Happy Holidays to all you flatpickers out there! This month I offer one of the greatest melodies of all time. My arrangement of this Bela Fleck “Big Country” is designed for the beginner/intermediate player. This, to me, is a great example of how to take a tune that, at first, seems really complicated, and bring it down to earth. This melody should be played by all and my arrangement should leave nobody out!

Bela’s version is, of course on the banjo, but is also in the key of E. I changed the melody to the key of D and straightened out some of Bela’s odd time signatures. I used this version in my youth orchestra fiddling class and it sounded amazing.

The A part melody is really four distinct musical sentences separated by long pauses. The chord player should continue to strum through these sections that seem like they have no melody. In fact, these long breaths is what makes this song so special. It gives the listener time to digest the phrase they just heard and wonder what phrase is coming next.

The B part does not have a long pause until the end where you hang on the F# note over a G chord for four measures. I usually play this song with an AAB format but I have presented it here with just an AB structure. Feel free to experiment with which form you like better.

Don’t forget to email with any questions or comments on this lesson, past lessons, or anything you’d like to see covered in upcoming lessons. I have had nothing but success when teaching this tune -- it seems to immediately connect with whoever is playing it. Once the melody enters your fingers it will never leave!