

Flatpicking Guitar Magazine
Free Lesson - September 2020

Red River Valley

Arranged by Mickey Abraham

Hello and welcome once again to Flatpicking Guitar Magazine's free lesson portion of our monthly newsletter. This month I present to you two versions of the tradition folk song "Red River Valley." The first pass is a straight forward melody and then I added in some bluegrass licks and phrases to spice it up. "Red River Valley" conjures up images of cowboys and western frontier and it makes a great flatpicking tune.

I chose to arrange "Red River Valley" in open C position. C position is considered the second most popular bluegrass position behind the G shape. Like most flatpickers I enjoy playing tunes and melodies out of C. It seems to just feel right and fit the guitar well.

The first version presented here will be very easy for you to learn. Once you learn a simple melody like "Red River Valley" you can use a song like this as a springboard for adding various licks and phrases that will make the music come alive. For some students, trying to re-invent a song with embellishments can be challenging. Even after several decades of trying to do this I still find it a worthy challenge to try to add all the flatpicking flavor into my playing while keeping the melody of the song intact. In many ways I find it easier to improvise random licks over chords than soloing with a song's actual melody.

All the great bluegrass flatpickers have a mastery of embellishing melodies. The second pass presented here includes several ideas I've picked up from listening to and learning flatpicking solos. First, we begin with a fiddle inspired lead in phrase. Next, we encounter some bluegrass inspired slides followed by some added eighth note runs. Finally, we throw in a mini cross picking part over the F chord and a fiddle tune style tag and we have a cool "Red River Valley" melodic solo. Make sure to click on the included lesson mp3 to hear both versions in action.

I hope you enjoy working on "Red River Valley" and adding to your list of great simple tunes to pick. This is a perfect song to break out when your friends and family ask to play something they will recognize. As always should you have any questions or comments on this lesson just drop me a line at michabraham@comcast.net. I have been enjoying doing virtual private guitar lessons via Zoom, Skype, and FaceTime the past few months. Please send me an email if you'd like to sign up for private lessons!

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1 C

Musical notation for measures 1-4. The top staff is in 4/4 time, starting with a whole rest, followed by quarter notes G4, A4, and B4. The bottom staff shows guitar fretting: measure 1 has a whole rest; measure 2 has frets 0 and 1; measure 3 has frets 0, 0, 0, 0; measure 4 has frets 3, 0, 3, 1.

5 G

Musical notation for measures 5-8. The top staff continues with quarter notes G4, A4, B4, and a half note G4. The bottom staff shows guitar fretting: measure 5 has frets 0 and 1; measure 6 has frets 0 and 1; measure 7 has frets 3, 1, 0; measure 8 has fret 3.

9 C F

Musical notation for measures 9-12. The top staff continues with quarter notes G4, A4, B4, and a half note G4. The bottom staff shows guitar fretting: measure 9 has frets 3, 1; measure 10 has frets 0, 0; measure 11 has frets 3, 1, 3, 0; measure 12 has frets 3, 1.

13 G C

Musical notation for measures 13-16. The top staff continues with quarter notes G4, A4, B4, and a half note G4. The bottom staff shows guitar fretting: measure 13 has frets 2, 2; measure 14 has frets 0, 0, 1; measure 15 has frets 3, 0, 3; measure 16 has fret 1.

17 C

Musical notation for measures 17-20. The top staff changes to 3/4 time and includes slurs and accents. The bottom staff shows guitar fretting with slurs and accents: measure 17 has frets 4, 5, 0, 0, 2, 1; measure 18 has frets 3, 5, 0, 3, 5, 0; measure 19 has frets 0, 0, 0, 3, 0, 3, 1; measure 20 has frets 2, 0, 2, 0, 0, 0, 2, 1.

Red River Valley (con't)

22 G

0 1 0 3 1 0 | 0 3 3 3 1 0 | 2 3 3 0 3 1 0 2 | 0 2 3 3 3 1

26 C F

0 3 5 0 1 0 3 | 0 1 1 1 1 3 0 | 3 1 2 1 1 2 1 | 1 2 2 2 1

30 G C

0 4 0 2 0 0 1 | 3 2 3 0 3 1 0 3 | 1 0 2 0 3 2 0 | 3