If You Could Read My Mind

Words and music by Gordon Lightfoot

In 1970, Warner/Reprise’s release of Gordon Lightfoot’s sixth album, *Sit Down Young Stranger*, catapulted the folkly Canadian singer-songwriter to the status of an internationally renowned folk-pop star. The label originally issued Lightfoot’s version of Kris Kristofferson’s song “Me and Bobby McGee” (featured in this issue’s Acoustic Classic) as the album’s lead-off single, but it barely dented the Top-40 barrier. However, Lightfoot’s gentle folk ballad “If You Could Read My Mind” shot to the top of the charts, and Warner/Reprise quickly renamed the album after the song that earned it such enormous sales.

The track featured the beautifully intertwined guitar work of Lightfoot and his long-time accompanist Red Shea, one of the great unsung heroes of folk guitar. In the intro and coda of my arrangement of “If You Could Read My Mind,” I’ve approximated the guitar figure that kicks off the original piece. Instead of underpinning the song’s melody with an arpeggio pattern, as Lightfoot and Shea do, I’ve either harmonized it with sixths over a simple bass line (bars 5–16) to better replicate the rhythmic nuances of Lightfoot’s vocal phrasing, or placed it atop three-note chords (bars 17–22) to emphasize the interesting harmonic progression in these bars and create a stronger dynamic feel.

Use the fretting-hand fingerings I’ve indicated in this arrangement, particularly the half-barre chords. You may find it a bit tricky initially to switch easily between some of these half-barre positions, but once you get the hang of them you should find that they greatly simplify the fretting-hand fingerings.

The original song has a coda that paraphrases a portion of the melody. In this arrangement, I’ve fashioned the coda out of the guitar figure that precedes the fourth verse, which is similar to the figure in the introduction. Again, pay attention to the half-barre A chord on the G, B, and E strings. You’ll have to quickly lift and then replace this barre to play the required open E string.

I’ve based this arrangement on Lightfoot’s first verse of “If You Could Read My Mind.” In subsequent verses, Lightfoot repeats the prechorus and chorus phrases found in bars 13–23, so follow the form on page 107 if you want to perform the tune exactly as Lightfoot sings it.

—RON FORBES-ROBERTS

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September 2006 ACOUSTIC GUITAR
Chorus

Dmaj7  A/C#  Bm7  E

play four times

Verse

A

1. If you could read____ my mind____ love  What a tale my thoughts____ could tell____ Just like an old-
2-4. See additional lyrics.

PreChorus

G  A  A7  Dmaj7

About a ghost from a wishing well____ In a castle dark____ or a fortress strong With chains

Chorus

E  F#m7  D  A/C#  A

And I will never be
A
g
1. If you could read my mind, love, what a tale my thoughts could tell
   A
   Just like an old-time movie about a ghost from a wishing well

PreChorus
   A   A7   Dmaj7
   In a castle dark or a fortress strong
   E   Fm7   D   A/C   A
   With chains upon my feet, you know that ghost is me

Chorus
   Dmaj7   A/C
   And I will never be set free
   Bm7   E
   As long as I'm a ghost you can't see

A

2. If I could read your mind, love, what a tale your thoughts could tell
   A
   Just like a paperback novel, the kind the drugstores sell

PreChorus
   A   A7   Dmaj7
   When you reach the part where the heartaches come
   E   Fm7   D   A/C   A
   The hero would be me, heroes often fail

Chorus
   Dmaj7   A/C
   And you won't read that book again
   Bm7   E
   Because the ending's just too hard to take

PreChorus
   A   A7   Dmaj7
   I'd walk away like a movie star
   E   Fm7   D   A/C   A
   Who gets burned in a three-way script, enter number two

Chorus
   Dmaj7   A/C
   A movie queen to play the scene
   Bm7   E   Fm7
   Of bringing all the good things out in me
   D   A/C   A
   But for now, love, let's be real

*Play chords in parentheses on third and sixth choruses only.

Chorus
   Dmaj7   A/C
   I never thought I could act this way
   Bm7   E
   And I've got to say that I just don't get it

Chorus
   Dmaj7   A/C
   I don't know where we went wrong
   Bm7   E
   But the feeling's gone and I just can't get it back

Repeat Verse 1

Chorus
   Dmaj7   A/C
   If you read between the lines
   Bm7   E   Fm7
   You'll know that I'm just trying to understand
   D   A/C   A
   The feelings that you lack

Chorus
   Dmaj7   A/C
   I never thought I could feel this way
   Bm7   E
   And I've got to say that I just don't get it

Chorus
   Dmaj7   A/C
   I don't know where we went wrong
   Bm7   E
   But the feeling's gone and I just can't get it back

September 2006 AC OUSTIC GUITAR 107