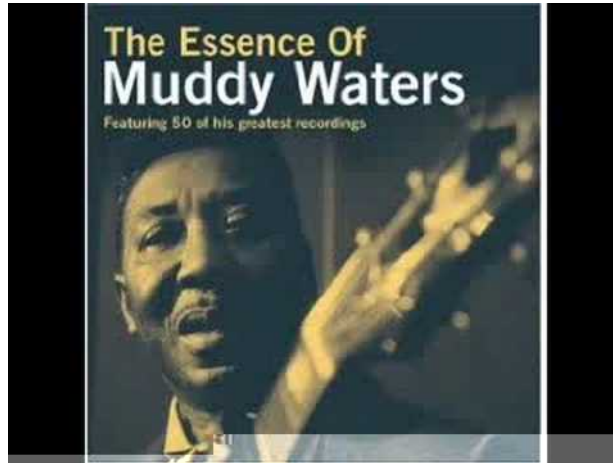


Learning the Blues

Music Lessons & Reflections from Rizwan Ullah



A record of conversations, lessons and listening — compiled from Commune.pk
commune.pk/play/usama/discover-how-to-play-blues-music-with-harmonia

Preface

These pages bring together the thoughts, lessons, and musical insights of Rizwan Ullah. They were first shared in conversations among students and friends, but they carry timeless lessons about sound, feeling, and the art of the blues.

This is not a technical manual. It is a living record of how the blues connects the ear, the heart, and the hands. You can follow it from the simplest harmonica exercise to stories about great musicians. Each chapter grows naturally from the last, moving from learning your first notes to understanding phrasing, scale color, and musical soul.

Rizwan often said that “the blues cannot be taught, only felt.” These notes are a way to feel your way into that truth.

Chapter 1 — Starting Out: Learning the Harmonica

Rizwan believed that the blues begins not with theory but with listening and feeling. The harmonica—simple, portable, soulful—is a perfect instrument to learn that lesson.

The First Steps — Recommended Course

Blues Harmonica Blueprint — Introduction by Annie Raines

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=6rnjZymx8GY&list;=PLdA59ZlIttAHtOnP65-h1fCW0ObZEOP1>

“Excellent course — concise, easy lessons. Babar is advanced, but this will be great revision. Little Eesa will have a great time learning blues as is advaosa a diat adv

Second Position (Cross Harp) — Common in blues, uses a major third. Perfect for major blues but not for minor songs.

Third Position — Produces a minor third and second — ideal for minor blues such as Howlin' Wolf's "I'm Ready." For a D-minor blues, use a C harmonica in third position.

Paul Butterfield, a great harmonica player, once used a G harp in second position on a D-minor song — great playing but not the ideal key.

Basic Notes on a C Harmonica

- Sa — C
- Re — D
- Ga Komal — E-flat
- Ma — F
- Ma Tivra — F-sharp
- Pa — G
- Dha — A
- Ni Komal — B-flat

Chapter 3 — The Sound of the Blues: Scales and Color

Blues scales change the mood of a song. Each adds a different shade of feeling.

1. BB King Blues Scale (Major Blues)

Notes: C, D, E-flat, E, F, F-sharp, G, A, B-flat

Listen: BB King Live Lesson on Major Blues Scale

https://youtu.be/bhYXolbCrr0?si=5Ur8F_R1tPPMaULB

"The happy sorrow scale — major and soulful at once."

2. Minor Blues Scale (Otis Rush / Little Walter Style)

Notes: C, D, E-flat, F, F-sharp, G, A, B-flat

Listen: Otis Rush Minor Blues Style

<https://youtu.be/QhDe0Eqxq24?si=0JNoGXl3RwC5qpaQ>

"The second note (D) is used sparingly, mostly over the V chord, while the third (E-flat) defines the minor feel."

3. Allman Brothers Scale (Mixolydian Influence)

Notes: C, D, E-flat, E, F, G, A, B-flat

Listen: Allman Brothers Live Mixolydian Jam

<https://youtu.be/bV3poO3njb4?si=vl0sDmRsZaCg0Ad0>

"Similar to BB King's scale but uses the minor third less. Without it, the sound turns mixolydian."

Hearing the Difference

Howlin' Wolf — Original in Correct Key

https://youtu.be/_38Oq_wNUwU?si=2bkXLhvi3BoAblxm

Paul Butterfield — D-minor in G Cross Harp

<https://youtu.be/nNkNuVRhkks?si=FqYaWC7gT8SI3RDC>

Paul Butterfield — Classic Rock Blues Performance

https://youtu.be/t_lk7DH9sOY?si=-aRiEDgcxB7RhD8J

"He played Newport '65, Monterey Pop '67, Woodstock '69, and The Last Waltz '76 — the only man to play all four."

Phrasing and Feel

"It's not possible to teach people the blues. There's no theory that lets you play both major and minor notes on a diatonic chord. It's all about phrasing." — Rizwan

Chapter 4 — Guitar and Beyond

The spirit of blues crosses all instruments. Rizwan shared these performances to show how tone and emotion matter more than technique.

Tanglewood — Live Blues Soul — "This is real."

https://youtu.be/b3_TQKdksyc?si=3WDTJ1cOx92LQS6a

Malo — Latin Rock Beyond Santana — "Some Latin Rock beyond Santana. Although they had his brother on guitar. That's Malo."

<https://youtu.be/73FP-iZXSuk?si=ROsxSRHy9fNzHnrJ>

El Chicano — Legends of Latin Rock — "This is very special. El Chicano were musicians to rival Santana. Bobby Espinosa was a great organist. For our guitar players, check out Mickey Lespron — based his style on Wes Montgomery and used only his thumb."

<https://youtu.be/vxmWpKqkCnk?si=hcnUFykJmu-Opg1G>

El Chicano — Forty Years Later

https://youtu.be/XoSGf89H_zY?si=sj6moTzl7xtGBUPC

Toy Caldwell — Marshall Tucker Band (Southern Rock)

<https://youtu.be/tbjBudsFH3g?si=dgh3BYZPADww3CTe>

Brian Auger's Oblivion Express — Jim Mullen on Guitar

<https://youtu.be/13XJY8kZDqs?si=BYtK67IxLFjkgZ5Q>

James Gurley — Big Brother and the Holding Company — "If you count fingerstyle players — thumb and fingers, no picks — you have John Cipollina of QMS, Johnny Winter, and Lindsey Buckingham of Fleetwood Mac, all before Beck and Knopfler."

<https://youtu.be/4BpGOyv40PY?si=RuHvELiJVX5T18TU>

Ted Dunbar — King of Thumb Players — "Another jazz great, also only used thumb. Less is more — sometimes restriction brings progress and learning."

<https://youtu.be/SyVhBfIFbiQ?si=rz5-gsEG6OYVqmq6>

Chapter 5 — Rhythm and Hidden Instruments

Classic Harmonica Performance — “Famous harmonica song.”

<https://youtu.be/9aibzdd7ZGk?si=8c8OeCImolwyRhs4>

Korean Samulnori and Japanese Taiko Drumming — “For our drummers — Korean and Japanese Taiko drumming.” These traditions teach timing, precision, and discipline — the core of all groove.

https://youtu.be/NAIKtgVbq_8?si=2NV1L4bzAd-666JC

Brian Setzer — Rockabilly Revival — shared for the guitar players in the group.

<https://youtu.be/N-aK6JnyFmk?si=Qa4tmG83AcaiKvne>

Chapter 6 — The Flute in Rock

Before Jethro Tull, many artists used flute in rock music. Rizwan traced that forgotten path.

History of the Flute in Rock — Part 1

<https://youtu.be/N-aK6JnyFmk?si=Qa4tmG83AcaiKvne>

The Blues Project — Flute Thing (1967)

<https://youtu.be/1oIE95Ro9Ms?si=vWcFu9aEsQDP6fgT>

Jeremy Steig — Howling for Judy (1970)

https://youtu.be/etOrYtQ3EGc?si=un_UaCsyzpjLKCA3

Traffic — Chris Wood on Flute and Sax

<https://youtu.be/B9iZlw6MlIM?si=XzBqBi1z6-8UEnuo>

Moody Blues — Ray Thomas (1967)

<https://youtu.be/cs4RG9u8lVU?si=dVgYfF4UvxjbeG27>

“That’s five famous rock records with flute — years before Jethro Tull and Focus. Love this band.”

Heart — Ann Wilson on Flute — “After Ian Anderson made flute his signature, Ann Wilson played it less, but she really rocks it.”

<https://youtu.be/XncZCEX0Opl?si=nJm3LKXylnsWhPZ1>

Canned Heat — Jim Horn on Flute (1969) — “Forgot this one. The Bear is only miming — the flute solo is by session player Jim Horn, based on a 1928 blues song.”

<https://youtu.be/nBhpiUFSYWI?si=XlgcZfeHoTx3qPkd>

Canned Heat — Second Version

https://youtu.be/ds3wXLxM6kg?si=d3w_5evjkJdMujn0

Chapter 7 — Reflection

“Music evolves when people stop caring about rules. Whether it’s a harmonica bending notes beyond scale, a drummer moving like a dancer, or a guitarist playing with a thumb instead of a pick — the spirit of blues and rock is to make something human.” — Rizwan Ullah

Glossary of Musical Terms

Cross Harp (Second Position)

Playing the harmonica one key above the song's key. Creates the classic blues sound with more draw bends available.

Third Position

Used for minor blues. Gives a darker, more emotional tone, ideal for songs in minor keys.

Blue Note

A note that falls between the major and minor version of a pitch, especially the third or seventh degree. It gives the blues its signature "cry."

Diatonic Harmonica

A harmonica tuned to one key. Most traditional blues players use this type.

Chromatic Harmonica

A harmonica with a slide button, allowing access to all notes and all keys.

Mixolydian Mode

A major scale with a flat seventh. Common in blues and rock for its soulful, open feeling.

Phrasing

The way a musician shapes timing and emotion in a line. It's the "spoken" rhythm of music.

Fingerstyle or Thumbstyle

Playing guitar without a pick, using thumb or fingers to pluck the strings for warmer tone and independence.

Major Blues Scale

A bright, soulful scale that mixes happiness with tension. Used by BB King and many Chicago blues players.

Minor Blues Scale

A darker version that leans into the emotional pull of the minor third. Used by Otis Rush, Little Walter, and many others.

Artist Profiles

Little Walter

The first musician to electrify the harmonica and make it a lead voice in blues. His phrasing and tone are unmatched.

Paul Butterfield

A bridge between Chicago blues and 1960s rock. Played Woodstock and The Last Waltz. His technical control and intensity influenced generations.

Otis Rush

Master of the minor-key blues. His bends and vibrato shaped the sound of modern blues guitar.

BB King

Known for his tone and phrasing more than speed. His guitar, Lucille, spoke like a human voice.

Wes Montgomery

Jazz guitarist who used his thumb instead of a pick, giving his tone warmth and depth. His influence reached rock and blues players alike.

Mickey Lespron

Guitarist for El Chicano. Brought jazz thumb-style into Latin rock, blending cultures and genres.

Jeremy Steig

Jazz flutist who crossed into rock and funk. His recordings later influenced hip-hop sampling.

Brian Setzer

Revived rockabilly in the 1980s. Combined technical precision with joyful swing.

Ted Dunbar

Jazz guitarist who played only with his thumb. A master of tone and restraint.

Listening Guide

All links repeated here for quick reference.

Harmonica Lessons and Study

- **Blues Harmonica Blueprint — Annie Raines: structured beginner course**

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=6rnjZymx8GY&list;=PLdA59ZlItAhtOnP65-h1fCW0ObZEOP1>

- **Reggae-Style Chromatic Blues Lesson — easy chromatic introduction**

https://youtu.be/VrKH94rGpk?si=Qa_PfgfGCQj6NdR2

- **Little Walter — tone and phrasing reference**

<https://youtu.be/Jh-5YhAbynl?si=H0PKDMn-XRuZYUSa>

- **Play Chromatic Today — beginner's chromatic harmonica lesson**

https://youtu.be/A5cwCd6DR-Q?si=BG-KMB9PRAB1f_ML

Blues Scales and Style

- **BB King Blues Scale demonstration**

https://youtu.be/bhYXolbCrr0?si=5Ur8F_R1tPPMaULB

- **Otis Rush Minor Blues example**

<https://youtu.be/QhDe0Eqxq24?si=0JNoGXl3RwC5qpaQ>

- **Allman Brothers Mixolydian approach**

<https://youtu.be/bV3poO3njb4?si=vl0sDmRsZaCg0Ad0>

- **Howlin' Wolf — original version in correct key**

https://youtu.be/_38Oq_wNUwU?si=2bkXLhvl3BoAbIxm

- **Paul Butterfield — cross harp example**

<https://youtu.be/nNkNuVRhkks?si=FqYaWC7gT8SI3RDC>

- **Paul Butterfield — classic performances**

https://youtu.be/t_lk7DH9sOY?si=-aRiEDgcxB7RhD8J

Guitar and Jazz Connections

- **Tanglewood — live blues performance**

https://youtu.be/b3_TQKdksyc?si=3WDTJ1cOx92LQS6a

- **Malo — Latin Rock beyond Santana**

<https://youtu.be/73FP-iZXSuk?si=ROsxSRHy9fNzHnrJ>

- **El Chicano — Latin Rock legends**

<https://youtu.be/vxmWpKqkCnk?si=hcnUFykJmu-Opg1G>

- **El Chicano — 40 years later**

https://youtu.be/XoSGf89H_zY?si=sj6moTzl7xtGBUPC

- **Toy Caldwell — Marshall Tucker Band**

<https://youtu.be/tbjBudsFH3g?si=dgh3BYZPADww3CTe>

- **Brian Auger's Oblivion Express — Jim Mullen on guitar**

<https://youtu.be/13XJY8kZDqs?si=BYtK67IxLFjkgZ5Q>

- **James Gurley — Big Brother and the Holding Company**

<https://youtu.be/4BpGOyv40PY?si=RuHvELiJvX5T18TU>

- **Ted Dunbar — king of thumb players**

<https://youtu.be/SyVhBfIFbIQ?si=rz5-gsEG6OYVqmq6>

Percussion and Rhythm

- **Korean Samulnori and Japanese Taiko drumming**

https://youtu.be/NAIKtgVbq_8?si=2NV1L4bzAd-666JC

- **Brian Setzer — Rockabilly revival**

<https://youtu.be/N-aK6JnyFmk?si=Qa4tmG83AcaiKvne>

The Flute in Rock

- **History of the Flute in Rock — Part 1**

<https://youtu.be/N-aK6JnyFmk?si=Qa4tmG83AcaiKvne>

- **The Blues Project — Flute Thing**

<https://youtu.be/1oIE95Ro9Ms?si=vWcFu9aEsQDP6fgT>

- **Jeremy Steig — Howling for Judy**

https://youtu.be/etOrYtQ3EGc?si=un_UaCsyzpjLKCA3

- **Traffic — Chris Wood on flute and sax**

<https://youtu.be/B9iZlw6MlIM?si=XzBqBi1z6-8UEnuo>

- **Moody Blues — Ray Thomas**

<https://youtu.be/cs4RG9u8IVU?si=dVgYfF4UvxjbeG27>

- **Canned Heat — Jim Horn on flute**

<https://youtu.be/nBhpiUFSYWI?si=XlGcZfeHoTx3qPkd>

• **Canned Heat** — alternate performance

https://youtu.be/ds3wXLxM6kg?si=d3w_5evjkJdMujn0

Index

Artists — BB King, Little Walter, Otis Rush, Paul Butterfield, Wes Montgomery, Mickey Lespron, Jeremy Steig, Brian Setzer, Ted Dunbar, Toy Caldwell, Chris Wood, Ray Thomas, Ann Wilson.

Concepts — Cross Harp, Third Position, Blue Note, Mixolydian Mode, Phrasing, Fingerstyle, Thumb Technique, Major Blues Scale, Minor Blues Scale.

Instruments — Harmonica, Guitar, Drums, Flute.

Source — Coke Studio Pakistan. (2018, August 31). *Nami Danam* — *Chand Tara Orchestra*, Coke Studio Season 11, Episode 4. YouTube.

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