

Arranging for Solo Guitar

What is arranging?

Arranging is a “re-composition” of a work or a piece of music written for another instrument or ensemble. Literally, anything can be arranged, however, your results will vary. Some compositions are more “arrangeable” than others. The skill and experience of the arranger (YOU!) will largely determine the results and the scope of compositions arranged.

Why arrange?

Because it is FUN as well as one of the most practical skills a solo guitarist can develop. You will be able to play things on the guitar you otherwise would not be able to play. Others will also be able to more easily recognize and enjoy what you are playing because you will be playing the melody just not the accompaniment or “rhythm” parts.

Ok... so how do I learn?!

Select the ideal (idiomatic) key, not necessarily for the piece, but the solo guitar. This will change depending on what you are trying to arrange, however, some ideal and effective keys for arranging are:

- C Major / a minor
- G Major / e minor
- D Major / b minor
- A Major / f# minor
- E Major / g# minor

Of course, other keys are a possibility, but these keys are a good place to start. You can use a capo to bring it to the original key, after you have arranged in a “guitar friendly” key.

Why are these keys the best keys for solo guitar?

Because you can utilize the open strings more often in these keys.

Basic Process of Arranging

1. “Figure out” the harmony (chords/accompaniment). Decide on the key you are going to use. Learn the harmony in that key.
2. Sing, hum, or if you can, hear the melody over the harmony.
3. “Figure out” how to play the melody.
4. Try to develop a very simple accompaniment while playing the melody. For example, just playing a chord on the downbeat or the “changes” or adding a steady bass line with the “root” of each chord.
5. Find the “groove”. Use it! (Most likely in the accompaniment)
6. What musical texture for accompaniment? Arpeggios, Ostinato, simple chordal, etc...
7. Make the melody work within this context. It may not lie rhythmically perfect with the original and you may not use every note.
8. Use timbre, color, and special effects to accentuate instrumentation.