

# C JAM BLUES AND INTRODUCTION TO THE 12 BAR BLUES

DUKE ELLINGTON  
(LESSON BY BEN PORTNER)

The twelve bar blues is an iconic song form used by jazz, blues, and rock musicians around the world. Anyone that shows up to a jam session is expected to be able to play and improvise over a twelve bar blues, which is why it's imperative that we learn about it. While the previous songs we were working on ("so what" and "Little Sunflower") have forms that encompass 32 bars, the blues is a little different in that it encompasses only 12. It is important that the student listens to renditions of C Jam blues multiple times before attempting to play.

First let's take a look at the melody and chords for each measure. I will use a root position voicings to make the chords clear and comfortable to play.

## SWUNG EIGHTH NOTES

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The melody in the treble clef consists of swung eighth notes. The bass clef staff shows root position chords for each measure. Measure numbers 1, 6, and 10 are indicated at the start of their respective systems.

Measure	Melody (Treble Clef)	Chords (Bass Clef)
1	G G	C <sup>7</sup> (CEGBb)
2	G G G G	F <sup>7</sup> (FACEb)
3	G C	C <sup>7</sup> (CEGBb)
4	-	C <sup>7</sup> (CEGBb)
5	-	F <sup>7</sup> (FACEb)
6	G G	C <sup>7</sup> (CEGBb)
7	G G G G	C <sup>7</sup> (CEGBb)
8	G C	C <sup>7</sup> (CEGBb)
9	-	C <sup>7</sup> (CEGBb)
10	G G	Dm <sup>7</sup> (DFAC)
11	G G G G	G <sup>7</sup> (GBDF)
12	G C	C <sup>7</sup> (CEGBb)
13	-	C <sup>7</sup> (CEGBb)

Practice the melody and root position chords together either with a metronome or with a recording of C jam blues until you start to feel comfortable playing them together. As improvising is one of the most important parts of playing a blues, let's review the scales for each chord. (Refer back to mixolydian and dorian scales earlier in the curriculum if you are struggling.)

The first chord is a C dominant 7th so we will use the C mixolydian scale over this chord

C<sup>7</sup>

14 C D E F G A B $\flat$  C

The second chord is an F dominant 7th, so we will use the F mixolydian scale.

F<sup>7</sup>

22 F G A B $\flat$  F C D E $\flat$  F

The final two chords are a 2-5-1 leading back into C7. a 2-5-1 to c7 would be Dminor 7 to G 7 to C7. Let's look at their scales.

Dm<sup>7</sup>

30 D E F G A B C D

G<sup>7</sup>

38 G A B C D E F G

The last scale we'll look at is the C blues scale. The blues scale is a great resource for beginners and sounds great on almost any part of the song. (Refer back to pentatonics and blues scales earlier in the curriculum if you are struggling.)

46 C Eb F Gb G Bb C

After practicing these scales in two octaves (like the exercises in the earlier lessons,) we'll take a look at some better sounding voicings in the left hand for the chords rather than just root position voicings.

C<sup>7</sup>

53 E Bb DEBb EABb EABbD GBbE BbDEA

Now we'll do the same thing for F7.

F<sup>7</sup>

59 EbA EbGA EbGAD AEb ADEb ADEbG

Lastly let's go over some 2-5-1 voicings at the end of the form for Dmin7 and G7.

65

Dm7 G7 C7 Dm7 G7 C7 Dm7 G7 C7

FACE F ABE E A B b D C E F A B E F A B b D E A D F A C D F G B C E G B b

If you would like more 2-5-1 voicings to choose from refer back to the 2-5-1 comping lessons earlier in the curriculum.

Now let's try playing the melody along with the rootless voicings. After playing the melody try soloing over the changes using the scales we've gone over. It is best to listen and transcribe blues solos of master players to build your vocabulary rhythm and phrasing.

71

C7 F7 C7 C7 F7 F7

G G G G G C G G G G G G

E A B b D E b G A D E A B b D E A B b D E b G A D E b G A D

77

C7 C7 Dm7 G7 C7 C7

G C G G G G G G G C

E A B b D E A B b D F A C F A B E E A B b D