



Guitars and backing Jon Bishop

VINTAGE BLUES ESSENTIALS

See how early electric blues has influenced rock with our run through five classic riffs

The 1940s and 50s saw an explosion of new blues acts. This was thanks to newly available electric guitars and amplification which made it possible to play at higher volumes and be heard over drums or other loud instruments. Essentially, this

was the dawn of the modern band as we now know it.

Here, we're looking at some riffs and licks inspired mostly from the post-war 'plugged in' era - and the Chicago blues scene was a large part of this musical revolution. As such, we're taking our inspiration from greats like Elmore

James, Otis Rush, Muddy Waters and Hubert Sumlin.

As you work through the tab it's worth seeing if you can play the licks as rock licks instead of blues - particularly with the lead guitar examples. It's an enlightening way to see just how influential those early blues pioneers

BLUES BOOGIE RIFF

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

♩ = 100

G⁵ G⁶ G⁵ G⁶ G⁵ G⁶ G⁵ D⁵ F⁵ E⁵ D⁵

TAB

D A F# D A D

5 5 5 5 5 5 5 0 2 2 2 0

5 5 5 5 5 5 5 0 2 2 2 0

5 5 5 5 5 5 5 0 2 2 2 0

5 5 5 5 5 5 5 0 2 2 2 0

5 5 5 5 5 5 5 0 2 2 2 0

5 5 5 5 5 5 5 0 2 2 2 0

Taking inspiration from Elmore James, here's an example of how easy it is to play a classic blues/rock 'n' roll boogie riff in open D tuning. Simply barre the strings with your first finger and add the 'boogie' aspect with your third finger. A slide is optional here - our riff can be played with or without.

FINGERSTYLE TURNAROUND

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

♩ = 100

D N.C. A^b A N.C. D⁵

let ring

TAB

Another Elmore James idea here, but this classic turnaround is also similar to the kind of ideas that Robert Johnson used in the 1930s. These riffs have been handed down from the earliest blues players and are still used today by modern guitarists everywhere. Sounds great on acoustic or with a dirty, distorted tone.

POSITION SHIFT LEAD LICK

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

♩ = 70

E⁷ D⁷

TAB

This example is collection of great lead guitar phrases that many of the Chicago greats would use. It's the kind of phrasing that would subsequently influence blues-rock greats such as Eric Clapton and Jimmy Page. Just watch out for the position shifts.

RHYTHMIC LEAD

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

♩ = 140

A⁷ D⁷

TAB

We're taking our inspiration from Otis Rush here in a catchy lick with a tricky rhythm. Like so many blues licks, this idea can be made to fit over any chord of a traditional I-IV-V progression, and you can easily tweak a note here or there to make it 'yours'. Just watch out in bars 2 and bar 4, where the opening note is on the second 16th note,

DIAD RIFFS

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

♩ = 150

G⁷

TAB

This example features a blues riff performed Hubert Sumlin style, and it's an idea whose influence can be seen in rock acts like Van Halen and AC/DC. For our bluesier purposes, aim for a light shuffle feel and use either fingerstyle or pick and fingers 'hybrid' style picking.