

## Blues Guitar Man Shows How It's Done !

It always sounds really romantic. Imagine the scene - the blues man playing on the street corners just like years gone by . Find out what it's like in reality and additionally what you need to do it effectively . Jim Bruce relates something about his calling as a street blues musician in France . What do you need to play [the blues on the street](#)? All you need is below - the hardware , good locations to play , general tips and that crucial ingredient - attitude!

## OK - Let's Get Started!!

I recall reading somewhere about the way of life of the musicians who travelled around to play the blues on street corners and in parking lots near tobacco warehouses to scrape a living together . They might also play at 'house rent' parties and bars, where often the pay could have been a meal, a few drinks and a place to sleep for one night

As they traveled around from place to place, their playing improved and adapted to the needs of the people who came to hear them. A street musician was at best a distraction from a hard , drab life and at worst, a pan handler, who could be distained and treated badly .

In the blues folk revival of the nineteen sixties, the life of a travelling blues man was romanticized even more. What is the reality of making a living playing blues guitar , and what do we need to make it a success? (I'll take it that you can already play great [blues guitar](#), or at least competently.)

## Do My Clothes Matter?

Without a doubt! Place yourself in the shoes of someone passing through a busy street, confronted with a performer playing an instrument in the open air. The first look they give you is extremely important , no matter how good the sound . Saying that, the music itself must be top class - just because it's street music doesn't mean it can be less than the best it can be . Quite the reverse, the music needs to be the

highest quality, so that people are pleased by the feeling.

Your visual impression at first sight speaks volumes. You're not a bum, but a musician, so give respect to yourself and this gives respect to your audience. Additionally helps a lot if you are a little different from the rest of the crowd. I favor a black suit, white shirt, thin black tie finished off with a wide brimmed black hat.

This way of presenting myself is like the old sepia record company photos of classic blues men, and is also a little different in today's world. Give yourself a name (possibly invent an alter ego) and write your new name on a poster displayed on your amp, for example .

## **Some Of The Essential Equipment**

Here's a list of some things I consider to be vital for a street playing blues guitar man: Guitar (duuuuh!) - Something To Sit On - Amp and mic - Guitar tuner - Trolley - Cool Sunglasses!

It goes without saying , you can add any item you feel you could need, but don't forget that you'll need to transport everything. I use a shopping trolley and strap the items to it with elastic chords . I can be ready to travel in under 5 minutes (if I have to!)

## **What Kind Of Amp Should I get?**

A basic amp with 2 channels, which assumes that you will be singing. I began with a microphone on a stand, but it was too heavy and large. I now favour a microphone attached to my head, which costs around \$50 for a reasonable sound .

My current amplifier is a 30 watt job bought from Thomann. It has a rechargeable battery inside and it takes around six hours to recharge, which allows a playing time (both channels ) of between 6 to 8 hours, depending on how loud you play and sing. It's quite heavy at 10 kilos, hence my little trolley.

Channel one has simple tone and volume controls - this is for the voice, and the other channel features volume, gain, low, medium, and high gain controls. This 2nd channel is ideal for balancing the string sounds of an acoustic guitar. The cost is excellent value at \$120.

## **The Guitar**

Keep in mind whereabouts you will be using your guitar. Ask yourself - could it be knocked? It's very possible! Could it get stolen? These things happen - all is possible. One time I mislaid a favourite guitar on the subway by mistake, as I was feeling sleep and distracted. It goes without saying that I never saw it again.

By luck, it's easy to purchase a perfectly good guitar nowadays without it costing an arm and a leg. For some time I played a Vintage parlor guitar, complete with integral Shadow equalizer and tuner unit, which cost around \$200!

My present street guitar is a Martin 000X1AE, which uses a braided strip bug under the saddle and volume/tone controls inside the sound hole. The spruce top is not varnished (or hardly at all ) and could be quite prone to marking, but the neck, and rest of the construction is some kind of man made material - not wood at all!

Martin don't say what it is, but do say that it's not plastic or a wood pulp derivative. No matter what it is, it's very resistant. I've banged it many times without any evidence of the contact. I carry it in a soft carrying case strapped to my back.

The sound is all Martin through and through, with very deep basses. This 000 size guitar is perfect for finger picking, which is all I do . Current price is about \$500 - go for it ! (No, I'm not an affiliate .)

## **Where Are The Good Places To Play?**

This is a tough one, as it depends on your city. Let me tell you how I do it. First of all , if you see a musicians performing outdoors, then it's safe to assume that it's at least

accepted by the police. After that, there's nothing left to do except try it out!

I move about a fair bit and watch people when they cross intersections, etc, or move through a pedestrian shopping precinct. It helps a lot if people can stand around without impeding the natural flow of other pedestrians, or motor traffic .

I often perform close to markets in the city centre - this is an ideal spot for a street blues man .

## **Let's Set Up And Play Something**

I like to have something at my back (removing the possibility of someone doing something suspect behind you, or trying to take something while you play. Remain vigilant, this is the city after all!)

You will get some funny looks when preparing to play, as folks are really curious. It may take a little gumption when you first start to do it, but gets easier each time. It's better if you take an attitude to your activity. When setting up, I'm generally smiling and chatting to people and try to give the impression that I should be there. It's my street, it's where I make my living and I have every right to go there. Of course, you don't have any right to be there at all, but if you play OK, and not oppressively loud, the police will (probably ) let you stay, as it brings a little interest to the general ambiance.

Start with a song that's simple and attractive - it won't help your cause if you try and perform to your maximum ability and make a mess of it! Play to seventy five per cent of your capabilities until you get into it. In that way, your playing will be sure .

## **Is It Possible To Make Good Money?**

Living from playing blues guitar is always tricky and can only be managed by earning relatively small amounts from several similar activities. In my case , street performance has really played a significant role .

That said, playing on the street just for tips will not make much. You need to offer something else, like a CD at a really good price. This often doubles the amount earned with street performances. Some of my other activities include live gigs and guitar tuition, and I get many contacts from my street playing. Sometimes people ask me about blues guitar lessons and some others offer me gigs at functions, parties and in their bars and cafes. I'm happy to say that [blues music](#) is the way I make my living .