



Harmonious Composition

by [Richard Gilewitz](#)

In response to a number of topics brought up by fingerstyle players during my seminars, for this session I have decided to focus my thoughts on composition, melody, and the effective employment of harmonics. I have selected the opening segment of an original piece titled *Jamaicalina*, composed in an open C tuning (low to high: C G C G C E). This tune was originally recorded on my first CD, "Voluntary Solitary". It is included in my recent Mel Bay release, "[Acoustic Fingerstyle Guitar Workshop](#)", which contains a DVD studio performance of the song.

In terms of composition, while searching for an original idea I seem to have a history of playing for quite a bit of time either through my repertoire or simply "noodling" around. At some point (if I'm lucky), it seems when my mind is somewhat adrift, a sucker punch of a few notes grabs my attention and pulls me back to the foreground. At that moment I realize it is time to get to work. I may play repeatedly with that handful of notes, experimenting with variations within them in an attempt to seek out a captivating melody of some sort, while considering the rhythmic content as well. This may be where some fingerstyle players tend to get lost. They neglect the absolute necessity to include some type of bounce, groove or a sense of a genuine *undercurrent* of a rhythm - the element that allows the tune to *ride* along. When done right this allows the listener to *ride* along as well.

As an experiment with harmonics while composing *Jamaicalina*, I attempted to hold a steady foundation in the upper register with a couple of fingers, while trying to capture a melody with my free left-hand pinky (4th finger). The result of this plan is the first 18 measures of the piece - which not only sees the pinky required for most of the melody, but also some slight adjustments with the fingers as well to add a bit more *flavor* to the event.

I shall refer to the numbers in the tab to explain my left-hand fingerings.

Measure one has the left-hand 2nd and 1st fingers, respectively, planted on string 5, fret 10 and string 4, fret 9. The pinky, or 4th finger, is directed towards the 12th fret harmonics on strings 1 and 2. The left-hand 3rd finger drops down on the first string, fret 10 on beat 4. During measure 2, the left-hand pinky targets both strings 2 and 3, *independently* and consecutively on beat 3 and the "and" of beat 3. What I mean by *independently* is that there may be a temptation to simply drop the left-hand pinky down flat to cover both strings. If this is avoided and you allow the pinky to arch up and bounce on each string, there is a much more apparent *chime* that can be heard. When doing this be sure to attack it aggressively with the right hand, as well when plucking the strings, to ensure a good resonance and not some weak, anemic sound. Remember that the beauty of the melody is in the overlapping and resonating harmonics that you will continue to employ throughout much of this piece.

One last thought on harmonics. I have attempted often times to use analogies when explaining technique and the effective use of harmonics is no exception. You may want to consider or rather imagine how quickly you would recoil your finger if it were to touch a hot stove. The *minimum* amount of time between the striking of the string and the *release* of the left-hand finger from the string will deliver the greatest and purest chime. In other

words, as soon as you strike the string with the right hand, JUMP OFF (with the left)!!! It's HOT!!!

Best of luck to you and I hope many of you continue to use your imagination to explore techniques and to create. Just write something. If need be, test your first efforts out on stuffed animals, work up to pets in your audience, and then eventually humans. Wait. Is that the right order?

Jamaicalina

Tuning: C G C G C E

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$\text{♩} = 120$

T <12> 0 10 10 11 0 <12> <12> 9 0 <12> 0 10 10

A 0 9 0 9 0 9 0 9 0 9 0 9 0

B 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10

T 11 <12> <12> 10 11 <12> <12> 9 0

A 9 0 9 0 9 0 9 0 9 0 9 0

B 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10

T <12> 10 11 0 <12> 10 10 p harmonics 10 10

A 0 9 0 9 0 9 0 9 0 9 0 9 0

B 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10

T 11 <12> <12> 10 11 0 <12> 10 10

A 9 0 9 0 9 0 9 0 9 0 9 0

B 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10

T <12> 10 11 <12> <12> 10 11 <12> 10

A 0 9 0 9 0 9 0 9 0 9 0 9 0

B 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10

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A musical score for guitar. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 3/4 time signature. It contains a melodic line starting with a quarter note G4, followed by eighth notes A4 and B4, then a quarter note C5, and finally a half note G4. The bottom two staves are labeled T, A, and B. The T staff has a diamond symbol above the first measure. The A staff has fret numbers 11, 9, and 0. The B staff has fret numbers 10 and 10.

Jamaicalina (BMI) "Voluntary Solitary" 1994 GillaZilla Records.
"Voluntary Solitary" is available from www.richardgilewitz.com, CD Baby, and Amazon.com

"Acoustic Fingerstyle Guitar Workshop" is available from www.melbay.com,
www.richardgilewitz.com, or from your local guitar shop.