

# *The Essential*

## **Mike Bloomfield**

### *Signature Phrases*

by Don Mock



This second installment of “The Essential Mike Bloomfield” features some of Mike’s distinctive and most identifiable phrases he used when improvising.

While most are classic Blues phrases played with his magic touch, tone and feel, many others are not found in a typical Blues-players repertoire. Bloomfield’s influences came from much broader horizons than standard Chicago Blues melodies. Sometimes in the midst of a “down and dirty” Blues solo, Mike interspersed interesting scale and interval melodies more along the lines of what you’d expect from a Jazz or country-swing player.

The first example is a simple scale melody that Mike played very often, almost at some point in every solo. It’s fairly unusual for a Blues player to use and Mike must have learned it when he was younger as part of a scale or arpeggio shape that eventually found it’s way into his Blues playing. He always played it on the high E string, in fact all but the last note are played on the 1st string. He seemed to use it, as what you might call a “connecting” phrase, to change positions down the fingerboard.

It starts on the b7th of whatever major or dominant 7th chord he wanted to play it over. He would also rhythmically vary the line sometimes holding the first note longer while adding vibrato or multiple pick attacks. In the example, which is for an A7, I added a classic Bloomfield bend phrase in the second bar to demonstrate one of many ways Mike would complete the line.

#### Example 1

The musical notation for Example 1 is as follows:

Chord: A7

Time Signature: 4/4

Key Signature: One sharp (F#)

Melody (Treble Clef):

- Bar 1: Quarter note (F#5), quarter note (E5), quarter note (D5), quarter note (C5), quarter note (B4), quarter note (A4).
- Bar 2: Quarter note (A4), quarter note (B4), quarter note (C5), quarter note (D5), quarter note (E5), quarter note (F#5).
- Bar 3: Quarter note (F#5), quarter note (E5), quarter note (D5), quarter note (C5), quarter note (B4), quarter note (A4).
- Bar 4: Quarter note (A4), quarter note (B4), quarter note (C5), quarter note (D5), quarter note (E5), quarter note (F#5).

Tablature (T, A, B strings):

- Bar 1: 15 14 12 9 10 9 10
- Bar 2: 13 13 10 11 10

Annotations:

- Triplets (3) are indicated above the first three notes of the first and third bars.
- Bends (1/2) are indicated above the first notes of the second and fourth bars.

This next example is slight variation of a phrase Bloomfield played on Nick Gravenites' "Killing my Love" a rocking minor Blues off the "My Labors" disk. It's nothing that a basic rock player wouldn't play but Mike just nails this bend/vibrato and quick descending-pentatonic line. On the recording Mike plays the pickup and first bar basically as written. Then continues to wail on the high F# that is played on the 2nd string, 17th fret, bent up a whole step. (The great vibrato he adds is definitely worth noting.)

In bar two of the example, I added another classic Bloomfield pickup phrase setting up a variation of the bent F#. Often times Mike would bend to the root (F#) on the 2nd string then add a high minor 3rd on top (A note, 17 fret, 1st string). He also, at times, would hold the F# letting it ring out while he grabbed the high A. This variation, in the third bar, ends with the same descending minor pentatonic riff.

For a good exercise, to work on your bending and vibrato, keep repeating the four bars in time. And be sure to check out the recording to hear Mike's great energetic solo in it's entirety.

### Example 2

The musical notation for Example 2 consists of a treble clef staff and three fretboard diagrams for strings T (Treble), A (A), and B (Bass). The notation includes a pickup phrase and two full bars of music. The first bar features a triplet of eighth notes (F#, G, A) and a quarter note (B). The second bar features a bent F# on the 2nd string (17th fret) with a wavy line indicating vibrato, and a descending minor pentatonic riff. The third bar features a triplet of eighth notes (F#, G, A) and a quarter note (B). The fourth bar features a bent F# on the 2nd string (17th fret) with a wavy line indicating vibrato, and a descending minor pentatonic riff. The fretboard diagrams show the fret numbers for each string: T (Treble), A (A), and B (Bass).

Example 3 is another signature Bloomfield riff. The actual phrase is the five-note melody in the 2nd half of the bar (starting with E) and is pure Bloomfield. This example is how he played it at one point in his solo on "Albert's Shuffle" from the "Super Session" album. Beginning with two whole-step bends from F to G, he played the phrase over the IV7 (C7) in the 12-bar Blues progression which is in the key of G. But the line works just as well over the I7 (G7) which is where Mike usually played it. If you analyze the phrase from the point of view of being played over the I7-G7, the E note is the 6th of G7 and is a tone Bloomfield loved to use over major and dominant 7th chords. The rest of the line includes the D-5th, Bb-b7 and G-root.

### Example 3

C7 (G7)

Another recognizable Bloomfield line that's a favorite of many players is this one in Bb. It also features the "sweet" 6th tone (G) and includes a few chromatics. One of the best examples of Mike playing this line is about 6 minutes into "Don't Throw Your Love on Me So Strong" from the "Live Adventures of Mike Bloomfield and Al Kooper" album. The entire tune is some of the best Blues playing ever. And as he builds his solo to a break, handing off to the organ solo, Mike plays several variations of Example 4 with incredible energy and expression.....and with one of the greatest Les Paul tones ever recorded.

### Example 4

B<sup>b</sup>7

I've combined Examples 3 and 4 to create a great technique building two-bar phrase that also demonstrates two of Bloomfield's favorite fingerboard positions. Both lines are moved to A and can be played either over A7 for both bars or just one bar of A7 followed by D7 for the second. Just repeat the two bars several times concentrating on clean in-tune bends, and smooth even vibrato.

The first line is basically at the 12 fret, a position a lot of player's think of as a "mirror" of the familiar home position in A at the 5th fret. Many, including Bloomfield, probably use the A root on the 5th string, 12th fret or 3rd string, 14th as a point of reference for the key.

The second line is lower, down around the 10th fret, and is where Mike spent time when he was going for the more "sweeter" major sounds (major 3rd and 6th) ala B.B. King. He most likely used the root A, on the B string at the 10 fret, as a guide. (And by the way, Example 1 lays right in this position too and fits like a glove when connected to this phrase.)

### Example 5

Example 5, first system. Treble clef: A7 chord, triplet of notes, bent note. Bass clef: 15 (whole), 15 (whole), 14, 12 (P), 13, 14, 14.

Example 5, second system. Treble clef: A7 (D7) chord, triplet of notes, bent note. Bass clef: 13 (whole), 12, 11, 10, 13, 10 (P), 11, 10 (H), 12 (P), 10, 11, 10.

Up next is a Blues turnaround phrase that demonstrates a unique technique Bloomfield used. The example can be played over the last two bars of a Blues progression in C. The first bar is a common Bloomfield style line with a few bends and includes the use of the major 6th (A).

But let's look close at the 2nd bar. Following the quarter-note C, we have a typical Bloomfield bend riff starting on the second beat. What is interesting is the way Mike would play the b5 tone (F#) on the 3rd string adjacent to the 5th (G) on the 2nd string at the end of the phrase. Hearing Mike play this phrase in many different situations, he sometimes might only play the F# once or alternate it with the G several times.

### Example 6

Example 6. Treble clef: C7, F7, C7, G7. Bass clef: 11 (whole), 8, 10, 8, 10, 7, 10, 8, 8, 10, 10 (P), 8, 8, 11, 8, 11, 8, 11, 8.

This final example demonstrates Mike's ability to play rapid-fire bends. It's similar to Example 6 in that it can be played over the last two or three bars of a Blues, this time in D. The "set-up" bar uses one of Bloomfield's classic lines leading into the quick repetitive four-note bend phrase. Each one begins on a downbeat. Then, in the final bar, he shortens the duration of the high D note to create a faster "off-set" rhythmic feel for the same repetitive phrase. The phrase is repeated three times followed by a similar version of Example 6, a Blues riff with the b5 added (G#).

One of the best examples of Mike playing this type of rapid bends is on the tune "Another Country" from the Electric Flag album "Long Time Comin'." This is one of my favorite and most influential Bloomfield solos occurring during the Am7-D9 Latin/Rock section. The repetitive riff, which he plays high up at the 17th fret, will be easy to find later in the solo when the band kicks into the full-on rock groove.

### Example 7

The musical notation for Example 7 consists of two systems. The first system is in 7/8 time and features a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat. It starts with a G7 chord and contains four measures of music. The first measure is a "set-up" bar with a 3/8 triplet of notes (10, 10, 13) on the treble staff and a whole note on the bass staff. The following three measures are repetitive phrases, each starting with a 3/8 triplet of notes (13, 10, 13) on the treble staff and a whole note on the bass staff. The second system continues with a D7 chord for the first two measures and an A7 chord for the last two measures, maintaining the same rhythmic and melodic structure.



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