

Happy
BLUESMAN

Week 11
Blues College
Practice Plan



Shuffle Practice (10 / 15 / 20 mins)

This week we dive deep into the blues shuffle.

At first sight, the shuffle might seem simple and barely worthy of practice.

But there is a huge difference between a tight shuffle where you are absolutely locked into the groove, and one which is loose – both in terms of timing and also articulation.

And this is even more true this week, as we slow the pace of the shuffle right down and add extensions into the mix. So to really nail this, put on a metronome and spend a little time playing the shuffle across the progression from "Have You Ever Loved A Woman?" and think about locking into the rhythm – which is harder to feel as it's now so much slower.

Don't forget the work from last week, and keep thinking about muting so that you accent certain notes and parts of it. This is really relevant for slow blues tracks, where the articulation of your rhythm part makes a massive massive difference to the feel of the rhythm part.

If you feel confident with that, then continue to push the pace of the metronome down, and start adding some licks into the mix too!

Mixing major and minor (10 / 15 / 20 mins)

This week we continue our focus on mixing the major and minor pentatonic scales in the playing. Now though there are a few different frameworks you can think about to mix these ideas into your soloing:

The simplest starting point is to play major pentatonic over the I chord and switch to minor when the IV chord arrives. The major third of the I chord creates a clash over the IV, so making that switch keeps things clean. Mix and match over the V chord, then return to major over the I.

A more nuanced approach is to chase the major thirds around the chord changes using the triad shapes - targeting E over C7, A over F7 and B over G7. This keeps your lead playing closely connected to the harmony in a very specific way.

The most advanced version combines both - chasing those major thirds over the I and V chords, switching to the minor pentatonic over the IV chord, and bringing everything to life with vibrato, bending and tone. That is the full Clapton approach.

One final point worth emphasising: targeting chord tones is a brilliant skill, but it shouldn't come at the expense of beautiful blues phrasing. The notes you choose matter, but the way you play them - the vibrato, the bends, the dynamics - matters just as much.

So don't forget to bring the blues power!

The Shuffle Challenge (10 /15/ 20 mins)

It's performance time!

Bring all of these concepts to life over "Have You Ever Loved A Woman?"

Work on tracking the shuffle, adding the extensions, throwing licks into the mix (if you feel confident to do so) and really locking into the groove of the track.

When it comes to the lead side of things, think about and work on:

- Adding licks between chords in the turnaround
- Experimenting with longer licks over the turnaround section
- Mixing major and minor pentatonic ideas, following those three levels of complexity
- Digging in and using dynamics, expressive bending and vibrato to bring the playing to life

Don't worry about the pace of the track, and instead build the confidence to leave space, let your phrases breathe and for the shuffle to keep driving on beneath you.

As in previous weeks, continue with the "sandwich" approach we have been focusing on during the programme - playing the rhythm part for a few rounds through the chord progression, before soloing, and then dropping back into the rhythm part.