

The Tradition Fingerstyle Guitar Arrangements

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Includes
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By Stuart Ryan

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Introduction

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For many years in traditional circles the guitar was reduced to the role of accompaniment – strumming or picking the chord sequence in support of melody instruments like the fiddle, whistle or voice. Whilst this is a complex art in itself, in the 1960s guitar greats like John Renbourn, Davey Graham, Gordon Giltrap and Bert Jansch began to explore the arranging potential of the guitar and started to perform solo fingerstyle versions of well known traditional songs. These self-contained arrangements featured bass, melody and chordal accompaniment with the final result being fully fledged performance pieces that, with their often unique harmony, breathed fresh life into traditional melodies.

In the 1990s and beyond, guitarists like Tony McManus, Tommy Emmanuel, Adrian Legg and Clive Carroll began to employ more demanding techniques and complex fingerstyle patterns so they could mimic the sound of the fiddle, bagpipes or harp in their arrangements. Factor in the possibilities presented by a myriad alternate tunings and now the traditional repertoire can be performed authentically on solo guitar with any harmony you wish to create. There has never been a better time for learning and performing this beautiful music that is now just as accepted as the solo repertoire of classical and jazz guitarists.

For me these arrangements represent the culmination of many years of arranging, performing and recording the traditional repertoire. From hundreds of columns for Guitar Techniques magazine to countless solo performances and masterclasses I have spent more than a decade tweaking, developing and refining my approach to arranging music from the traditional canon. It's an intensely personal discipline as you come to discover your own harmonic language for these pieces. There are questions along the way – how complex should the harmony be and is simple sometimes best? Which tuning should you choose for an arrangement? Are you trying to emulate another instrument or really bring out the voice of the guitar?

In this book I've selected some of my favourite airs, jigs and reels and arranged them in a variety of different styles from the stripped back air to uptempo reels and denser pieces where there is more going on. Traditional music is a rich genre laden with moving and exciting music and after you have learned the arrangements contained within this book I can think of no better result than you developing your own approach to arranging the music of 'The Tradition.'

Stuart Ryan
May 2013

Planxty Irwin

“ This arrangement is more sparse than many others within this book and focuses on really getting to the heart of the melody. As is traditional with DADGAD tuning there is much use of open strings and a lot of the arrangement is based around chord shapes within the open position – make sure you have these shapes under your fingers before you play through the whole arrangement.

However, there is one modern twist within this arrangement! Towards the end the melody is stated with ‘artificial harmonics’ accompanied by bass notes that are either plucked or hammered on. Although slow and sparse, this is a demanding sequence for which the technique really needs to be explained. The bass notes in square boxes are known as ‘hammer-ons from nowhere’ – this means that these notes are not plucked with the picking hand fingers but sounded with a strong hammer-on from the fretting hand finger. Against these are ‘Artificial harmonics’ which is normally abbreviated to ‘AH’ on the page. This is a tricky technique requiring much precision and there are several elements to it. In bar forty-two you will notice the twelfth fret of the 1st string indicated in brackets preceded by a small open 1st string (the zero). To create the artificial harmonic you must first select a note twelve frets above its open or fretted counterpart so in this case to create the artificial harmonic at fret twelve you must go twelve frets higher than the open string. Next you lightly rest the tip of the picking hand index finger over the fretwire of the 1st string at fret twelve and whilst this is resting in place you pluck the string with the picking hand thumb (p) or middle (m) finger. This requires especially light and relaxed picking hand fingers – apply too much pressure and the artificial harmonic won’t sound.

Other than the ‘hammer-on from nowhere’ bass note at fret two of the 5th string, this first example does not require the fretting hand to be doing anything else to create the artificial harmonic. However, the next example in bar forty-three is another story. Here you are aiming to create an artificial harmonic at fret sixteen of the 2nd string and to do this you must fret the note twelve frets behind this point – sixteen minus twelve = four and so you will see a small ‘4’ indicated just before the ‘16’ in brackets. So, now a fretting hand finger must be in place at fret four of the 2nd string before the picking hand creates the artificial harmonic at fret sixteen. This entire sequence is a study within itself as you combine hammer-ons from nowhere with plucked open strings, all played at the same time as the artificial harmonics. It is undoubtedly a challenge but the end result is always worth it! ”

PERFORMANCE NOTES

Bar 1 – Much of this arrangement relies on playing the melody from within chord shapes or simple two-string bass/melody accompaniment. For this reason let everything ring throughout as we are aiming to emulate the sound of the harp. Fretting hand fingers must be precise at all points, as you don't want any strings to be muted and therefore not sound clearly.

Bar 5 – Sliding into notes is a very common phrasing device when playing slow airs. Although this is indicated as a 'grace note' (i.e. you slide very quickly from the note at fret two of the 4th string up to fret four) you can slow these slides down if you want – this will make them more of a melodic feature than a passing phrasing device.

Bars 10, 11 – There is a bit of movement for the fretting hand to contend with here so try using my suggested fingerings for these chord shapes to keep everything playing as smoothly as possible.

Bar 34 – Although I've indicated to strum down this chord with the picking hand thumb, you can also use the index or middle finger to achieve the same effect. You can pick up the pace a bit here to keep things moving along if you wish. The melody notes on the 1st and 2nd strings can be played with the 'm' and 'i' fingers respectively or the 'a' and 'm' fingers on the picking hand. Either combination will work so it depends on what you are most comfortable with.

Bar 42 onwards – This is the 'hammer-on from nowhere/artificial harmonics' sequence described in the General Overview. Although slow, this is a great technical challenge to execute cleanly and smoothly. It would be useful to plot your way through this section one bar at a time so you can really internalise the interplay between fretting and picking hands here.

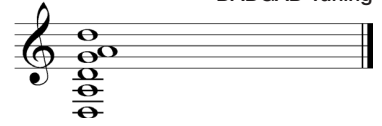
BACKGROUND

This beautiful, sparse melody by the legendary Irish harper Turlough O'Carolan gives the arranger an opportunity to really examine the use of space when creating a solo guitar arrangement. The use of DADGAD tuning in conjunction with the sustaining, open strings allows us to approximate the sound of the harp within traditional music. Some people believe that 'Planxty' means 'tribute' when appended to someone's name whilst others feels it more likely means 'good health.' There is probably some truth in both of those as O'Carolan was well known for writing pieces dedicated to friends and patrons.

Planxty Irwin

Traditional, arranged for solo acoustic guitar by Stuart Ryan

DADGAD Tuning



♩ = 116

Musical notation for measures 1-3. The first system shows a treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a 3/4 time signature. The melody consists of quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, A4, G4. The guitar tablature below shows the fretting: 0, 0, 4, 4, 4, 0. Dynamics include *a/p* and *m*.

Musical notation for measures 4-5. Measure 4 continues the melody with quarter notes G4, A4, B4. Measure 5 has a half note G4. The guitar tablature shows 0, 0, 0, 2, 0. A 2/4 time signature change is indicated in measure 5. Dynamics include *m/p* and *m*.

Musical notation for measures 6-7. Measure 6 has a half note G4. Measure 7 has a half note G4. The guitar tablature shows 0, 2, 0, 0. A dynamic of *p* is indicated.

Musical notation for measures 8-9. Measure 8 has a half note G4. Measure 9 has a half note G4. The guitar tablature shows 4, 2, 0, 7, 6, 7, 0. Dynamics include *a*, *m*, and *p*.

10

TAB

0 4 4 4 | 0 4 4 0

2 4 | 5 0

12

TAB

0 0 | 2/4 0 0

0 0 | 2 0

m
i
p

14

TAB

0 0 | 0 0

5 2 | (4) 0

16(32)

TAB

0 2 0 4 | 0 0

4 2 0 | 0 0

34

TAB

0 2 0 | 0 4 0

0 0 4 0 | 0 4 0

Black is the Colour

General Overview

“ The main features of this arrangement are the open G minor tuning which suggests some dark sounding minor chords as found in the introduction and the percussive thumb slaps on the 6th and 5th strings throughout. These occur on beat two and sometimes beat four and are represented in the tab by an ‘x’ and in the notation as an ‘x’ notehead. The use of percussive techniques is very common in solo guitar playing but does require a strong sense of timing and an accurate and relaxed thumb on the picking hand. In order to execute this technique correctly you must develop a synergy between picking and fretting hands – the fretting hand fingers must mute (i.e. lightly rest upon) the strings so the picking hand thumb can then slap onto the strings without causing a pitch to sound. The motion of the thumb itself must be extremely fast otherwise the resulting sound will be a dull thud rather than a percussive slap. Practise this technique in isolation first as ultimately you must co-ordinate it with all the other picked notes in this arrangement.

Another key performance requirement in this arrangement is the overall clarity of playing – all notes must be fretted precisely so the open strings surrounding them can ring out at all times. Aim for a harp like sound here as it is the ringing of the strings which really builds up the sound. In addition there are some fretting hand stretches, e.g. in bar fourteen where you must fret the 6th string at fret one whilst simultaneously fretting the 4th string at fret three and the 1st string at fret five. The use of a capo will lessen these stretches and I recorded this capo’d at fret two in order to give you a reference recording. It does sound bigger if played in the open position without the capo though so this could be something to work towards.

Another tricky technique can be found halfway through beat three in bar ten – here there is a simultaneous ‘double hammer-on’ onto fret two of the 2nd and 3rd strings. It’s best to use the index finger on the fretting hand to perform this and aim to use the flat of the finger just below the fingertip so you can land evenly on both strings. The overall picking pattern is a standard ‘pima’ approach which in itself should not cause too many problems – aim for even timing and gentle dynamics at those points you see fit. ”

PERFORMANCE NOTES

Bar 2 – Although the tempo is slow you are maintaining a constant, rolling sixteenth note/semiquaver rhythmic pattern from the start so make sure your timing and dynamics are always even from each picking hand finger.

Bar 6 - A difficult element appears towards the end of this bar – the fourth finger must slide up to fret seven of the 1st string whilst the index finger slides from fret two of the 3rd string to ensure both of these notes ring at the same time. This means keeping the index finger on fret two of the 3rd string even after you have first sounded it.

Bar 9 – There are some rhythmic variations at the start of the melody each time it repeats (e.g. the last three notes of this bar) so always aim to keep an eye on these.

Bar 10 – Here is the ‘double hammer-on’ to fret two of the 3rd and 2nd strings – use the index finger hammering on with a partial barre to get these two strings sounding.

Bar 14 – This chord voicing is undoubtedly a large stretch even with a capo at fret two. Work on this shape in isolation from the piece for a while, get the fingers into place a few times and then try to incorporate it into the arrangement.

Bar 26 – This outro passage is a development of the original chord progression and springs from some of the great chord voicings that can be found in Open G minor tuning.

Bar 27 – Pay particular attention to the last two beats here (starting at fret seven of the 6th string) as this all needs to be played as smoothly as possible letting the notes on the last beat ring together.

BACKGROUND

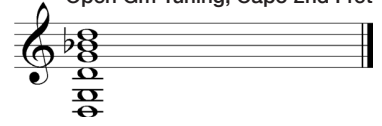
Although often associated with the Appalachian Mountains of America, ‘Black is the Colour’ most likely originates from Scotland, a theory backed up by the reference to ‘The Clyde’ in the lyrics. However the tune most commonly associated with ‘Black is the Colour’ was actually composed in the 1940s by John Jacob Niles, a folk singer and composer from Kentucky, USA.

This beautiful minor melody carries a great deal of power and because of this it translates particularly well onto solo guitar. Placing the tune in the key of G minor allows us to use open G minor tuning (DGDGBflatD) and take advantage of all the open strings. The open strings are useful for filling out the sound and their droning sound can lend the guitar an almost harp like quality.

Black is the Colour

Traditional, arranged for solo acoustic guitar by Stuart Ryan

Open Gm Tuning, Capo 2nd Fret



♩ = 74

Musical notation for the first system, including a treble clef staff with notes and a guitar tablature staff with fret numbers and lyrics: *a m i m a p p m i p i m a i p i m a p p i m p i m a m i m i*

Musical notation for the second system, including a treble clef staff with notes and a guitar tablature staff with fret numbers and lyrics: *a p i m p p i m p i m a a p i m a m i m i*

Musical notation for the third system, including a treble clef staff with notes and a guitar tablature staff with fret numbers and lyrics: *p i m i p p i m p p i a m i p*

Musical notation for the fourth system, including a treble clef staff with notes and a guitar tablature staff with fret numbers and lyrics: *p i m i p p i m p p i a m i p*

10

T
A
B

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 3 0
3 3 3 3 0 2 3/5 0 5 0 5 0 0 0 0 5 0
1 X 1 3 X 3

12

T
A
B

5 7 0 0 7 3 0 0 0 0 0 3 0
8 7 X 8 7 5 2 0 3 X 0 3 3 0 0 0 3 0
p i m a a p

14

T
A
B

5 3 0 0 3 0 2 0 5 2 0 0 0 3 5 0 0
1 X 1 3 0 3 X 0 3 3 0 5 5 0
p p i m p m p i

16

T
A
B

3 0 0 0 3 3 0 2 3/5 0 5 0 5 0 5 0 4 0
1 X 1 3 X 3 0 5 5 X 0 5 X 0 5

18

T
A
B

3 0 3 3 3 0 2 3 0 0 0 0 0 3 0
3 3 3 3 0 2 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 0
1 X 1 3 X 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 0 0
a m a m p p

The Mason's Apron

General Overview

“ I've placed this arrangement in standard tuning. Whilst it would work well in an alternate tuning, the key of A Major lends itself to standard tuning giving you the opportunity to use the open 4th (D) and 6th (E) strings for those times when you move to the IV and V chords respectively. As with most reels there is a lot of movement in the melody – the rhythmic pattern means that you are typically playing quavers/eighth notes (notes lasting for half a beat) throughout with the occasional crotchet/quarter note (a note lasting one beat). The best way to learn an arrangement like this is to start off very slowly so the fretting hand can build up the muscle memory. A useful tactic is to learn the melody on its own first so you really get to hear how the tune sounds. Of course just playing the melody on its own could involve a different fingering so I've included fingerings for the full arrangement to assist you. The use of a capo is not essential but will certainly make this easier to play!

”

PERFORMANCE NOTES

Bar 1 – It's straight into things with an up-tempo pace and some rhythmic embellishments on the melody to watch out for! You'll notice that you cross over the strings quite a lot so this will be a great exercise for developing all of the picking hand fingers. The bass notes are sparse to begin with so just make sure you keep those open low strings ringing throughout the bar – careful placement of picking and fretting hands is required here.

Bar 4 – Although I've indicated that you should pick every note here as opposed to using hammer-ons/pull-offs as in the preceding bars, this is more of a suggestion so you can develop the picking hand fingers. If you feel more comfortable using hammer-ons/pull-offs here then use that phrasing instead.

Bar 7 – Just watch out for the bass note which is brought in on beat four in this bar (the open 4th string). Sometimes bass notes will pop up in unexpected places!

Bar 9 – The descending basslines from this point will require the melody to be re-fingered and will also involve some fretting hand barres – the capo is a very useful device for making these barres easier on the hand. We are also using open strings to play melody

notes wherever possible to aid the transition between positions and cut down the work for the fretting hand (slightly!).

Bar 11 – The basslines continue to move around a little adding extra harmonic interest.

Bar 17 – The 'B' section, whilst still a challenge, affords some breathing space. You can still add rhythmic embellishments and repeat bass notes if you want to make this all a little busier though.

Bar 25 – The melody is now re-fingered to allow the use of open strings. This will give a different texture as the notes can ring out a lot more. Placing a melody in a different region on the fingerboard and/or playing with open strings wherever possible is a great tool for adding variety to your arrangements. It also often means that you can play everything out of a chord shape – this can be trickier for the picking hand if it is crossing over the strings but it can give the fretting hand a rest.

Bar 30 – Watch out for the stretch here as you fret the bass note on fret two of the 6th string whilst also fretting the melody note on fret five of the 1st string. The subsequent pull-off to the open 1st string will be a great exercise for the fourth finger on the fretting hand.

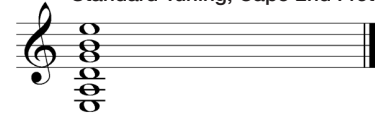
BACKGROUND

'The Mason's Apron' is one of the all time standards in traditional music circles. It is especially well known in Ireland although the tune supposedly has English origins. This reel can be taken at any number of speeds – if performed with a more upbeat feel it provides a fantastic workout for the picking hand in particular.

The Mason's Apron

Traditional, arranged for solo acoustic guitar by Stuart Ryan

Standard Tuning, Capo 2nd Fret



♩ = 177

Musical notation for the first system, measures 1-2. The treble clef staff shows a melody starting with a quarter rest, followed by eighth notes. The guitar tablature shows fret numbers for each string. Lyrics are written below the tablature.

5
2 2 2 2 2 0 2 4
0 4

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

Musical notation for the second system, measures 3-4. The treble clef staff shows a melody with triplets and quarter notes. The guitar tablature shows fret numbers. Lyrics are written below the tablature.

3
3 0 0 0 0 2 0 2
0 2

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

Musical notation for the third system, measures 5-6. The treble clef staff shows a melody with quarter notes and a half note. The guitar tablature shows fret numbers. Lyrics are written below the tablature.

5
2 2 2 2 2 0 2 4
0 4

Musical notation for the fourth system, measures 7-8. The treble clef staff shows a melody with quarter notes and a half note. The guitar tablature shows fret numbers. Lyrics are written below the tablature.

7
3 2 3 0 2 4 5 2
0 0

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

The Tradition

In this collection award winning acoustic guitarist Stuart Ryan presents fingerstyle arrangements of some of the most beautiful and engaging pieces from the traditional music of England, Ireland, Scotland and America. Ideal for the fingerstyle guitarist who is looking to develop their technical abilities whilst expanding their repertoire, 'The Tradition' features reels, jigs and airs arranged for solo guitar in a variety of tunings and tempos. The arrangements range from intermediate level to beyond and will introduce you to a variety of essential fingerstyle techniques and concepts.

Each arrangement appears in standard notation and tablature with performance notes, suggested picking and fretting hand fingerings and a recording on the accompanying CD.



Regarded as one of the UK's leading fingerstyle guitarists, Stuart Ryan has written and recorded over 500 lessons for *Guitar Techniques*, *Guitarist* and *Total Guitar* magazines and his instructional DVDs have sold in excess of 80,000 copies worldwide. He has been the acoustic guitar columnist for *Guitar Techniques* magazine since 2005 writing lessons in a variety of genres and transcribing and recording pieces by legendary guitarists such as Tommy Emmanuel, Paul Simon and Paul McCartney amongst others.

An acclaimed performer, he began his professional career in 2002 when he was awarded *Guitarist* magazine's 'Acoustic Guitarist of the Year' and since then his concert schedule has seen him play at every major UK guitar festival and prestigious concert venues including London's Purcell Room and The Sage, Gateshead. He has also performed solo concerts in Italy, Ireland, Austria and Germany with more overseas appearances planned.

When not performing or writing, Stuart maintains a busy schedule as a session guitarist on both acoustic and electric guitar within all genres. His original fingerstyle pieces can be found on his CD 'The Coast Road' whilst students of the Rockschooll and RGT exam syllabuses study his compositions and arrangements worldwide. A renowned clinician and masterclass host, Stuart endorses Collings Guitars and LR Baggs pickups.

For more information, downloadable guitar lessons and performance footage please visit www.stuartryanmusic.com.

"A world class guitarist, one of the finest of his generation"

Martin Taylor MBE

*"Will be one of the greatest guitarists this country
has produced"*

Eric Roche

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