

How to play California Dreamin'

Easy Fingerstyle Guitar arrangement by Damon Winter

[The following is a transcript of my original tutorial video]

Hi, I'm wedding guitarist Damon Winter. Today we take a look at my arrangement for solo guitar of the John & Michelle Phillips penned folk rock classic California Dreamin'. Released in 1965, the song was a huge hit for The Mamas and The Papas. Glowing with transcendent vocal harmonies it also carries an undercurrent of melancholy epitomized musically by the wistful flute solo provided by jazz veteran Bud Shank.

PART A

The key signature contains no sharps or flats: we are in the key of A minor. The time signature is 4 – 4, or, 4 beats per bar where each beat equals a crotchet. The tempo indication is 'moderately.' Aim for a final performance tempo of around 120 beats per minute. Part A is the instantly recognizable 4 bar introduction. Notice the two dotted quavers in the second half of bars one and three. Dots are used to make a note half as long again; in this case creating a syncopated figure which needs to be counted carefully. Tap and clap from beat three in bar one using semiquavers like this: "**three** e and a **four** e **and** a." Remember you are striking a note on every clap and marking time with each tap. In bar 2 we see diamond shaped note heads which indicate the notes are to be played as harmonics. In this case we are playing the natural harmonics which occur when you lightly press above the notes e and a on the 5th and 6th strings of the twelfth fret. Allow the semibreve to ring for the entire bar. Notice the crescendo in the first three bars of part A. We begin mezzo piano, or moderately soft, climbing to mezzo forte, or moderately loud, upon reaching the first beat of bar four.

PART B

Part B contains the verse and chorus for California Dreamin' In several bars beginning in bar six we are asked to glissando. This is two notes or more produced by one or more strings while maintaining left hand finger contact with the fingerboard across frets throughout the movement. The time values of notes at the start of a glissando are not to be taken literally: all the notes in the glissando are fitted into the time available. The first barre chord in the piece occurs in the second half of beat 4 in bar 17. Notice that written above this is a capital C followed by the Roman numeral 1 and the number 6 in a circle which has a line attached to it.

This indicates that you are playing a barre chord on the first fret, covering all six strings, and you hold it until the end of beat two in bar eighteen. The capital C stands for the word *capotasto* which is also the origin of the word used for the clamping devices used by many guitarists. Barre chords can be made easier to play by slightly rolling the left hand index finger towards the headstock. This works because the bones are closer to the surface on the side of your index finger meaning that less downward pressure is required.

PART C

Part C, beginning at bar 37, features a 16 bar solo divided into two distinct 8 bar sections. Notice the rolled, or, arpeggiated E major chord in bar 44. The arpeggiation of chords is one of the most charming and widely used guitaristic effects. It is also one of the most abused. A thoughtlessly played arpeggiated chord sounds sloppy. We use arpeggiation to enrich texture and the separation of notes in time is accepted by the ear as the equivalent of separation in musical space. Problems arise when chords are spread too broadly, making them rhythmically vague. Also if the thumb plays *on* the beat the upper notes must necessarily come *after* the beat. When the highest note is melodic, as it usually is, the result is a delayed stress. This may be appropriate if the intended effect is rubato or espressivo, but more often than not it just sounds inept. The best strategy in most cases is to begin arpeggiating the chord *before* the beat so as to *place the highest note on the beat*. Rhythmically the lower notes then have the effect of grace notes. Be careful when the thumb plays more than one note to keep the spacing even and to play with consistent nail tone.

PART D

Part D comprises the second ending and coda of California Dreamin'. I indicate in bar 60 that the E major chord may be played rasgueado. The spelling and pronunciation of this technique varies but it is instantly recognizable as the rapid right hand strumming effect found throughout Flamenco music. The simplest rasgueado is one in which the four fingers of your right hand brush lightly across the strings in the sequence c – a – m – i. In order, these letters represent your right hand fingers starting with your fifth digit little finger and ending with your index finger. Anchor your thumb on the sixth string or occasionally the sound board. A rolling or continuous rasgueado is possible when upward strokes are introduced. Begin with c – a – m – i down strokes followed by an upward stroke with your thumb...and repeat. The use of rasgueado in California Dreamin' adds a certain exoticism I thought in keeping with the Haight-Ashbury vibe of the song.

FINAL THOUGHTS

John Phillips wrote California Dreamin' in New York after his wife Michelle complained that she hated the cold and missed California. The song celebrated the state as a golden paradise, yet,

its delivery is tense and tinged with unease. "I'd be safe and warm if I was in L.A" the honeyed harmonies chime but the minor key melancholy of the piece belies that sentiment. This dichotomy is part of the song's lasting appeal. California Dreamin' was recorded not long after The Byrds released Mr Tambourine Man and replaced that song as the high point of 1960s folk rock. Widely loved, endlessly covered and as enduring as the American dream, California Dreamin' is a must-have on any set list. Have fun with my arrangement of California Dreamin'. You can view my performance and download the TAB, notation and Sibelius file at www.EasyFingerstyleGuitar.com. Feel free to like, leave comments and subscribe for more videos like this. Until next time, I'm wedding guitarist Damon Winter. Thank you for watching.