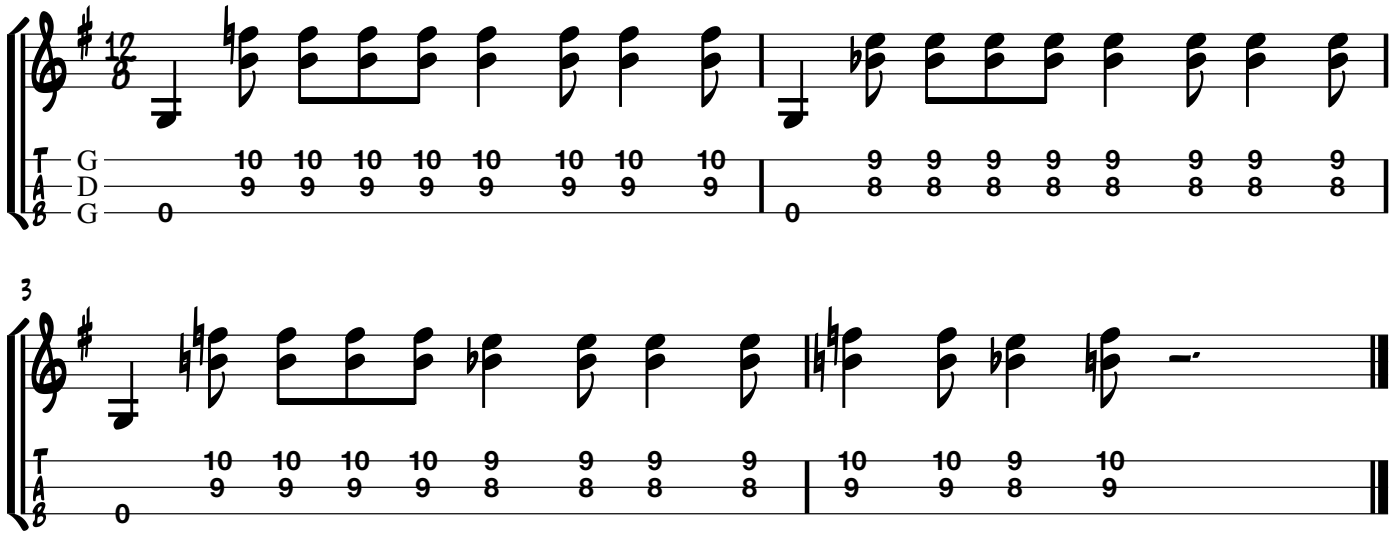
Riff no 1

In the style of Robert Johnson



Starting with an easy one. This riff, typical of what Robert Johnson would have done on Kind Hearted Woman, uses tritones and a triplet/shuffle feel to create and resolve tension, setting up a shift to the IV chord (The double stop on the 8th and 9th frets is the tritone in the C7 chord).

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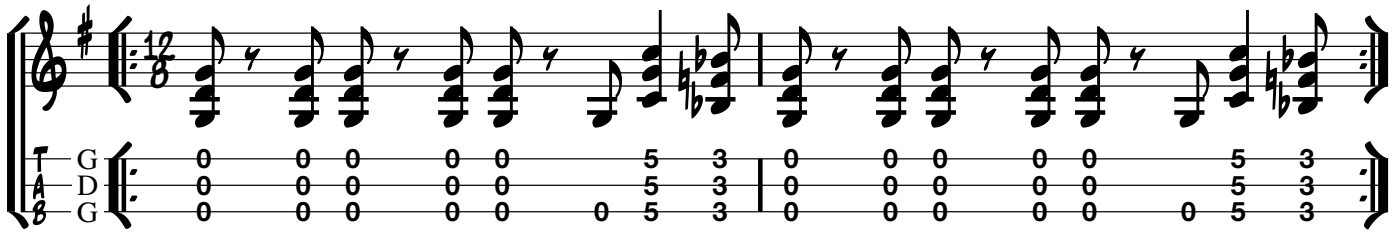
Riff no 2

The "I'm A Man" Riff



This classic will be known to many but I just couldn't leave it out.s

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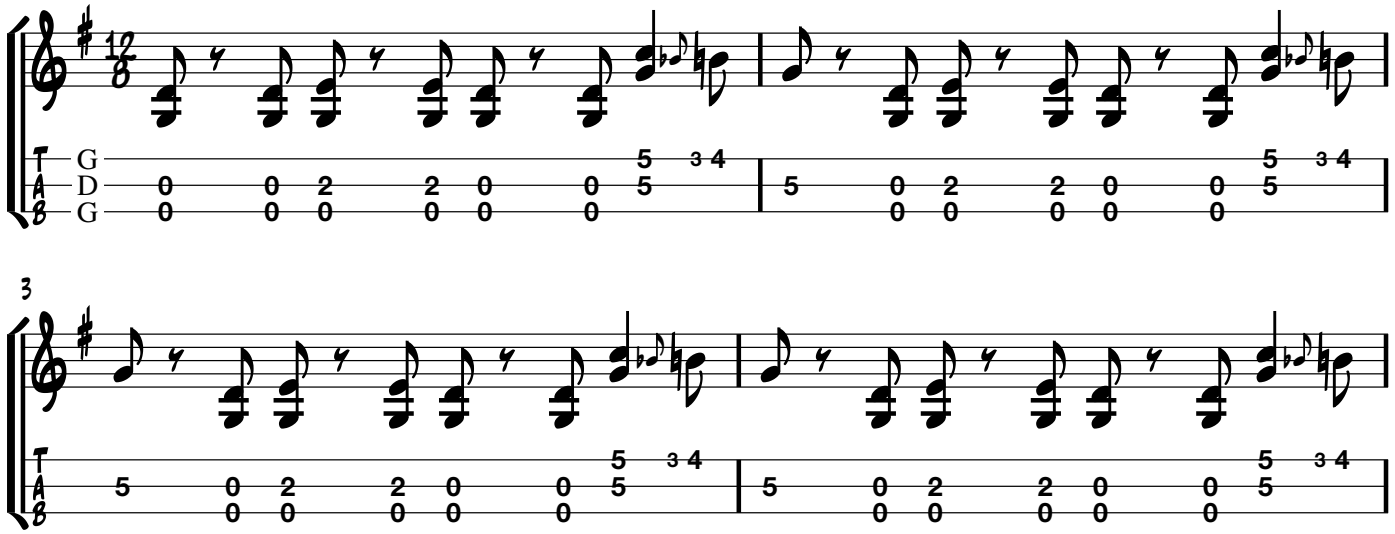
Riff No 3

"I'm a Man" variation



This variation on the classic "I'm a Man" riff was used in Muddy Water's version, Mannish Boy. The main lick, although used at the end of the bar here can be thrown in just about anywhere.

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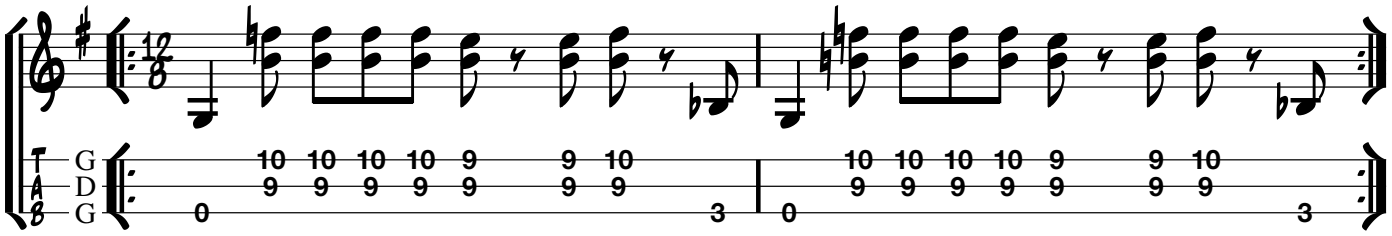
Riff no 4

Crossroads/Terraplane Blues/Phonograph Blues....



This basic idea was used in Crossroads, Terraplane Blues and a stack of others. The movement from the flat 7 to the 6 note was often played as a rhytmic figure in the bass, Johnson got it from listening to the boogie-woogie piano players in his many travels. It would eventually make it's way to Chuck Berry's playing and now everybody does it. Here he's using it up the neck as a fill between his vocal lines.

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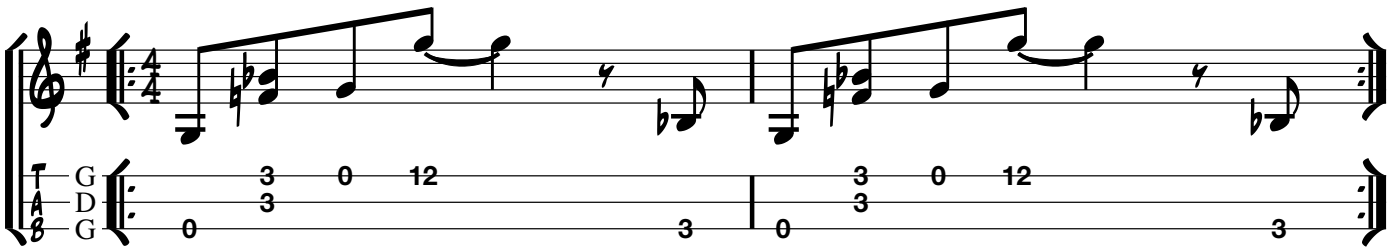
Riff no 5

Death Letter Blues / Little Red Rooster



Most of the riffs in this package are in 12/8 time, giving them a triplet/shuffle feel. This one is a straight 4/4, typical of Son House and one of the things that drives his playing so hard, more like a Rock player would. He played it in a few different tunes, most notably in Death Letter Blues. Wille Dixon (no saint himself apparently) stole it and turned it into a shuffle in his classic Little Red Rooster.*s*

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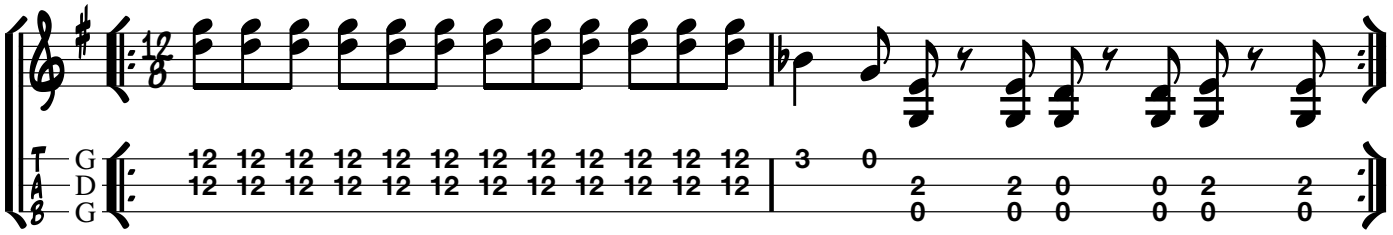
Riff No 6

Elmore James



This classic from Elmore James switches from a triplet feel to a classic shuffle in the bottom end in much the same way that Robert Johnson would in his intros. This is a whole lot simpler and more suited to the electric guitar. This riff is used by slide players more than probably any other. It's easy enough on the 6 string but the big jump back to the 3rd fret on a 3 string will take some practice.

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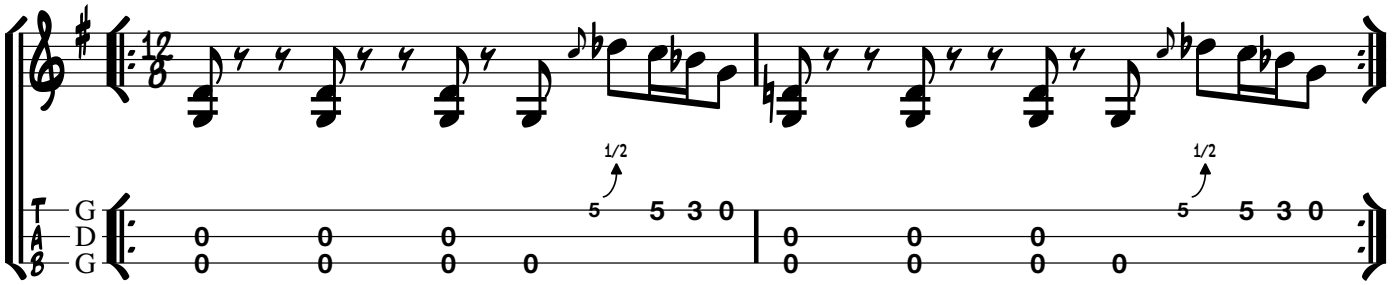
Riff No 7

Catfish Blues



This riff probably pre-dates the blues itself. Certainly the song, Catfish Blues was played long before anyone got a chance to record it. If you listen closely you can hear how it's related to what we now call the "I'm A Man" riff that you learned earlier. The trick with this one is the quick release back to the tonic after you bend up to the flat 5 devil's note.

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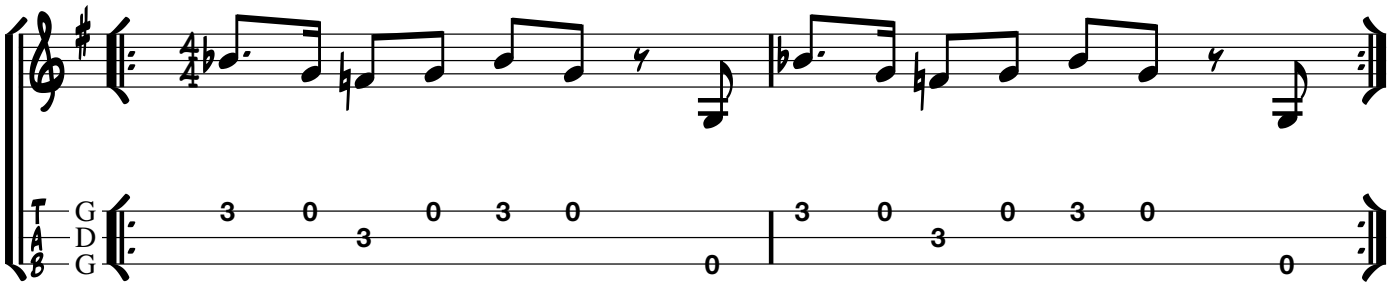
Riff No 8

Rollin' and Tumblin'



Another old song that did the rounds early on. This one is from Muddy Waters' playing and simplified for the 3 string. You'll hear similar ideas on Robert Johnson's Travelling Riverside Blues.

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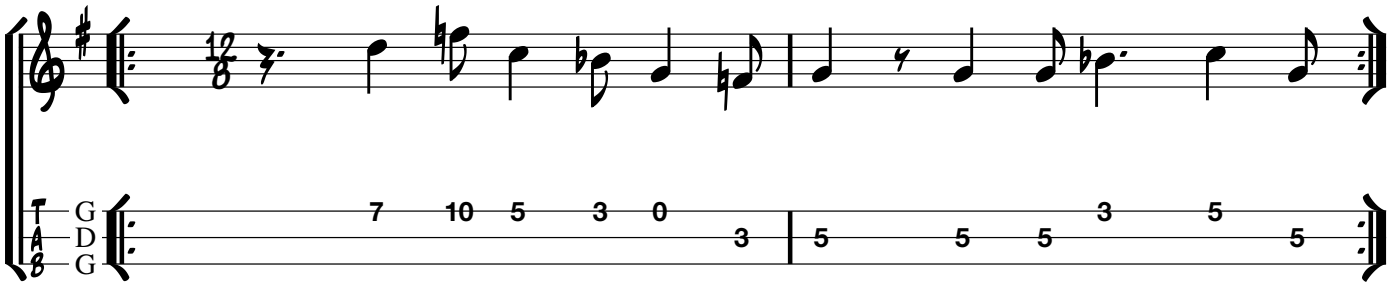
Riff No 9

John Lee Hooker



The great John Lee Hooker used this one a lot, most notably in Dimples it's also very similar to Boom Boom. It's a classic minor pentatonic boogie style riff that's used every time you think of the great man.

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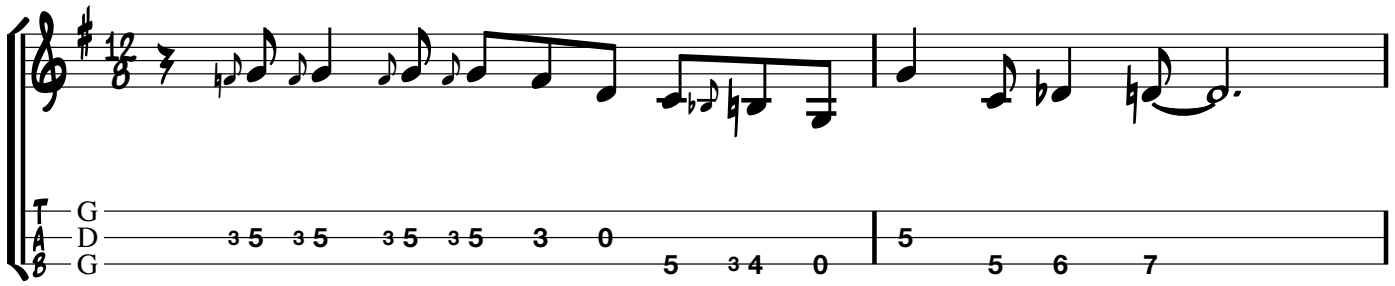
Riff No 10

The Jimmy Reed Turnaround



Jimmy Reed was one of the great Chicago Blues players and this riff typifies the influence that he had on this style of guitar playing.

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