

The Blues Scale

(AKA the "Minor Blues Scale")

Dr. Selfridge

G Blues Scale (Higher Octave)

R b3 4 b5 5 b7 R R b3 4 b5 5 b7 R

The Blues Scale is one of the most common scales in music. You can hear the sounds of the blues scale in many styles of music: Jazz, Rock, Country, Pop, Rhythm & Blues, Gospel, and of course, BLUES music.

The Blues Scale evolved over time, starting around the late 1800s, as musicians would "bend" the notes of the major scale to express emotion and feeling.

To understand how a blues scale is derived, we can label the notes with numbers and how they are altered compared to the Major scale. As you can see above, the Blues Scale is made up of the following scale degrees:

Root (1st scale degree) b3 (flatted 3rd) 4 b5 (flatted 5th) 5 b7 (flatted 7th) Root (8th scale degree)

The notes that were "bent" by singers are called the "blue notes", because they are the notes of the scale that sound the most "bluesy". Which notes of the blues scale do you think are the "blue notes"?

Playing (improvising) a Blues Solo

The first step in learning how to create a blues solo is to practice short, one-measure phrases. Let's play some short phrases in a **call-and-response** style. The teacher, or a designated student, will play the call, and everyone will respond with the same pattern. This can also be called an echo.

1) Call Response Call Response

2)

3)

4)

5)

Alto/Bari Sax

2

6) Call Response Call Response

7)

8)

9)

10)

11)

12)

13)

14)

15)

Alto/Bari Sax

3

16) Call Response Call Response

17)

18)

19)

20)

21)

22)

23)

24)

25)

That's a lot of patterns! Try playing call and response patterns with a friend, or with your jazz band. You can use some of the patterns we just played, or create your own.

As you practice call and response with others, you have to LISTEN carefully to what the other person plays and try to copy it. At the beginning, this might seem very challenging. But the more you practice, your "ear" will get better as you start to hear how each note of the scale has a unique sound. Another great way to develop your ear is to try SINGING simple phrases using the blues scale.