Watch Your Step!

John Mayall/Peter Green: The Stumble

Freddie King’s ultimate instrumental saw Peter Green on blistering form. Neville Marten straps on a guitar and tries to stay on his feet...

HAVING BRAVELY filled the shoes of a deified Eric Clapton in John Mayall’s Bluesbreakers in 1966, a 19-year-old Peter Green went on to do the unthinkable – he too covered a Freddie King instrumental, as EC had done on the group’s previous album. Where Eric had chosen Hideaway, Peter opted for King’s even more slippery offering, The Stumble.

Clapton was considered the finest white exponent of blues guitar around this time. His playing on the now-legendary ‘Beano’ album defined a style that took standard blues licks and cranked them up to new levels of speed, attack and tone. But while Clapton was indeed the undisputed master, many people believe Green had the edge when it came to feel, and was actually more authentic in his approach to the blues. Since then, of course, Eric has made a life’s work of the genre.

The Stumble is a major and minor pentatonic workout over a typical blues shuffle, with King’s trademark stops and starts. It’s put together in easy-to-digest chunks, so you can approach it in sections and, having mastered one, move on to the next.

Although melodically close to King’s original, Peter’s take on the tune is tighter and better executed. Some might say he sanitised it, but others would insist that he created the definitive version. That said, it was a ‘one-take’ performance and contains one or two ambiguous notes, so I’ve used some artistic licence and played what I believe Peter (then a teenager!) meant to.

The Stumble’s melody begins on the IV chord (A in the key of E), giving it its jaunty feel. When it comes to the stops, watch your timing because it’s easy to pre-empt the beat and come in early. Once you’ve mastered Peter’s version and want to stretch out with your own improvisations, when the ‘hanging’ Bbdim7 (or A#dim7 as shown in the tab) comes at the end of the stops you might like to try a Bb diminished arpeggio (Bb Db Eb G) or the Bb diminished scale (Bb C Db Eb Gb). However, as the diminished scale is symmetrical and repeats every three frets, you can also view Bb diminished as G diminished, Db diminished and E diminished. A lucky coincidence is that you’ll find the good old E blues scale (E G A Bb B D) fits the bill as it has so many so many notes in common with E diminished.

Every guitarist should have this fabulous tune in his or her repertoire, so give it a go and see what a satisfying experience it is to nail it! GT

I loved Clapton’s playing with The Bluesbreakers, but if you listen to Peter Green his tone is more authentic”

Gary Moore
PRO TIP

- This is the perfect track to learn in sections. But rather than 'sort' of learning one section and moving on to the next too soon, really spend time getting each little piece spot on. This way, your feel as a player will increase immeasurably; your timing will improve, your vibrato become more positive and you'll sound like a player who's much more in control of the guitar than before.
**PETER GREEN THE STUMBLE**

**[Intro Bar 1]** As the melody begins before the track comes in, pay special attention to the count-in. Your first note should come in just before beat 4.  
**[Bars 1-6]** Notice how the opening lick is pure E major pentatonic and the second pure E minor pentatonic (with a nice major 3rd as its final note).

**[Bars 9-12]** The only tricky part is the alternate-picked figure in bar 1. E major pentatonic position five. Watch the pre-bend and the pull-off in bar 12.  
**[Bars 13-16]** That tricky 6ths section and turnaround: lock the fingers in position (they’re both playing the same frets all the way down on the first and third string). Note how the first three 6ths are picked, the next two slid and the final one picked each time...

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*Note: The image contains a musical score and guitar fretboard diagrams. The text provides guidance on playing the blues lick.*

[Bars 24-26] Here's a great E minor pentatonic shape I lick that you can steal. Watch the shifts between the strings here: it's a little more tricky to play than it looks.

[Bar 28] Over the diminished chord, notice those descending chromatic minor thirds on the fifth and fourth strings. Take care with timing here: these should sound as strong triplets.

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**Play: Blues**

**PETER GREEN THE STUMBLE**

**[Bars 33-48]** Here’s Peter’s first solo. Where you’d normally expect the stops to come (bars 41-44), the band carries on and Peter plays some fairly rapid repetitive licks in E minor pentatonic and blues scale – not Vai perhaps, but not so easy to play well. Learn this in one-bar chunks and then glue it all together afterwards.

**[Bars 45-48]** Coming out of E minor pentatonic, Peter goes back to referencing an E major sound (eg part of 45 and the gorgeous E minor/major lick that closes this solo (bars 47-48).
[Bars 49-60] Second solo Peter begins way up in the higher range with an E minor pentatonic position 2 lick. Then it gets quite Chuck Berry-esque with repetitive fills and unison bends. **[Bars 61-64]** Check this out: Peter ends with a variation of the previous solo's final lick and a displaced version of the chromatic minor thirds. He's switched them round! Compare these four bars to bars 49-48.
PETER GREEN THE STUMBLE

[Bar 66-67] Peter is right up at the top of the fretboard here. Watch how you execute the first finger bends on the first string. This is potentially tough going if you're not used to using this finger.

[Bars 68-69] These are the highest frets used yet. Make sure you organise your fingering so you use the strongest fingers available for the bends. And always support the bending finger with others.
**Play: Blues**

**[Bars 80-94]** The final verse. The first section is pretty much as before, but notice how the stops section changes and this time Peter chooses not to play those descending chromatic minor thirds.

**[Bars 95-96]** The ending shows a great piece of blues composition from Peter. Although the notes aren't particularly difficult, to play this with the right conviction takes some attitude. And could you better those final F9 to E9 chords to finish? I don't think so!