

The Musicarta Pentatonics Workbook

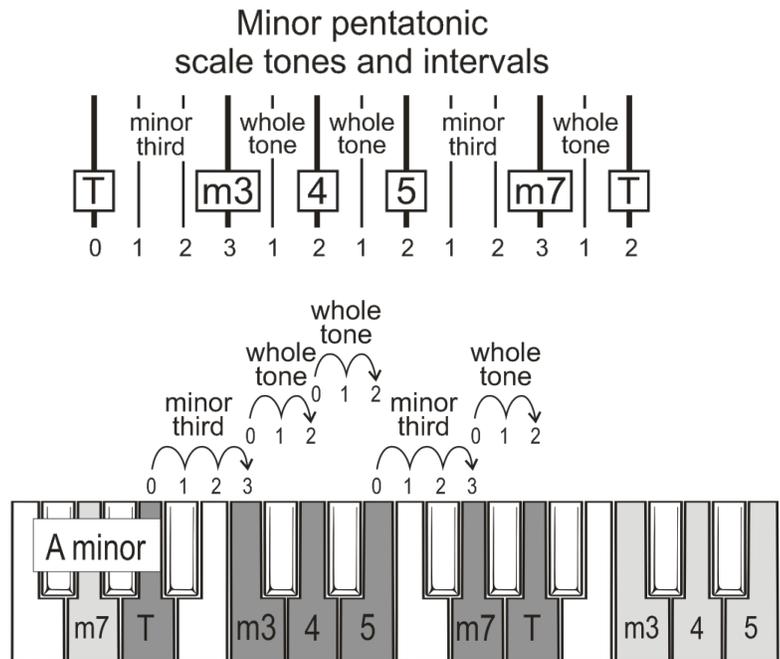
ONE-OCTAVE MINOR PENTATONIC BLUES

This catchy 12-bar minor blues uses the white-key A minor and D minor pentatonic scales – chords I and IV (One and Four) of a twelve-bar chord sequence. (The third chord twelve-bar chord – E minor (V, Five) is ‘implied’ in the right hand, but you do play the bass.)

Watch the performance on-page to get the feel.

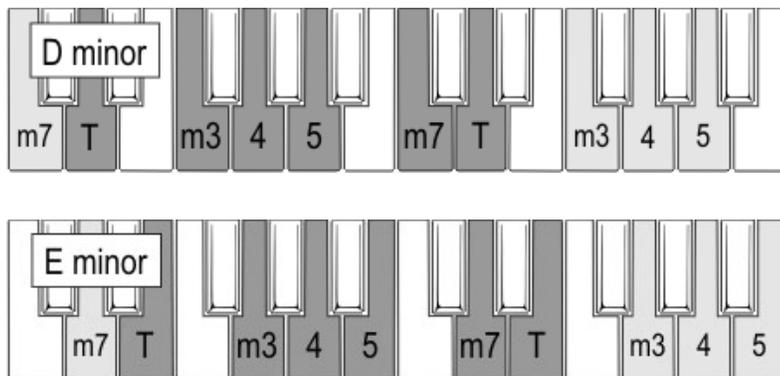
Part One: Counting the minor pentatonic scale

Follow the video on page to find the minor pentatonic scale tones, using these two diagrams for reference.



The pentatonic keyboards

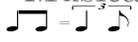
The two other pentatonic keyboards you need are these. Follow the video on-page for the build-up and a few basic scale practice drills.



Sing along as you count the minor pentatonic scale tones to really embed the scale in your musical vocabulary. It will also help with playing by ear.

Musicarta Pentatonics Workbook Those One-octave Blues

R A Chappell



Am

Playing the one-octave scales

Now make sure you can play the one-octave minor pentatonic scales with your right hand, fingering correctly.

A minor

T m3 4 5 m7 T m7 5 4 m3 T

E minor

T m3 4 5 m7 T m7 5 4 m3 T

D minor

There are video and audio reference files on-page.

Please try to sing the minor pentatonic scales. You don't have to be in tune!

You should be able to name the minor pentatonic scale-tones, count the steps in semitones between them, and build the minor pentatonic scales on A, D and E.

Part Two: Building your performance

There is a four-part video build-up to the riff in A minor (first third of the performance) on-page.

- First you play the scale 'straight' in the right hand, with a left hand 'pulse' note in the left hand, to learn where the right hand fits in with the beat.
- Then you anticipate (pull forward) the last note in the right hand run, going both up and down.
- Then you play that left hand note in two places. (This often throws the right hand off.)
- Then you add the left hand syncopation.

Make sure you can comfortably play each section before going on. Expect to repeat the build-up several times.

The D minor build-up

The pattern you play in D minor is exactly the same, so the build-up for that section is all in one. Practice until you can play along without losing the beat.

The last third

The last third of the riff isn't 'to pattern' – you don't actually play the E minor pentatonic scale.

Use the video on-page to learn how it goes.

Endings

You can end your performance a number of ways, from simple to complicated. Feel free to leave a more difficult ending for later. What's important is that you end your performance neatly and decisively!

12-bar form

As you work towards a delay-free performance, it's useful to have an 'aerial view' so you know what's coming up next.

Like a lot of minor pentatonic music, the One-octave Blues is in twelve-bar form. "Twelve-bar" usually means the classic 3-times-4 structure, but here there are actually 24 bars here, in 3-by-8 form. The chord sequence is this.

Am							
Dm	Dm	Dm	Dm	Am	Am	Am	Am
Em	Em	Am	Am	Em	Em	Am	Am

(You don't actually use the E minor pentatonic scale in the module performance.)

The 'last third' build-up covers the Am-to-Em jumps; use the Am-to-Dm practice drill on-page to eliminate any delays there.

Polishing your performance

Keep using the build-up practice segments to polish your performance – it's much more efficient than throwing yourself at it and hoping trial-and-error will win the day. Sing along and tap your foot (if you can) as you play all the riffs in this module. Minor pentatonic blues riffs like this are very good for 'getting your mojo working' - they're not for sitting and listening politely to!

You should be able to play a chorus of the riff with a formal ending at the end of this section.

Part Three: Melodic development

Every blues-styles player has a collection of favourite 'ornaments' – decorations to the right hand line, often originally copied but later highly individual from years of use. Here is a collection of eight or so ways to jazz up the basic right hand pentatonic run. No MS (= manuscript, written-out music) is offered for this module, on the grounds that it would only complicate the issue and delay the start of the practice necessary to make these little decorations available in performance.

Some rhythmic variation has also crept into this section*. See if you can hum/sing along with Mister Musicarta – it really helps show your hand what's wanted.

The video is divided into section by screens introducing the next item. Use these to navigate through the lesson.

1. A crushed note on the way up

The basic crushed note, on the classic blues #4/b5 (sharp four/flat five) semitone. This is one that you simply have to have! Remember to keep your fingers close to the keys – you can't play this if your fingers are waving about high in the air.

2. Improvisation fingering

Improvisers don't usually have the luxury of planning their fingering like classical players, so turning the fingers over instead of passing them under the thumb to keep going up the keyboard is an essential trick.

3. Left hand syncopation*

Count along: One two AND three four One two AND three four.

This left hand rhythm is quite capable of supporting any right hand improvisation.

Not an essential development at all; Mister Musicarta's left hand was just doing its own thing, so it got covered.

You could be using just the on-the-beat 'pulse' note or the 'official' performance left hand "dut-de-der" figure.

4. A crushed note on the way down

The crushed note would naturally fall on the D on the way down (count 3) so, as before, the fingering needs revisiting so fingers 2 and 3 are available.

5. Anticipating the right hand run*

Anticipation has a way of creeping in and infecting any and all straight counts.

Note that you can practice all these rhythmic tricks away from the keyboard, just tapping your (left) foot on the beat (probably counts 1 and 3) and practicing the foxy right hand rhythms on your desktop.

Progress to fingering a 'virtual piano' on your desktop and try to sing along too.

6. Rolling the right hand

Anticipating the start of the run leads naturally to keeping the thumb playing more of the in-between "and" counts.

7. Descending grace note figures (1)

Once you've padded out the ascending run, you'll feel the need to do something for the descending run too, possibly with these two-note grace note figures.

Notice that they are (of course) pentatonic scale tones too.

The demonstration takes it to extremes, with figures on the fifth, fourth and minor third. You wouldn't normally decorate all three. Or would you?

8. Descending grace note figures (2)

The last ornament is really a two-note 'crushed note', and one of my blues favourites – octave and $b5$ semitone crushed down onto the fourth.

Practice

Practice these figures one or two at a time and keep coming back to remind yourself of the options. It takes hundreds of repetitions to truly make them your own. Expect to diverge off into pentatonic improvisations as you practice, especially if you can keep the two-note left hand syncopation going.

Part Four: Harmonic development

This module shows how you can make more music out of the One-octave Blues material you've already learned by re-arranging musical components and playing them in different places on the keyboard. This builds your 'freedom-to-create' skills.

Transposing

The One-Octave Blues easily transposes down a fourth into E minor and still plays on all-white keys. Watch the video on-page a few times, then copy.

Your chord sequence will be this.

Em							
Am	Am	Am	Am	Em	Em	Em	Em
Bm	Bm	Em	Em	Bm	Bm	Em	Em

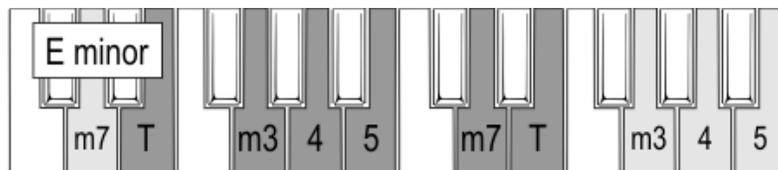
Remember that the 'Bm' refers only to the bass (LH); the right hand uses the E minor pentatonic scale-tones for all of the last line.

A true twelve-bar version

Play a true twelve-bar form of this riff for comparison by substituting real rising E minor and D minor pentatonic scales in bars 19-20 (Em) and 21-22 (Dm) and finishing with a unison (hands-together) descending A minor scale.

Here are the chord sequence and new keyboard.

Am							
Dm	Dm	Dm	Dm	Am	Am	Am	Am
Em	Em	Dm	Dm	Am	Am	Am	Am



Watch the MidiPiano performance on-page a few times, then try to copy. (The video shows only the new, last third of the chorus.)

Twelve-bar riffs nearly always merit some improving 'tweak' to the pure pattern. Would you say this was better than or not as good as the final Musicarta version?

Two 'Bells' versions

Here's a more advanced development with both hands playing the whole minor pentatonic scale, but 'staggered' - a good way to add 'body' to a solo line. It's the right hand that's on the beat - the left hand provides a sort of 'pre-echo', which suggested the 'Bells' title.

Watch the videos on-page. There is no MS for these performances.

Note that you your left hand runs have to end on the thumb so your little finger can reach down and play the between-the-phrases rhythmic contribution (two types).

If this seems way beyond you, don't hesitate to skip it and make mental note to come back one day!

A two-handed variation

Challenge yourself!

Playing the same riff with different fingers or hands really makes you think about what the keys on the keyboard (the pentatonic scale tones) are going to sound like.

Here's a two-handed variation of the One-octave Blues with a crossed-hands addition.

Cover the pentatonic octave (see the keyboards again) with LH 4, 2, 1 and RH 2, 3, 4 (shown below left) or 2, 4, 5 (below right).

A minor



D minor



Watch the video on-page to figure out how the clef changes in the music show where the hands go. The very lowest notes are always RH-over (right hand over) notes.

Play the E minor transposed version like this, too.

The music is on the next page. All right hand notes are on the upper staff (five lines); all left hand notes are on the lower staff.

Vocalisation and visualisation

As a way of practising your aural (playing by ear) skills, make a habit of singing or humming along to the riffs as you play them. You don't have to be in tune at all – it's not for anybody's benefit but your own.

Sooner or later, continually seeing the pentatonic keyboard diagrams will help you start to 'see' the melodies you're humming playing out on the keyboards.

Experiment with it. You can probably remember the One-octave Blues melody. Look at or imagine the three all-white-key minor pentatonic keyboards – A, D and E minors.

Unless you're at the keyboard, you probably don't what key you're humming in, but it doesn't matter. See the melody playing up and down the octave on the three keyboards, one at a time.

Doing this regularly will improve your ability to pick out melodies at the keyboard beyond measure – a huge proportion of popular-music melodies contain only the five pentatonic scale-tones, major or minor.

One-octave Blues: Two-handed version

R A Chappell



Am (RH over)

4 2 1 2 1 4 (RH over) Dm

Am

Em Am

(RH over) Em Am (RH over)