



# Building a Traditional Tune Repertoire

by Wendy Anthony

## Old Joe Clark

**(Key of A-mixolydian)**

### The Tune:

*Old Joe Clark* is an easy-to-play, well-known fiddle tune that is included in repertoires of both Bluegrass & Old-Time players in many different places. Researchers have found a variety of origins of this tune, all of which are based on the lives of some real Joe Clarks in Virginia, Kentucky & Maryland. *Old Joe Clark* may even have started out as a ballad which then later became a popular fiddle tune, instead of the lyrics being added to an already existing fiddle tune. Recordings in 1924 by Fiddlin' Powers Family and in 1926 by the Skillet Lickers were the 3rd & 4th best selling country recordings during those years.

# Old Joe Clark

Traditional

Arranged by Wendy Anthony

**Part A**

**A**

**E**

**Part B**

**A**

**A**

**E**

**1. A**

**2. A**

**G**

**A**

**A**

**E**

**1. A**

**2. A**

Listen to the Old Joe Clark MIDI  
[120](#) & [160](#) bpm

## Techniques:

- **Overview of Tune:** Even though the key signature of A has 3 sharps (F#, C# & G#), there are actually only 2 sharp notes - A, B, C#, D, E, F#, G, A, because this tune is in the Mixolydian Mode, which has a flatted 7th note (G natural instead of G#).
- **Chords:** The main chords used are basic to the key of A: A(I) & E(V), with the addition of G(bVII), the flatted 7th note characteristic of the Mixolydian tuning mode. Both Parts A & B have the same chord structure, with the exception of the 13th measure of Part B, where the full measure of E (V) is replaced by a G (bVII) chord.

Part A: ||: A | A | A | E | A | A | A/E | A :||

Part B: ||: A | A | A | G | A | A | A/E | A :||

- **Pick Strokes:** Pick all 1/4 notes with Downstrokes & all paired 1/8 notes with Down/Upstrokes. The simplified version of this tune contains many 1/4 notes, creating lots of opportunities to practice multiple Downstrokes with crisp, clear ringing tones that blend well together without sounding too choppy. The 1/4 notes can also be played slow & saucy with lots of slides or easily sped up to produce a very upbeat tune when played close to 200 +/- bpm!

## Variations:

1. **Kick-Off Introduction:** An opening kick-off is a traditional introduction to count in the rhythm, by adding 2 extra measures of strumming an A chord before starting the tune.

**Old Joe Clark - Intro Kickoff**

**Part A**

2. **Add/Replace Notes:** Alternate the melody notes with quieter open strings notes to vary the rhythm; replace 1/4 notes with a pair of 1/8 notes to vary the melody; slide up to the 7th fret on the next lower set of strings to pair up with open-string notes, like those starting both Parts A & B.

**Old Joe Clark - Extra Notes**

Part A  
A

Part B  
A

Measure 1      Measure 2      Measure 10

E 0 2 3 2 0 0 2 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0  
A 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0  
D 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0  
G 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

□ V □ V □ V □ V

3. **Add Chord Notes:** Add notes from the appropriate chord to create a full, droning background to the single melody notes

**Old Joe Clark - Add Chords**

Part A  
A

Part B  
A

Measure 1 & 5      Measure 4      Measure 10      Measure 13

E 0 2 3 2 2 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0  
A 0 0 0 0 0 2 2 2 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0  
D 0 0 0 0 0 2 2 2 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0  
G 0 0 0 0 0 2 2 2 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

4. **Lyrics:** Even if you don't plan on singing along, knowing some lyrics can often help in remembering the notes & rhythm of a tune. As many different silly verses to this tune exist, I've only included one for a sample, from Fiddlin' Power's 1924 recording. The Chorus is sung to Part B.

Verse:

Wish I had a nickel,  
Wish I had a dime,  
Wish I had a pretty little girl,  
I'd give her all that's mine.

Chorus:

Fare thee well Old Joe Clark,  
Goodbye Betsy Brown,  
Walk along home Old Joe Clark,  
Try and leave this town.

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**Comments or Suggestions?**

Keepin' tuned ...  
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