

WIN A TAKAMINE GUITAR!

# ACOUSTIC GUITAR

FOR EVERY PLAYER IN ANY STYLE

## LEARN GUITAR ONLINE

YOUR GUIDE TO THE LATEST SITES

## 7 Guitars that Made History

AMOS LEE'S FOLK-SOUL FUSION

## LESSONS

6 Ways to Create Chord Progressions

Geoff Muldaur on Arranging

Set Up Your Practice Space

## 6 SONGS TO PLAY

- BO DIDDLEY "Bo Diddley"
- ELLIOTT SMITH "Between the Bars"
- AMOS LEE "Ease Back"
- J.S. BACH Prelude from the Cello Suite No. 1 in G Major

... and more

## Get Great Amplified Tone

## Start Soloing Now!

## NEW GEAR REVIEWS

BREEDLOVE Pro Series

GODIN Archtop

5 Creative CAPOS

NOVEMBER 2008

\$5.99US \$7.99CAN



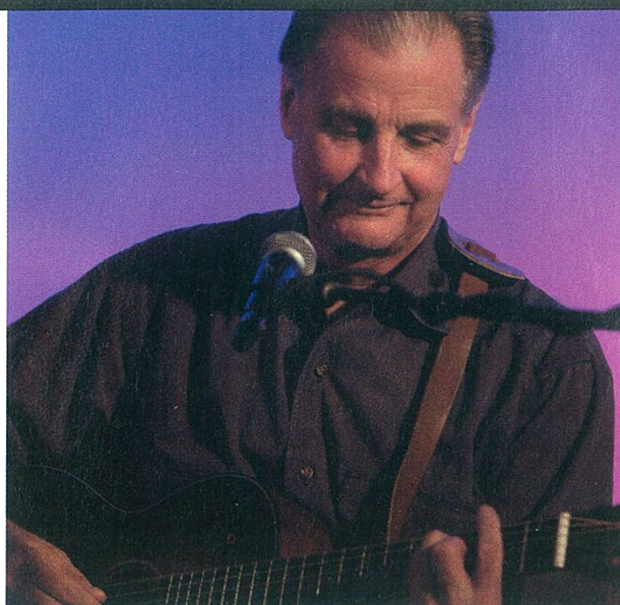
0 71658 02519 6

acousticguitar.com

# Geoff Muldaur

A lesson in the art of arranging music for the acoustic guitar from one of the instrument's great interpreters.

by Eric Schoenberg  
and Dan Apczynski



For those who remember the Jim Kweskin Jug Band, the sound of Geoff Muldaur's voice should be very familiar. That sound carried through Muldaur's career with the Jug Band to Paul Butterfield's *Better Days* and his pairings with Maria Muldaur and Amos Garrett. After ducking out of the limelight in the mid-'80s (during which he had a behind-the-scenes career as a composer and producer), he returned in 1998 with *Secret Handshake*, an album that more heavily featured his guitar playing, and has been touring and recording ever since.

Often labeled as a bluesman, Muldaur is much more. He's a sophisticated musician as well as an eclectic collector of influences from the American jazz/blues heritage, inspired by the likes of Bix Beiderbecke, Jimmie Rodgers, Gid Tanner, Jelly Roll Morton, and Blind Lemon Jefferson—influences that now live happily in every note he plays.

These days, Muldaur is still actively performing and recording as a solo artist. His guitar playing is no mere accompaniment—it plays a major role in his complete solo performance as the vehicle for the sophisticated arrangements that define his music. The guitar is his rhythm section and horn section, with his bare fingers supplying a driving, Motown-style pulse. We sat down with Muldaur between recent tour stops to discuss his unique ideas about arranging music for the guitar.

*You've been a composer/arranger for many years—what have you learned about arranging on the guitar?*

I don't think I'm a "born" guitar player—I think it's just a perfect instrument to arrange

Hear the music examples at [acousticguitar.com/privatelesson](http://acousticguitar.com/privatelesson)  
PASSWORD: prelude

on so I can sing in front of a few people. A piano would probably be better, but then I'd need to lug a piano to every gig, and that's not going to happen.

One thing it's helped me to discover is that motion trumps harmony. [Plays *Example 1*.] Anything sound bad in there? [Replays *Example 1*, emphasizing dissonance on beat three of measure 2.] I could have gone [Example 2] but it's not as cool as [Example 3]. You don't hear it because it's moving past, and you're hearing the root movement in this nice, funky way that you're sort of used to hearing anyway.

*What tips do you have for guitar players who want to try their hand at arranging?*

All I can pass on is . . . listen to everything. I

## Lick of the Month

"I was playing in C tuning many, many years ago," Muldaur says. "I showed this tuning to Muddy Waters. I was playing with him in Denver in the '70s; I was backstage with him and he said, 'What's that?' He loved all the octaves."

Open-C Tuning: C̣ G̣ C̣ G̣ C̣ E

Ex. 1 **C#m7** **F#7b9** **B9** **E** Ex. 2 Ex. 3

Open-G Tuning: D G D G B D

Ex. 4 **G** **Am** **G** **G7** **Am/G** **G7** **Am/G** **G**

Standard Tuning (Ex. 5-6)

Ex. 5 **E7** **F#dim** **C7** **B7** **E** **A** **D** **A** **E** **C#dim** **E**

Ex. 6a Ex. 6b

Harm. P.M. H H H P walkup

listen to Puccini. I listen to rembetiko music. Things work into me from all over the place. I've never been the kind of guy who just dug into country-blues and learned all of the things those guys did. I felt the feelings as best I could as a white kid growing up outside of New York City. Your musical DNA is open to certain input—the more things you hear, the more things are gonna come in.

**And what effect does all of that input have when you start playing a tune?**

Depending on the tune, I think of the style I want to imply and how those grooves feel. I play something like this on "Trouble Soon Be Over" [Example 4]. It's a Blind Willie Johnson tune, but my reference is the Spinners, so it ends up much more like a Motown- or a Philly-sounding groove.

**So you're not imitating the song as much as you're trying to convey a certain style.**

I try not to imitate—but imitating is not a bad thing. Learning songs exactly the way they're played on a record is a fun thing to do. I

remember when John Hammond came to town playing the things that Robert Johnson played, and we were amazed that anyone ever sat down and figured that stuff out. We had never even tried to—we just sort of heard it and started messing around.

**When you take a tune that people have played, and you play your version of it, how do you know that it's your version?**

Because when I've heard it, I'll hear something

that could be done to it, and I'll let it marinate—sometimes for 20 years. I'll say, "If I ever do that, I know just how I'm going to do it." I'll work some of the lines out on the guitar, but maybe I mostly hear it as a horn thing—that's just who I am.

Of course, you're going to reinvent the wheel from time to time. I remember working on this [plays Example 5, from "Searching for Blind Lemon"] and asking myself, "Have I ever heard anyone else do that? Did Joseph Spence ever play something like that?" And it's close, but no! I don't ever want to imitate somebody else, even by mistake.

**"Searching for Blind Lemon" seems like an unusual song title, considering your philosophy on imitating other players.**

It was actually Paul Rishell's idea that I write that song. I asked him to show me two Blind Lemon Jefferson figures, and I'll make reference to him [in the song] as an homage. This is way out of the normal thing I would do [Examples 6a and 6b]. That's a one-off deal I've given to Blind Lemon.

AG

## WHAT HE PLAYS

- **Acoustic Guitars:** Martin 00-18H Geoff Muldaur signature model, 1935 Martin 00-40H, 1941 Martin 00-18H.
- **Amplification:** Highlander iP-1x (external power) undersaddle pickup to Countryman DI.
- **Strings:** Elixir light gauge.
- **Capo:** Shubb 12-string model.
- **Picks:** "No picks, except at parties."