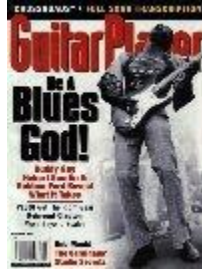


HAND ME DOWN BLUES

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Creating new lines from Cream-era Clapton licks



By Andy Ellis

"Borrow, rework, borrow, rework". This is the mantra of the blues gods. Muddy Waters, B.B King, John Lee Hooker - in fact, all the giants - internalized music they heard as kids and then played it their own way? They didn't reinvent the wheel, they simply gave it a new spin. And that's all you have to do. Developing your own blues guitar style is a straightforward process consisting of two steps : First, discover the essential elements of the blues-its rhythms, harmonies, melodies, and texture - by imitating your favorite players as accurately as you can. The second step (one all the greats take, but others commonly neglect) requires that you recombine the elements in a way that tells *your* story.



The Template Technique

One potent way to develop your own voice is to make this pact with yourself. Each time you cop a line from one of your heroes, you'll take the time to craft *and practice* two related, but different, phrases. Latch onto an idea—a rhythmic pattern, a harmonic shape, a physical gesture, a melodic fragment—within the line, and use this idea in two other ways. Eventually such reworking becomes instinctive. What starts as a methodical exercise becomes a creative habit.



Eric Clapton borrowed heavily from the greats—Hubert Sumlin and Freddie King, in particular—hot-rodged their lines, and then, with Cream, used his supercharged blues to change the sound of rock guitar. It is fitting that we explore our "one classic phrase begets a pair of new ones" concept using Clapton's Creamera blues lines as templates. Be sure to record background chords for each example so you can hear the lines in their appropriate harmonic context.

Superimposed Triads

Clapton played several variations of Ex. 1a in "Strange Brew" (from *Disraeli Gears*). Notice that the phrase begins with a 2nd inversion C triad arpeggiated against the background D9. Two of the C triad's three notes are D9 chord tones: E, the 9, and C, the 67. The remaining note, G, sets up a restless I I sound against the harmony. Using triads this way is a great idea. They're easy to visualize and grab, and, though tame by themselves, they can generate intriguing tone colors when superimposed over other chords.

Ex. 2a

♩ = 112-124

E7(7)

Let's borrow this lick's rhythmic structure and melodic contour to craft Ex. 2b, but rather than starting with a whole-step bend into B, we'll stretch into it from a half-step below. Bar 2's first two beats are straight out of Grant Green's blues bag, but the line ends with the same Clapton approved whole-step bend we saw in Ex. 1c. In this case, we're nailing E7, so the bend targets G#. The contrast between G4 and G#-the 6³ and 3 of E7-is particularly juicy because the two notes occur within the same measure. In Ex. 1b, we hovered two frets above the blues box. In 2b, we're two frets below it. The message? You can extend the four-fret blues box by two frets in either direction. Use these licks as passkeys to blues-box extensions.

Ex. 2b

♩ = 112-124

E7(7)

Another lick-hunting tip: When you find a cool move, try it in another octave. Look what happens when we drop our "Outside Woman Blues" line down an octave (Ex. 2c). Thicker strings mean no bending, so hammers and slides provide the grease. The concluding tritone (D-G#) ties the phrase tightly to E7 by sounding the chord's 6⁷ and 3.

Ex. 2c

♩ = 112-124

E7(7)

Just think-if you took each lick you know and moved it up or down an octave, you'd have twice as many phrases. It's one of those "duh" ideas that's easy to overlook. Chances are you'll have to adapt a line when you move it-change its fingering, swap bends for slurs, move along the fretboard differently, and so forth-but that's good for two reasons. One, the new lick will take on its own character, and, two, solving fretboard puzzles makes you a better player. Try it.

Change the Venue

Ex. 3a is the elegant turnaround Clapton used in "Sitting on Top of the World," from *Wheels of Fire*. Play *dm* with a fat, squawky humbucker tone. Notice how five notes get vibrato. Fortunately, it is a slow 12/8

blues, so you have plenty of time to caress the strings. The grace-note pull-off (bar 2, beat one) is a signature Clapton move.

In Ex. 3b, we make a template from Ex. 3a's chords, rhythm, and melodic contour. Notice how the notes in bar 1 remain in the same register as before, but are located on a lower string set. Where previously all the notes fell within the third position, the turnaround now encompasses the fifth, seventh, eighth, and tenth positions. To get around the fretboard smoothly, we have to add slides-cool. Featuring quarter-bends, the sweet moves 2's second and third beats are right out of Clapton's amazing blues playing in "Sleepy Time Time" (*Fresh Cream*). Beat one's quick minor-third pull-off, however, is pure B.B. King.

Once you learn a turnaround such as this one, find fresh ways to interpret it. Ex. 3c illustrates what happens when we nudge the phrase in a country direction. The melody remains virtually the same, but this time we harmonize it where possible. Dig the whammified minor sixth on bar 1's third beat! Beat four's bend-one-string-against-two-others wrench suggests a pedal-steel guitar. Release the bend carefully in bar 2 so that beat one has a honky-tonk whine. Notice how the concluding minor seventh supplies D7#9's root and 67.

On "Wheels of fire, Clapton launched his "White Room" solo using the moves in Ex. 4a. The tricky parts are at the end of bar 1, ere you hold C absolutely steady while adding vibrato to the A bend, and in bar 2, ere you keep C ringing as you release e whole-step bend.

Ex. 3c

♩ = 44-48

G7(17) C9(IV7) G7(17) D7^{#9}(V7)

Ex. 4b precisely duplicates the previous rhythm. But this time, hold the whole-step bend for a total of five beats while sustaining a tangy major second above it. Be generous with the whammy Drop the same grip to the seventh position (bar 2), and you're rewarded with pedal-steel lick composed of D pentatonic scale tones.

Ex. 4a

♩ = 112-118

D D/C D/B B \flat 5 G5 D D/C

This three-bar phrase starts salty and ends sweet. As in this instance, a reworked lick will often suggest a new background progression. Great—a double payoff.

Like Ex. 4b, Ex. 4c begins with a D7 arpeggio that's sustained for five beats, but this time, no bends. Fretting the notes sets us up for the cool soul-jazz maneuver that caps the phrase. As jazzy as it is, see how closely this three-bar line resembles Clapton's original?

Ex. 4b

♩ = 112-118

D D/C G G \flat Bm

Hammered Tritones

Ex. 5a stems from the riff Clapton played in "Sleepy Time Time" from *Live Cream*. (This growling live version differed substantially from his studio riff, which featured a singing melody on the second and third strings.) Focus on the hammered tritone in the first beat of bars I and 2. It makes a strong arrival point to C7, the 17.

Ex. 4c

Rather than approach the tritone from below, as Clapton did, let's plunge into it from above. Ex. 5b illustrates. The chromatic G-G9-F(5-65-4) adds spice, and the quarter-bend puts you somewhere between minor and major - Clapton's preferred zone-for a heartbeat.

Ex. 5a

We're not limited to hitting the 17 tritone.

Ex. 5c targets the tritone in F9, the IV7, with the same hammer as before. While it's the same *physical* move, the musical results differ: Hammering into the I7, we shift from 63 to 3. Hammering into the IV7, however, we shift from 6 to 67. The same thing happens in Ex. 5d, where we nail the V7 by hammering into G9's tritone. Try linking the G9, F9, and C7 moves into a V7IV7-17 turnaround. See how one idea gleaned from a phrase-in this case, hammering into a tritone-can inspire new licks and even extended passages?

Ex. 5b

Ex. 5c

Take It Out

Ex. 6a is inspired by a lick Clapton played in "Politician," on *Live Cream, Vol. II*. The key here is the

major-second dissonance that's made especially gnarly with massive Marshall distortion. Watch the *letting* marking-keep your 1st and 3rd fingers planted on the fretboard throughout beat one.

Ex. 5d

♩ = 82-84

G^b(V7)

For Ex. 6b, let's graft the major-second dissonance to another favorite Clapton move-the slippery, position-shifting lick (beats two, three, and four) that appears in nearly every solo he plays. Though it's quick, the quarter-bend is essential.

Ex. 6a

♩ = 82-84

D7(17)

let ring - - - - -

In Ex. 6c, hold the major-second for another beat to really get the point across. Beat three's hammered double-stop adds a country flavor, while beat four's pulled double-stop has a '60s soul-jazz vibe.

Ex. 6b

♩ = 82-84

D7(17)

let ring - - - - -

Why stop there? Lees move our major-second dissonance to strings two and three, and develop an entire lick around this single grip (EL 6d). Don't lift your fingers from the strings-just follow the descending notes as if you're riding on train tracks. Follow the accents and slide markings *very* carefully, and keep those major seconds ringing as indicated. Some slapback echo (40 to 60ms delay, with no regeneration) makes the ride even wilder AU this jangle from one "Politician" lick.

Ex. 6d

♩ = 82-84

D7(17)

let ring - - - - -

w/ bar

Eric Clapton's Tools

By Art Thompson

"Clapton Is God" graced many a structure in the late '60s, and for good reason-he practically wrote the book on how to play electric blues-rock guitar. Attaining a credible Clapton sound requires that you first determine which period in his long career you like best. In his early years with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, Clapton used a late-'50s Gibson Les Paul Standard through a 45-watt, model- 1962 Marshall 2x12 combo. Part of the secret here is that Clapton's amp was equipped with KT66 output tubes, which have a more refined midrange and clearer top end than either EL34s or 6L6s.

With Cream, Clapton went to high-volume heaven with 100-watt Marshall heads and 4x12 cabs. He also used a Vox wah-wah and, occasionally, a fuzz. After his Les Paul was stolen, Clapton played a '61 SG-style Les Paul, and then a Gibson ES-335 for Cream's farewell concert.

With Blind Faith, Clapton used a Gibson Firebird through a Fender Showman. He then switched to maple-fretboard Strats through Fender tweed Champs during his Derek & The Dominos/Layla period. Both setups yielded tones that rate among Clapton's best.

After years of touring with Fender Lace Sensor-equipped Strats (likely for noise considerations) and Soldano SLO 100-watt amps, Clapton has recently been seen performing with a Gibson ES-335 and-yep-tweed Fender amps.



BUDGET CLAPTON

Guitars: Fender Standard Stratocaster (\$400), Epiphone Les Paul Studio (\$659). **Amps:** Crate VC508 (\$250; 5 -watt, 1x8 tube combo), Marshall VS30R (\$399; 30-watt, IXIO tube/solid-state combo), Fender Blues Junior (\$470; 15-watt, 1x12 tube combo with reverb). **Effects:** Dunlop CryBaby Original wah-wah (\$148).

MID-PRICED CLAPTON

Guitars: Epiphone Les Paul Standard ,(\$769), Fender American Standard Strat (\$1,000), Hamer Sunburst Flametop (\$769), Gibson Les Paul Studio (\$1,378). **Amps:** Marshall VS65R (\$599; 65 -watt, 1x12 combo

with reverb), Line 6 Flextone (\$799; 50-watt, 1x12 digital-modeling combo), Fender Vibrolux Reverb (\$1,200; 40-watt, 2x10 tube combo with reverb), Kendrick Black Gold 35 (\$1,295; 35watt, 1x12 tube combo with reverb). **Effects:** Dunlop CryBaby Original wah-wah (\$148).

HIGH-END CLAPTON

Guitars: Fender Eric Clapton Stratocaster (\$1,600), Kendrick Town House (\$2,500), Gibson Les Paul Standard (\$2,520) or Les Paul DC Standard (\$2,189), Gibson SG'61 Reissue (\$2,599), PRS McCarty (\$2,900), Gibson ES335 Reissue (\$3,382). **Amps:** Marshall 1962 Bluesbreaker (\$1,599; 45-watt, 2x12 tube combo), Dr. Z Route 66 (\$1,499; 32-watt, Kr66-powered tube head), Marshall 1959 SLP (\$1,499; 100-watt tube head) and Marshall 1960 BC 4x12 cabinet (\$1,039), Soldano SLO 100 Combo (\$3,599; 100-watt, 2x12 tube combo). **Effects:** Vox V847 wah (\$164).



By Michael Molenda

It is deified as the perfect evocation of a blues-rock guitar solo by practically everyone-the notable exception being the cat who actually played it.

I've always had 'Crossroads' held up as, like, one of the great landmarks of guitar playing," said Eric Clapton in an April '98 interview with Britain's *Mojo*. "But most of that solo is on the wrong beat. Instead of playing on the two and four, I'm playing on the one and three and thinking, 'that's the off beat.' No wonder people think it's so good-because it's wrong!"

Groove-challenged or not, Clapton's solo on "Crossroads"-recorded five at San Francisco's Winterland for Cream's classic 1968 album, *Wheels of fire*-is truly inspirational. Clapton's ferociously passionate licks, bends, and runs have humbled pro guitarists and music fans alike, and "Crossroads" has become a staple of every blues bar band worth its beer intake.



The gear equation for this landmark solo is explicit: Clapton used a '61 Gibson SG-shaped Les Paul (his prized sunburst Les Paul was stolen during the rehearsals for Cream's debut concert), light-gauge Fender Rock and Roll strings, and a 100-watt Marshall stack (two stacks were typically set up onstage, but one was a spare). More mysterious, however, is what possessed Clapton to transform Robert Johnson's licks—as well as the riffs and lines of other blues greats—into a stunning and highly personal language. You can explore ways to morph classic blues lines into fresh licks in our "Hand Me Down Blues" lesson (p. 54). Then, use this "Crossroads" transcription as a starting point for *your own* stylistic epiphany. In other words, don't merely rip off these riffs—get inspired! If you can translate Clapton's playing into something all your own, you're on the road to becoming a *genuine* blues god.

Good luck!

Suivi de la partition complète de "Crossroads".



Retour à la [page des archives sur Eric Clapton.](#)



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