few bands have made as much of an impact on rock as Queen did with 1977’s News of the World. In a changing musical world in which punk was gaining ground, Queen proved that they could adapt and survive, combining the aggressiveness of tracks like “Sheer Heart Attack” and “Get Down, Make Love” with anthems such as the album’s opening medley, “We Will Rock You/We Are the Champions.” While “We Will Rock You” became an all-time favorite at sporting events, “We Are the Champions” maintained the grandiose elements of classic Queen material, with Freddie Mercury’s soaring vocals guiding the band and Brian May adding just the right touches in both rhythm and lead guitar tracks.

**SIMPLE VS. COMPOUND METER**

“We Are the Champions” has a 12/8 time signature, which, along with an intermittent 6/8 time signature, falls into a category called compound meter. In each of these signatures, the main pulse is divided into three smaller parts—one strong note followed by two weak ones. In simple meter, on the other hand, each beat is divided into two parts—one strong and one weak. So, in a simple meter such as 4/4, the eighth notes are counted “one-and, two-and, three-and, four-and”; in 12/8, however, they are counted “one-and-uh, two-and-uh, three-and-uh, four-and-uh.” At faster tempos, you generally count or tap your foot only to the main beats; as such, it’s important to get a feel for compound meters at a slow speed, where you can make sure to give equal time to each part of the beat, tapping your foot or counting aloud as needed.

**THE VERSE**

Since Mercury’s piano style is full of ringing arpeggios and right-hand octave leaps, it’s difficult to duplicate it note for note on the guitar; however, our transcription’s arrangement will suffice, as long as you pay proper attention to dynamics and phrasing. Note that the second beat is often accented, and that staccato notes occur on or just after the third beat of each measure. If you’re fluent with two-hand touch, or tap-style, playing you may want to try expanding the range of this C minor-based part by using a pattern such as the one in Fig. 1.

May also plays arpeggios when he enters with the clean guitar part—at this point, the harmonic emphasis shifts to an E5 chord, the tonic of C minor’s relative major key. While the key signature doesn’t change (E5 major and C minor both contain three flats), this move sets up the transition (up a whole step) to F major in the chorus, aided by a B5-C5 sequence (the IV and V chords of F major). Since B5 is the V chord of E5, and therefore diatonic (within the key) to both E5 and F major, it helps smooth out the key change.

**THE CHORUS**

With his volume cranked, May launches into the power chord-laden chorus figure—the perfect counterpart to the piano-driven verse—and finishes up with some wide voicings of inverted chords. Mercury makes an interesting harmonic choice at the four-bar interlude tagged onto the chorus; here, he uses phrasing similar to the verse but replaces the Cm chord with the iv chord, Fm. This iv-v sequence makes the Fm act briefly as the tonic—resulting in the fusion-like sound of F Dorian (F–G–A–B–C–D–E)—before returning to the Cm chord as the vocals reenter.

In the second chorus, May puts his unmistakable phrasing, bending, and vibrato into some lead fills, creating a call-and-response effect before harmonizing with Mercury’s vocals. Despite having single-coil pickups in his homemade guitar, May gets outrageously thick lead tone. A humbucker-equipped guitar wouldn’t do out of the question for approximating May’s sound, but if you’re going for it with single-coils (which are generally brighter than humbuckers), be sure to add enough midrange for a good amount of bite and sustain.

**TONE ZONE**

**GUITARS:** Solidbody
**PICKUP/POSITION:** Single-coil/Fridge and Middle
**GAIN:** 7
**EQ:** Bass/Mid/Treble: 5/7/6

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WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS
As Recorded by Queen
(From the Hollywood Recording NEWS OF THE WORLD)

Transcribed by Jordan Baker

Words and Music by Freddie Mercury

Lyrics

Verse 1
I've paid my dues, time after time.
I've done my sentence, but committed no crime.
And bad mistakes, I've made a few.
I've had my share of sand kicked in my face, but I've come through.
And I need to go on and on and on and on.

Chorus
We are the champions, my friends,
And we'll keep on fighting 'til the end.
We are the champions, we are the champions.
No time for losers, 'cause we are the champions of the world.

Verse 2
I've taken my bows, and my curtain calls.
You brought me fame and fortune and everything that goes with it.
I thanked you all.
But it's been no bed of roses, no pleasure cruise.
I consider it a challenge before all human race, and I'd never lose.
And the meters go on and on and on and on.

Moderately Slow Rock \( \frac{3}{4} = 60 \)

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We Are the Champions

I've had my share of sand kicked in my face, but I've come through. And I need to go

Chorus

on and on and on and on. We are the champions, my friends, and

we'll keep on fighting 'til the end. We are the champions, we are the champions.

No time for losers, 'cause we are the champions of the world.
Verse 2

Gtr. 1 tacet
Cm Gm7/C Cm Gm7/C Cm Gm7/C

bows, and my curtain calls. You brought me fame and fortune and everything that goes with it. I thanked
dist. off

you all. But it's been no bed of roses, no pleasure cruise. I consider it a

Gtr. 2: w/Rhy. Fill 1
Eb5 Bs/D C5 F Bs5

challenge before all human race, and I'd never lose. And the meters go on and on and on and on.
We Are the Champions

Chorus 2
Gtr. 2: w/Rhy. Fig. 1
F5  A5  D5  B5  C5/G

We are the champions, my friends,

and we'll keep on fighting 'til

Bb5  F#  G5  C/G  Bb5  D#7

the end. We are the champions, we are the champions.

F5  Ebadd9/G  Fm/Ab  Bb  Cm11

No time for losers, 'cause we are the champions

P.M.

Gtr. 3 tacet
F5  A5  D5  B5  C5  F5  Am

We are the champions, my friends,

and we'll keep on fighting.
We Are the Champions

'Btil the end.
Ah, we are the champions,
'cause

No time for losers,