

Still Got The Blues

BLUES: a genre originating from African Americans in the Deep South of the USA around the 1860s, around the same time that slavery was abolished in USA. It has incorporated work songs, field hollers, shouts, chants, spirituals, and rhymed simple narrative ballads. Many elements, such as the call-and-response format, can be traced directly back to the music and traditions of Africa. (see *The Land Where The Blues Began*: Alan Lomax).

Jelly Roll Morton said he first heard blues music in New Orleans in 1902; Ma Rainey first heard blues in the same year in Missouri; and W.C. Handy first heard the blues in Tutwiler, Mississippi, in 1903.

1908: The first publication of sheet music with 'Blues' in the title ('I Got The Blues: Antonio Maggio), but its more ragtime than the blues that developed later.

1912, WC Handy published "Memphis Blues," still not a blues song, but an instrumental cakewalk.

10 August 1920, The Jazz Hounds backed Mamie Smith recording "Crazy Blues." And we're off!!!!

SOME CHARACTERISTICS:

1. RHYTHM - Straight time v Shuffle time: [clips: Caroline]

Straight time in this example is 4 beats to a bar. Split the notes equally and you get an 8-beat rhythm.



Shuffle time is a very common blues rhythm, constructed by taking a beat and dividing it into three, creating **triplets**. For a more 'blues' feel, miss out the middle note of each triplet.



What this creates is a rhythm best vocalized as "dump, da dump, da dump, da"

2. CHORDS – These are usually simple. Most blues songs are based around three chords for any given key. These chords are labelled by Roman numerals referring to the **degrees of the progression** (the distance from the root note). So, if we are playing in the key of **C**:

- **C** is the root (or **tonic**) note and is marked as Roman numeral (**I**).
- **F** is the 4th note in the scale (or **subdominant**) and is marked as Roman numeral (**IV**)
- **G** is the 5th note in the scale (or **dominant**). and is marked as Roman numeral (**V**)

Sometimes these chords are played in the harmonic seventh (7th) form so **C7 = (I7)** and so on.

This formula applies to ANY key.

3. FORM - 12 bars (most common) [also 8 bars (fairly common) / 16 bars (for brave people)]

Early blues verses consisted of a single line repeated four times. It was early in the 20th century that the most common structure became standard: the AAB rhyming pattern. This consisted of a line sung over the four first bars, repeated over the next four bars, with a different concluding line over the last bars. The last two bars are often used as an instrumental break called the **turnaround**, marking the transition to the beginning of the next progression.

Most common 12 bar blues chord progression.
Each box denotes a bar

I	I	I	I ₇
IV	IV	I	I
V	IV	I	V ₇

Turnaround

In the key of C, the chords we would play would be :

C	C	C	C ₇
F	F	C	C
G	F	C	G ₇

Turnaround

The structure means that you can easily change keys. So long as you know what key you are going to play in, you can work out the root/tonic chord, the subdominant and the dominant chords. So If you're going to play in A, the chords you will need will be the (I) = **A**; the (IV) = **D** and; the (V) = **E**.

Some musicians may play a harmonic 7th for all the chords. So that would look like:

Most common 12 bar blues chord progression.
Each box denotes a bar

I ₇	I ₇	I ₇	I ₇
IV ₇	IV ₇	I ₇	I ₇
V ₇	IV ₇	I ₇	V ₇

Turnaround

In the key of C, the chords we would play would be :

C ₇	C ₇	C ₇	C ₇
F ₇	F ₇	C ₇	C ₇
G ₇	F ₇	C ₇	G ₇

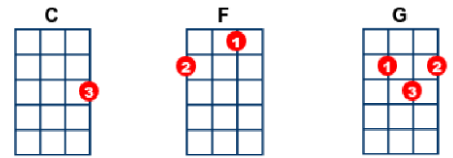
Turnaround

But there are no unbreakable rules. Some musicians favour playing an IV chord in the second bar, sometimes referred to as a 'quick turnaround'.

You can explore plenty of early blues songs on YouTube, but bear in mind that recording technology was not great in the 1920's. Fortunately, many have been re-recorded, and Eric Clapton is a good place to start listening, especially if you want to learn some lead uke solos. To play along with those, you are likely to have to experiment with playing in other keys (especially **A** if it's Clapton you're playing along with).



SWEET HOME CHICAGO



Intro

C	C	C	C7
F	F	C	C
G	F	C	G7

verse 1:

Come [C] on, [C] baby don't you want to [C] go [C] Come [F] on, [F] baby don't you want to [C] go [C]
 Back from [G] the land of California To my [F] sweet home, Chica- [C] -go [G]

verse 2:

Come [C] on, [C] baby don't you want to [C] go [C] Come [F] on, [F] baby don't you want to [C] go [C]
 Back from the [G] land of California To my [F] sweet home, Chica- [C] -go [G]

verse 3:

[C] Two and two is four babe, [C] four and two is eight [C] Come on now darlin', [C] don't you make me late
 I'm cryin' [F] please, [F] baby, don't you want to [C] go [C]
 Back from the [G] land of California To my [F] sweet home, Chica- [C] -go [G]

C	C	C	C7
F	F	C	C
G	F	C	G7

C	C	C	C7
F	F	C	C
G	F	C	G7

verse 4:

[C] One and one is two, [C] two and two is four I'm [C] heavy loaded baby, I'm [C] booked, I gotta go
 I'm cryin' [F] please, [F] baby, don't you want to [C] go [C]
 Back from the [G] land of California To my [F] sweet home, Chica- [C] -go [G]

C	C	C	C7
F	F	C	C
G	F	C	G7

C	C	C	C7
F	F	C	C
G	F	C	G7

Verse 5:

Come [C] on, [C] baby don't you want to [C] go [C] Come [F] on, [F] baby don't you want to [C] go [C]
 Back from [G] the land of California To my [F] sweet home, Chica- [C] -go [G]

Verse 6:

Come [C] on, [C] baby don't you want to [C] go [C] Come [F] on, [F] baby don't you want to [C] go [C]
 Back from [G] the land of California To my [F] sweet home, Chica- [C] -go [G]

Repeat instrumental for optional outro