



The Beatles "While My Guitar Gently Weeps"

By Douglas Baldwin

George Harrison was my favorite Beatle. Often overshadowed by two of the greatest songwriters of the twentieth century—Lennon and McCartney—he proved himself their creative equal with songs like "Something," "Here Comes the Sun," and of course, "While My Guitar Gently Weeps." And as the lead guitarist, he continually demonstrated that most musical skill that eludes so many: knowing when not to play.

In this recording, George demonstrates all these skills. The unadorned song was certainly strong enough—listen to his acoustic demo on the *Anthology, Vol. 3* collection. But the initial recording sessions were reportedly marred both by John's and Paul's bickering and their dismissal of George's contribution. George, however, came in the next day with a secret weapon, Eric Clapton, who took over lead guitar chores and whose commanding presence got the lads back on track. In one fell swoop, George pulled the Beatles together, chose not to play lead, and brought a brilliant song to completion. He was my favorite Beatle, and I miss him.

GEORGE

Harrison's acoustic rhythm guitar (Gtr. 1) sets an insistent rhythm

throughout the song, employing chords from the key of A minor (A-B-C-D-E-F-G) for the Intro and Verses. An occasional F# added via the D9/F# and D chords and a G# added via the E chord add some harmonic tension. The descending bass line (A-G-F#-F) is the most prominent feature of this progression, creating a sense of somber contemplation. Songwriters should note that George's demo version of "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" was played with the same chord progression transposed to D minor and capoed at the fifth fret, resulting in a performance in G minor. The ability to pursue a musical idea beyond mere chord fingerings and keys was one vital part of the Beatles' success as songwriters.

The Chorus modulates to A major and, bolstered by the arrival of a church-like Hammond organ, creates a sense of parting clouds as George wonders aloud why "nobody told you how to unfold your love." All of the chords of the Chorus (A, C#m, F#m, Bm, E, and E7) lie within the A major scale, generating a calmness that contrasts well with the harmonic tension of the verses. The minor-major contrast of the verse and chorus rocks back and forth throughout the song until the final verse. The minor tonality wins out

as the song unfolds into Eric Clapton's keening wail of a finale.

ERIC

Mr. Clapton's playing on this session is full of the very anguish that the lyrics describe. As George said, "It was my guitar that was gently weeping—Eric just happened to be playing it." His fills and solo work come from two slightly different approaches: soul/R&B two-string dyads in the intervals of major and minor sixths, and rock/blues-based single-note licks employing extremely large bends and vibrato. The prominent sound of his guitar amplified through a Leslie (rotating speaker) cabinet adds still more to the almost human lamentation of his phrasing. When not adding fills, he steps back with softly picked arpeggios and chord stabs.

Here's how Slowhand plays out these two ideas. The final two beats of the Intro find Clapton's dyadic fill announcing the Verse. He plays these dyads exclusively on the first (high E) and third (G) strings, and exclusively over E and E7 chords throughout the song. Fig. 1 is the complete pattern of E7-based dyads from which these fills are taken. Play these using hybrid picking: the pick attacks the third string while the middle or ring finger simultaneously plucks the first string.

Clapton's single-note lines are built primarily around two old

favorite pentatonic/blues fingerings in the key of A. One is the across-the-neck 5th-position scale shown in Fig. 2, and the other is the 12th-position fingering wedded to a 15th-position extension shown in Fig. 3. Although these are some of the most worn-out scales in the blues-rock lexicon, Eric makes them sound thoroughly cliché-free by employing unique phrasing and through careful consideration of the chords supporting his lines. Two phrases in his solo are worthy of anyone's practice regimen: 1) the 1½-step bend that opens the solo; its slow release coupled with a wide vibrato is both emotionally powerful and technically challenging, and 2) the 16th-note run that concludes the solo; it covers one-and-a-half octaves of territory in four beats, yet it sounds like a cry for compas-

sion, not an exercise in scale-wanking. Such was George Harrison's effect on fellow musicians—and on the world. ♪

TONE ZONE

GUITAR 1: Large-bodied acoustic

GUITAR 2: Solidbody electric

PICKUP/POSITION:

Humbucker/Bridge

AMP SETTINGS: Treble: 6-7; Mid: 4; Bass: 3-4

GAIN: 5

VOLUME: 5-7

EFFECTS: Leslie speaker; to simulate, use a Chorus or Flanger pedal set to moderately fast speed and shallow depth.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

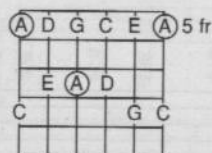
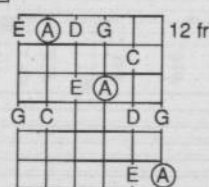


Fig. 3



While My Guitar Gently Weeps

Verse

Gr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 1 (1½ times)

Am C/G D9/F# F

at you all, see the love there that's sleep - ing.

Gr. 2

Am G D E

while my gui - tar gen - tly weeps. I look -

mf

1½

Am C/G D9/F# F

at the floor and I see it needs sweep - ing.

mp

While My Guitar Gently Weeps

Am G C E

Still my gui-tar— gen - tly weeps.—

Gtr. 2

mf

Rhy. Fig. 1A

Gtr. 1

End Rhy. Fig. 1A

Chorus

A C#m F#m C#m

I don't know why— no - bo - dy told— you

mp

Rhy. Fig. 2

While My Guitar Gently Weeps

Bm E E7

how — to un - fold — your love. —

End Rhy. Fig. 2

Gtr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 2

A C#m F#m C#m

I don't know how — some - one con - trolled you.

Gtr. 2

mp

Bm E E7

They — bought and sold — you. 2. I look —

While My Guitar Gently Weeps

Verse

Gtr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 1 (1½ times)

Am C/G D9/F# F

at the world and I no tice it's turn - ing,

7 0 5 5 5 5 0 2 2 0 1 2 3 1 3 2 0

Am G C E

while my gui - tar gen - tly weeps. With ev -

mf 1/4

2 2 0 0 0 2 0 0 7 5 5 5 8 10 0

Am C/G D9/F# F

'ry mis - take we must sure - ly be learn - ing.

mp

10 (10) 0 0 2 2 1 3 2 0 0

Gtr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 1A

Am G C E

Still my gui - tar gen - tly weeps. Yeah, yeah.

f 1 1/2 1/2

0 0 0 0 3 14 (14) 12 14 13 15

While My Guitar Gently Weeps

Guitar Solo

Gtr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 1 (1½ times)

Am C/G D9/F# F

Am G D E

8va

hold bend

Am C/G D9/F# F

8va

loco

hold bend

hold bend

Gtr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 1A

Am G C E

8va

Chorus

Gtr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 2 (2 times)

A C#m F#m C#m

I — don't know how — you — were di - vert - ed.

8va

loco

mp

While My Guitar Gently Weeps

E

E7

Bm

You were per - vert - ed, too.

mf

2 4 2 2 4 3 4 4 5 0 1 1 2 1 4 4 2 0

Detailed description: This system contains the first two staves of music. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The lyrics 'You were per - vert - ed, too.' are written below the notes. The bottom staff is a guitar line in standard tuning, with fret numbers indicated by numbers on the lines. A dynamic marking of *mf* is placed between the two staves.

A

C#m

F#m

C#m

I don't know how you were in - vert - ed.

2 2 2 4 6 6 2 4/6 4 2 2 4 2 4 6 6 5 5 6

Detailed description: This system contains the second two staves of music. The top staff continues the vocal line with lyrics 'I don't know how you were in - vert - ed.' The bottom staff continues the guitar line with fret numbers. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' above it.

Bm

E

E7

No one a - lert - ed you. 3. I look —

2 4 3 2 4 4 4 3 4 3 4 0 0 3 12 12 12 13 14 14 14

Detailed description: This system contains the final two staves of music. The top staff continues the vocal line with lyrics 'No one a - lert - ed you. 3. I look —'. The bottom staff continues the guitar line with fret numbers, including a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '3' and a wavy line above it.

While My Guitar Gently Weeps

Verse

Gtr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 1 (1½ times)

Am C/G D9/F# F

at you all, see the love there that's sleep - ing,

mf

Fretboard diagram for the first system: 5 7 7 5 | 7 7 5 | 3 3 | 3 | 2 2 | 2 2 | 1 | 0 1 | 0 1

Am G D E

while my gui - tar gent - ly weeps.

mf 1/4 1½ 1½

Fretboard diagram for the second system: 1 2 2 0 0 0 | 0 12 14 14 14 (14) 13 14 14 14 12 14 12

Am C/G D9/F# F

Look at you all.

mp

Fretboard diagram for the third system: 10 | 2 0 2 0 2 | 0 1 1 2 2 2 | 0 0 0 | 2 2 | 1

