

The Heritage

Fingerstyle Guitar Arrangements



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By Stuart Ryan



PICKING HAND TECHNIQUES

There are several different approaches to the picking hand that you will encounter in this book. Pieces like 'Amazing Grace' rely on the traditional 'pima' fingerpicking approach. In this system the thumb is typically used to pluck the 6th, 5th and 4th strings whilst the index, middle and ring fingers pluck 3rd, 2nd and 1st strings respectively. Of course there are variations on these patterns and sometimes the fingers move to different strings but if you come from a traditional fingerpicking background then you will probably be already familiar with this approach. Other pieces like 'Since I Lay My Burden Down' rely on the traditional American blues/Travis picking system where the thumb is used to pluck alternating basslines on the 6th, 5th and 4th strings and the remaining strings are mostly plucked with the index and middle fingers. Indeed as you will see in the case of 'Since I Lay my Burden Down' this system is sometimes reduced down to just the picking hand thumb and index finger. This approach was popularized by the great American Country guitarist Merle Travis in the 1930s and 40s though you will also find it in the Delta Blues and legendary blues artists like Robert Johnson and Mississippi John Hurt. The Celtic reels 'The Bucks of Oranmore' and 'Lord Gordon's Reel' use a system that is designed to mimic the performance and ornamentation of fiddle and harp players. To this end its foundation is in the 'pima' approach discussed earlier but there are also some demanding techniques unique to this style such as executing rapid phrases mimicking fiddle bowstrokes (usually on the 1st string but also on the 4th, 3rd and 2nd strings on occasion). The various picking systems are discussed in more detail in the performance notes for each piece and it's worth going into each arrangement with a good sense of how the picking hand will be working each time.

TUNINGS/ALTERNATE TUNINGS

Some pieces seem to 'sit' well in standard tuning whilst others demand an altered tuning in order to make them work on the fretboard. Celtic reels, airs and jigs are typically drawn towards DADGAD tuning as the modal nature of this tuning and the I-IV-V relationship between the D, G and A strings respectively allows for simple open string accompaniments to be played against the complex melody figures. This tuning is also ideal for slower Irish and Scottish airs or harp pieces where you can really exploit the evocative, wistful harmonies that can be found within DADGAD tuning, e.g. in the arrangement of 'Bridget Cruz' which would have originally found its setting on a wire strung harp. The ringing, open strings are ideal for these pieces but you

must ensure your fretting hand is clean and accurate so you can really keep these strings sounding. When building your own arrangements you'll find DADGAD is ideal for pieces from the Irish and Scottish canon (and beyond) but you may come to a point where you find it always drags you to the key of D so make sure you try arranging in some other keys when using this tuning!

Standard tuning is ideal for pieces requiring walking basslines or chords that are commonly associated with Gospel and Blues and you'll find this used on pieces like 'Amazing Grace' and 'Swing Low Sweet Chariot.' A close cousin of Standard tuning is Drop D where the 6th string is lowered a tone from E to D. This is used in 'Shenandoah' and is particularly effective when you are arranging in the key of D Major or minor and want to add some low end weight to things – a sustained open 6th string can be a great device to use in cases like these.

You'll also find some tunings that are more commonly associated with Blues and slide – open G major (DGDGBD) is used for 'Just A Closer Walk With Thee' and open D minor (DADFAD) is used for 'Wayfaring Stranger.' These tunings can provide the open strings required for the alternating basslines and some interesting harmonies that may not fall under the fingers so easily in standard or other tunings.

SUGGESTED FINGERINGS

I have added suggested detailed picking and fretting hand fingerings for each piece but remember that these elements are entirely subjective, there is no definitive way to play these pieces so if you find alternate fingerings that work better for you then don't hesitate to use them!

You'll see fretting hand fingerings by the note heads on the stave as follows –

1	=	Index or First Finger
2	=	Middle or Second Finger
3	=	Ring or Third Finger
4	=	Little or Fourth Finger (sometimes referred to as the 'Pinky')

The picking hand fingerings are notated as follows –

p	=	Thumb
i	=	Index finger
m	=	Middle finger
a	=	Ring or Anular finger

Lord Gordon's Reel

General Overview

“ This up-tempo reel from Ireland is one of my favourite pieces to play in this style. It does, however, contain a number of challenges from the speed of the piece to the particular phrasing and techniques required of the picking hand that are outlined in the performance notes. Compared to many of the other arrangements in the book this one is actually quite sparse – really it is just a melody line with bass note accompaniment which is a common way of arranging tunes like these. The fact that most of the bass notes are open strings gives the fretting hand more time to focus on the melody. In terms of learning pieces like these I would isolate the melody line first and then add the bass accompaniment when you have the melody flowing smoothly. If you are new to the fiddle style embellishment technique that I describe in the performance notes then I'd start really slowly with this particular element of the arrangement. For further inspiration check out the playing of the wonderful Scottish guitarist Tony McManus who specializes in this style and has adapted the techniques of the fiddle onto guitar with a masterful level of skill. ”

PERFORMANCE NOTES

Bar 1 – The sheer speed of reels arranged for solo fingerstyle guitar often demands a good, efficient legato technique (hammer-ons/pull-offs) and that is at the heart of this arrangement. Work slowly so the legato is clean and, just as importantly, in time.

Bar 4 – The notes on string 4, fret two feature a common rhythmic embellishment to mimic the bow-strokes of the fiddle in traditional music and continues a theme also examined in my previous book, 'The Tradition.' Executing this embellishment is a challenge and the picking hand fingering is subjective. I choose to use an alternating p/i/p/l pattern for this particular embellishment though other players prefer to use a down/up/down/up alternating stroke with the picking hand thumb (and I do sometimes use this myself). Another approach is to combine p, i, and m fingers on this string so try all the options to see which works best for you.

Bar 8 – Although many of these pieces can be performed with the p, i and m fingers on the picking hand doing most of the work there are also phrases which demand a more traditional pima approach as with the melody on beat one here. Also pay attention to the triplet at the start of this phrase as it requires a sudden acceleration with the picking hand.

Bar 11 – Some challenging work for the fretting hand here with bass notes on fret five of the 6th string quickly followed by fret two on the 5th string.

Bar 15 – It's very common to have moving basslines in fingerstyle arrangements and that's the case here – I've written in suggested fretting hand fingers to make sure you can keep these bass notes sounding whilst the melody moves against them.

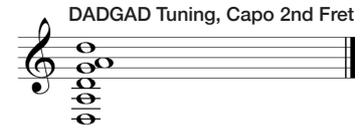
Bar 18 – The rhythmic embellishment that we encountered in bar four is now moved onto the 1st string. The picking hand pattern is more straightforward here, the pull off takes care of the second note (fret seven, string 1) whilst the rapid 'ami' pick hand stroke is used to sound the following notes.

Bar 20 – It's not essential to use the picking hand thumb to strike the notes on the 2nd string at the end of this bar but it is my preference as it allows you to focus the all important 'ami' pickstroke on the 1st string.

Bar 26 – The melody remains intact here but there is a bit more movement on the bass so make sure the picking hand thumb is comfortable with accurately moving into place each time.

Lord Gordon's Reel

Traditional, arranged for solo acoustic guitar by Stuart Ryan



♩ = 172

1

m i m p i p i a i m a m

4

m p i p i m p i p i m p m i m p

7

a m i m i m i p i m a p m i

Sally Gardens

General Overview

“ This beautiful Irish air derives from a poem by W B Yeats. He was trying to re-create the sound of ‘The Rambling Boys of Pleasure’, a traditional Irish folk song he overheard an old woman singing. However, the melody to accompany the lyrics of ‘Sally Gardens’ ended up coming from another old Irish air, ‘The Maids of Mourne Shore’. This tune is very popular within traditional circles and will be a great asset to any performance set - indeed I’ve placed this one in many live settings and it has always gone down well. The Drop D tuning helps to give the arrangement a ‘larger’ sound as we can really exploit the open sixth string at various points. The melody is simple and sparse and so offers various opportunities for supporting harmony to move against it. In addition, it is common to add some rhythmic embellishment to simple melodies such as this one. This helps to add some interest to an arrangement but it’s also a great device for a player to work on – even though we are moving at a slow tempo here, some of these rhythmic phrases will require sudden acceleration on the fretting hand so focused work on hammer-ons and pull-offs will pay dividends ultimately. ”

PERFORMANCE NOTES

Bar 2 – This slow melody needs to be played with clarity and even dynamics. Keeping the open 6th and 5th strings ringing in this bar will help to add some depth over which you can play the melody. The legato phrasing is not essential here - you can pick every note but hammer-ons and pull-offs may smooth things out even more.

Bar 6 – Look out for the triplet rhythm at the end of this bar, these three notes need to fit into two beats and this can be an awkward rhythm to get used to at first.

Bar 12 – Although it's not indicated, you can pick up the pace on the ascending melody in this bar. This type of rhythmic phrasing is ultimately instinctive but works well when you are moving between sections in a piece.

Bar 14 – Simple two-note harmony is a useful device to incorporate when developing solo guitar arrangements. It doesn't sound as full as three or more note chords but you can get simple counterpoint as with this bar and the following one – note the movement on string 5 against the melody.

Bar 17 – The melody moves up an octave here so work on keeping all the notes ringing in this bar to make this section sound as full as possible.

Bar 20 – The combination of harmonics and the melody played from within chord shapes makes this one of the more detailed passages for the fretting hand to contend with so as ever make sure you have all the shapes under the fingers before fitting this into the whole arrangement.

Bar 22 – As with bar 20 there is a lot to deal with here starting off with the descending counter melody on string 3. Look out for the rhythmic embellishment half way through the following bar (the pull-off on string 1) as it's quite rapid.

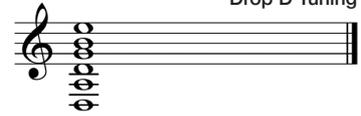
Bar 26 – Some tricky rhythmic phrasing to contend with here – there is a demi-semiquaver legato phrase on string 4 that then gives way to a triplet phrase. It's not as bad as it sounds as we are dealing with a slow tempo but it is worth isolating this bar to ensure you can perform these rhythms at this tempo without speeding up or slowing down.

Bar 34 – The ascending movement on the bassline makes this a more challenging passage and successful execution of this bar is really contingent on the fretting hand being confident with playing these shapes.

Sally Gardens

Traditional, arranged for solo acoustic guitar by Stuart Ryan

Drop D Tuning



♩ = 81

Musical notation for the first system, including a treble clef staff with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a 4/4 time signature. The guitar tablature below the staff shows fret numbers for strings E, B, G, D, A, and D. The lyrics 'm i m i i i m a m i' are written below the tablature.

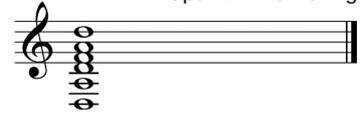
Musical notation for the second system, continuing the melody and guitar accompaniment. The lyrics 'a m i p m i i i m' are written below the tablature.

Musical notation for the third system, concluding the piece. The lyrics 'a m i p a m' are written below the tablature.

Wayfaring Stranger

Traditional, arranged for solo acoustic guitar by Stuart Ryan

Open D Minor Tuning



♩ = 67

Let ring throughout

TAB: D A F D A D

0 0 0 3 2 0 0 0 0 0

p p m a m i p

4

TAB: 2 0 3 0 0 0 0 0 3 2 0

m i p p p i m p

7

TAB: 2 0 0 0 0 2 3 1 3 0 3 0

m i p p p p p i p