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beginning fingerstyle blues guitar

Beginning Fingerstyle Blues Guitar: The Importance of Technique


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Interested in learning Beginning Fingerstyle Blues Guitar? Discover the essential techniques and skills needed to master this captivating genre. From fingerpicking patterns and chord progressions to understanding the blues scale, explore the history, get started with the right guitar, and unlock a world of possibilities. Start your musical journey today!

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💡 Key Takeaways about Beginning

Fingerstyle Blues Guitar:

- Fingerstyle blues guitar offers more intricate and complex playing, providing greater control over melody and rhythm.
- Learning fingerstyle technique is essential for playing authentic blues music and allows for greater expression and emotion.
- Fingerstyle technique improves hand coordination, dexterity, and overall musicianship skills.
- Fingerstyle blues guitar has deep roots in traditional African American music and has influenced countless musicians.
- Choosing the right guitar, such as a steel-string acoustic, is crucial for learning fingerstyle blues.
- Tuning your guitar accurately is important before playing chords or scales in fingerstyle blues.
- Learning basic fingerpicking patterns like Travis picking and exploring different styles can enhance your fingerstyle blues playing.
- Incorporating the blues scale into your playing adds soulfulness and creativity, while exploring alternate tunings and developing your own style contribute to mastery in fingerstyle blues.

Are you tired of guitar teachers telling you to “just strum” when all you want to do is fingerpick those beautiful blues melodies? As a fellow blues enthusiast, I understand the frustration. That’s why today, we’re going to discuss the essential skill that every blues guitar player needs: fingerstyle technique.

The Definition and Explanation of Fingerstyle Blues Guitar

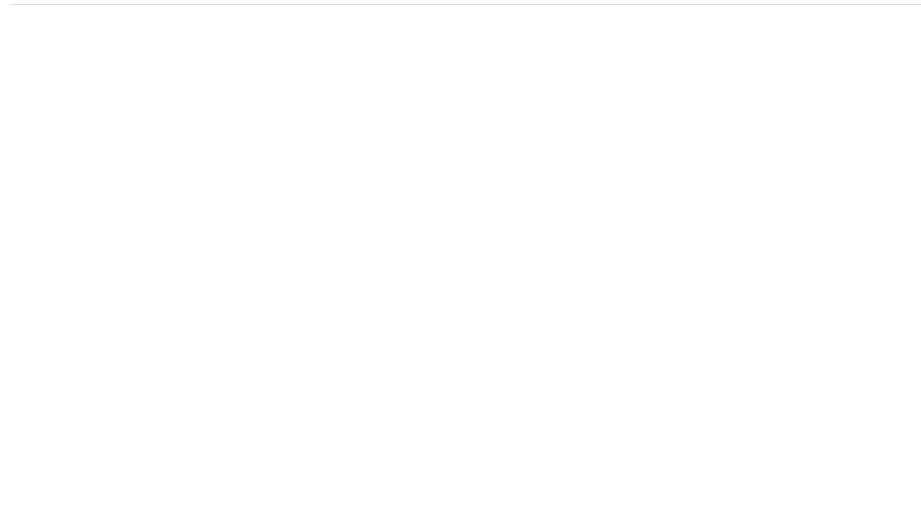
Fingerstyle blues guitar is a technique where the guitarist uses their fingers instead of a pick to pluck the strings on their instrument. This technique allows for more intricate and complex playing, giving players greater control over melody and rhythm. While it may seem daunting at first, practicing fingerstyle technique can open up a whole new world of possibilities in your playing.



The Importance of Learning Fingerstyle Technique

Learning fingerstyle technique is essential if you want to play authentic blues music. While strumming can be effective for some genres, it simply doesn't have the same impact as fingerpicking does when it comes to blues music. Additionally, using your fingers instead of a pick allows for greater expression and emotion in your playing.

Another reason why learning fingerstyle is crucial for any aspiring blues musician is that it can significantly improve your overall musicianship skills. By practicing this technique, you'll develop better hand coordination and dexterity, which will translate into improved chord progressions and soloing abilities.



Jim Bruce talks about some minor blues men and teaches 'How Long Blues'
by Leroy Carr

Brief History of Fingerstyle Blues Guitar

Fingerstyle blues guitar has its roots in traditional African American music from the early 20th century. Back then, many musicians didn't have access to expensive instruments or recording studios – yet they still managed to create timeless masterpieces through their mastery of fingerpicking techniques.

Musicians like Blind Blake, Mississippi John Hurt, Reverend Gary Davis, and Merle Travis pioneered the use of fingerstyle guitar in blues music. Their unique styles and approaches to playing have influenced countless musicians since then, making fingerstyle blues guitar an essential component of the genre.

If you want to play authentic blues music that truly captures its spirit and soul, learning fingerstyle technique is a must. With practice and perseverance, you'll soon be able to create intricate melodies and rhythms that will make your audience tap their feet and nod their heads along to the beat.

Getting Started with Fingerstyle Blues Guitar

Choosing the Right Guitar for Fingerstyle Playing

As someone who has been playing fingerstyle blues guitar for over 40 years, I have seen far too many beginners make the mistake of choosing the wrong guitar for their needs. Let me tell you right now: if you want to learn fingerstyle blues, you need a steel-string acoustic guitar.

Don't even think about trying to learn on an electric guitar or a classical guitar. Why?

Well, first of all, an electric guitar is designed to be played with a pick. Sure, you can use your fingers instead, but it won't sound the same and it won't feel as natural.

As for classical guitars, they have wider necks and higher action (the distance between the strings and the fretboard), which makes them more difficult to play for beginners. So what kind of steel-string acoustic should you get?

That's up to you – there are plenty of great options out there from brands like Martin, Taylor, and Gibson. Just make sure that it feels comfortable in your hands and produces a warm tone when played unplugged.



Jim Bruce playing a Martin x1000AE guitar

Tuning the Guitar for Fingerstyle Playing

Before we get into any fingerpicking patterns or exercises, we need to talk about tuning your guitar. There are several tunings that are commonly used in fingerstyle blues – open G (D-G-D-G-B-D), open D

(D-A-D-F#-A-D), and dropped D (D-A-D-G-B-E) being some of the most popular – but for now we'll stick with standard tuning (E-A-D-G-B-E).

If your guitar isn't already in tune, use an electronic tuner or download an app on your phone. It's important to have accurate tuning before playing any chords or scales.

Basic Fingerpicking Patterns and Exercises

Now that your guitar is in tune, it's time for some fingerpicking exercises. One of the first patterns you should learn is called Travis picking, named after country guitar legend Merle Travis. To play it, simply alternate your thumb between the bass strings (E, A, D) while your fingers pluck the treble strings (G, B, E) in a specific pattern.

There are countless variations of Travis picking – some use four fingers instead of three, some use different finger combinations – but the basic concept remains the same. Once you've got that down, try playing some simple chord progressions like G-C-D or E-A-B7 using Travis picking.

Other fingerpicking patterns to explore include Delta blues style alternating bass lines and monotonic bass lines. With enough practice and experimentation with these patterns and exercises on your steel-string acoustic guitar with right tunings would place you on a path to becoming a skilled fingerstyle blues player!

Even the most complex songs can be learned by mastering the Travis picking technique

Understanding the Blues Scale

Blues music is unique because of its use of the blues scale. If you're new to blues guitar, understanding and mastering this scale is really useful. The blues scale is a six-note scale with a mixture of major and minor sounds that create a distinctively sad yet soulful sound.

Definition and Explanation of the Blues Scale

The blues scale consists of six notes: the root note, flat third, fourth, sharp fourth or flat fifth, fifth, and flat seventh. For example, in the key of A, the notes would be A-C-D-Eb-E-G.

The flat third and seventh give it a minor sound while the fourth gives it a major sound. The sharp fourth or flat fifth is called the "blues note" and creates that distinctively sad sound that we all know and love.

How to Play the Blues Scale on Guitar

Playing the blues scale on guitar can be done in various positions across the fretboard but let's start with one position for simplicity's sake. In this example we'll be using an A pentatonic minor shape:

E | —————5-8- |

B | —————5-8— |

G | ———5-7—— |

D | —5-7———— |

A | -5-6———— |

E | ————— |

In this shape we're using only five notes in A pentatonic minor: A-C-D-E-G which can easily be expanded into full six-note blues scales by adding Eb between D and E or/and Bb between A and C.

Incorporating The Blues Scale into Your Playing

Once you've learned how to play the blues scale on guitar, incorporating it into your playing will take some practice but will greatly benefit your playing style as it adds another dimension to your playing. One way to accomplish this is by using the scale to improvise lead lines over a 12-bar blues progression.

It can also be used as a basis for creating riffs and licks that can add flavor to your rhythm playing. Understanding and mastering the blues scale is essential for any aspiring blues guitarist.

It's a sound that defines the genre and adds soulfulness to any playing style. With practice, it will become second nature and open up new avenues of creativity in your playing.

Advanced Techniques for Fingerstyle Blues Guitar

Alternate Tunings: Unlocking a World of Possibilities

If you're looking to take your fingerstyle blues guitar playing to the next level, then it's time to explore alternate tunings. By changing the standard tuning of your guitar, you can create an entirely new world of sound and possibilities for your playing.

Experimenting with alternate tunings is crucial if you want to stand out as a unique musician in the crowded blues guitar scene. One popular alternate tuning that is frequently used in fingerstyle blues is open D (D-A-D-F#-A-D).

This tuning allows for easy access to many chord shapes and tonal variations that are difficult or impossible to create with standard tuning. Another great alternate tuning worth exploring is open G (D-G-D-G-B-D), which gives a bright and cheerful sound that lends itself well to upbeat and uptempo songs.

Bass Lines and Chord Progressions: Building a Solid Foundation for Your Playing

In order to make your fingerstyle blues guitar playing more interesting and dynamic, it's important to focus on adding bass lines and chord progressions to your playing. Without a solid foundation, even the most impressive fingerpicking patterns can become repetitive and boring. Bass lines add depth and richness while chords provide harmonic support.

Try incorporating basslines into your picking patterns by alternating between plucking the root note of each chord with your thumb while picking the rest of the notes with your other fingers. Experiment with different basslines within each chord progression until you find one that really adds interest and momentum.

Developing Your Own Unique Style: Finding Your Voice in Fingerstyle Blues

With so many great fingerstyle blues guitarists out there, it can be tempting to try emulating their styles in order to achieve success as a musician. However, true success in music comes from finding your own unique voice and style.

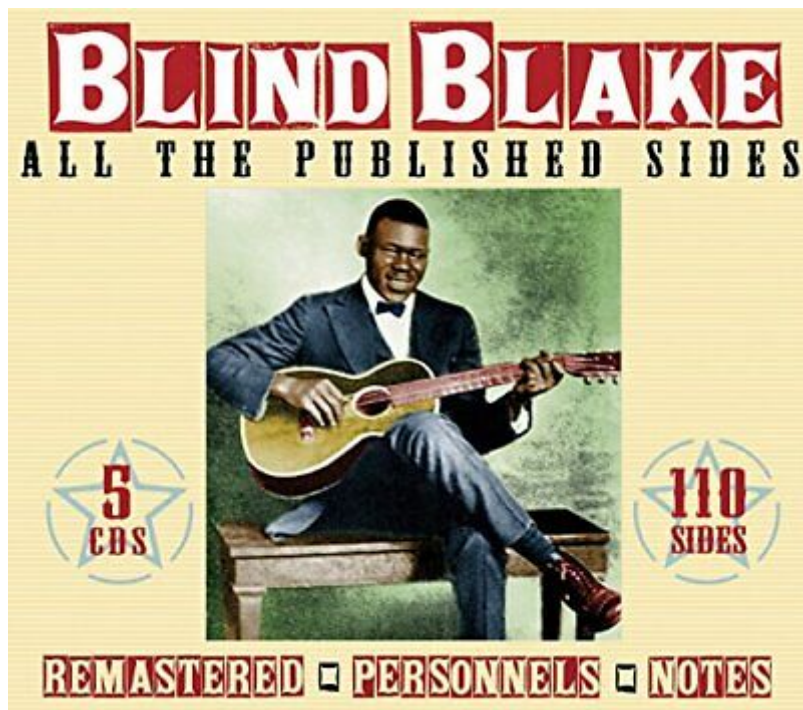
Take inspiration from the greats, but don't be afraid to experiment and develop your own sound. One way to start developing your own style is by adding subtle variations to popular fingerpicking patterns or chord progressions.

Try adding a hammer-on or pull-off here and there, or throwing in an unexpected chord change. Over time, you'll start to build a style that is uniquely your own.

Famous Fingerstyle Blues Guitarists and Their Techniques

Overview of Famous Players: Learning from the Best

To truly master fingerstyle blues guitar, it's important to study the techniques of the greats who came before you. Mississippi John Hurt's gentle fingerpicking style was characterized by his use of syncopated rhythms and intricate picking patterns.



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picking techniques that astounded audiences. Rev Gary Davis' fiery gospel-infused playing incorporated intricate thumb-picking patterns and highly expressive slide work.

Merle Travis' influential "Travis picking" technique combined bass lines with melody played on the higher strings. By studying these players, you can learn valuable insights into both technique and style that will help take your playing to new heights.

Jim teaches Blind Blake's syncopated guitar fingerstyle

Incorporating Their Techniques: Making it Your Own

While it's important to study famous fingerstyle blues guitarists for inspiration, it's equally important not to become too reliant on any one player's techniques or styles. If all you're doing is copying someone else's playing note for note, then you're not truly developing

as a musician. Instead, try incorporating aspects of multiple players' styles into your own unique approach to fingerstyle blues guitar playing.

Take Blind Blake's rapid-fire picking technique and combine it with Mississippi John Hurt's syncopated rhythms, for example. By combining the best of multiple players' techniques and styles, you can create a sound that is truly your own.

Tips for Improving Your Fingerstyle Blues Playing

The Importance of Practice: No Substitute for Hard Work

There's really no getting around it: if you want to become a skilled fingerstyle blues guitar player, then you need to practice, practice, practice. Carving out regular practice time each day is crucial if you want to see significant improvements in your playing ability.

Make sure that your practice routine includes a mix of fingerpicking exercises, chord progressions and songs that challenge your technique and musicality. Set specific goals for each practice session and track your progress over time.

Recording Yourself: The Ultimate Tool for Improvement

One of the most powerful tools at your disposal as a fingerstyle blues guitar player is the ability to record yourself playing. By listening back to recordings of yourself, you can identify areas where you need improvement and make changes accordingly. Try recording yourself playing different fingerpicking patterns or chord progressions and listen back critically.

Pay attention to things like timing, phrasing and dynamics. Identify areas where you need improvement and make note of them so that you can focus on them during future practice sessions.

Fingerstyle blues guitar is both an art form and a science – one that requires equal parts technical skill and creativity. By incorporating alternate tunings into your playing, adding bass lines and chord progressions for support, developing your own unique style by studying famous players while making it your own unique voice,

practicing regularly with specific goals in mind while using recordings to assess performance will help anyone improve their skills in this genre.

Remember that mastering fingerstyle blues guitar takes time but with dedication over time anyone can become an accomplished musician with their own sound!

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FAQ relating to beginners blues fingerstyle guitar:

Can a beginner start with fingerstyle guitar?

Yes, a beginner can definitely start with fingerstyle guitar. While it may require some initial practice and patience, starting with fingerstyle can be a rewarding way to develop your technique and musicality from the very beginning.

Should a beginner start with fingerstyle?

Whether a beginner should start with fingerstyle depends on personal preference and goals. Fingerstyle guitar offers a unique sound and opens up a wide range of possibilities, but it also requires dedication and practice. Some beginners may prefer to start with strumming

chords before delving into fingerstyle, while others may be drawn to the fingerpicking style right from the start. It ultimately depends on what you find most enjoyable and fulfilling.

How should I start learning fingerstyle guitar?

To start learning fingerstyle guitar, it's important to begin with the basics. Familiarize yourself with proper finger positioning, hand placement, and posture. Begin by practicing simple fingerpicking patterns on open strings, gradually introducing chords and more complex patterns as you progress. Utilize online tutorials, instructional books, or even consider seeking guidance from a guitar teacher to help you develop a solid foundation.

How do you play fingerstyle blues?

Playing fingerstyle blues involves a combination of fingerpicking patterns, chord progressions, and techniques such as slides, bends, and hammer-ons. Start by learning the basic blues chords, such as E7, A7, and B7. Practice alternating bass patterns with your thumb while plucking melody notes with your fingers. Gradually incorporate blues-specific techniques like bends, slides, and trills to add flavor to your playing. Listening to blues recordings and studying the playing styles of blues legends can also greatly aid in understanding and playing fingerstyle blues.

Is fingerstyle harder than chords?

The difficulty of fingerstyle versus chords depends on individual skill and familiarity. Fingerstyle guitar requires coordination between multiple fingers and the thumb, as well as independent movement. Chords, on the other hand, involve positioning your fingers on specific frets and strumming or picking multiple strings simultaneously. Both techniques require practice, but some individuals may find fingerstyle more challenging initially due to the added complexity of finger movements.

Why is fingerstyle so hard?

Fingerstyle can be perceived as challenging due to the need for precise finger coordination and the independent movement of multiple fingers. It requires practice to develop finger strength, dexterity, and accuracy. Additionally, fingerstyle often involves more intricate picking patterns and chord voicings, adding to the complexity.

However, with consistent practice and a structured learning approach, fingerstyle guitar can become more accessible and enjoyable over time.

Is fingerstyle the hardest guitar style?

The difficulty of guitar styles is subjective and varies from person to person. Fingerstyle is often considered one of the more challenging styles due to its technical demands and complexity. However, other styles like classical guitar, flamenco, or advanced jazz techniques can also be equally challenging. It's important to remember that mastering any guitar style requires dedication, practice, and a love for the music.

Can you learn fingerstyle by yourself?

Yes, it is possible to learn fingerstyle guitar by yourself. With the vast resources available online, including tutorials, videos, and tabs, you can develop your fingerstyle skills independently. However, having a knowledgeable instructor or mentor can greatly accelerate your progress and provide personalized guidance and feedback. They can also help correct any technical issues and offer valuable insights and tips.

Why do fingerstyle guitarists have long nails?

Many fingerstyle guitarists grow and shape their nails to achieve a desired tone and control while playing. The nails, especially the thumbnail and the fingertips, can produce a brighter and more defined sound when plucking the strings.

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