

Red House — Jimi Hendrix

12 Measures of Blues Magic

The intro to “Red House” is only 12 measures long, but Hendrix packs it with just about all the essentials. Major pentatonic ideas, minor pentatonic licks, and blues phrases. Singing bends. Wide vibrato. Long, sustained notes followed by sudden bursts of speed. Every phrase has its own personality, yet the entire intro flows naturally through the 12-bar blues progression.

Let’s break down why these 12 measures pack such a punch—and how Hendrix creates so much music from such simple blues vocabulary.

Phrase 1.

Right out of the gate, Hendrix is locked into the 12-bar blues form. In measure one, he begins with a repeating triplet figure built from a B $\flat$ 7 voicing. Across the G, B, and high E strings, the notes are the fifth, flat seven, and major third: F, A $\flat$, and D. He repeats that triplet figure for two measures, then moves the entire shape down a half step. Now the notes are E, G, and D $\flat$, outlining an A7 chord and creating tension as he approaches the next phrase. The figure resolves on the downbeat of measure three with a powerful B $\flat$ power chord. From there, Hendrix goes directly into three whole-step bends on the B string, bending the flat seven up to the tonic.

Triplets figure based on a B $\flat$ 7 Down a 1/2 step to B $\flat$ 7

Whole Step Bends on the downbeats (isolate this lick.....get it to flow)

T
A
B

In just the opening four measures, he establishes the form, outlines the harmony, creates tension with a chromatic chord movement, and then answers it with one of the most essential sounds in blues guitar: the flat seven bending up to the root.

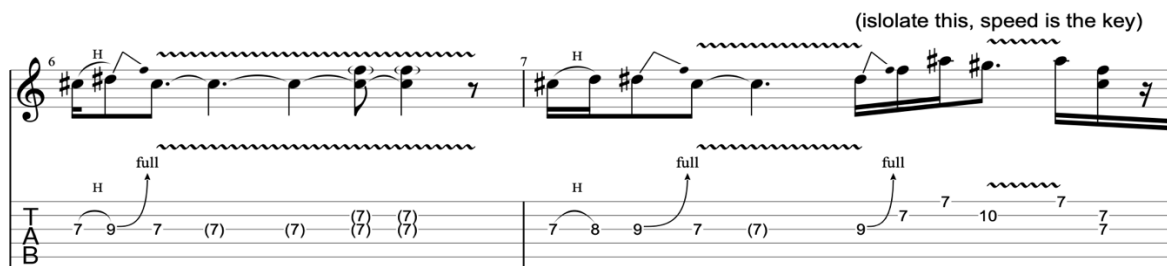
Phrase 2 — Short Licks, Huge Vibe

At the beginning of measures five and six, Hendrix plays the same quick hammer-on and bend figure. He hammers onto the E at the ninth fret of the G string, gives it a quick bend, and then lands back on the seventh fret—the flat third of the scale. Each time he reaches that flat third, he applies a wide, expressive vibrato. It is a very short phrase, but it has a tremendous amount of attitude and feel.

After the second hammer-on lick, Hendrix immediately launches into a fast little flurry: a quick bend on the G string, followed by the seventh fret on the B and high E strings, up to the tenth fret, and then back to seven.

This happens very quickly, which is why I wrote **“Isolate This — Speed Is the Key”** above the measure.

Practice this lick very slowly until the movements feel smooth and connected. The goal is to come out of those hammer-on phrases and flow naturally into the fast final lick of Phrase 2.

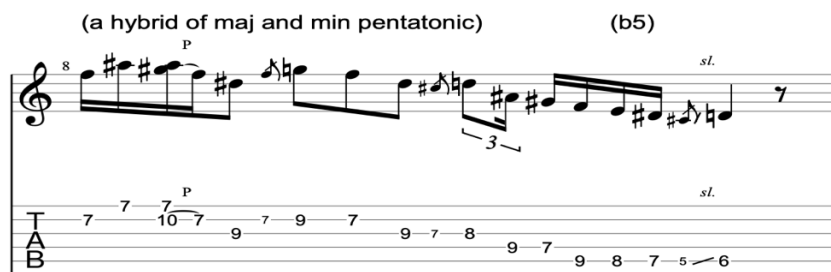


Phrase 3 — Major and Minor Pentatonic

The lick begins with Hendrix incorporating the major sixth on the B string at the ninth fret. Moving to the G string, he plays an enclosure around the major third—ninth fret, seventh fret, and then landing on the eighth fret.

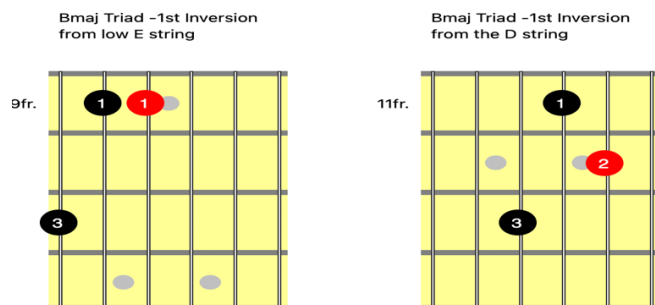
From the root on the D string, he descends through the blues scale, including the flat five on the A string, and finishes with a quick slide back into the major third.

In one smooth descending run, Hendrix moves effortlessly between major pentatonic sweetness and minor blues tension. Brilliant.



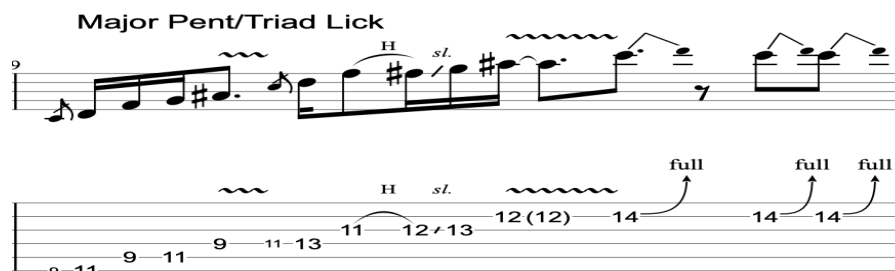
Phrase 4 — First-Inversion Triads or the Major Pentatonic

I like to picture this phrase revolving around two first-inversion major triad shapes—one beginning on the low E string and the other beginning at the eleventh fret of the D string.



Within each shape, Hendrix hammers from the fifth up to the major sixth. That added sixth gives the phrase its sweeter major-pentatonic flavor. Organize it visually around those two first-inversion triad shapes, incorporate the hammer ons and slides

The end of this measure, the 3 quick bends on the B string 14th fret, flow right into phrase 5.

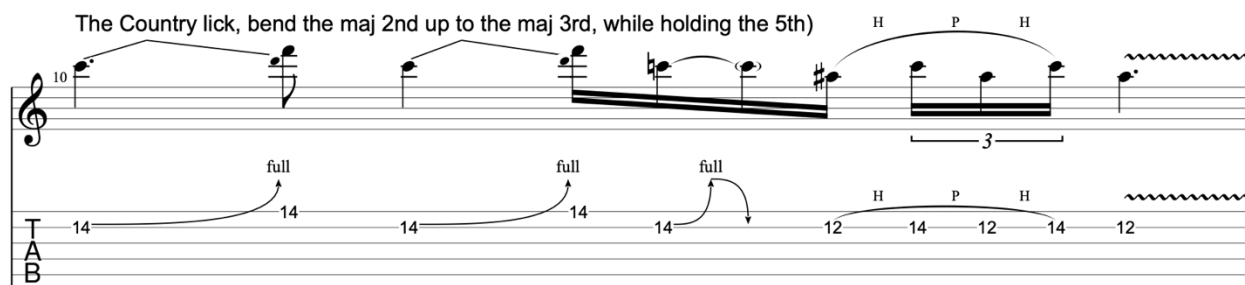


Phrase 5 — The Country Lick

I like to call Phrase 5 “the country lick.”

Hendrix holds the F $\sharp$ firmly in place while bending the C $\sharp$ —the major second—up to the major third. Finishing off the phrase with a quick D-to-B pull-off on the B string, giving the lick a tight, bluesy ending

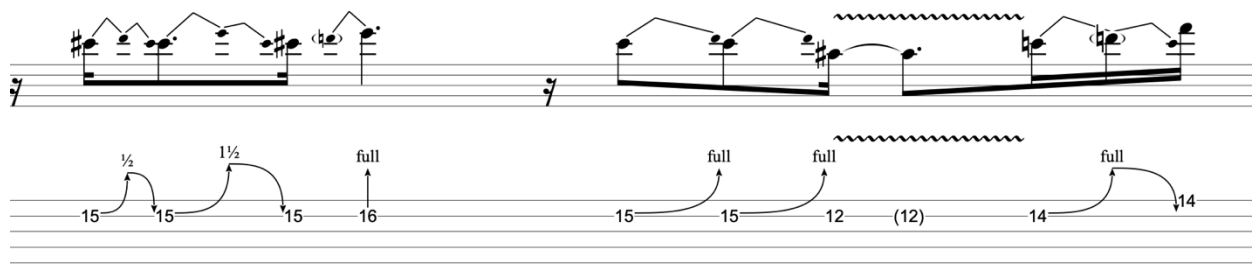
Isolate the lick and play it a few times, and you will hear a distinct pedal-steel quality—the kind of sound country guitarists use frequently. I am not saying that is necessarily where Hendrix got the idea, but the lick definitely has that flavor.



Phrase 6 — The Classic Flat-Third Overbend

Phrase 6 features one of the most expressive sounds in blues-rock guitar: the flat third overbend going up a step and a 1/2, then released back to the root.

Think of the kind of lick Jimmy Page plays in classic “Whole Lotta Love” solo break.



It has that same raw, vocal quality.

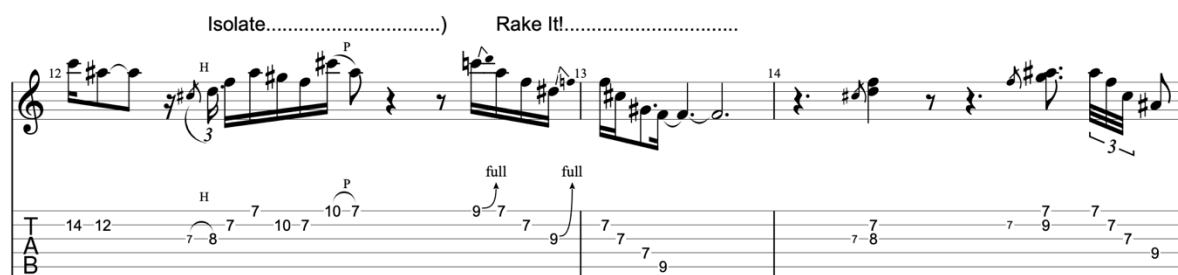
It is a classic blues lick, but in Hendrix’s hands it becomes intensely emotive.

Phrase 7 — Frantic Blues Stabs

In Phrase 7, Hendrix returns to the root-position pentatonic shape for a series of frantic, Buddy Guy–style blues stabs.

Take these slowly at first. Work out the fingerings and make sure each short lick flows cleanly before bringing it up to speed.

When the phrase crosses the strings with one note per string, rake the pick upward. That small picking adjustment will help the lick flow much more naturally.



There you have it—12 measures of some of the best blues guitar ever played.

Take each phrase slowly, work out the details, and listen to the original repeatedly. The more you hear Hendrix’s phrasing, timing, vibrato, and dynamics, the more naturally these ideas will begin to come through in your own playing.