**Introduction to the Music**

Mississippi Fred McDowell’s music can be quite complex at first look, but hopefully this E-book will break it down for you in a way that allows you to dig in and start playing this Delta legend’s songs.

For the beginner, Mississippi Fred McDowell’s album, “This Ain’t No Rock n’ Roll” is an excellent introduction to playing Blues music for the guitar. It is also a great transition to McDowell’s comprehensive repertoire. As much as the recording industry wanted to coin McDowell’s music as ‘rock n roll’, McDowell scoffed at the idea that he was playing anything other than the ‘straight natural blues.’ This album is his rebuke of the up and coming rock movement and an affirmation of his undeniable Mississippi roots.

**Introduction to ‘E’ Standard Tuning**

The first thing to consider, is that when Fred played in standard tuning, his tendency was to remain exclusively in the key of E. This approach was wildly popular among his peers in the hill country of Mississippi’s Delta. They often would tune their guitars to be lower in pitch, but would still continue to play patterns and holdings using ideas in ‘E’. McDowell explores different ways to riff off of an ‘E’ blues scale for songs using the standard ‘E’ tuning in the album, *This ain’t no Rock n Roll*.

The four songs played in E standard tuning in this E-Book perfectly illustrate the interplay between riffs, the melody, and the dominant progression of an E and E6 chord. Few of these songs feature a heavy bass guitar accompaniment and emphasize the main guitar riff. Some of the pull-offs and licks find their way into McDowell’s songs played with open G and D tunings which are also explained later on in this book.
The ‘E’ Blues scale in the first position represents the core foundation for much of the riff structure behind Fred McDowell’s music. Mastering the E blues scale allows the learner to anticipate the tendencies of McDowell’s riff constructs. Every signature lick, or bass accompaniment in McDowell’s music, is in some shape or form extracted from this particular blues scale. What makes Fred McDowell a great artist to begin learning the blues, is his tendency to compose songs that revolve around only one chord. Standard Rock N Roll music is rooted in the staple I-IV-V chord progression. However, McDowell’s compositions in ‘E’ tend to remain completely in the ‘I’ chord. The four songs in E standard tuning portrayed in this E-Book, exhibit exactly how both the chord progressions of E and E6, and the E blues scale in the first position, are the key to McDowell’s music and playing.
**Dankin’s Farm**

*Standard ‘E’ Tuning: (E-A-D-G-B-E)*

**Dankin’s Farm** has nodes of fluid country blues guitar with the key of ‘E’ blues scale notes built into the melody. The bass line accompaniment accentuates the rhythm, as the dynamic overtone and driving force of the composition overall.

The Harmony and rhythm progression is based on an ‘E’ and ‘E6’ chord played predominantly throughout the song.

The main baseline throughout the song. You will need a second party to play this on the bass guitar.

The first part of the verse and melody.
The second part of the verse and melody.

Back to the main riff. You then will repeat the melody structures stated in verse 1 and 2 across the remainder of the songs’ stanzas.

(Instrumental break)

Applying the alternating bass picking pattern on the 5th string/open is recommended for emphasis.

Back to the main riff.

The outro ending to the song where the 'E' blues scale is utilized.
**Dankin’s Farm Lyrics**

I ain’t going back to that Dankin’s Farm  
I ain’t going back to that Dankin’s Farm

I ain’t gonna raise no cotton either plant no corn  
Ain’t gonna raise no cotton even plant no corn

That’s why I got to move from that Dankin’s farm  
That’s why I got to move from that Dankin’s farm

Live here 22 years, never cleared a dime  
Live here 22 years, never cleared a dime

You can head to the house, captain of mine

(Solo)

You can head to the house, lord, house of mine

I’m gonna carry my gear, hang em’ up on the ride  
I’m gonna carry my gear, hang em’ up on the ride

Lord there’s no more work, tell the captain I’m back

(outro)
Worried Now, Won’t Be Worried Long

Standard ‘E’ Tuning: (E-A-D-G-B-E)

Worried Now, Won’t Be Worried Long shares many similarities with Dankin’s Farm. The combination of the E blues scale and ‘E/E6’ chord progression is emphasized again.

The main riff of the song is based in the Key of ‘E’. Finger an ‘E’ and ‘E6’ Chord and strike the notes as tabbed below. The riff is actually incorporated into the harmony.

The first part of the verse and melody.

Melody starts after Fred begins with the spoken lyric ‘worried mama’. Emphasize bending and pulling off the notes on the second string 7th fret (F#).

Then back to the main riff.
The second part of the riff. Emphasize bending and pulling off the notes on the second string 7th fret (F#), and lastly on 1st string 2nd fret (F#).

Back to the main riff.

The outro.

‘E’ Blues scale in the first position.
**Worried Now, Won’t Be Worried Long Lyrics**

Worried mama  
Won’t be worried long  
Lord I’m worried  
Won’t be  
Won’t be  
Won’t be worried long  
Oh no no

Run yer’ shovel lord  
Run here and get this bone  
Eh run yer’ shovel lord  
Lord and get  
Lord and get this bone  
Lord Lord Lord

If you can’t drag it  
Please leave it alone  
Lord if you can’t drag it  
Should of leave it  
Should of leave it  
Should of leave it alone  
Lord Lord Lord  
Lord Lord Lord
Eh baby

What ya’ got on your mind

Well-a tell me baby

What ya’ got

What ya’ got

What ya’ got on your mind

Lord  Lord  Lord

Lord  Lord  Lord

(outro)
Jim, Steam Killed Lula

Standard ‘E’ Tuning: (E-A-D-G-B-E)

Jim, Steam Killed Lula is another composition in ‘E’ standard tuning that shifts more focus onto the riff and individual melodic ideas over the chord progression and harmony. The riff, being firmly rooted in the ‘E’ blues scale, is emphasized as the dominant staple of the composition overall.

The main riff is based off of the ‘E’ chord. The song is in the key of ‘E’ utilizing a standard tuning pitched in ‘E’.

An alternate way of playing the riff: use the third string open ‘G’ note, instead of the 5th fret on the 4th string. I believe this is how McDowell is playing it in the recording. It might be difficult to ‘jump’ the strings at first, but this should serve as good practice.

The first part of the verse and melody.
The second part of the verse and melody.

Then back to the main riff.

The ending lick.

(It’s a simple slide from the 3rd to the 12th fret on the high ‘E’ string)

Old Jim Killed Lula Lyrics

Old Jim killed Lula
On a Friday night
Old Jim killed Lula
On a Friday
On a Friday night, Lord, Lord
Old Jim got ninety
Steam got ninety-nine
Old Jim got ninety
Steam got ninety
Steam got ninety-nine
Lord, Lord

Well they followed poor Lula
to her buryin' ground
Well they followed poor Lula
to her buryin'
to her buryin' ground
Lord, Lord

Ten thousand people
At one buryin' ground
Ten thousand people
At one buryin'
At one buryin' ground
Lord, Lord

Just to see the undertaker
Let poor Lula down
Just to see the undertaker
Let Poor Lula
Let Poor Lula
Lord, Lord

Well, the church bell ringin'
Horse went drivin' slow
Well, the church bell ringin'
Horse went
Horse went drivin' slow
Lord, Lord

Lord I hate it so bad to see poor Lula go
I hate it so bad oh lord
See poor Lula
See poor Lula
You Ain’t Treatin Me Right

Standard ‘E’ Tuning: (E-A-D-G-B-E)

You Ain’t Treatin Me Right is another piece performed in ‘E’ standard tuning. The ‘E’ Blues scale is noticeably present in the melodic structures of the song.

This is the main base line throughout the song. I would play it in ‘Drop D’ Tuning. The ‘D’ open note on the 6th string is pivotal to the riff. Have a second person play the bass guitar for accompaniment.

The main riff played throughout the song is based in the key of ‘E’. You may finger an ‘E’ chord and pick out the melody below. The guitar portion will be in ‘E’ standard tuning. (Again, similar to Dankin’s Farm)

This is the main verse with the lyrics incorporated between the measures. Fred sets this up with the spoken lyric “Oh I can’t see“.
In the portion above, the riff sits namely on the 3rd string with the F note bending and pulling off into the open ‘G’ third string. The foundation of the riff is again firmly rooted in the ‘E’ blues scale.

Back to the main riff. Then repeat the melodic ideas stated in verses 1 and 2 across the remaining stanzas in the song.

Break for solo.
Back to the riff.

Solo towards the end of the song.

You Ain't Treatin' Me Right Lyrics

Oh
I can't see
How my
Baby
Rest at night
You know I can't see how my
Baby

(Laughter)

Oh I know
You ain't
Treatin' me right
Lord I
Know baby
You ain't
Well I’m a
Poor boy
Great long
Ways from home
Lord I’m (whatcha doin)
Gimme my
Train ride

(Solo)

Well my
Mama said I’m crazy
Papa
Says I’m wild
Well my
Mama said I’m crazy
Papa

(Solo)
Bye, Bye Little Girl

Open ‘A’ Tuning: (E-A-E-A-C#-E)

**Bye, Bye Little Girl** is a quintessential piece in familiarizing oneself with playing in Open ‘G’ tuning. The combination of the alternating bass and melodic riffs in the treble, produce the very characteristic ‘loop’ effect often found in McDowell’s compositions with open tunings. This song sounds especially sleek on the electric guitar.

The main riff. The accompanying alternating bass picking pattern must remain a constant to execute and maintain the rhythm.

The break on the ‘IV’ chord.

Back to the riff.
Turn around and ‘V’ chord. He ‘sits’ on the riff but only briefly. Watch out for the change in tempo.

```
E  \-3
C# 1-2-3-3 1
A\-E\AE 0 3 0 0
A\-E\AE 0 0 0 0
```

Yeah bye bye little girl  Bye bye little girl  little girl

Back to the riff.

```
E  \-3
C# 1-2-3-3 1
A\-E\AE 0 3 0 0
A\-E\AE 0 0 0 0
```

Then you would apply the IV chord and V chord arrangements across the remaining stanzas as necessary.

**Bye, Bye Little Girl Lyrics**

Yeah Bye Bye

Bye Bye

Little girl, little girl

Yeah Bye, Bye

Bye Bye little girl

Bye Bye
Yeah, bye bye little girl
Bye bye little girl
Bye Bye

Sail along
Sail along
Little girl sail along

Yeah, sail along little girl
Sail along little girl
Sail on

You gonna keep on sailing
lose your happy home

I done told you once baby
Twice that you been told

I done told you once darlin’
Twice that you been told again

Next time I tell you honey
Hit that dusty road

Yeah so long
So long little girl
So long
So long little girl
So long little girl
So long

Yeah tell me baby
What you want me to do?

Yeah tell me baby
Honey what you want me to do?

You must of wanted me baby
To lay down and die for you

I’m going back to the pawn shop
I’m gonna put my watching on you

I’m going back to the pawn shop
Gonna put my watchin’ on you

I don’t want nobody tell me
I owe my baby gold

(outro)
**Going Down That Gravel Bottom**

*Open ‘A’ Tuning: (E-A-E-A-C#-E)*

*Going Down That Gravel Bottom* has more of the raw and rugged qualities of Delta Blues style guitar. This song accentuates the use of the slide on the first string with intense solo detail.

The introduction played with a slide throughout.

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The main riff played throughout the whole song played with or without the slide.

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The first melody in the first part of the verse; played with a side throughout.

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*I ain't going down... gravel bottom take that right hand road*

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Back to the main riff.
Repeat of the verse.

I ain’t going down... gravel bottom take that right hand road

Second part of the verse played with a slide.

Lord, I ain’t going to stop walking till I get in my sweet mama’s door

Back to the main riff.

Back to the main riff and repeat.
Here is an alternate solo, that follows the lyric, “Lord, you goin’ into the kitchen there, cookin’ till she come home.” Playing the 8th fret is the main difference from the other solos in the song.

Back to main riff.

Then the second solo without the 8th fret. He then plays this solo twice at the outro of the song.

**Going Down That Gravel Bottom Lyrics**

I’m goin’ down that gravel bottom, take that right hand road

I’m goin’ down that grave bottom, take the right hand road

Lord I ain’t gonna stop walking till I get in my sweet mama’s door
Lord that girl I'm lovin' got that great long curly hair

Lord that girl I'm lovin' got that great long curly hair

Lord her mama and her papa sure don't want me there

(Solo)

Don’t your house look lonesome here, your door roller gone

Don’t your house look lonesome here, your door roller gone

Lord, you goin’ into the kitchen there, cookin’ till she come home

(Solo)

I’m gonna get up one morning, I’m gonna get up soon

I’m gonna get up one morning, baby I’m gonna get up soon

I’m gonna do my walking by the start light in the moon

(Outro Solo)
Meet Me Down in Froggy Bottom

Open ‘A’ Tuning: (E-A-E-A-C#-E)

Meet Me Down in Froggy Bottom mirrors McDowell’s more acclaimed Write Me a Few of Your Lines. McDowell plays it using Spanish Tuning. You may tune your guitar to open ‘G’ tuning and place a Capo on the II fret. Do this in order to match the pitch of the original recording, without all the hassle of adjusting the machine heads on the guitar. This piece is an excellent introduction to playing and practicing techniques in Open ‘G’ Tuning. The bottleneck is used heavily throughout the song across the bass and treble strings respectively. The alternating bass picking patterns deeply pulsates the rhythm. The song is ideal for learning both disciplines of finger picking and slide application for Delta Blues guitar.

The introduction is played entirely with a bottleneck/slide.

Introduction then dissolves into the main riff shown below. The treble strings will be played with a slide. The alternating bass picking pattern is loosely applied.

In the ‘IV’ chord detail of the song, McDowell chords a typical ‘IV’ chord in Spanish tuning. He does not use a slide at this part of the song. Here is where mostly all the lyrics are spoken throughout the song.

Lord meet me down in froggy bottom baby
Bring me my bushy shoes
Back to the main riff.

This is an instrumental break played with a slide throughout on the bass strings.

Solo Break on the 12th fret.
McDowell then reverts back to this riff soon afterwards.

Meet Me Down In Froggy Bottom Lyrics

Lord meet me down in froggy bottom baby
Bring me my bushy shoes
Lord meet me down in froggy bottom baby
Lord bring me my bushy shoes
If I meet my baby nigger
He ain’t no tellin’ what he might do
Well, that’s alright

Oh baby in the way you do

Oh that’s alright

Lord in the way you do

(Spoken) Play it!

(Solo)

Everybody

Everybody down on knee

Everybody baby, lord they seem that they down on me
Going Away, Won’t Be Gone Long


Going Away, Won’t be Gone Long is a hybrid of McDowell’s playing in Open ‘G’ tuning that incorporates the ‘loop’ rhythms we’ve explored along with the attention to solo detail on the 1st and 2nd strings. It’s a unique and creative composition.

The main riff of the song; with or without the slide.

![Main Riff Diagram]

The melody of the verse played with a slide.

![Verse Melody Diagram]

The second portion of the melody and verse.

![Second Melody Diagram]

Then back to the main riff.

![Riff Return Diagram]
Then back to the main verse.

Going Away, Won’t be Long Gone Lyrics

Train I ride
She’s 16 coaches
She’s 16 coaches
That train I ride
16 coaches long

Buy me a ticket
Just as long as my right arm
Just as long as my right arm
Gonna buy me a ticket
Long as my right arm

Ride so long
You’d think I’m dead and gone
Think I’m dead and gone
Gonna ride so long
Think I’m dead and gone
Going away
To make it lonesome here
Just to make it lonesome here
Lord, I’m gonna wait, lonesome here

They have been-a
A long, old lonesome day
Long, old lonesome day
They have been
Long, old lonesome days

Going away baby
I won’t be gone so long
I won’t be gone so long
Going away
Won’t be gone so long

Tell me honey
What am I to do?
Baby what am I to do?
Baby tell me
What am I to do?
**I Worked Old Lu and I Worked Old Bess**

*Open ‘E’ Tuning: (E-B-E-G#-B-E)*

The signature licks found in this composition is repeatedly used across McDowell’s extensive repertoire. Here you have a marriage of the typical pull-off lick on the third string accompanied by the pronounced slide Hammer-on on the bass strings of the third fret. The two together are a staple of McDowell’s distinctive sound; definitely a characteristic of his work in open ‘D’ tuning. Learning the song is essential to mastering his work.

*This is the predominant riff used throughout the song. The combination is a Fred McDowell staple used extensively across his wide array of songs.*

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The verse is worked into the riff with a bending on the 3rd string on the 3rd fret.

*The second part of the verse continues with the same as the first part.*

---

Baby and I worked old Bess
To finish of this first stanza, McDowell reverts to the slide to play the bottom two strings. The lick comes in after McDowell speaks “Lord I couldn’t find no Mule”.

“Lord I couldn’t find no mule”...

The next stanza goes back to the first and second parts of the verse which repeat the same. You will do this across the entire song.

The end of this second stanza drops starts in the second string rather than the first. He switches off back and forth with this lick and the other throughout the song at the end of his stanzas. Play the second string with a slide gently ringing out the notes.

Lord I cannot drive him...
The solo is played with a slide gently ringing out the notes on the first fret.

Then is back to the riff and verses.

This is the last solo before the song ends. He starts with a slide played on the second string. He plays the main riff shortly one last time before sliding and ending the song from the 5th fret to the 12 fret.
I worked Old Lula and I Worked Old Bess Lyrics

Lord I worked old Lu
Babe and I worked old Bess
Lord I worked Old Lu, captain
You know I worked old Bess

Lord I couldn’t find a mule
Captain Willie sure aware

He won’t drink no water
He won’t even eat no corn

Lord I cannot drive him
Lord you the one kept him going on long

I’m a long line skinner
I got the shortest line

Lord, he got a water berry
You know baby he won’t even keep time
Lord he’s hollering hurry
Boy you know I’m almost blind
Oh you got a hot shootin’ pistol
You know he thinks he bad

He got a hot shooting pistol
Baby you know he thinks he bad

But I’m gonna take it in the morning
Baby if he makes me mad

Lord gonna take it in the morning darlin’
Baby if he makes me mad

(SOLO)

Lord you can’t do me darlin’
Like you done poor shine

Lord you can’t do me
Honey like you done poor shine

Well you took his money
I declare you can’t take mine
Lord you took his money darlin’
But I declare you can’t take mine
Ethel Mae Blues

Open 'E' Tuning: (E-B-E-G#-B-E)

This song has the same musical makeup of I Worked Old Lula, and I Worked Old Bess. The only main difference is the solos at the end. McDowell actually plays at some point the 15th fret on the first string.

The main riff of the song.

Ehtel Mae Lyrics

Ethel Mae called me yesterday morning

A long distance telephone

Lord, Ethel Mae called me

Lord, a long distance telephone

Lord, I said I need to go to the doctor baby

Lord, she would get along fine

Lord, she need to go to the doctor

She told me but she was done fine
She’s a long, tall woman
Her front teeth is crowned with gold
‘That’s what I said’ (Spoken)

She’s a long, tall woman
Her front teeth is crowned with gold

Oh you know that’s the oldest woman baby
She got a mortgage on my soul

Lord that’s the oldest woman
She got a mortgage on my soul

Oh the good lord spared me
Just to get my business straight

Oh the good lord spared me
Lord, Just to get my business straight

I might bid farewell
Lord, to this old Southern’ state

(Solo)
Oh I feel so lonesome
I ain’t got nowhere to go

Oh, Ethel Mae
Please don’t be home

Oh don’t write no letter baby
I’m a be in the world

Lord, don’t write no letter
I’m a be in this world

-SOLO-

‘That’s aright’ (spoken)
I Heard Somebody Calling Me

Open ‘D#’ Tuning: (D#-Bb-D#-G-Bb-D#)

This is an unusually different approach to playing in open ‘D’ tuning. The song’s structure mimics those used in Going Away, Won’t be Gone Long except that it is played in open ‘D’ tuning instead of open ‘G’. I Heard Somebody Calling Me emphasizes McDowell’s loop playing.

The main riff of the song starts off with a bending of the 3rd string on the third fret, and ends with a pull of the bass strings.

The first verse McDowell leads with—You know I heard somebody— he plays the slide on the notes of the first and second strings.

Back to the riff.
The second part of the verse avoids the first string entirely. McDowell leads with...

Lord I heard somebody...

Back to the riff.

The end of the first verse closes on a riff based on the low 6th string. This is basically the ‘turnaround’ for all the stanzas in the song. He repeats this over and over.

Back to the riff.
The next stanza begins with... I don't need no water heater baby...

He repeats the same melody in the second part of the verse, then does the turnaround.

"Well she walk like Black Mattie"

Lord I got something to tell you.

Then back to the main riff.
I Heard Somebody Calling Me Lyrics

You know I thought I heard somebody
Baby
Calling me

Lord I heard somebody
Baby
Calling me

Lord I sit down and I wonder
Honey
Who can it be?

I ain’t need no heater baby
Sittin’ down
By my bed

Lord I don’t need no heater darling
Right down here
By my bed

Lord the woman I’m lovin
Keep me
Cherry red
Well she walk like Black Mattie
Well I believe
She walk the floor

Walk like Black Mattie
Well I believe
She walk too slow

I got something to tell you baby
Just before I go

Lord, I got something to tell you baby
Just before I go

Please let me lay down
Baby in your cool iron bed

Please Let me lay down
Baby in your cool iron bed

I've been drinking white lighting
Drinking white lighting darling
Gone down to my head
I Wonder What Have I Done Wrong

Open ‘E’ Tuning: (E-B-E-G#-B-E)

This song has the same musical structure as I Heard Somebody Calling Me, except that it is tuned a half step higher. Use what you learned in I Heard Somebody Calling Me, and apply it to your playing here.

The main riff.

I Wonder What Have I Done Wrong Lyrics

Lord I wonder

What have I done wrong?

Lord I wonder

What have I done wrong?

Lord and tell me baby

What have I done wrong?

Lord I got two women

Can’t hardly tell them apart

Lord I got two women baby
Can’t hardly tell them apart

One of them is my sweetheart
The other one is my heart

I got a long, tall woman
Front teeth is crowned with gold

I got a long, tall woman
Her front teeth is crowned with gold

That’s the only woman
Got a mortgage on my soul

-SOLO-

Lord I get is so baby
I can’t hardly rest at night

Lord I get it is so darling
I can’t hardly rest at night

Lord I know my baby
She ain’t treatin’ me right
Conclusion

The songs presented in this E-book will undoubtedly solidify your foundation in understanding and playing Delta Blues Music. Mastery of Mississippi Fred McDowell will also help you to move on to study other Delta Blues artists, that will follow in the series. (In the coming weeks)

Thank you for your purchase of this E-Book and I hope that you continue to love and play the blues forever.

Best wishes,

Delta Lou-

www.deltaloumusic.com