

# What's Between The Lines



## Muddy Waters "Rollin' Stone"

By Dave Rubin

No one was more surprised than Leonard Chess when Muddy Waters' "I Can't Be Satisfied" backed with "I Feel Like Going Home" started flying out of record stores in Chicago in 1948. The president of the fledgling independent label had been previously pushing urban blues as propagated by Memphis Minnie, Big Bill Broonzy, and Tampa Red. With much effort, Muddy finally convinced him to try the unfettered electric country blues he had been performing to enthusiastic audiences hungry for a taste of "down home." Ten years after the passing of the Delta blues era, postwar Chicago blues had been born.

By 1950, the Hoochie Coochie man was still recording solo blues like he had on Stovall's Plantation in the early 1940s for the Library of Congress. Of course, the addi-

tion of amplification brought a thrilling intensity. "Rollin' Stone" has a pedigree as long as the Mississippi, incorporating the primal "Catfish Blues" riff and lyric along with Muddy's heavy-weight vocal delivery. Backed with "Walking Blues," the song sold 80,000 copies in the urban Midwest, making Muddy a bona fide hit. "Rollin' Stone" is a perfect example of solo electric Delta blues and the art of the magnificent Muddy Waters. With dynamics, tone, touch, and a groove as deep as a moldboard plow, his subtle articulations and nuances reward diligent attention.

### PLAYING THE BLUES FINGERSTYLE

Delta cats like Muddy often used plastic thumbpicks and

metal index-finger picks. Typically, the thumb would thump the bass strings while the index finger would be used to pick prominent upstrokes (and occasional downstrokes) on the treble strings. Bare fingers would suffice, though, while producing a softer, rounder tone. Another viable technique involves using a flatpick for the bass strings and the bare middle finger on the treble strings. Experiment to see which blues-approved approach works best for you.

### TONE TO THE BONE

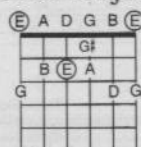
Muddy sounds like he's playing an amplified acoustic guitar; this is due to the full bass, dynamics, sharp attack, and quick decay of the notes. A Gretsch with a DeArmond pickup was his probable weapon of choice; so any hollow- or semi-hollowbody axe through a small tube amp will honorably catch that vibe. Otherwise, a solidbody with a neck pickup and some extra treble dialed in on the amp should provide a reasonable facsimile.

### THE RIFF

The three-measure intro contains the riff, one of the pillars of American popular music that Jimi Hendrix would turn into a bone-crusher in his "Voodoo Child." Derived from the open-position E minor pentatonic scale [Fig. 1] with the crucial addition of the major 3rd (G#) on string 3, the riff expresses several defining characteristics of the blues. These include the bent "true blue note" in between the ♭3rd (G) and major 3rd in the pick-up measure, the tension bend of the 4th (A) to the ♭5th (Bb), and the barely audible trill of the ♭3rd to the major 3rd in measure 1.

Fig. 1

### E Minor Pentatonic (w/added Major 3rd)



### THE VERSE

Verse 1 is 13 measures long, and features the following harmonic arrangement: I (E7) chord for the first two measures, then IV (A7/E) chord for two measures, and I chord for the last nine measures. The odd number of measures and the minimal chord changes are a vestige of early solo blues artists, who were free to craft their accompaniments to fit their lyrics and deliveries. Playing with other

musicians would eventually necessitate regular 8-, 12-, or 16-bar progressions. Note how all the I chord measures contain variations on the riff. Also observe the A7 voicing [Fig. 2] with the 5th (E) in the bass in measures 3 and 4. Due to an extra measure of E7 at each

ending, verses 2 and 3 are 14 measures long.

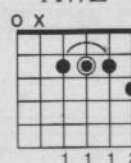
### THE SOLO

Muddy's 10-measure solo is a textbook on Delta blues guitar. In measures 1-3 he basically replicates the patterns found in the verses. Measures 4 and 5, though, contain a trenchant stop-time fill combining E and E7 chord forms with the E blues scale (E-G-A-Bb-B-D). Muddy's copious use of triplets makes the two-measure phrase flow dynamically in contrast with the swinging eighth notes that frame the tune.

Hitting his stride, Muddy defines the V (B7/E) chord in measure 6 with the root (B) and 5th (F#) notes. He implies the seventh measure's IV chord (A7) with a throaty bassline that begins with the root (A) and segues smoothly back to the I chord in the following measure via beat 4's low G, bent a quarter step. ♮

Fig. 2

### A7/E





# ROLLIN' STONE

## As Recorded by Muddy Waters

(From the MCA/Chess Recording MUDDY WATERS: HIS BEST 1947 TO 1955)

*Deep Blues* (00694789, \$24.95) features this tune and 29 more Muddy classics transcribed with tab. Order by calling 1-800-637-2852, or at [www.musicdispatch.com](http://www.musicdispatch.com).

*Written by Muddy Waters*

*Transcribed by Adam Perlmutter*

## Intro

**Moderate Blues** ♩ = 80 (♩♩ =  $\overset{-3-}{\text{♩}}$  ♩)

Mod. Blues

Gtr. 1 (slight dist.)

E7

*mf* w/ fingers throughout  
\*P.M.

1/4

3

2

1/2

2

(2)

0

2

0

(1)

0

3

1/4

TAB

3

\*Bass strings only

tr

tr

tr

1. Well, I wish—

tr

0

0

0

0

1

0

(1)

0

(0)

0

3

### Verse

E7

Musical score for "I was a catfish" in G major, 4/4 time. The score includes a vocal melody and a guitar accompaniment. The vocal melody starts with "I was a catfish" and continues with "swim - min' in". The guitar accompaniment features a repeating eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The score is divided into two systems, each with a key signature change from G major to E major.

"Rollin' Stone" a/k/a "Catfish Blues"  
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## Rollin' Stone

A7/E

The musical score is written for guitar on a single staff. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The melody starts with a half note A4, followed by a quarter note G#4, and then a half note F#4. A slur covers the next four notes: E4 (quarter), D#4 (quarter), C#4 (quarter), and B3 (half). After a whole rest, there is a quarter note A4, followed by a quarter note G#4, and then a half note F#4. The lyrics 'a whole deep blue sea. I will have all' are written below the staff. The guitar accompaniment is shown in two systems. The first system has a 2/2 time signature and consists of two measures. The first measure contains a whole note chord (A2, D2, F#2) marked with an 'X'. The second measure contains a whole note chord (E2, A1, D2). The second system also has a 2/2 time signature and consists of two measures. The first measure contains a whole note chord (A2, D2, F#2). The second measure contains a whole note chord (E2, A1, D2). The lyrics 'a whole deep blue sea. I will have all' are written below the staff.

a whole deep blue sea. I will have all

[illegible]

Sure 'nuff af - ter me, sure 'nuff af - ter me.

# Rollin' Stone

Sure 'nuff.—

## Verse

E7

2. I went to \_\_\_\_\_ my told ba-by's house—  
my fa-ther—

4. See additional lyrics

and just I be-fore, down, ho, on her step.—  
hmm, I was born,—

E7

She said, "Come on— in now, Mud-dy, you know my  
"I got a boy - child com - in', gon - na be,

hus - band— just now left.—  
he's gon - na be a roll - in' stone.

Sure 'nuff, he just now left.—  
Sure 'nuff, he's a roll - in' stone.

## To Coda ⊕

Sure 'nuff, he just now left.—  
Sure 'nuff, he's a roll - in' stone.

Oh, Lord.—  
Whoa, well, he's a,

Oh, well.—  
Oh, well, he's a,

Oh, well.—  
Oh, well, he's a

*tr*

*tr*

*tr*

## Rollin' Stone

3. Well, my moth - er — Oh, well, he's a."

**Guitar Solo**  
A7E

E7

# Rollin' Stone

B7E A7

0 2 2 2 2 2 2 0

2 0 2 0 2 2

1/2 1/4

E7

tr

tr

tr

tr

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

0 (1) 1 1 2 0 2 0 2

0 0 (1) 1 1 2 2 2 0 2

1/2 1/4

D.S. al Coda

4. Well, I feel,—

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

1 0 1

⊕ Coda E7

Sure 'nuff, ch.

0 2 2 2 0 1 2

0 0

Sure 'nuff, eh.

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

1 2 2 2 2 2 0 0

1 2 7 7 9 12 9

## Additional Lyrics

4. Well, I feel, yes I feel, baby,  
Like the low-down, ho, time ain't long,  
I'm gonna catch the first thing smokin'  
Back, back down the road I'm goin',  
Back down the road I'm goin',  
Back down the road I'm goin'.