

# MISSISSIPPI DELTA BLUES: ROBERT JOHNSON

This lesson and tablature is excerpted from the book *Robert Johnson (Guitar Signature Licks)* by **Dave Rubin**. Hal Leonard Corp. # 695264, Book/CD pack \$22.95 (US).

## LOVE IN VAIN BLUES

**DAL 402-1**

Words and Music by Robert Johnson  
(Recorded Sunday, June 20, 1937 in Dallas, Texas)

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### Intro and Verse 1 **AUDIO CLIP**

Due to the prominent cover of "Love In Vain Blues" by the Rolling Stones in 1969 it has received an extra measure of attention. On its own merits, however, it occupies a unique spot in the Robert Johnson canon. First off, it is the only song he recorded in open G tuning, which is doubly unusual because it was such a common tuning for acoustic country blues. In addition, though a 12-bar blues, it is his only progression that incorporates II-V chord changes. Lastly, the recording from the CD box set contains the only known snippet of Johnson speaking as he introduces the song with, "I wanna go on with our next one myself." What was he referring to? We will never know for sure, but perhaps it was simply a matter that he did not want to stop the session yet and was ready to keep rolling.

The 4-measure intro is, structurally, the classic Robert Johnson double turnaround. Measures 1 and 2, though, contain a descending double-stop pattern on strings 1 and 2 that does not appear anywhere else in his music. It is interesting to note that at this point in his development he had found a way to reduce his chordal turnarounds to the bare minimum. Measures 3 and 4 utilize the descending pedal-point pattern that resolves to a D7 chord and functions as the turnaround in measures 11 and 12 for verses 1-3.

All four verses contain the following arrangement: I = 4 measures, IV = 2 measures, I = 2 measures, II = 1 measure, V = 1 measure, I = 1 measure, V = 1 measure. All of the changes are built around the appropriate chord form with very little left-hand embellishment. Note that Johnson throws in the V chord as a substitute for beats 3 and 4 of measure 5 (I chord).

Open G Tuning, Up 1/2 Step:

① = D#      ④ = D#

② = B#      ⑤ = G#

③ = G#      ⑥ = D#

# Love in Vain Blues (Robert Johnson)

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Open G Tuning, Up 1/2 Step

## Intro

Moderately ♩ = 89 (♩ = ♩<sup>3</sup>)

\*\* Chord symbols reflect implied tonality. \*\*\* downstemmed notes only

\*\* G G<sup>7</sup> D7 G G<sup>7</sup>/F C/E Cm/E<sup>b</sup> D7

*mf*  
w/ fingers

\*\*\* P.M. throughout

## Verse 1

G

C

† Barre your index finger at the 2nd fret each time you play the C chord throughout this song.

G<sup>7</sup> D7 G A7

D7 G G<sup>7</sup>/F C/E Cm/E<sup>b</sup> D7