

Doc Watson's "Way Down Town" Part II

by Dix Bruce



Doc Watson's Lead Guitar on "Way Down Town"

Last time we looked in depth at Doc Watson's rhythm guitar work on "Way Down Town" from the Smithsonian / Folkways CD set "Doc Watson and Clarence Ashley: The Original Folkways Recordings 1960-1962" and transcribed in my new book of the same title. (See below for availability.)

Doc's approach to playing lead on "Way Down Town" is kind of a hot rodded, expanded Carter-style which comes a natural extension of his rhythm, playing in other parts of the song. In both solos, he starts with the basic melody (included in the last column) and adds a variety of hammers,

pulls, and strums. It works very well as a guitar solo or as a solo in an ensemble as Doc always keeps the rhythm going along with his lead.

The first solo below is used as the introduction to the song. Notice how the melody is simply stated without a lots of extra notes. By the time the vocal comes in, the listener already knows the tune. Beginning in the second full measure (don't count the pickup) Doc begins using a series of hammers, much like he did in the rhythm work we looked at last time. In measure 11 (M11) he adds a pull off. In M6, 14, and 15 he plays around a little with the rhythm to get a syncopated feel through the use of eighth notes followed by quarter melody notes.

In both solos Doc mixes single (down) and double (down-up) strums (see M1 on the F chord). The up stroke of the double strum is played much lighter than the down stroke and Doc usually plays only strings one, two, and sometimes three on the up stroke. I tried to notate all the instances of the double strums on "Way Down Town" as I think they make a difference to the sound Doc gets but they do add significantly to the difficulty of the piece. You can play them as written or as single strums.

When Doc strums, he sometimes articulates individual chord tones, almost like an arpeggiated strum. (as in M12) If you get the timing right it makes for a very nice, full, sound.

In the second lead solo below, Doc expands the ideas he played on the first solo. This second solo includes more hammers and pulls and also uses the sixth string F bass note (M17) as in the rhythm part.

I find it quite interesting to compare the two solos. While they're very similar, the second deftly enlarges on the first and

makes great use of many of the elements of the backup we studied previously. The solos, when viewed in succession, offer a great study in developing theme and variation with a light artistic touch. It's done in a style that brings the listener along on the improvisation. We always know what song he's playing but his subtle changes are delightful and just enough to keep us interested in the process. Therein lies the genius.

Listening to and studying Doc Watson as I have with this project allowed me to discover many wonderful aspects of his art. He is a master of guitar playing with a great command of both the instrument and the traditional idiom. Once I had transcribed his individual notes, licks, and backup schemes, I tried to look at the larger picture and evaluate how each worked as a complete piece. There never seemed to be a note out of place, never a time when I thought the solo could be improved with a few more or a few less notes. It's not that his playing is perfect - that would be boring - it just hangs together so well and sounds so much like him. I guess that's the mark of a great artist.

Dix Bruce's book "Doc Watson and Clarence Ashley: The Original Folkways Recordings 1960-1962" is available with the accompanying CDs from the author. Call Toll Free 1-877-219-0441, Musix PO Box 231005, Pleasant Hill, CA; e-mail: MUSIX1@aol.com.



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Way Down Town

Arranged by Doc Watson

Transcribed by Dix Bruce

1 **F** **C**

5 **G7** **C**

9 **F** **C**

13 **G7** **C**

18 **F** **C**

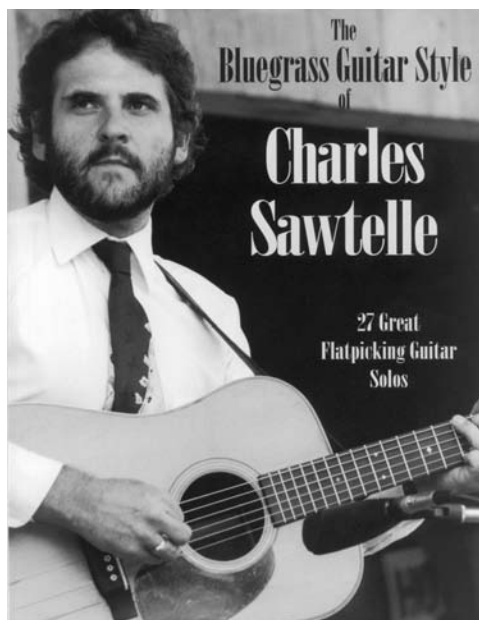
The musical score is written for guitar and bass. The guitar part is in the treble clef, and the bass part is in the bass clef. The key signature is one flat (F major/D minor), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 1, 5, 9, 13, and 18 indicated at the start of each system. Chord markers (F, G7, C) are placed above the guitar staff to indicate the harmony. Fret numbers (0, 1, 2, 3) are written below the bass staff to indicate fingerings. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, beams, and slurs. The bass line is particularly active, featuring many triplets and slurs. The guitar part consists of chords and single notes, often beamed together. The overall style is characteristic of traditional flatpicking guitar music.

Way Down Town (con't)

22 **G7** **C**

26 **F** **C**

30 **G7** **C**



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