

The Water Is Wide

Traditional, arranged by Ron Forbes-Roberts

In the 1950s, jazz guitarist Johnny Smith recorded a haunting solo guitar arrangement of the folk song, "Black Is the Color of My True Love's Hair." This demonstrated that when used judiciously, new reharmonization techniques can be applied to folk songs with gorgeous results. I've used some of these techniques to create a new arrangement of the traditional tune "The Water Is Wide," taking care to retain the song's intrinsic character.

In this arrangement, most of the song's original chords have been slightly altered to enrich the harmonies supporting the melody. For example, in measures 2 and 3, I've substituted an E^{maj7} and an E^{maj13} chord for the original E triad. I've also harmonized some melody notes with passing chords not found in the original, such as the D^{dim} chord in measure 1 which approaches the E^{maj7} in measure 2.

The basic form of the tune is more or less intact, with a few deviations. In measure 16, for example, I've inserted a four-measure jazz turnaround to delay the V chord (B⁹ in measure 19). I've also delayed the resolution to the concluding I chord with the addition of a C^{maj7} chord in measure 21 and an F^{maj7} in measure 22.

Most people play this song in 4/4 time but to get a different feel, I've arranged it in 3/4. Phrasing is crucial to this arrangement, and it's vital that you play it with a very relaxed and flexible tempo. Feel free to hold notes longer than their indicated value, particularly at the end of melodic phrases. Take care to draw out and emphasize the melody, which—despite its revamped setting—remains the essence of this beautiful song.

—RON FORBES-ROBERTS

The musical score is written for guitar in 3/4 time, featuring a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The score is divided into four systems, each with a treble staff and a guitar staff showing fret numbers (0-7). Chords are indicated above the treble staff, and fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 on the treble staff and 0-7 on the guitar staff.

System 1 (Measures 1-6): Chords: A/B, D^{dim}, E^{maj7}, E^{maj13}, A^{maj7}, B⁹, F^{dim}/E, E^{add9}, G^{#7}. Measure 6 includes a triplet of eighth notes (G, A, B) and a 'P' (pizzicato) marking.

System 2 (Measures 7-13): Chords: C^{#m7}, A^{maj7}, F^{dim}, F^{#m7}/G, F^{#m}, F^{#m7}, B⁹, G^{#m7}, G^{#m7}/A, B^{m7}, E⁹. Measure 13 includes a triplet of eighth notes (G, A, B).

System 3 (Measures 14-19): Chords: A^{maj9}, A^{min9}, G^{#min9}, F^{maj11}/C#, F^{#m11}, B⁷/9. Measure 16 includes a 'Rit.' (ritardando) marking. Measure 19 includes a triplet of eighth notes (G, A, B).

System 4 (Measures 20-22): Chords: C^{maj7}, F^{maj7}11, E^{maj7}, E^{maj13}. Measure 22 includes a triplet of eighth notes (G, A, B).

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