

The Essential

Mike Bloomfield

Chords & Rhythm

by **Don Mock**



The legendary Michael Bloomfield is remembered as one of the premier Blues/Rock soloist of all time. His improvising techniques and mastery of the Blues has influenced generations of aspiring guitarists the world over. But Mike was also a fine rhythm player and accompanist. Artist such as Bob Dylan valued Bloomfield's chording and supporting fills he brought to songs such as "Like a Rolling Stone." Mike also proved he was a team player in his own band the Electric Flag. He supplied perfect rhythm phrases to many of the Blues, Pop and R&B style tunes that featured vocals rather than his guitar playing. And even when he was thrust into situations where his guitar was the focus, such as the Super Session, Live Adventures and Nick Gravenites albums, he still delivered inspiring and energetic rhythm behind the vocals and other instrumentalists.

This fourth installment of The Essential Mike Bloomfield takes a closer look at Mike's rhythm playing. We'll learn some of his favorite chord voicings and double stop moves. Growing up in Chicago, Bloomfield acquired an interesting mixture of rhythm guitar talents. He started out playing '50's Rock & Roll. Eventually he became intrigued by the Blues and became *the* hot young player in town sitting in with as many Blues artist he could. But he also somehow got involved in the Folk and Bluegrass scene too and mastered finger-style acoustic guitar. He also played piano and admired R&B session players such as Steve Cropper, both which likely contributed to his rhythm guitar know-how. By the time Mike started playing with the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, he was already an experienced young veteran with a sizable knowledge of chords and rhythm fills.

Chord Voicings

First up, lets explore some of the chord voicings Bloomfield relied on. Blues requires a decent knowledge of dominant chords and Mike knew all the classics. Example 1 shows several dominant 7th, 9th and 13th voicings that Mike can be heard using on recordings. Their roots are either on the 5th or 6th string (a few shown do not have the actual root on the 5th string but are in the same basic position.) Remember that 9th, 11th and 13th chords are just extended "fuller" versions of dominant 7ths and are interchangeable.

Example 1

C dominant chords root on 5th *C dominant chords root on 6th*

C⁷ C⁷ C⁹ C¹³ C⁶ C⁷ C⁷ C⁹ C¹³ C⁹ C⁶ C⁷

Example 2 list his basic major and minor voicings. Just like the dominants, extended minors, such as minor 9 and minor 11, are usually interchangeable with basic minor and min7th chords.

Example 2

C major chords *C minor chords root on 5th* *C minor chords root on 6th*

C Cm Cm⁷ Cm⁹ Cm⁷(add11) Cm Cm⁷ Cm⁷ Cm⁹

The third example are other chord voicings Bloomfield likely used. They include a few major 7ths, suspended, dominant 7#9, diminished and augmented. It's important to remember that any tone in a diminished 7th or augmented chord can be considered the root. Gaug for example, is also Baug and D#aug.

Example 3

Important additional chords

(G, Bb, Db & Edim7) (G, B & D#aug)

Cmaj7 Cmaj9 Cmaj7 Cmaj7 Csus4 C7sus4 C7#9 C7#9 Gdim7 Gdim7 Gaug Gaug

	5	3	8	8	8	3	4	8	4	2	2	4	4
T	4	4	9	9	10	3	3	8	5	2	2	4	4
A	3	2	9	10	10	3	3	7	4	2	2	4	4
B	3	3	8	8	8	3	3	8	4	2	2	4	4

Slow Blues in Bb

The next example is a 12 bar slow Blues in Bb demonstrating chords and movements Bloomfield played. It's a composite of several recordings where Mike is comping behind other soloists. It features several examples of Mike's classic 6th and 9th chord approach phrases.

The pickup bar uses one of these melodic moves which is essentially a Bb6 voicing that is slid up from a whole step below. Then the top note is sounded as the chord is slid back down. It's a very useful coincidence that the same voicing works in two places for Bb7, at the 5th fret, in which case it's Bb9, or at the 7th fret where it's Bb6. Following the pickup move, the first bar uses a Bb9 voicing. Since this is a slow blues, Mike would usually keep a steady 1/8th note-triplet rhythm throughout the progression. He would then add the sliding-approach phrases at key points to help emphasize the chord changes.

Another move Mike often used is shown in at the beginning or bar 3. It's a common R&B and Blues technique of hammering from the minor to major third of a dominant chord. I'm pretty sure Mike, like a lot of players, wrapped his left thumb around the neck allowing him to fret notes on the 6th string. Using your thumb on the low Bb makes the move easier as you can bar the 2nd, 3rd and 4th strings with your first finger and hammer the D (major 3rd) with your second finger. It is, however, possible to play this move without your thumb by barring with your third finger, root with your second and hammer the 3rd using your fourth finger. Or you can just bar a full Bb7 (include the 5th-F on the 5th string) and hammer the 3rd with your second finger.

The chord progression also uses diminished 7ths and augmented chords in several places to add a nice bit of motion and tension/resolution to the chords. They're chord substitutes and are optional, in a slow Blues like this, but Bloomfield would usually add them. Also, bar 4 demonstrates a common chromatic chord move as the I7-Bb9 chord walks up in 1/2 steps for the change to the IV7-Eb9 in bar 5.

"Slow Blues in Bb"

Example 4

B^b9

E^b9 **Edim⁷**

B^b7 **Faug**

B^b7 **(E^b)** **(B^b7)** **(B^b9)** **(B9)** **(C9)** **(D^b9)** **(D9)**

E^b9

E^b9 **Edim⁷**

T 13 11 11 11 11 11 8 8 8 8 6
 A 12 10 10 10 10 10 8 8 8 8 6
 B 13 11 11 11 11 11 7 7 7 7 6

B^b9 **Faug** **B^b7** **(E^b)** **(B^b9)**

T 8 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 8 6 8 10 10
 A 7 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 8 6 9 10
 B 8 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6

F⁹ **E^b9** **Edim⁷**

T 10 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8
 A 10 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8
 B 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8

B^b7 **(B^b6)** **E^b** **Gdim⁷**

T 6 6 6 6 8 8 11 11
 A 7 8 6 7 7 8 9 9
 B 8 8 6 6 6 6 10 10

B^b7 **F⁷** **(Faug)**

T 6 6 6 6 8 8 10 10 6
 A 7 7 7 7 8 8 10 10 6
 B 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6

Double-Stop Phrases

Up next are some examples of Mike's double-stop-rhythm phrases. He often used them to add interest to his chord playing. The next three examples are country/steel-guitar inspired hammer-riffs which Mike used in many different situations. Example 5 demonstrates several positions of the move over C major. They're essentially 4th intervals that are played followed by a whole-step hammer-on of the lower tone creating a 3rd interval. The phrases in Example 5 also works great when played over Am.

Example 5

C (Am)

T
A
B

For me, and I'm sure many other young players at the time, learning these little double-stop moves off Bloomfield's records was a huge benefit to my own rhythm playing. Armed with just a few, you can liven up the chords of even the most boring and simple tunes.

A great recording that you can hear Mike play several versions is on "The Weight" from "The Live Adventures of Mike Bloomfield and Al Kooper." It's a great guitar performance all the way around including a fine country-ish solo and lots of classic uses of his double-stop phrases.

Something that has always stood out to me about Mike's rhythm playing is how well he "laid back" on the time. I've been around hundreds of young guitarists and one thing they all have in common is the tendency to "push" or rush when playing rhythm. It's rare to hear a player in their mid-twenties having such a mature rhythm feel like Bloomfield. Notice throughout "The Weight" how laid-back he plays the quarter-note comp.

Example 6 is a six-bar excerpt from "The Weight." It occurs around 1:08 into the track during the Csus2. The series of hammer-on 3rds, in the first two bars, end with a Bluesy version at the 3rd fret. Then he plays just the triad bar-chords with the organ while the bass plays a descending line underneath. Mike then plays one of his classic 6th licks to set up the next chorus.

Example 6

Excerpt from “The Weight”

The Live Adventures of Mike Bloomfield and Al Kooper

Csus²

G Bm/F# Am/E G/D C

etc.....

Like most people, the first time I heard Mike Bloomfield was probably on the Bob Dylan classic “Like a Rolling Stone.” At the time I didn’t know who the guitar player was but knew there was something special about the cool rhythm part he was playing. And one of the parts that stood out was the hammer-triads he played up high on his Telecaster.

Example 7 is a short excerpt from “Like a Rolling Stone” during one of the Dm to F sections. If you know the lyrics, it’s where Dylan sings “*After he took from you everything etc.*” Bloomfield plays a nice Dm7sus voicing followed by an F at the 5th fret before shifting up to the 10th fret for the high arpeggiated Gsus2 adding the hammered 3rds. Check it out.

Excerpt from “Like a Rolling Stone”

by Bob Dylan

Example 7

The musical notation for Example 7 is presented in two systems. The first system covers the first two measures, with the first measure labeled 'Dm' and the second 'F'. The second system covers the next two measures, with the first labeled 'G'. The notation includes a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a melody line with lyrics: "After he took from you.....". Below the melody are three guitar staves (T, A, B) showing fingerings. The first system uses fret numbers 8, 5, 7, 8, 5, 7, 8, 5 for the Dm chord and 6, 5, 7, 6, 5, 7, 6, 5 for the F chord. The second system uses fret numbers 10, 12, 10, 12, 10, 12, 10, 12 for the G chord, with 'H' indicating a harmonic. The second measure of the second system ends with 'etc.....'.

The final example is another 12-bar Blues, this time played entirely with 6th intervals in the key of C. Bloomfield relied on this sound often when playing Blues or even Rock and Pop tunes. The example uses a classic melodic-triplet-sequence moving up or down the scale of the particular chord in the progression. Most of the time the 6ths follow the scale but in a few instances, such as in bar 4, the line uses chromatic passing tones for that classic Blues melody. The 6ths in the example can be played in a few different styles. The notes can be picked separately or played more legato with slides. The typical way you would likely hear Bloomfield play this would be with slides on the lower notes. Bar 1 can easily be played this way. Just keep your 2nd finger on the lower notes and slide down from one 6th group to the next.

“Slidin’ 6th Blues”

Example 8

C7 **F7**

T	12	10	8	6	10	8	6	4
A	12	10	9	7	10	8	7	5
B					10	8	7	5

C7

T	5	8	10	6	8	10	11	12
A	5	8	10	7	9	10	11	12
B								

F7

T	13	11	10	8	6	10	8	6
A	14	12	10	8	7	10	8	7
B						10	8	7

C7

T	8	6	5	3	6	5	3	1
A	9	7	5	3	7	5	3	2
B					7	5	3	2

G7 **F7**

T 3 5 6 7 | 6 8 9 10
 A 4 4 5 5 6 6 7 7 | 7 7 8 8 9 9 10 10
 B

C7 **F7** **C7** **(Ab9)** **G9**

T 8 6 10 9 | 8 11 10
 A 9 9 7 7 10 10 9 9 | 8 11 10
 B 10 10 9 9 | 8 11 10

I hope this lesson got you thinking a bit more about your rhythm playing. Take it from me, someone who learned the hard way that you cannot neglect your rhythm playing in favor of flashy soloing. I'm sure Bloomfield knew this early on. When I was young, I was intensely focused on my improvising chops and figured playing a bunch of chords during the vocals or other guys solos was a mindless exercise. It finally took the insistence of my fellow band mates to get serious about my comping. And as we all learn, you spend at least 3/4 of the time playing rhythm in most music situations. So you might as well get it down.

Thanks for checking this out.

-Don Mock



Don Mock is one of America's most respected guitar educators and players. As one of the founding instructors of G.I.T. and Musicians Institute in Hollywood, Don has authored several books, CD's and videos on modern guitar including his acclaimed "The Blues from Rock to Jazz." He also produced and directed nearly 100 instructional videos of some of the world's top players including Robben Ford, Scott Henderson, Joe Pass, Pat Martino, Paul Gilbert, Joe Diorio, Allan Holdsworth and many others.

For more information visit: DonMockGuitar.com.