Introduction to Son House’s Music

Son House has been called one of the fathers of the Delta Blues. His playing embodies the very essence of the rugged, rough, and rustic Delta Blues sound. The songs illustrated in this E-Book cover his most essential works, and will give the learner a solid foundation in beginning Delta Blues guitar playing. The book will cover songs based in three essential tunings: Vestapol, Open ‘G’ (Spanish) and standard ‘E’.
Louise McGhee

‘D’ standard tuning (D-G-C-F-A-D)

Louise McGhee utilizes the basics of playing in the key of ‘E’. The song is tuned one whole step down to ‘D’ standard tuning.

The introduction has elements of a classic ‘E’ turnaround moving down the next board. He plays a variation of this later on in the song as well.

Eventually the turnaround will dissolve into an ‘E’ chord.

This series is played four times. Let the open top string ring out as you play the lick on the 7th/8th fret. Bend the strings accordingly. He starts singing at this part of the song.
The second part of the verse moves into the IV chord (or the A7 chord).

Then he repeats the ‘A’ chord sequence which dissolves back to the ‘E’ chord.

The end of the first stanza utilizes a B (7)/C (7) turnaround before going back to the coda.

Repeat the concepts illustrated above and begin the next verse on the 7th/8th fret.
**Lyrics**

You see a little girl they call

Louise McGhee

Please do me a favor and shake

Her little hand for me

I said if you see a little girl

Her name, Louise McGhee

You know, please do me a favor, shake her little hand for me

I know a little girl

Like a cow like to chew cud

Her little low down ways I wish you

Had quit as she would

You know I love that little thing

Just like a cow like to chew her cud

Little low down ways

I sure wish you'd quit if she would
Mmm, Lookie here
If I don't go crazy
Lookie here
If I don't go crazy
Yeah lookie here
I'm gonna lose my mind
You know cause I stayed bothered
Worried all the time
You know it's a shame
A dirty shame

I so sorry the day I ever
know Louise's name
Yeah it's a shame
I said it's a low down dirty shame
You know...
Levee Camp Moan

Open ‘G’ tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D)

Levee Camp Moan is played in open ‘G’ tuning. There is heavy emphasis on sliding over the 12\textsuperscript{th} fret with great application of force in playing the IV and V chords.

The introduction and main riff is shown below. Harmonica accompaniment pairs well with this Delta Blues masterpiece.

The IV chord is played with lots of force.

Half chords harmonizing individual notes. Elements of Robert Johnson’s playing are evident.

He then plays the V chord followed by the IV chord before going back to the beginning.
Then back to the half chord riff.

He reverts back to what was played in the introduction. He starts singing at this point.

Continues singing across the IV chord.

He plays the half chord riff before jumping to the V chord.
Then back to the IV chord followed by the half chord riff.

![Guitar tablature]

She left me with the gone awfy blues

Then he begins the next stanza by sliding on the 12th fret.

![Guitar tablature]

The ending is based off of this lick below.

![Guitar tablature]

Apply the concepts demonstrated accordingly as you listen to the original recording.

**Lyrics**

You know I had a job on the levee

I had a good looking woman who lived in Hughes

I had a job on the levee

I had a good looking woman she lived in Hughes

You know that pretty little thing

She kept me with the government fleet blues
You know on every pay day

She'd be standing around the landing crying

On every pay day

She'd be standing around the landing crying

She be saying why don't that big boat hurry and

Bring home that man of mine?

You know on every pay day

She could, she could hear the big boat when she blow

Well on every pay day

She could hear the big boat when she blow

But when I done not get the check

She told me she couldn't use me no more

But I said that's all right big girl

Honey, that's all right for you

Yeah - hooooo -- little girl that's all right for you

I say you treat me low down and dirty

See, baby, that's the way you's do
I packed up all my clothes
Left her settin' in the back door crying
Aye yeah I left her settin' in the back door crying
You know that done run the poor girl crazy
I believe she gonna lose her mind

You know don't come here honey
Throwing up your doggone hands
Don't come here baby
I said throwing up your doggone hands

You know l, I been your dog
Ever since that I been your man

But I said baby when you get lonesome
Set right down and write to me
Yeah -- yeah -- set right down you can write to me
You know I can read your little writing baby
Don't care where in this world I'll be

You know love . . . make you do things you don't want to do
You know love . . . make you do things you don't want to do
You know from love sometime
Will leave you feeling so sad and so blue
Oh, Listen here honey

Think about poor me some time

Yeah -- hooooo -- think about poor me some time

You know I feel so bad

When you roll across my mind

You know if you never no more see me

You'll forever be on my mind

If I never no more see you

Yeah, you'll forever be on my mind

You know every time I think about you honey

I just can't keep from crying

Oh it's so hard

To love when they don't love you

Ah, yeah -- yeah, when they don't love you

You can't do nothing baby when they do not want you

But I tell 'em look it here, baby

Your little trouble is coming home some day

Yeah just like I tell you

Your little trouble is coming home some day

I said you gonna be sorry

That you treated poor me this way
Death Letter Blues

Open ‘A’ Tuning (E-A-E-A-C#-E)

Death Letter Blues is undoubtedly Son House’s most famous number. It epitomizes the very essence of Delta Blues style slide guitar. It is played in open ‘G’ tuning, tuned one whole step up to ‘A’.

The main riff is played extensively with a bottleneck. The 5th fret/bottom string must be pinched with finesse while using the slide.

This is the main riff played while he sings out the stanzas. Most of the emphasis will be in pressing the slide on and off the 3rd fret.

He continues the concept before transitioning into the IV chord with great force.
He continues with the IV chord followed by the signature break afterwards. Pinch the 5th fret/bottom string with the slide.

Then he plays the V chord followed by the IV chord.

He then goes back to this riff before going back to the beginning.

Repeat the concepts demonstrated over the following stanzas to come.
Lyrics

I got a letter this mornin', how do you reckon it read?

It said, "Hurry, hurry, yeah, your love is dead"

I got a letter this mornin', I say how do you reckon it read?

You know, it said, "Hurry, hurry, how come the gal you love is dead?"

So, I grabbed up my suitcase, and took off down the road

When I got there she was layin' on a coolin' board

I grabbed up my suitcase, and I said and I took off down the road

I said, but when I got there she was already layin on a coolin' board

Well, I walked up right close, looked down in her face

Said, the good ol' gal got to lay here 'til the Judgment Day

I walked up right close, and I said I looked down in her face

I said the good ol' gal, she got to lay here 'til the Judgment Day

Looked like there was 10,000 people standin' round the buryin' ground

I didn't know I loved her 'til they laid her down

Looked like 10,000 were standin' round the buryin' ground

You know I didn't know I loved her 'til they damn laid her down
Lord, have mercy on my wicked soul
I wouldn't mistreat you baby, for my weight in gold
I said, Lord, have mercy on my wicked soul
You know I wouldn't mistreat nobody, baby, not for my weight in gold

Well, I folded up my arms and I slowly walked away
I said, "Farewell honey, I'll see you on Judgment Day"
Ah, yeah, oh, yes, I slowly walked away
I said, "Farewell, farewell, I'll see you on the Judgment Day"

You know I went in my room, I bowed down to pray
The blues came along and drove my spirit away
I went in my room, I said I bowed down to pray
I said the blues came along and drove my spirit away

You know I didn't feel so bad, 'til the good ol' sun went down
I didn't have a soul to throw my arms around
I didn't feel so bad, 'til the good ol' sun went down
You know, I didn't have nobody to throw my arms around

I loved you baby, like I love myself
You don't have me, you won't have nobody else
I loved you baby, better than I did myself
I said now if you don't have me, I didn't want you to have nobody else
You know, it's hard to love someone that don't love you
Ain't no satisfaction, don't care what in the world you do
Yeah, it's hard to love someone that don't love you
You know it don't look like satisfaction, don't care what in the world you do

Got up this mornin', just about the break of day
A-huggin' the pillow where she used to lay
Got up this mornin', just about the break of day
A-huggin' the pillow where my good gal used to lay

Got up this mornin', feelin' round for my shoes
You know, I must-a had them old walkin' blues
Got up this mornin', feelin' round for my shoes
Yeah, you know bout that, I must-a had them old walkin' blues

You know, I cried last night and all the night before
Gotta change my way a livin', so I don't have to cry no more
You know, I cried last night and all the night before
Gotta change my way a livin', you see, so I don't have to cry no more

Ah, hush, thought I heard her call my name
If it wasn't so loud and so nice and plain
Ah, yeah
Mmmmm
Well, listen, whatever you do

This is one thing, honey, I tried to get along with you

Yes, no tellin' what you do

I done everything I could, just to try and get along with you

Well, the minutes seemed like hours, hours they seemed like days

It seemed like my good, old gal outta done stopped her low-down ways

Minutes seemed like hours, hours they seemed like days

Seems like my good, old gal outta done stopped her low-down ways

You know, love's a hard ol' fall, make you do things you don't wanna do

Love sometimes leaves you feeling sad and blue

You know, love's a hard ol' fall, make you do things you don't wanna do

Love sometimes make you feel sad and blue
Empire State Express Blues

Open ‘G’ tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D)

Empire State Express is played in open ‘G’ tuning. He uses elements of Tommy Johnson’s Future Blues in his introduction.

The introduction is a turnaround playing the octaves on the bass strings.

He plays this transition before moving into the IV chord.

He uses the slide forcefully to jump into the 5th fret (IV chord) as he begins to sing.

He plays this transition after.
Followed by...

Then he goes back into the IV chord.

Here is the V chord transition.

Followed by this peculiar turnaround...
The second verse uses the concepts of the turnaround.

A brief play on the IV chord...

Followed by this riff...

This comes next.
He moves into the V chord.

This riff wraps up the introduction.

Then he starts the third verse using this alternate lick.

Apply the concepts demonstrated according to the original recording.
Lyrics

I went down to the station
I leaned against the door
I went down to the station
I leaned against the door
You know I know the Empire State
Any time I hear her blow

Then I ask the depot agent
Let me ride, let me ride the blind
Oh depot agent
Please let me ride the blinds
He said I wouldn’t mind it son
But this empire state ain’t mine

You know he said I have an Empire State
She rides on eastern
She rides on eastern
Eastern time
She runs on ester time
She is the rollingest baby
that runs on New York central line

Engineers
I said wasn’t me an old farmer
And I trust all engineers
You know they took my women away
President Kennedy

Open ‘G’ Tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D)

President Kennedy is an unusual yet beautiful song. It is played using open ‘G’ tuning. He explores an array of alternate chordings based predominantly on double stops.

Before going into the main riff, he starts the introduction with a strum of open chords.

The song is dominated by these double stop turnarounds.

Few strums of the open chords before going back to the double stops...

The introduction continues.
He begins the song with this double stop combination.

Mr Kennedy was born but now he is gone

The rest of the song is more of what was played in the introduction.

He'll never return anymore

Made me feel sad He's the best friend we had
The last sequence before reverting back to the beginning.

Apply the learned concepts over the remaining stanzas.

He's from the rich and the poor

Now I can't muchin' tell It'll last me for years

His memory still rings in my head
Lyrics

Mr. Kennedy was born
But now he is gone
To never returning a-more
Made me feel sad
He's the best friend we had
He's from the rich and the poor
Now I can't muchin' tell
It'll last me for years
His memory still rings in my head.

Now this sorry grief
Had a great family
They all seemed so happy and gay
From adults to a child
They all seemed to a-have a smile
They must a-have been born that way
Now I can't much-a tell
It'll last me for years
His memory still rings in my head.
Mmh God bless little John
That little Caroline responds
And also their mother dear
His father and mother
Sister and brother
They must-a been born that way
Now I can't muchin' tell
It'll last me for years
His memory still rings in my head.

Mmh this sorry grief
Had a great family
All seemed so happy and gay
Father and his mother
Sister and brother
They must a-have been born that way
Now I can't much-a tell
It'll last me for years
His memory still rings in my head
Preachin’ Blues

Open ‘E’ tuning (E-B-E-G#-B-E)

Preachin’ Blues is played in vestapol tuning pitched at ‘E’. There is a lot of emphasis in sliding forcibly on the 12th and 3rd frets.

The introduction is played with a slide throughout followed by fast up-down-up open chord strums.

A brief transition played before the main riff. These will be brisk and fast open strums.

He plays this standard ‘vestapol’ lick on the 7th/8th frets as he sings. He caps off the link by dissolving into the 12th fret with the slide.

Well, I’m a get me religion.... and join the baptist church...
An alternate instance found later in the song with the slide resting and reverberating on the 12th fret.

Lyrics

Yes, I'm gonna get me religion

I'm gonna join the Baptist Church

Yes, I'm gonna get me religion

I'm gonna join the Baptist Church

You know I wanna be a Baptist preacher

Just so I won't have to work

One deacon jumped up and he began to grin

You know he said, "One thing, elder I believe

I'll go back to barrelhousin' again"

One sister jumped up and she began to shout

"You know I'm glad this corn liquor's goin' out"

Another deacon jumped up and said, "Why don't ya hush?"
You know you drink corn liquor and your lie’s a horrible stink”

One sister jumped up and she began to shout

One sister jumped up and she began to shout

"I believe I can tell y’all what it’s all about"

Another sister jumped up, she said, "Why don't ya hush?"

Another sister jumped up, she said, "Why don't ya hush?"

You know he’s abandoned, and you outta hush your fuss"

I was in the pulpit, I’s jum'pin' up and down

I was in the pulpit, I’s jum'pin' up and down

My sisters in the corner, they’re hollerin' Alabama bound

Grabbed up my suitcase and I took off down the road

Grabbed up my suitcase and I took off down the road

I said, "Farewell church, may the good Lord bless your soul"

You know I wish I had a heaven of my own

You know I wish I had a heaven of my own

I’d give all my women a good ole happy home

I’m gonna preach these blues

And I’m gonna choose my seat and sit down

I’m gonna preach these blues

And I’m gonna choose my seat and sit down

But, when the Spirit comes, I want you to
Yonder Comes My Mother

Open ‘G’ tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D)

Yonder Comes My Mother is played in open ‘G’ tuning. There is a lot of emphasis on slide application with great attention to detail and finesse in the playing of this song. It’s one of his more enigmatic numbers.

The introduction is played entirely with a bottleneck/slide.

Introduction continues.

"they were walking down the street sayin’"
Here is a tricky portion in the song where Son is actually ‘hitting/palm muting’ over one note on the 3rd fret. It’s an example of a percussive element to extend out the rhythm. It works nicely into the song. He then starts singing as he slides into the 12 fret.

At this point you are continuing the introduction while starting to sing the first verse.

The IV chord is inserted here.

A more continuation of what was demonstrated in the introduction.
The following portions represent the instrumental break with heavy emphasis on sliding about the 9\textsuperscript{th}, 10\textsuperscript{th} and 12\textsuperscript{th} frets with great attention to detail and finesse.

The transition into the second verse at the end of the instrumental break.
Lyrics

They’re walking down in the street saying
When they roll
Tell em’ I’ll be there

Oh when the road
Is coming up yonder
Yes, where
Out on the mountain top

There’s gonna be no separation
Bid farewell to every nation
When they roll
Tell em’ I’ll be

Yes, the bells in the heaven be ringing
The angels there be singing
The bells in the heaven be...
The angels there be singing, yes
The bells in the heaven be...
And the angels there be singing
When they roll
Tell em’ I’ll be
Oh when the roll
Is coming up yonder
There’s no way
Mmmm, out on the mountain top

There’s gonna be no separation
Bid farewell to every nation
When they roll
Tell em’ I’ll be

Yes, the rocks upon the mountain
They be burning down with fire
Some be singing and some be crying
Won’t have no place to hide, yes
The rocks... upon the mountain
Be burning down with fire
Singing when they roll
Tell em’ I’ll be

Oh when the roll
Is coming up yonder
Oh way
Mmmm out on the mountain top
There’s gonna be... separation

Bid farewell every nation

When they roll

Tell em’ I’ll be

Oh when they roll

Is coming up yonder

Mmmm out

Mmmm, out on the mountain top

(There’s gonna be no separation)

Bid farewell to every nation

When they roll

Tell em’ I’ll be
Pony Blues

Open ‘D’ tuning (D-A-D-F#-A-D)

Pony Blues, in many ways, captures the very essence of Delta Blues music. The rough sound is highly characteristic of his playing style. It is played in vestapol open ‘D’ tuning.

The introduction starts off with the lick on the 7th/8th frets. The portions on the 3rd fret are played with a slide.

The predominant riff played throughout the songs incorporates a percussive palm mute pounce on the strings at about the 3rd fret. He then extends the life of the riff by pressing his slide firmly to play the notes on the 3rd fret.

The next portion before leading up the first sung verse.
The 7th/8th fret lick is played while he sings. This is then followed by a boogie rhythm on what would be the D (7) chord.

![Guitar tablature](image1)

Why don't you catch my pony, now saddle up my black mare?

Then he presses firmly on the 3rd fret to sing out the rest of the verse.

![Guitar tablature](image2)

my pony, saddle up, up my black mare?

This slap rhythm follows. The palm muting is essential.

![Guitar tablature](image3)

A repeat of the same...

![Guitar tablature](image4)

You know, I'm gonna find my baby, well, in the world somewhere
Back to the slap rhythm...

Then back to this lick.

Repeat the concepts accordingly when listening to the original recording.

Lyrics

Well, catch my pony, saddle up, up my black mare

Yes, my pony, saddle up, up my black mare

You know, I'm gonna find my woman, lord in this, in this world somewhere

Well, I hit him a lick

And I sported him round in his side

Mmmmm, yeah, sported him round, down in his side

You know, a pretty little girl asked me

Mr. Please sir, a-let me ride
You know, he's a travelin' horse, he don't deny his name

Mmmm, He don't, deny his name

You know, the way he can travel, is a low-down, down dirty shame

You know, the horse that I'm ridin', he can fox-trot, lope and pace

Mmmm, mmmm, fox-trot, and lope and pace

You know, a horse with them many gaits you know, booked to...a win the race

Well, Rest assure, 2 and 2 is 4

Oh sure, 2 yeah, and 2 is 4

You know I’m going to get me a stone pony, and I ain’t going, to Shetland no more.

Yes, I think I’m gonna go to the race track

So I can see my pony run

See my, my pony run

You know, he the best in the world, but he’s a running, son of a gun

I say, get up here now horse (click click)

Now c’mon, let’s leave this town

C’mon horse, let's leave this town

Yes honey, I don’t know more, a hanging around
Why don't you get up horse, and come on, let's just go

C'mon Horse, now let's just go

As we saddle on down, on the Gulf of, of Mexico
Pearline Blues

Open ‘A’ Tuning (E-A-E-A-C#-E)

Here you have another piece heavily emphasizing the use of the slide on the 12th fret. The song is played in Open ‘G’ tuning, tuned one whole step up to ‘A’.

This is the predominant riff on the 12th fret. The slide is played throughout with great finesse.

He shifts the slide to play notes on the 3rd and 5th frets with great finesse and attention to detail.

He plays some typical IV and V chords before this turnaround melody that follows it.

Here is an alternate play on the verse.
**Lyrics**

*Mmmm, Pearline, Pearline*

*Yeah oh Pearline  Matter with you?*

*Don’t care what I do*

*Mmmmmm, mmmm, mmmmm, mmmmmmm*

*Love you Pearline*

*Love you Pearline*

*I love you Pearline*

*Mmmmmm, mmmm, mmmmm, yeah*
Conclusion

The songs presented in this E-book will undoubtedly solidify your foundation in understanding and playing Delta Blues Music. Mastery of Son House will also help you to move on to study other Delta Blues artists that will follow in lessons to come in the future.

Thank you for downloading this E-Book, and I hope that you continue to love and play the blues forever.

Best wishes,

Delta Lou-

www.deltaloumusic.com