## MU 009 (Feurzeig): The Blues Scale and the Dominant Seventh Chord

The **blues scale** contains the notes used to form common blues licks and melodies. It consists of a minor pentatonic scale plus an additional chromatic pitch that fills in the whole step between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> scale degrees.

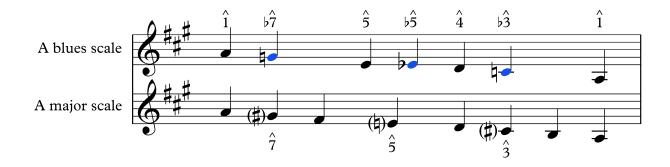


This added note is typically spelled as a raised  $\hat{4}$  when it <u>ascends</u> to  $\hat{5}$ , **and** as a lowered  $\hat{5}$  when it descends to  $\hat{4}$ .

The blues scale should not be taken literally. Many blues licks include other pitches as well. Furthermore, blues-style melody includes bent pitches and other microtuned notes (notes that do not correspond precisely to the keys on a piano) that are not easily represented in standard notation. Nonetheless, practicing the blues scale and patterns using its notes is a great way to start sounding "bluesy".

Comparing the blues scale to its parallel **major** scale, we see that the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> degrees are flatted. These three notes are called "blue notes". But any note can become a blue note if it is played with an expressively altered intonation.

**Remember**: when speaking of generalized scale and chord relationships, "flatted" usually means "chromatically lowered". A "flatted" note is not necessarily a note with a flat in staff notation. In the following example, the flat 7<sup>th</sup> and flat 3<sup>rd</sup> degrees are G and C, respectively.



## **Dominant seventh chords**

A **seventh chord** is a 4-note chord formed by a triad plus a note a third above the triad fifth. This note is a seventh above the root, hence the name.

If the triad is major and the seventh is minor (in other words, if the interval between the chord 5<sup>th</sup> and chord 7<sup>th</sup> is a minor third), the chord is called a **major-minor seventh** chord. "Major" here refers to the <u>triad</u> quality, "minor" to the seventh between the root and chord 7<sup>th</sup>.

The only place this particular quality of seventh chord occurs in a major scale is over the dominant pitch. So another term for "major-minor seventh" chord is **dominant seventh chord** or just **dominant seventh** for short. This is in fact much more common than the term major-minor seventh.

Although the chord occurs naturally only on V, chords of this quality are can be called "dominant sevenths" no matter what the scale degree of the root. For example, in the key of E major an E major-minor seventh chord may be formed by altering the D-sharp of the scale. This is called an "E dominant seventh", even though E is the tonic of the key, and would be labeled with roman numeral I.

