

# Kind Hearted Woman Blues

Recorded Monday, November 23, 1936

in San Antonio, Texas

(SA 2580-1)

The first song at the first session contains the only solo that Johnson recorded. This may seem surprising in light of his vaunted instrumental expertise, however, his entire repertoire is overflowing with classic Delta blues licks, riffs, and fills.

“Kind Hearted Woman” is an excellent introduction to the essential techniques of Robert Johnson’s standard-tuning style: descending turnaround, diminished chord forms, and a steady “ground rhythm” provided by his thumping thumb. (Note: chord names and notes will refer to the chords in parentheses. In addition, except where noted, use your thumb for the bass notes [down stems] and a combination of the middle and ring fingers to strum [upstroke] or pluck the notes on the treble strings.)

## FIGURE 1

### Study

The intro uses a combination of dominant 7th, diminished, and minor 6th chords derived from one basic chord shape blended with a descending pedal tone sequence to form a “double turnaround.” Note how they tastefully imply I–IV–I–V chord changes. These seamless patterns occur throughout Johnson’s repertoire and have become a part of virtually every blues guitarist’s lexicon.

### Performance

Place your fingers thusly for the A7 chord in measure 1 (from low to high): index, ring, middle, and pinky. When you get to the A°7 chord on beat 3, tighten up your formation by sliding your ring, middle, and pinky fingers down one fret. When you get to the Dm6/A chord on beat 5 (actually begun on the upbeat of beat 4), slide the same three fingers down one more fret, all the while maintaining your index finger on fret 7 (A, the root note). This may require a bit of shifting, but it definitely is possible. If you have problems, you can always grab this chord with your middle, ring, index, and pinky fingers on strings 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively.

In measure 2, move your pinky down to fret 5 on string 1 and leave it there as a pedal tone while you descend on string 4 with your ring and middle fingers through beat 3. Beat 4 requires some fancy footwork (*finger work!*) to access that Dm/F form. Barre across fret 2 with your index finger and place your middle finger on the F note at fret 3. You will now have your barring finger in place for the snappy hammer and pull-off (via your middle finger, which must make a quick jump from string 4 on the upbeat of beat 4).

In measure 3, play the E7 chord with your index and ring fingers on the G# and D notes, respectively, leaving your middle finger for the B note on fret 2. It has to be done this way in order to allow the high notes to sustain over top of the E5 (“blues” power chord) underneath. This may be a stretch for us mortals—take a look at the length of Johnson’s fingers in the photo booth shot. Did someone say a giant spider is crawling across the fingerboard?