

Up to now we've played eighth notes with alternating down and up pick strokes. However, Bill Monroe, and just about every other past and current blue grass mandolin player, often used all do wn-strokes when playing at slow and moderate tempos to make the notes punch out more, to sound louder and more intense. Try the solo to "Wayfaring Stranger" below first with all down-strokes and then with alternating do wns and ups. (Use tremolo on the longer notes.) Notice the dif ferences in sound between the tw o ways of picking. Which do you like bet- ter? Review all the other solos in the book and try them with all do wn-strokes.

Bluesy Solos & The Moveable Blues

Bill Monroe often talk ed about the huge influence blues music had in his v ersion of bluegrass. Certainly many of the themes and forms of American blues are e vident in the blue grass repertoire. But Bill w as also describing his bluesy approach to singing and playing where he included "blue" notes. What are blue notes? We can find the blue notes in any major scale by flattening the third and se venth tones. The blue notes in the C major scale are E \flat and B \flat .

C major scale:	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
tone number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Here's the same scale with blue notes:

C	D	E \flat	F	G	A	B \flat	C
1	2	\flat 3	4	5	6	\flat 7	8

The blue notes in the G major scale are B \flat and F natural.

G major scale:	G	A	B	C	D	E	F \sharp	G
tone number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Here's the same scale with blue notes:

G	A	B \flat	C	D	E	F	G
1	2	\flat 3	4	5	6	\flat 7	8



Photo by Dix Bruce

Bowlback "taterbug" mandolins

If we're playing in the key of C, we can add E \flat and B \flat notes here and there to add to the bluesy flavor of a melody or solo. If we're playing in the key of G, we can add B \flat and F natural notes to add bluesy flavor. The original, unflatted, third and seventh notes might also still be used. "Moveable Blues," inspired by Bill Monroe, uses lots of flatted thirds (B \flat) and sevenths (F natural) from the G major scale. We'll learn it first in the key of G, as shown below, to hear how these flatted thirds and sevenths sound.

Moveable Blues

Key of G

by Dix Bruce

The musical score is divided into four systems, each with a melody line and a guitar accompaniment line. The key signature is one sharp (F#), indicating the key of G major.

- System 1 (Measures 1-4):** The melody starts with a G chord. The guitar accompaniment includes a triplet of notes (5-2-3-4) and a sequence of notes (5-3-3-3-3-6-3-1) with a slur and a 's' marking. Fingerings for the melody include 3 1 2 3, 3 2, 4 2 1 3 2 1 3 2 4 3, and 2 1.
- System 2 (Measures 5-8):** The melody features a C chord. The guitar accompaniment has a sequence of notes (5-5-5-1-2-3-1-2-3) with a slur and a '7' marking, followed by (3-6-5-3-6-5-3-7-5). Fingerings for the melody include 3, 1 1 2, 3 1 3 2 1, and 3 2.
- System 3 (Measures 9-12):** The melody includes G and D7 chords. The guitar accompaniment has a sequence of notes (2-3-3-3-1-3-1-1-3) with a slur, followed by (5-5-5-2-3-4) and (5-5-5-5-5-3-6). Fingerings for the melody include 2 3 3 3 1 3 1 1 3, 3, and 2 4 3 6.
- System 4 (Measures 13-16):** The melody is in the G chord. The guitar accompaniment has a sequence of notes (3-1-5-3-2-5-3-7) with a slur and a '7' marking, followed by (5-5-3-3-3-2-2-2) and (5-5-5-2-3-4). The piece ends with a double bar line and a circled '5' in the guitar line. Fingerings for the melody include 3 1, 3 3, and 5 5 5 2 3 4.

“Moveable Blues” is written in a closed position so we can move it later on. So, all the notes are fretted and suggested fingerings and pick directions are indicated. Stick to these suggestions and it’ll be easier to move the whole melody later. Your pinkie will get some exercise as it frets notes high on the first and fourth strings in m1, m2, m9, and m10.

“Moveable Blues” also includes our first *triplets* , in m3 & m11. With triplets we fit three eighth notes in the space of one beat. Think first of a quarter note. We’d count quarter notes in a 4/4 measure like this: “one, two, three, four,” and each quarter note occupies the space of one beat. If we filled that same measure with eighth notes, we’d fit two eighth notes in the space of each quarter note and we’d count them like this: “one and, two and, three and, four and.” With triplets, we fit *three* notes in the space of one beat and count them like this: “one-trip-let, two-trip-let, three-trip-let, four-trip-let.” We pick a note on each syllable: “one-trip-let.” Listen to “Triplet Demo” on the CD. I suggest that you play triplets with a “down-up-down, down-up-down, down-up-down, down-up-down” picking pattern.

Once you have memorized “Moveable Blues” and its fretting hand position in the key of G, try moving it up the fingerboard to different positions and keys. The key of B \flat , three frets up the fingerboard, is a good place to start. I’m sure you’ll hit some clinkers now and then, but give it a chance. If you get stuck, go back to the G version and review. If you can play it in B \flat , you can play it anywhere you can reach! The obvious next step is the key of B, one more fret up the neck. As a bluegrass mandolinist, you’ll be expected to be able to play in B, so now’s a good time to explore the B position with this and other melodies. Be sure to try A, C, A \flat , D, etc. (If you can’t figure it out in B \flat , drop me an e-mail, dix@musicnow.com, and I’ll send you a copy of the music and TAB.) Once you can move the melody up and down the neck comfortably, try moving the original G version down one string so that your first note is the fourth string fifth fret C. This position will put you in the key of C, and you can play the entire melody (except for two notes). You’ll run out of fingerboard real estate on the last note in m2 and m10. What, oh what shall you do? Improvise! Suggestion: play the next to last note in each measure twice or substitute another note you like. When you have the C melody nailed, moved it up the neck to every key you can reach, C \sharp /D \flat , D, D \sharp /E \flat , E, F, etc., and so on.

If you really want “Moveable Blues” to have that Bill Monroe-esque feel, try playing all the notes, except maybe the triplets, with down-strokes. That’s how Bill got that almost rock and roll intensity from a little acoustic mandolin.