4) presents the initial melody, and the IV chord (measures 5-6) resets it with some degree of harmonic tension before the I chord reappears with sweet relief (measures 7-8). The V chord (measure 9) breathtakingly caps the momentum and then the turnaround (measures 11-12) closes the chorus while at the same time preparing for the next installment of twelve bars.



Recommended Listening

Clapton, Eric. *Complete Clapton*. Polydor Ltd, 2007. Apple Music.

Johnson, Robert. *The Complete Recordings*. Sony Music Entertainment, 1990. Apple Music

King, B.B. *Live At the Regal*. Geffen Records, 1965. Apple Music.

King, Freddie. *Let's Hide Away and Dance Away*. Gusto Records, Inc., 2005. Apple Music.

Vaughan, Stevie Ray. *The Essential Stevie Ray Vaughan and Double Trouble*. Sony Music Entertainment, 2002. Apple Music.

Waters, Muddy. *The Best of Muddy Waters*. Geffen Records, 1957. Apple Music.

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- Cowley, John. "Really The Walking Blues: Son House, Muddy Waters, Robert Johnson and the Development of a Traditional Blues." *Popular Music I* (1981), reprint, *Juke Blues I*, No. 1 (July 1985).
- _____. "Walking Blues." *Blues Unlimited* No. 106 (February/March 1974): 13.
- Lomax, Alan. *The Land Where The Blues Began*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1993.
- Palmer, Robert. *Deep Blues*. New York: Penguin Group, 1981.
- Rubin, Dave and Edward Komara. *12-Bar Blues: The Complete Guide for Guitar, Inside the Blues*. Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard Corporation, 1999.