TUNES ON GUITAR

THE BLARNEY PILGRIM—a jig

Although reels, jigs, hornpipes, etc., can be finger picked on the guitar, a flat pick is usually the handiest way to get around all those notes in the cleanest fashion. It works well for all those tunes in the keys of C and G and it gives a great "String Band" sound (just listen to Dan Curry sometime).

Despite the relative ease of flat picking there are still a number of crazies who insist on ruining their nerves and their fingers. For the likes of such here's a way of tackling tunes in the key of D. It utilizes the dropped D tuning (D A D G B E low to high, ie., the bottom E string is tuned down to D) and the trick is to play the melody on the upper strings and to add open string bass notes (D A D) to accent the rhythm. A good way to improve your knowledge of the finger board and really get those left hand fingers working is to play the melody on closed strings, usually up around the fourth to seventh fret. This is particularly suitable for jigs as it gives a nice stacatto sound.

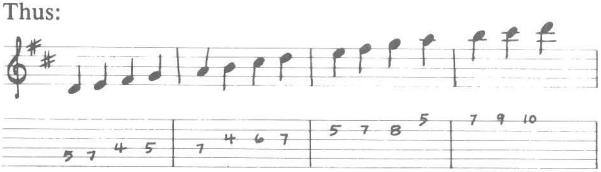
So, to get in shape the first thing to do is to play the D major scale starting with D on the fifth string (A) at the fifth fret.

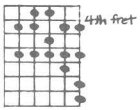
If you aren't used to playing in this area of the finger board it will save you a little pain if you use a capo and play higher up until your left hand strengthens.

Jigs are in 6/8 time and the basic rhythmic unit is the triplet (♫♫). If you are not used to playing jigs the next step is to practice the scale in triplets. The beat in 6/8 is two to the bar and the count would be *1* and *2* and ah, with the emphasis on 1 and 2. Learning to get the feel of triplets is well worth the effort as it is so important in Celtic music.

The Blarney Pilgrim is a double jig fairly common in Celtic music. The Seattle group "No Comhaile" include it in their repertoire and it may be heard on the recordings of Alistair Anderson (Concertina Workshop, Topic 12TFRS501) and Jack and Charlie Coen (The Branch Line, Topic 12TS337). A couple of interesting things about the tune: Although it's in the key of D major the tonal centre is A (Myxolydian mode) and it is based on a gapped scale (no C sharp). This gives the tune a particular flavour and would make it difficult to harmonise in a modern manner.

Thus:





It sounds best on steel strings, preferably a light gauge to save wear and tear on the fingers, and is played in a more or less strict classical manner. At speed finger picks would probably be too clumsy and a thumb pick adds too much thump to the bass. The strength of the tune lies in the melody and the bass notes are added to give a nice rhythmic feel. The usual advice applies; start slow and even—a slow jig is better than no jig. The final tempo is a matter of personal choice but around 100 beats/minute sounds okay. Each section is repeated and it is usual to play through the entire piece three times.

It is also usual to play jigs in sets of two or three so the next step is to find at least one other jig to go with the *Blarney Pilgrim*. Check through the back issues of the Canada Folk Bulletin, O'Neills Music of Ireland or any one of a thousand fiddle tune books. After that there's any number of reels, hornpipes, etc. that may be suitable. One that immediately comes to mind is the Newfoundland tune *Mussels in the Corner* (CFB, Volume 1, Number 1).

One word of caution, this is only one way of tackling tunes in the key of D. It won't work for every tune and even if it did it would end up sounding monotonous. So keep looking and experimenting.

Rod Wilson

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