



# **An Introduction to Blues Turnarounds, Intros and Endings**

By Scott Blanchard

Have you ever listened to a favorite blues tune and wondered how they put the intro together? How did they use the final turnaround to create such a satisfying ending? If these questions are giving you the blues, read on and we'll discover tricks that'll have you sounding like a pro in no time—and you'll know the theory, so you can apply it over and over to your favorite blues tunes! In this edition of the Theory Corner, we'll take a look at an excerpt from bluesman Dennis McCumber's book, *The Total Blues Guitarist*, available through Alfred Publishing. Dennis will introduce you to the concept of creating blues intros and endings from the *turnaround*. A turnaround is the group of chords that take you back to the beginning of the form. In a 12-bar blues form, the turnaround is the last four measures. Think of how your favorite blues tune starts—you'll most likely think of a characteristic lick or riff that leads into the chorus.

Dennis' logical teaching style alongside a myriad of true blues examples make this book a great addition to any guitarist's collection. The book includes a CD so you can easily follow along with all the examples. Speaking of audio, be sure to check out the audio examples I've provided in this document. If you want to take your blues to the next level, keep reading!

## **Chapter 17: Turnarounds, Intros and Endings**

Turnarounds can be used as intros and endings in the blues. The turnaround can be done many different ways. The most common are the single-note turnarounds heard in all the different musical styles influenced by the *Delta blues*, an early, guitar-driven blues style that originated in the Mississippi Delta. Harmonic-style turnarounds come from the jazz influence creeping back into the blues.

### **Single-Note Turnarounds**

The single-note, melodic-style turnaround is still harmonic, in a sense. The turnarounds start with an arpeggio of the I chord then move to the V chord. Let's try one. First, let's select the key of E for our blues.

We'll start with a simple E Major triad on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd strings in 1st position. This means the root is the open 1st string, E. The 3rd is the 3rd string, 1st fret, G#. The 5th is the open 2nd string, B.

We are now going to take only the 3rd and the 5th of the chord and move them three frets up the fretboard. The 3rd becomes the 5th of the chord, and the 5th of the chord becomes the  $\flat$ 7th of the dominant chord used in the blues.

This is a very cool sounding change. If you put the root back into the chord, it becomes a 7th chord without the 3rd.

To turn this into a turnaround, we will put the root back in and arpeggiate the chord in triplets chromatically down the neck until we get back to where we started. Let's try it.

**A**



E

3 3 3 *let ring*<sup>3</sup> - - - - - |

SL H

T 0 0 2 1 0 2 1 0 2 1 0 0 1 0 0  
 A 0 1 4 3 3 2 2 1 0 1 0 0 0 0 0  
 B 0 0 1 1 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Now, all we have to do is get to the V chord. We will approach it chromatically as well.

**B**

B7

3 3 3 *let ring*<sup>3</sup> - - - - - |

SL H

T 2 1 0 2 1 0 2 1 0 0 1 0 0 0 0  
 A 2 1 0 2 1 0 2 1 0 0 1 0 0 0 0  
 B 0 1 2 1 3 0

# Harmonic Turnarounds

Harmonic turnarounds reflect the jazz influence on the blues. They are based on typical chord progressions used in *jazz standard* tunes (the repertoire of songs that jazz musicians like to play). The progression used the most is I–vi–ii–V. This progression is used in many jazz blues standards. In the basic 12-bar form we've looked at so far, the turnaround begins at bar 9. The turnaround in the following B<sup>b</sup> blues begins a bar earlier, with the change to the vi chord in bar 8.



**A** *Swing 8ths*

B<sup>b</sup>7      Gmin7      Cmin7      F7      B<sup>b</sup>7      Gmin7      Cmin7      F7

T		11	8	6	11	8	6
A	7	10	8	8	7	10	8
B	6	12	8	7	6	12	8
	6	10	8	8	6	10	8
	3	2	3	1	3	2	3
	2	1	3	4	2	1	4
	1	3	3	2	1	3	2
		1	2	3		2	3

# Dominant 7ths

The blues is not often thought of as a complex musical form, and it's true—it does not have to be. But the fact is, the blues can be as complex as you choose to make it.

One of the most common devices in blues music is the use of the dominant 7th chord for the I, IV and V chords.

In our last turnaround idea, you can make all the chords dominant 7th chords.

Yes, even the minor 7th chords can be changed to dominant 7ths. Check it out:

**B** *Swing 8ths*

B<sup>b</sup>7      G7      C7      F7      B<sup>b</sup>7      G7      C7      F7

T		8	6	8		6	8
A	7	10	8	7	8	9	6
B	6	9	7	6	9	8	7
	6	10	8	6	10	8	8
	3	1	3	3	1	3	1
	2	4	2	2	4	2	4
	1	2	1	1	2	1	2
		3			3		3

# Using Turnarounds to Create Intros

You can create some really cool sounding intros simply by taking one of the many different turnarounds available and starting your blues with one that fits. Who says you have to start at measure 1?



## A Intro Swing 8ths E7

Let's try one of our harmonic turnarounds. In this example, measures 9–12 will be our intro.

## B Swing 8ths E9

# Using Turnarounds to Create Endings

Just as we used them as intros, turnarounds can also be used as endings. Here's an example.



## A E7

## Conclusion

For more information on turnarounds, be sure to check out the Licks and Tricks section of this newsletter for some first-rate playing examples that'll make you shine at the next jam session!

If you liked this excerpt, order Dennis McCumber's book, *The Total Blues Guitarist*, at [www.alfred.com](http://www.alfred.com). In addition, be sure to check out his blues guitar lessons at [www.WorkshopLive.com](http://www.WorkshopLive.com) today!

To learn more about blues turnarounds, guitarists should check out the blues lessons "Turnarounds," "Theory of 6ths," "Soloing with 3rds and 6ths" and "Riff-Based Blues with 9-Chord Turnarounds," taught by Dennis McCumber, David Boye and Scott A. Smith.

Keyboardists will enjoy the Adult Refresher lesson "Why Am I Blue: Blues Scales and Progressions," taught by Leo Marchildon and Andrea Amos.

Have fun trying out new ideas—see you soon!