



EMBRYONIC JOURNEY

ON RAMP



This solo acoustic guitar instrumental, written and performed by Jefferson Airplane guitarist Jorma Kaukonen and featured on the band's commercial breakthrough album *Surrealistic Pillow*, is a brilliantly constructed miniature masterpiece of self-accompaniment. Just under two minutes, the piece is a cleverly woven counterpoint of sprightly, folk-flavored melodies and bouncy bass figures that meet in the middle register to form a tapestry of briskly flowing eighth-note rhythms and gently shifting harmonic movement.

Jorma plays this piece in Drop D tuning, in which the guitar's low E string is tuned down one whole step to D (low to high, D–A–D–G–B–E). This tuning is ideal for the key of D, as it enables the guitarist to incorporate a satisfyingly deep open low D note into the proceedings and create a warm, rich sounding texture that exploits the use of open strings and makes the most of the acoustic guitar's low-end resonance.

ROADMAP



Jorma performs “Embryonic Journey” fingerstyle, using a thumbpick in conjunction with his bare fingers. While the piece may be played without a thumbpick, you'll find that using one gives the bass notes a more articulate attack, with greater definition and volume. For most of the piece, the thumb plays an alternating bass pattern, jumping between the 6th and 4th strings in a steady quarter-note rhythm that integrates with the melodic activity on the top three strings and propels the piece along. Throughout the tune, be sure to maintain a light palm mute on the bass strings. Doing so will add clarity to the proceedings by preventing the thumb-picked notes from ringing together too much, and it'll also help you feel the groove better because you'll have a closer connection to the strings (literally!).

This song is written in cut time. Cut time is a time signature that implies a fast tempo and has only two strong beats to every measure, with the half note getting one beat. It's also known as $\frac{2}{2}$ time. In cut time, there is usually an implied back beat on beats 2 and 4.

As is always the case, you'll want to tackle this tune one section at a time, proceeding at a slow tempo at first as you get the notes under your fingers and work on coordinating both hands to play the notes in their proper order and rhythms. Also, be sure to use the TNT software to slow down the provided sound-alike track; this will give you more detailed insight into how each note comes together in the piece. When studying the transcription, you'll find it helpful to check out the standard notation (not just the TAB) to see how the thumb-picked bass notes are mostly indicated as a separate rhythm, with the stems pointing downward.

When reading from the TAB during the A section, you'll find it very helpful to know that the thumb picks all the notes on the bottom three strings while the index and middle fingers pluck the notes on the G and B strings, respectively. The high E string is not used during this opening section. Assigning fingers to strings like this is a very effective way to approach fingerpicking in general and makes learning a tune like this much easier, as you can memorize the feel of your fingers picking their assigned strings in turn.

The A section is based on an eight-bar phrase (measures 1–8) that repeats, so if you master the first eight bars, you will also have conquered bars 9–16 by default. The phrase is for the most part built around a recurring D–G/D chord change. Jorma barres his fret-hand index finger across the D, G, and B strings at the 7th fret and hammers his 3rd and 2nd fingers onto the 9th and 8th frets of the D and B strings. These two fingers move as a unit throughout this section, pressing down and lifting up off the strings at the same time, even though the strings are not always picked together. This two-note hammer is the signature lick for this section and is critical to master. Keep the thumb alternating constantly throughout. However, when the signature hammered notes occur on the beat, such as on beat 4 in bar 3, a good suggestion is to allow the thumb to float and not strike the B note, as it interrupts the flow. Allow the force of the hammer to sound the notes whenever it occurs on the beat. In most cases the hammered notes land on an offbeat, allowing the thumb to be in position to sound the next bass note on the beat.

Chord diagrams for the first system:

- D (7fr. 111)
- G/D (7fr. 312)
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- D (7fr. 111)
- G/D (7fr. 312)
- D (7fr. 111)

Instrumental notation (T, A, B) for the first system:

T: 7-8 7-7 7-8 7-7 7-8 7-7 7-8 7-7 7-8 7-7 7-8 7-7

A: 7-9 7-7 7-9 7-7 7-9 7-7 7-9 7-7 7-9 7-7 7-9 7-7

B: 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

In bars 6 and 14, Jorma temporarily lets go of the 7th-fret barre to play a sliding 3rds figure on the G and B strings, fretted with the middle and ring fingers. Notice that when he does this, the pick-hand thumb keeps the alternating bass pattern going, picking the open 4th string on beats 2 and 4.

Chord diagrams for the second system:

- G/D (7fr. 312)
- D (7fr. 111)

Instrumental notation (T, A, B) for the second system:

T: 8-10 8-7 7-8 7-7 7-8 7-7 7-8 7-7 7-8 7-7 7-8 7-7

A: 9-11 9-7 7-9 7-7 7-9 7-7 7-9 7-7 7-9 7-7 7-9 7-7

B: 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

In bars 10–13 of the B section, Jorma introduces a new melodic idea. He maintains the very strict alternating thumb pattern while playing a series of simple chords (G–G/F#–Em–A–A7–D). The first three chords produce an especially interesting sound because of the contrast between the static open strings on the top of each chord and the moving bottom voices. The second half of the B section is the same series of chords strummed in an aggressive syncopated rhythm.

Chord diagrams for the third system:

- G (5fr. 111)
- G/F# (4fr. 111)
- Em (111)
- A (1111)
- A7 (1 2 3)
- D (1 2 1)

Instrumental notation (T, A, B) for the third system:

T: 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

A: 5 5 4 4 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

B: 5 5 4 4 2 2 2 2 0 0 0 0

Cont. picking simile

Chord diagrams for the fourth system:

- G (5fr. 111)
- G/F# (4fr. 111)
- Em (111)
- A (1111)
- A7 (1 2)
- D (1 2 1)

Instrumental notation (T, A, B) for the fourth system:

T: 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

A: 5 5 4 4 2 2 2 2 0 0 0 0

B: 5 5 4 4 2 2 2 2 0 0 0 0