

Ten Minute Tech

The Blues scale in Octaves

The musical notation consists of two systems. Each system has a treble clef staff and a guitar fretboard diagram below it. The first system shows the blues scale starting on the 6th string (low E) and the 5th string (A). The second system starts on the 4th string (D) and the 3rd string (G). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 on the strings. The notation includes a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a key signature of one flat (Bb).

This is a very cool way to extend your soloing vocabulary and sound "jazzy" at the same time. All we are doing is playing the A Minor blues scale with one finger and using another finger to play the same scale an octave up simultaneously. So we play A on the 6th string the same time as we play A an octave higher on the 4th string. Then we play C on the 6th string at the same time as C an octave higher on the 4th string, and so on.

A few technical notes-

You can start by playing the normal blues scale with just your first finger. This will help plot the scale before you add the octave above.

The octaves starting on the 6th and 5th string (low E and A) have a one fret gap between the fingers, whilst the octaves starting on the 4th and 3rd strings (D and G) have a two fret gap between them. My advice is to play the low note with your first finger and the higher note with your fourth finger for all of them- It is a lot easier to move fingers slightly further apart or closer together as you cross the strings than it is to swap fingers and change shapes for each note.

Use your middle finger of your left hand to mute/dampen all the other strings as you play. This adds a rhythmic sound as well as cleans it up by preventing extra notes sounding. It also enables you to strum all the strings or just pluck the two notes that you want as and when you wish without altering your left hand shape.

Always focus on the first finger, this will stop you getting lost if you switch your attention between the first and fourth finger as you play. You will see what I mean as you start moving around the neck!

Check out Wes Montgomery's "Talking Verve" album, or any of his other recordings- he was king of the octaves and strummed and picked almost solely with his right thumb!

Lastly- the octave approach can be applied to any scale.