

# Alison

Words and music by Elvis Costello



Although Elvis Costello's "Alison," a single from his 1978 debut album, *My Aim Is True*, was only a modest success when it was released, the quirky song has endured as one of his best known tunes. On the original recording, Costello's backing band provides a solid beat with a soft-rock feel. However, Costello has performed the song solo with just his guitar and sometimes slows the piece down, giving the song a more melancholy flavor.

I've arranged this instrumental fingerstyle version in D A D G A D, in the key of G. (Costello recorded the song in E.) Like many pop tunes, the melody and harmony are fairly simple and repetitive; a lot of the song's appeal stems from the lyrics and Elvis's vocal inflections. To compensate, I use several techniques to introduce some tonal variety, especially on repeated notes. In addition to slides, hammer-ons, and pull-offs, I sometimes play repeated notes on different strings (in measures 5 and 11, for example). A strumming technique (see measures 9 and 13) also helps give emphasis to various notes and adds some different colors.

The bass line uses a light-rock, dotted-quarter/eighth-note pattern, which helps

give the arrangement a bit of a groove. This pattern can be tricky to play against the melody at times. Take it slowly the first few times, so you can discover which melody notes fall at the same time as the bass notes. I like to play this tune a bit more slowly than Costello did on the original recording, treating it as a pretty ballad and emphasizing the minor-chord changes. The arrangement is fairly straightforward; the main challenge is to bring out the melody and to play lyrically. I find that knowing the words to this tune and hearing them in my head as I play helps me mimic some of Elvis's subtle variation between phrases.

—DOUG YOUNG

Tuning: D A D G A D

Chord progression: D Bm C Em D Am Bm D Verse C

Chord progression: G C Bm Em D C Bm Em

Chord progression: F D C Bm Em D C

The musical score is presented in three systems. Each system consists of a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The bass clef staff shows a consistent dotted-quarter/eighth-note pattern. The first system covers measures 1-8, the second system covers measures 9-12, and the third system covers measures 13-16. Chord changes are indicated above the treble staff, and specific fingerings and techniques like hammer-ons (H) and pull-offs (P) are marked throughout the piece.

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Bm Em D C Bm Em F D

Chorus

C G D Bm D6/F# Em D C

To Coda Verse

C Bm Em D C Bm Em F

D C Bm Em D C Bm Em D

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C Bm Em F D *D.S. al Coda*

41

45 **Coda**

48

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Cadd9

G

1. Oh it's so funny to be seeing you after so long, girl

Cadd9 Bm6 Em D  
And with the way you look I understand that you were not impressed

Cadd9 Bm6 Em  
But I heard you let that little friend of mine

Fadd9 D  
Take off your party dress

Cadd9 Bm6 Em  
I'm not going to get too sentimental

D Cadd9 Bm6 Em D  
Like those other sticky valentines

Cadd9 Bm6 Em  
'Cause I don't know if you are loving some body

Fadd9 D  
I only know it isn't mine

Chorus

Cadd9 G Cadd9 D Bm6 D/F# Em  
Alison, I know this world is killing you

D Cadd9 G Cadd9 D G  
Oh, Alison, my aim is true

Cadd9 G  
2. Well I see you've got a husband now

Cadd9 Bm6 Em D  
Did he leave your pretty fingers lying in the wedding cake?

Cadd9 Bm6 Em  
You used to hold him right in your hand

Fadd9 D  
Bet he took all he could take

Cadd9 Bm6 Em  
Sometimes I wish that I could stop you from talking

D Cadd9 Bm6 Em D  
When I hear the silly things that you say

Cadd9 Bm6 Em  
I think somebody better put out the big light

Fadd9 D  
'Cause I can't stand to see you this way

Repeat Chorus

Cadd9 Fadd9  
D G Cadd9 Fadd9  
My aim is true

D G  
My aim is true

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