Introduction to R.L.’s Music

R.L. Burnside is one of the most famous blues artists to feature out of the Mississippi Hill Country. He was a student of Mississippi Fred McDowell and other prominent artists from the area. R.L.’s career lasted well into his elderly years and his musical influence is still felt today. The eleven songs in this book is an in-depth introduction at R.L.’s repertoire in standard and open tunings which also feature some of his most famous compositions.
The ‘E’ Blues scale in the first position

When R.L. Burnside played in standard tuning, his tendency was to play exclusively in the key of ‘E’. This approach was wildly popular amongst his constituents in the Mississippi Hill Country. They often would tune their guitars lower in pitch, but would still continue to play patterns and holdings in ‘E’. The ‘E’ blues scale in the first position represents the core foundation for much of the riff structure behind R.L. Burnside’s music. Every signature lick and bass accompaniment in Burnside’s repertoire is in some shape or form extracted from this blues scale. What makes R.L. Burnside such a great artist to begin learning the blues, is his tendency to compose songs revolving around one chord. Understanding what goes behind his compositions will allow the learner to unravel the full extent of Burnside’s playing in ‘E’ standard tuning. Six songs from this book focus on R.L. Burnside’s playing in the key of ‘E’ through various pitches of standard tuning.
**Little Babe**

*Standard ‘D#’ Tuning (D#-G#-C#-F#-Bb-D#)*

This song utilizes typical blues holdings in ‘E’ yet it is tuned a half step down to standard ‘D#’ tuning. Once the guitar is tuned accordingly, you still will want to anticipate playing in the key of ‘E’. R.L. sits on an alternating bass picking pattern based upon an octave interval on the ‘D#’ note between the 6th and 4th strings.

The main riff of the song is shown below. He is essentially sitting on an ‘E’ chord, but letting his fingers extract out the notes he needs.

![Guitar Tab](image1)

He sings the lyrics of the song over this alternate bass picking pattern on the ‘D#’ octave interval. It eventually reverts back to the main pull-off riff to cap off the stanzas. You should hold an ‘E’ chord while playing this.

![Guitar Tab](image2)

He then plays a melody hinging on the 1st and 2nd strings that accentuate the singing of the higher notes of the ‘E’ blues scale. This solo appears towards the end of the song.

![Guitar Tab](image3)
Lyrics

You go and I’ll come witchya little babe
You go and I’ll come witchya little babe
You go and I’ll come witchya
Bet your life I won’t quit ya little babe

You get the fair
We go the show
You bet the horses
I’ll pick up the dough

You go and I’ll come witchya little babe

You go and I’ll come witchya little babe
You go and I’ll come witchya
Bet your life I won’t quit ya little babe

You go to jail
I go yo’ bond
You get time
Yeah what I would do
Stay outside and wait for you
You go...
You go and I’ll come witchya little babe

You go and I’ll come witchya

Bet your life I won’t quit ya little babe
Rollin and Tumblin’

Standard ‘C’ Tuning (C-F-Bb-D#-G-C)

R.L. is once again extracting notes out of an ‘E’ Blues scale in the riffs for the song. The song is utilizing typical blues holdings in ‘E’ yet it is tuned two full steps down to standard ‘C’ tuning. Once the guitar is tuned accordingly, you still will want to anticipate playing the song in the key of ‘E’. Pay attention to how deep and low the tone is now that you’ve tuned the guitar accordingly.

The introduction is played loosely. He is playing a melody based off of the ‘E’ blues scale.

The main riff throughout the song is constructed almost entirely out of double stops. The bass strings must be played simultaneously along with the melody on the treble strings.

He then plays a melody hinging on the 1st and 2nd strings that accentuate the singing of the higher notes of the ‘E’ blues scale. Listen to the original recording to get the timing right.
R.L. finishes off the stanza by playing notes on the 3\textsuperscript{rd} string from the ‘E’ blues scale. The first note is a whole note.

The solo at the end of the song showcases more of the usual melodic ideas from the ‘E’ blues scale.

He ends the solo ascending up the ‘E’ blues scale terminating at the ‘C’ note on the 4\textsuperscript{th} string/2\textsuperscript{nd} fret.

The outro lick is simply the ‘E’ blues scale ascending in the first position.
Lyrics

Well I roll and I tumble
And cried the whole night long
Well I roll and I tumble
And cried the whole night long
Roll in the mornin’
I didn’t know right from wrong

I spent ninety days in jail ma(i)n
My face turned to the wall
I spent ninety days in jail ma(i)n
All I could hear
Was my baby call

What you want with a rooster
When he won’t crow for day
What you want with a rooster
When he won’t crow for day
(What you) Want a woman
Who won’t do nothing you say (said)

(SOLO)
Come On In

Standard ‘D’ Tuning (D-G-C-F-A-D)

The song is utilizing typical blues holdings in ‘E’ yet it is tuned one full step down to standard ‘D’ tuning. Once the guitar is tuned accordingly, you still will want to anticipate playing the song in the key of ‘E’.

The main riff of the song is pictured below. Bend the ‘G’ note on the 2nd fret/3rd string up and down as you pull off and resolve into the ‘D’ note on the 2nd string/4th fret. Then flicker the top string and bottom two strings open which will then terminate to the ‘G’ note on the 2nd fret/3rd string.

He starts off singing while playing something similar to the main riff shown below. It is played ‘loosely’.

He then plays a melody hinging on the 1st and 2nd strings that accentuate the singing of the higher notes of the ‘E’ blues scale.
R.L. then immediately riffs off of the ‘E’ Blues scale on the bass strings for the 6th, 5th, and 4th strings. He plays this series three times in succession. He appears to be mumbling some words over these riffs.

R.L. then sits on an open ‘A’ note on the 5th string in the next series of riffs. He switches off on the octaves for the ‘E’ note at the end of the riff for the first instance.

Then back to the main riff and repeat across the remaining stanzas of the song...
Lyrics

Yes, it (t)ain’t
(t)ain’t but the one thing
Yeah, that make me sing the blues
I ain’t gonna bother ma(i)n
(Spoken)
I...
Show em’...
I...
Show em’...

Well if I can’t
Can’t come in
Let me sit down in front of your door
I leave early in the mornin’ babe
Real men
(Spoken)
Show em’...
I mean...
show em’...
I...
Well it (t)ain’t

Not my baby

But you know I know it (t)ain’t right

They done kill men all day long

Show em’...

I...

Show em’
See My Jumper Hangin’ on the Line

Standard ‘F’ Tuning (F-Bb-D#-G#-C-F)

R.L. is extracting notes out of an ‘E minor’ chord and the ‘E’ blues scale in the constructs of the riffs. The song is utilizing typical blues holdings in ‘E’ yet it is tuned one full step to ‘F’. Once the guitar is tuned accordingly, you still will want to anticipate playing the song in the key of ‘E’.

The main riff of the song. He is essentially riffing off of an ‘E minor’ chord, but letting his finger extract out the notes he needs. Again, this is all coming out of the ‘E’ blues scale. The palm muting portions are key components to the riff.

Here he plays a lick from the ‘E’ blues scale on the bottom three strings.

Then he wraps up the stanza with this lick below; also on the bottom three strings.

Back to the main riff and repeat...
The outro...

Lyrics

See my Jumper Lord Hanging out on the line

See my Jumper Lord Hanging out on the line

Know about that something on my mind

Good no baby oh baby lord if hadn’t been for you

Good no baby oh baby lord if hadn’t been for you

Way down here way you want to do

Fix my supper lord let me go to bed

Fix my supper lord let me go to bed

This white lighting done gone to my head
**Going Down South Blues**

*Standard ‘C#’ Tuning (C#-F#-B-E-G#-C#)*

R.L. is using a picking pattern again in 'E'. The song is utilizing typical blues holdings in 'E' yet it is tuned down one and a half steps to 'C#' standard tuning. Once the guitar is tuned accordingly, you still will want to anticipate still playing the song in the key of ‘E’.

*The main riff is a picking pattern as demonstrated below in ‘E’.*

![Guitar Tab](image1)

R.L. then sings the lyrics over this predominant riff over and over throughout the song.

![Guitar Tab](image2)

Then he finishes off the stanza by sitting on the ‘E’ note on the 5th fret/4th string twice.

![Guitar Tab](image3)

This is the riff break that ends the stanzas before they go back to the main picking pattern. Again, the ‘E’ blues scale makes an appearance.

![Guitar Tab](image4)
The rest of the song repeats the parts illustrated thus far. Apply them according to what you hear in the original recording.

**Lyrics**

*Going with ya babe*

I’m going with you babe

I’m going with you babe

I’m going with you babe

I’m going with you babe

I don’t care where you go

I’m going down South

I’m going down South

I’m going down South

I’m going down South

I’m going down South

I’m going down South

I’m going down South

The chilly wind gonna blow

I’d rather be dead

I’d rather be dead

I’d rather be dead

I’d rather be dead

I’d rather be dead

And six feet in the ground
Some black man
Some black man
Some black man
Some black man
Some black man
Some black man
Some black man
Some black man
Always hangin’ around

Going...
Going...
Going...
Don’t care where you go

I’m going with you babe
I’m going with you babe
I’m going with you babe
I’m going with you babe
I’m going with you babe
I’m going with you babe
I don’t care where you go
Bird Without A Feather

Standard ‘C#’ Tuning (C#-F#-B-E-G#-C#)

The song is utilizing typical blues holdings in ‘E’ yet it is tuned down one and a half steps down to ‘C#’ standard tuning. Once the guitar is tuned accordingly, you still will want to anticipate playing the song in the key of ‘E’.

The main riff is extracted from the ‘E’ blues scale descending.

He transitions to an ‘E’ Chord while only plucking the strings shown below as double stops.

After he plays that, he starts off with the lyric, “Just like a bird without a feather” at a resting point where no music is being played. He plays this melody below right after the spoken lyric. Again, he is extracting out notes from the ‘E’ blues scale.

Back to the main riff that started the song.
Then repeat the concepts illustrated thus far against the remaining stanzas.

**Lyrics**

*Just like a bird without a feather*

*You know I’m lost without your love*

*Just like a bird without a feather*

*You know I’m lost without your love*

*You know I need your love*

*Just like the angels need heaven above*

*Well you know as soon as I shot my baby*

*But I did it because she did me wrong*

*Well you know as soon as I shot my baby*

*I did it because she did me wrong*

*Yeah, you know the judge called it murder*

*The penitento’ (penitentiary) is my home*

*Yeah, I love that woman*

*Said she didn’t love no one but me*

*Yes, I love that woman*

*She says she loved no one but me*
Yeah, but I caught my baby cheatin’

Now my home ain’t half it used to be
Poor Black Mattie

Open ‘D’ Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D)

Poor Black Mattie is played using the open ‘G’ tuning. It’s one of his most recognizable pieces. Though simple in construct, I would rate it as the most challenging song to learn. The timing switch offs on the bass riff makes it difficult to sing the lyrics over the song. There is also a bit of palm muting incorporated into the main riff.

The main riff of the song is shown below. The ‘5th’ string alternating between the 5th sting/open and the 3rd fret/5th string will position you into holding the ‘timing’ down.

R.L. plays the verse loosely in portions of the song where he is singing the lyrics. The pull-off on the first fret sets up the stanzas being sung. The bass is dictating the ‘timing’.

Here is how the rest of the stanza continues.
He then goes back to the main riff before singing the last part of the stanza. Notice the lick off of the 3rd fret being played.

The first instrumental break of the song is shown below; it’s played fluidly. The pull-off on the first fret and hammer-on on the 3rd fret are crucial.

The instrumental break appearing later in the song incorporates a lick on the 5th fret on the bottom two strings.

Then back to the main riff and to the second verse.
The second instrumental break varies a lot from the first; it’s also played fluidly.

Then back to the main riff.

The ending outro is a simple slowed down lick variation of the instrumental break ending on the 5th fret/1st string.

Lyrics

Old Black Mattie got

Change of clothes

Girl got drunk

Close that door

Poor Black Mattie

I ain’t change of clothes

Girl got drunk

Told her close that door
Going to Memphis see that
World’s little fair
Reason I’m going
Baby’s there

Going to Memphis
See that world’s little fair
Reason I’m going
Know my baby’s there

Ain’t no heat or fireplace
By my bed
Woman I got
Cherry red
Need no heat or
Fireplace by my bed
Woman I got
Keep me Cherry red
Long Haired Donney

Open ‘G’ Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D)

This song is played in open ‘G’ tuning. The introduction is similar to what we learned in ‘Poor Black Mattie’. He tends to recycle the same licks in most of his songs in open ‘G’ tuning.

The introduction is played like below.

The main riff shown below is played throughout much of the song, usually between verses.

The verse of the song. The melody mirrors the sung lyrics.

Back to the main riff.
The second part of the verse ending the stanza. The 4th string is being emphasized.

Back to the main riff.

The rest of the song repeats the concepts illustrated thus far.

**Lyrics**

Yeah

Gonna see my long haired

Donney

Yeah

Gonna see my long haired

Donney

Yeah

Gonna tell her about my trouble
Soon
My trouble will be
Yeah
My trouble soon will be
Well
My trouble soon be over

Trouble will make you settle your
Trouble will make you settle your
Trouble will make you settle your
Mama

Well
I'm going away to
Well
I'm going away to
Well
Don't let my leaving grieve you
Peaches

Open ‘G’ Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D)

The song is played in open ‘G’ tuning from the First Original Recordings, and is a half step higher on the Too Bad Jim album. R.L. recycles some of the same licks and pull-offs found across his other songs in the same tuning.

The main riff is played as such below.

All together it is played like below in a continuous loop.

The music played over the sung portions of the song is sitting on open-palm muted chords followed by a lick off of the 1st fret.
Back to the main riff.

Then back to the sung portion of the song.

**Lyrics**

Don’t your peaches

They look mellow

Hanging way

Up in

Your tree

Don’t your peaches

They look mellow

Hanging way

Up in

Your tree
Get up there mama
Your yellow peaches
Baby I know
They sweet

Gonna get me
Stepladder baby
Climb up on
Your top
Top limb

Gonna get me
Stepladder baby
Climb up on
Your top
Limb

Get up there mama
Your yellow peaches
Baby it’s going to be
Too bad Jim
Every time I decide
To climb up your tree
Baby I wonder
What makes
You smile

Every time I decide
To climb your tree
Baby I wonder
What makes
You smile

Look down mama
Your yellow peaches
Baby I know
They sweet
And mild
When My First Wife Left Me

Open ‘G’ Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D)

The song is played in open ‘G’ tuning. R.L. plays this loosely with the main emphasis on holding and playing out the ‘IV’ chord on the 1st and 2nd frets.

The introduction has similarities to Poor Black Mattie. He repeats this lick throughout the song in between the stanzas.

The sequence that follows emphasizes the individual notes being played on the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd frets.

Followed by this before R.L. sings...
R.L. then flicks a series of open chords as he sings, ‘Well when my first wife left me’.

Back to the intro lick.

The sequence after that is played like this.

He breaks that sequence up by singing, ‘God knows she put me out on the road’.

This lick follows...
Then he sings, ‘Well when my first wife left me’. It is followed by this lick again.

He reverts back to this lick.

The remainder of the song recycles the licks transcribed thus far. Apply them accordingly to play along with the song. There is a lot of room for exploration with the licks.

**Lyrics**

Well when my first wife left me

God knows she put me out on the road

Well when my first wife left me

God knows she put me on out the road

Yeah and you ever since that day now people

I’ve been driven from door to door
Well you know between me traveling people
You know my clothes got very thin
Well you know between me traveling people
You know my clothes got very thin
You know I’m just sitting here wondering when
Would my baby she take me back again

Will my baby take me back again
God knows I wouldn’t leave my home no more
Well if my baby took me back again
God knows I wouldn’t leave my home no more
Yeah I’m stayin’ home with my baby
And God knows I would settle down
Skinny Woman

Open ‘G#’ Tuning (D#-G#-D#-G#-C-D#)

The song is played in open ‘G’ tuning pitched at ‘G#’. R.L. plays this loosely with the main emphasis on holding and playing out the ‘IV’ chord on the 1st and 2nd frets.

The introduction has similarities to Poor Black Mattie. He repeats this lick throughout the song in between the stanzas. The introduction focuses heavily on pull-off combinations over the treble strings.

Heavy pull-offs continue on the treble strings.

He then shifts to licks on the bass strings.
R.L. then taps a rhythm with his finger tips above the sound hole on his guitar. He starts it off by playing the 5th string/3rd fret followed by the open string on the 5th string.

He reverts to this riff on the bass strings.

**Lyrics**

Yeah don’t want

Skinny woman

Yeah don’t want

Skinny woman

Meat don’t shake

Meat don’t shake

Meat don’t shake

Meat don’t shake

Meat don’t shake

Meat...
Yeah she won’t cook no breakfast
Yeah she won’t wash no clothes
All she do
Walk up and down
Walk up and down
Walk up and down
Walk up and down
Walk...
Walk...
Walk...
Walk...

Yeah don’t want
Skinny woman
Yeah don’t want
Skinny woman
Yeah don’t want
Skinny woman
Meat don’t shake
Meat don’t shake
**Conclusion**

The songs presented in this E-book will most undoubtedly solidify your foundation in understanding and playing Delta Blues Music. Mastery of the songs will prove dividends when you move on to study other Delta Blues artists. Thank you for your purchase of this book, and I hope you continue to love and play the blues forever.

Best wishes,

-Delta Lou

www.deltaloumusic.com