

Quick Notes: “American Girl” by Tom Petty

Tempo: 118 bpm

Once you get the structure of the song (through the chords) this one is really easy to follow.

While it depends on which role you play in this song, anything and everything that is strummer friendly should seriously be picked out very loosely. I'm not sure there is any true “strumming” approach to the chords used by Petty. The tab will help you, but don't be too particular about the notes.

Long story short, here's the chord-based structure as far as what Petty played:

Intro: D Major (just strum it once or twice – a little hammer on using the G string is what Petty did)

Verse: D – Em – G – A (x2)

Pre-Chorus: D – G – Em – A (hold the A chord a bit)

Chorus: G – A – D – Bm | G – A

Interlude (just D – Petty plays open D and 5th fret D note)

Verse (repeated)

Pre-Chorus (repeated)

Chorus (repeated)

Bridge: (this is shown in the tab below)

Interlude (repeated from before until the end)

Now, when it comes to the tab, here's what the other guitar player is playing during these same parts.

Intro:

D

This is played after the 4th click on the backing track. Just strum this 3 quick strums. You will then move into the rest of the intro, which is also the interlude:

D

The verse is pretty easy as well:

D	Em	G	A	
5 3	7 6	10 8	12 10	121212 101010

Play the above part twice and then move into the pre-chorus, sticking to the overall "A" from above, but this time it's over Petty's (partial) D Major during the pre-chorus:

D	G	Em	A
	<i>let ring</i>	<i>let ring</i>	<i>let ring</i>
121212 101010	0 0 3 3 0 0 0 0	0 0 0 0 0 2	5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
	3		0 0 0

A		
<i>let ring</i>	<i>let ring</i>	<i>let ring</i>
0 0 2 2	2 2 2 0 0 0 0 0	0 0 0 2 2 2 0 0 0 0 2

The chorus is next:

G	A	D	Bm
<i>let ring</i>			<i>Full</i>
3 3 4 4	5 5 6 6	7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7	9 9 7 7 9 9 0 7
3	4 5	7 7 7 6	

p

G **A**

let ring

At this point you would play the interlude (x4 if I recall) and then go back to the verse etc. The other part that is played is the bridge, which is a combination of both guitar parts. I think this is the easiest way to get you through the song in a way that makes sense:

G7 **A7** **D7**

Play the above three times, then end with this:

G7 **A7**

After that you go back to the interlude (the 7's and 10's) for a while. There's no real need to count how much. At some point, you can do this, which is the FIRST part of the solo (and not so bad)

The above part is played twice. The fingerings here are purely logical. Then, well, it gets really hard.

D

10 7 7 8 7 7 10 7 7 8 7 7 10 7 7 8 7 7 10 7 7 8 7 7

P P P P P P P P

The above is easiest practiced thinking in a D Major chord shape. Your 1st finger covers the 7th fret notes, while your 3rd or 4th finger plays the 10th fret notes and your 2nd finger plays the 8th fret notes. This is the exact same formation into the next run, which is:

E

12 9 9 10 9 9 12 9 9 10 9 9 12 9 9 10 9 9 12 9 9 10 9 9

P P P P P P P P

After the above part, you'll then move into the "G" realm of things, and your fingers switch up slightly:

G

15 12 12 14 12 12 15 12 12 14 12 12 15 12 12 14 12 12 15 12 12 14 12 12

P P P P P P P P

In order to get (close) to getting the above part in "G" I would recommend sticking to your 1st finger for the 12th frets, then your 4th finger for the 15th fret notes. Finally, use your 3rd finger for the 14th fret notes.

A

17 14 14 15 14 14 17 14 14 15 14 14 17 14 14 15 14 14 17 14 14 15 14 14

P P P P P P P P

The “A” realm is back to your D shape, so your 1st finger covers the 14th frets, your 3rd (or 4th) finger plays the 17th frets, and your 2nd finger plays the 15th frets.

This is REPEATED....and you can end on the interlude theme (the 7's and 10's) or you can just say to heck with it like I did because that sucker is hard to play. If you can play it, wow. Just remember that you have to DOUBLE the triplet (trip-uh-let) feel. That's not something I practice on a daily basis.

Believe me....I tried. I spent at least 4 hours trying it and looked at the clock and said “uh – I better just skip that for now.”

However, everything else that I covered should get you through the song, and be SURE that you remember one very important thing: less is more. Don't overplay your chords. Just hint at them. You could even get by with mostly root notes. When you check out the PDF you'll see that is what Petty did almost the entire time. Even the other guitarist took a break during it. I think the bass and that interlude (7's and 10's) is what really makes this song shine.