

The Secrets of the BB King Box

Steve Stine

Performance

♩ = 100

The first system consists of a treble clef staff and a guitar TAB staff. The treble staff shows a melodic line in 4/4 time with a key signature of two flats. The TAB staff has two lines, T and B. The first measure contains notes 8, 10, 8, 10. The second measure contains a tremolo on the 8th fret and a quarter note on the 8th fret. The third measure contains notes 11, 8, 10, 12, 11, 12, 10, 8.

The second system consists of a treble clef staff and a guitar TAB staff. The treble staff continues the melodic line. The TAB staff has two lines, T and B. The first measure contains notes 3, 4, 5, 3, 4, 5, 4, 5, 6, 3. The second measure contains notes 4, 5, 3, 5, 8, 5, 5, 5.

The third system consists of a treble clef staff and a guitar TAB staff. The treble staff continues the melodic line. The TAB staff has two lines, T and B. The first measure contains notes 5, 7, 5, 5, 5, 8, 10. The second measure contains a tremolo on the 8th fret and a quarter note on the 8th fret. The third measure contains notes 8, 8, 11.

The fourth system consists of a treble clef staff and a guitar TAB staff. The treble staff continues the melodic line. The TAB staff has two lines, T and B. The first measure contains notes 11, 10, 8, 10, 10, 8, 10. The second measure contains a tremolo on the 10th fret and a quarter note on the 8th fret. The third measure contains notes 8, 11, 8, 11, 8, 10, 8, 11.

The fifth system consists of a treble clef staff and a guitar TAB staff. The treble staff continues the melodic line. The TAB staff has two lines, T and B. The first measure contains notes 10, 8, 11, 10, 8, 11, 10, 10, 12, 12, 13. The second measure contains notes 13, 11, 11, 8, 11, 8, 11, 8, 8, 10, 11, 10, 8, 11, 10. The word 'full' is written above the first three measures, and '1/4' is written above the second measure.

3 3 3 3 3

T
A
B
13 11 13 11 13 11 12 11 13 11 12 11 10 8 10 8 10 8

full full full

T
A
B
10 8 8 11 13 8 11 8 10 8 11 8 10 8 10 10 10 8

T
A
B
8 8 7 7 5 5 3 3 5 3 5 3 5 5

1/4

T
A
B
3 1 1 3 1 3 1 3 5 5 3 5 4 6 3 6 6 3 6 8 6

T
A
B
8 11 8 13 11 8 11 8 11 8 11 8 10 8 10 8 10 11 11 10 8

Musical notation for the first system. The top staff is a treble clef staff in a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). It contains a melodic line with notes, slurs, and vibrato markings. The bottom staff is a guitar TAB staff with three lines labeled T, A, and B. Fret numbers are indicated: 11, 10, 11, 13, 13, 11, 11, 13, 12, 11, 13, 13, 11, 8. A wavy line above the first fret is labeled "full". A quarter note (1/4) is indicated above the 11th fret in the second measure.

Musical notation for the second system. The top staff is a treble clef staff in a key signature of two flats. It contains a melodic line with notes, slurs, and vibrato markings. The bottom staff is a guitar TAB staff with three lines labeled T, A, and B. Fret numbers are indicated: 11, 13, 11, 12, 11, 10, 8, 8, 8, 10, 8, 10, 11, 8. Slurs are used to connect fret numbers across measures.

Musical notation for the third system. The top staff is a treble clef staff in a key signature of two flats. It contains a melodic line with notes, slurs, and vibrato markings. The bottom staff is a guitar TAB staff with three lines labeled T, A, and B. Fret numbers are indicated: 11, 8, 11, 8, 10, 10, 10, 8, 10, 8, 10, 8. Slurs are used to connect fret numbers across measures.

Lesson

Building the BB Box

First let's start with our first position pentatonic scale.

The image shows a musical staff in B-flat major (two flats) with a treble clef. The scale is written as a sequence of eighth notes: B-flat, C, D, E-flat, F. The first two measures each contain a triplet of the first three notes (B-flat, C, D). The next two measures each contain a triplet of the last three notes (E-flat, F, B-flat). The guitar TAB below shows the fret numbers for each note: 8, 11, 8, 10, 8, 10, 8, 11, 11, 8, 11, 8, 10, 8, 10, 8, 10, 8, 11, 8.

By extending the notes available on our first three strings we are able to build the BB Box right out of our familiar first position minor pentatonic scale. Visualize the connection. Root in ()

The image shows two measures of musical notation in B-flat major. The first measure contains the first five notes of the first position minor pentatonic scale (B-flat, C, D, E-flat, F) with a circled '8' above the F note. The second measure contains the first five notes of the BB Box (B, C, D, E, F) with a circled '13' above the F note. The guitar TAB below shows the fret numbers: 8, 10, 8, 11, (8), 11, 10, 12, 11, (13), 11, 13.

BB Box - Ex. 1

The image shows a musical staff in B-flat major. The first measure contains a triplet of notes (B, C, D) followed by a tremolo on the B note. The second measure contains a quarter note B, a quarter rest, and a quarter note B. The guitar TAB below shows the fret numbers: 13, 11, 13, 13, 11, with a 1/4 note indicated above the final 11.

BB Box - Ex. 2

Try to separate the movement between the 2nd and 3rd strings, and the 1st and 2nd strings to build clean, simple licks at first.

The image shows two measures of musical notation in B-flat major. The first measure contains notes B, C, D, E with a slur over C and D. The second measure contains notes B, C, D, E with a slur over D and E. The guitar TAB below shows the fret numbers: 12, 11, 13, 13, 13, 11, 13, 13.

BB Box - Ex. 3

This lick works particularly well over any chord in Blues.

Musical notation for BB Box - Ex. 3. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The melody consists of four quarter notes: B-flat (fret 11), D-flat (fret 13), E-flat (fret 12), and F (fret 11), with a slur over the last two notes. The bottom staff is a guitar TAB with fret numbers 11, 13, 12, and 11. A wavy line above the notes indicates a vibrato effect.

BB Box - Ex. 4

Here we utilize a slide out of nowhere to approach our BB Box and finish strong on the 11th or 13th fret of the 2nd string.

Musical notation for BB Box - Ex. 4. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of two flats. The melody starts with a slash indicating a slide, followed by quarter notes: B-flat (fret 12), D-flat (fret 11), E-flat (fret 11), F (fret 12), G-flat (fret 11), and A-flat (fret 13). The bottom staff is a guitar TAB with fret numbers: / 12, 11, 11, / 12, 11, 13. Wavy lines above the notes indicate vibrato.

* Make sure you're using a fingering that's comfortable. Depending on the lick, it may be wiser to use our 2nd and 1st fingers to play the bottom two notes. Get familiar with both and let your playing decide.

Musical notation for BB Box - Ex. 5. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of two flats. The melody consists of quarter notes: B-flat (fret 13), D-flat (fret 11), E-flat (fret 13), F (fret 11), G-flat (fret 12), and A-flat (fret 10), ending with a quarter rest. The bottom staff is a guitar TAB with fret numbers: 13, 11, 13, 11, 12, 10.

Connecting with the 1st Position

By extending the 3rd string down we can easily slide into and out of our BB Box from the first position pentatonic scale.

Musical notation for Connecting with the 1st Position. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of two flats. The melody consists of quarter notes: B-flat (fret 13), D-flat (fret 11), E-flat (fret 13), F (fret 11), G-flat (fret 12), A-flat (fret 10), B-flat (fret 8), C (fret 10), D-flat (fret 10), E-flat (fret 8), F (fret 10), G-flat (fret 12), A-flat (fret 11), B-flat (fret 13), C (fret 11), and D-flat (fret 13). The bottom staff is a guitar TAB with fret numbers: 13, 11, 13, 11, 12, 10, 8, 10, 10, 8, 10, 12, 11, 13, 11, 13.

BB Box - Ex. 5

Here we can make a lick out of that BB Box entrance pretty easily.

Musical notation for BB Box - Ex. 5. The top staff shows a melodic line in G major with a key signature of one flat (F major) and a 4/4 time signature. The notes are G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The bottom staff is a guitar tablature with fret numbers 10, 8, 10, 12, 11, 12, 11. A bracket groups the notes 10, 8, 10, 12.

BB Box - Ex. 6

We can follow that idea all the way to the top of the BB Box

Musical notation for BB Box - Ex. 6. The top staff shows a melodic line in G major with a key signature of one flat (F major) and a 4/4 time signature. The notes are G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The bottom staff is a guitar tablature with fret numbers 10, 8, 10, 12, 11, 13, 11, 13, (13), 11, 13, 11. A bracket groups the notes 10, 8, 10, 12. An arrow labeled 'full' points from fret 13 to fret (13). A quarter note '1/4' is indicated above the final note.

BB Box - Ex. 6

By grabbing just a snippet of the previous lick, we have another very useful BB Box lick fragment to drop in anytime.

Musical notation for BB Box - Ex. 6. The top staff shows a melodic line in G major with a key signature of one flat (F major) and a 4/4 time signature. The notes are G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The bottom staff is a guitar tablature with fret numbers 13, (13), 11, 13. An arrow labeled 'full' points from fret 13 to fret (13). A wavy line indicates a vibrato effect on the final note.

This is a staple of blues and rock soloing from all kinds of great guitarists.

Musical notation for BB Box - Ex. 6. The top staff shows a melodic line in G major with a key signature of one flat (F major) and a 4/4 time signature. The notes are G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The bottom staff is a guitar tablature with fret numbers 13, 13, 13, 13, 11, 13, 13, 11, 13. Three arrows labeled 'full' point from fret 13 to fret 13. A bracket labeled '3' is placed under the notes 11, 13, 13. A wavy line indicates a vibrato effect on the final note.

Bending in the BB Box

Using normal whole step bends and ghost bends we can add a variety of new sounds to our BB Box arsenal. Bending is one of the hallmarks of blues playing so we really need to get used to it if we want to play authentic blues.

Example 1 shows a musical staff in G major (one sharp) and a corresponding guitar tablature. The staff contains four notes: G4, A4, B4, and G4. The first two notes are connected by a slur, and the last two by another slur. The tablature shows the first string starting at fret 13. An arrow labeled 'full' points from fret 13 to a higher pitch. A second arrow labeled 'full' points from fret 13 to a note circled as '(13)', indicating a ghost bend. The tablature is labeled 'T A B' on the left.

Bending - Ex. 1

This first lick showcases those two forms of bending and then simply resolves to the root.

Example 2 shows a musical staff in G major and a corresponding guitar tablature. The staff contains five notes: G4, A4, B4, G4, and E4. The first three notes are slurred together, and the last two are slurred together. The tablature shows the first string starting at fret 13. An arrow labeled 'full' points from fret 13 to a higher pitch. A second arrow labeled 'full' points from fret 13 to a note circled as '(13)'. The tablature then shows fret 11 and then fret 13. The tablature is labeled 'T A B' on the left.

Bending - Ex. 2

Here we get a bit more aggressive, bending several times and ending it with a classic blues bend on the 1st string.

Example 3 shows a musical staff in G major and a corresponding guitar tablature. The staff contains six notes: G4, A4, B4, G4, E4, and G4. The first four notes are slurred together, and the last two are slurred together. The tablature shows the first string starting at fret 13. Three arrows labeled 'full' point from fret 13 to higher pitches. The fourth arrow points from fret 13 to a note circled as '(13)'. The tablature then shows fret 11, followed by a wavy line indicating a vibrato, and then fret 11 with a '1/4' note value. The tablature is labeled 'T A B' on the left.

Bending - Ex. 3

As before, we can walk our BB Box all the way down to the root in our first position pentatonic scale. This time we simply add some tasteful bends as we do.

Example 3 shows a musical staff in G major and a corresponding guitar tablature. The staff contains eight notes: G4, A4, B4, G4, E4, D4, C4, and G4. The first four notes are slurred together, and the last four are slurred together. The tablature shows the first string starting at fret 13. Three arrows labeled 'full' point from fret 13 to higher pitches. The fourth arrow points from fret 13 to a note circled as '(13)'. The tablature then shows fret 11, followed by frets 13, 11, 12, 10, 8, and 10. The tablature is labeled 'T A B' on the left.

Bending - Ex. 4

And here we walk back up from below. It might be just one small part of your fretboard but the BB Box is an absolute must for anyone trying to play blues and rock guitar. It's simple but incredibly effective.

Musical notation for Bending - Ex. 4. The top staff shows a melodic line in G minor with various bends. The bottom staff shows the corresponding fret numbers: 10, 8, 10, 12, 11, 13, 11, 13, 13, (13), 11, 13, 13, 11, 13. Arrows labeled "full" indicate the extent of the bends on the 13th fret notes.

BB Box Jam

Musical notation for BB Box Jam, first system. The top staff shows a melodic line with a tremolo effect. The bottom staff shows fret numbers: 12, 11, 13, and a later 13 with a "full" bend arrow.

Musical notation for BB Box Jam, second system. The top staff shows a melodic line with various bends. The bottom staff shows fret numbers: (13), 11, 13, and 11 with a 1/4 bend arrow.

Musical notation for BB Box Jam, third system. The top staff shows a melodic line with a tremolo effect. The bottom staff shows fret numbers: 13, 11, 13, 11, 12, 10, 8, 10, 10, 8, 10.

Jam Ideas - Ex. 1

One idea to take away from this is to experiment with moving between the 1st position and BB Box. Don't forget where your root is. Depending on what you're trying to do, the root on the 1st string might not be as useful as the same note on the 2nd string.

Musical notation for Jam Ideas - Ex. 1. The top staff shows a melodic line in G minor (one flat) on a treble clef. The bottom staff shows the corresponding guitar fretboard positions for strings T, A, and B. The fret numbers are: T: 8 11 8 11 11 13 11 13; A: 8 11 8 11 13 11 13 11; B: (empty).

Jam Ideas - Ex. 2

Another great idea is to use the blues note on the 14th fret.

Musical notation for Jam Ideas - Ex. 2. The top staff shows a melodic line in G minor with a blues note (F#) on the 14th fret. The bottom staff shows the corresponding guitar fretboard positions for strings T, A, and B. The fret numbers are: T: 13 14 13 11; A: 13 14 13 11; B: 13 11 13.

Trills

Another stylistic lick that is easy to pull off is a simple trill. Quick hammer-ons and pull-offs come together for a unique kind of sound.

Musical notation for Trills. The top staff shows a melodic line in G minor with a trill over the final note. The bottom staff shows the corresponding guitar fretboard positions for strings T, A, and B. The fret numbers are: T: 13 11 13 11 13 11 13 11 13; A: (empty); B: (empty).

Pentatonic Positions Review

Let's review our first and second position pentatonic scales in order to expand our ability to move these around the fretboard effectively.

Musical notation for Pentatonic Positions Review. The top staff shows the first and second position pentatonic scales in G minor, with triplets over the first and last notes of each scale. The bottom staff shows the corresponding guitar fretboard positions for strings T, A, and B. The fret numbers are: T: 8 11 11 8; A: 8 11 8 11; B: 8 11 8 11. The second scale is shown on the next line: T: 11 8 11 8; A: 10 8 10 8; B: 10 8 10 8.

2nd Position Pentatonic

And now the 2nd position pentatonic scale in its entirety.

Musical notation for the 2nd position pentatonic scale. The top staff shows a treble clef with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The scale is written in eighth notes, ascending and then descending, with triplets marked above and below. The bottom staff shows the fingerings for the strings: Treble (T), A, and Bass (B). Fingerings are: T (11, 13), A (10, 13), B (10, 13, 10, 12, 11, 13, 11, 13, 13, 11, 13, 11, 12, 10, 13, 10, 13, 10, 13, 11).

Two-String Movement

Another great exercise to not only practice these positions but moving between them. A simple place to start is limiting yourself to only two strings and exploring the sounds you can get by jumping between the two positions in this one area.

Musical notation for two-string movement. The top staff shows a treble clef with a key signature of two flats. The scale is written in eighth notes, ascending and then descending. The bottom staff shows the fingerings for the strings: Treble (T), A, and Bass (B). Fingerings are: T (13, 11, 8, 11, 10, 8, 10, 12), A (11, 12, 10, 8, 11, 10, 12, 11), B (empty).

3rd and 4th Strings

Musical notation for 3rd and 4th strings. The top staff shows a treble clef with a key signature of two flats. The scale is written in eighth notes, ascending and then descending, with a slur over the first two notes. The bottom staff shows the fingerings for the strings: Treble (T), A, and Bass (B). Fingerings are: T (12, 10, 12, 10, 13, 10, 13, 10, 8), A (8, 10, 10, 8, 10, 13, 10, 8, 10), B (empty).

4th and 5th Strings

Musical notation for 4th and 5th strings. The top staff shows a treble clef with a key signature of two flats. The scale is written in eighth notes, ascending and then descending. The bottom staff shows the fingerings for the strings: Treble (T), A, and Bass (B). Fingerings are: T (8, 10, 8, 10, 13, 10, 13, 10), A (8, 10, 8, 10, 8, 10, 13), B (empty).