

## How to Make Your Blues Playing More Rhythmically Interesting

by [Dennis Winge](#)

When you're playing a shuffle blues, there's an underlying triplet on each beat. Thus you could call it 12/8 as well. If you want to be able to vary up your rhythms greatly, the best way is to dig into the triplets in lots of different combinations, of which, we shall see, there are many.

Rather than talk about all 12 subdivisions over 4 beats, we will at first limit our focus to rhythms within 1 beat. Specifically we will look at subdividing the triplet further, into 6 subdivisions. Since some musicians do not read music, we shall represent these graphically rather than in standard notation. As per Figure 1 below, whether you choose to count in 6, in 2, or in 3 is up to you. The reality is that all 6 subdivisions fall with one single beat of 4/4 (more on this below).

The important thing is to hear these rhythms and incorporate them into your improvisation. All examples can be heard in the following video:

[https://youtu.be/\\_uxsr5P9omg](https://youtu.be/_uxsr5P9omg)

Notice that, as a starting point, we have chosen 4 onsets per 6 possible beats. You can also apply the concept outlined here to any number of onsets per bar, except 6 wherein there would be no room for variety.

Notice that below we always have an onset present on the first beat. This doesn't always need to be the case. By removing the downbeat and combing rhythmic options, this concept can easily be taken to an infinite variety of rhythms depending on how they are strung together.

**Figure 1: Possible combinations of 4 onsets over 6 beats that include "1"**

In 6	1	2	3	4	5	6
In 2	1	&	a	2	&	a
In 3	1	&	2	&	3	&
Triplets	1		&		a	
a)	x		x		x	x
b)	x		x	x	x	
c)	x	x	x		x	
d)	x		x	x		x
e)	x	x		x	x	
f)	x	x		x		x



x		x	x		x		x	x		x	
	x	x		x		x		x	x		x
#5											
x	x		x		x		x	x		x	
	x	x		x		x	x		x		x
#6											
x	x		x		x	x		x		x	
x		x		x		x	x		x		x

Each of the 6 variations of the Afro-Cuban clave are derived by changing the position of one of the prior clave's onsets.

Starting at 2:58 in the video, each one of these is demonstrated – first as is, then its inverse.

In the final segment of the video, from 4:05 to the end, an improvisation of all the above concepts is demonstrated.

Have fun digging into these triplets. Perhaps you will never hear the blues the same way again!