

Foggy Mountain Top:

Open & closed positions

by [Dix Bruce](#)

Here's "Foggy Mountain Top," another song from my "[Parking Lot Picker's Songbook, Mandolin edition.](#)" (We also have separate editions for guitar and banjo.) It's written in the key of G.

As you play through the first version below, you'll notice that several of the melody's notes are played on open strings. As you progress as a mandolinist it's important to know how to play a melody with all fretted notes and no open strings. The great advantage of knowing a melody or solo in a "closed" position is that you can easily move or "transpose" it to any other key. That can be helpful when a picking buddy knows a song in a different key from you or when a vocalist can't quite make all the notes in a chosen key and you have to move the song up or down to a new key.

Foggy Mountain Top

** Verse 1 often used as chorus*

1. If I was on some fog - gy moun - tain top, I'd
2. Now if you see that girl____ of____ mine, There's
3. She caused me to weep, she caused_ me to mourn, She
4. If I had listened to what my____ ma - ma said, I

Chords: G, C, G

Tab: 2 || 5 2 5 0 | 2 5 5 2 0 2

3
sail a - way to the West, I'd sail all a - round this
some - thing you must_ tell her, She need not to fool her
caused me to leave my_ home, To the lone - some_ pines and the
would not be here to - day, Just ly - ing a - round this

Chords: D, G

Tab: 5 2 5 5 5 | 0* 5 5 2 2 5 5

6
whole wide world, To the girl I love the best
time a - way, To_ court some oth - er feller.
good old times, I'm_ on my way back home.
old jail - house, A'_ weep - ing my poor life a - way.

Chords: C, G, D, G

Tab: 2 5 0 5 0 | 2 2 2 0 | 5*

For the next version below, I moved all the open string notes, the second string As and third string Ds, to fretted positions on a lower string. The small numbers between the standard notation and the TAB staff are suggested fretting finger numbers. If you follow these suggestions you'll map out a position on the fingerboard that you can eventually use to move the whole melody down in pitch by one fret to the key of Gb. You will also be able to move it up the fingerboard and up in pitch to many other keys.

Foggy Mountain Top *closed position 1*

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Once you swap out the open string notes for fretted notes, you're not limited to only the one position we just explored. You can also move your fretting hand to a completely new position. In the final version of "Foggy Mountain Top" below I moved some of the notes to higher positions on the fingerboard. I find this position to be incredibly useful. It's relatively easy to reach and I've discovered that hundreds of melodies and solos can be logically found and played here once you understand the real estate. You'll gain that understanding by working through melodies like this one in this position. For extra practice, try to place simple melodies that you've memorized elsewhere on the fingerboard in this position.

In my mind this position is centered around the third string fifth fret G, which I play with my first finger. When I play through a melody here, I'm really just mapping out the locations of the G major scale. Since most of the melodies or solos I'll play in bluegrass, folk, and country music will be encompassed in a major scale, this is a very good thing to know. As with the other position, I can easily move this one up and down the fingerboard to just about any key once I define the position and can visualize it in my head and feel it in my fingers. Ain't nothin' but the magic of the mandolin!

Foggy Mountain Top

closed position 2

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The straight, unadorned melody works OK for a solo, but I'd suggest that you try adding more notes of the same pitch to fill in the sound here and there. The acoustic mandolin doesn't have a whole lot of sustain and the sound can die out quickly. That's why traditionally mandolinists have doubled or quadrupled the number of notes played in a melody or solo.

Example one below shows the simple melody. Example two shows the same two measures with notes added to fill in. Try adding notes in this way to the rest of the melody. Don't feel like you have to add to every note. Work towards a solo that you like and can play.

I have several examples of this "note fill in" technique in my ["Getting into Bluegrass Mandolin"](#) book/CD set and I hope to cover the subject in more depth in a future column.

3 1 3 1 2 3 1 3 2 1

9 5 9 5 7 9 5 5 9 7 9

3 1 3 1 2 3 1 3 2 3

9 5 5 5 5 9 9 9 9 5 5 5 5 7 7 7 7 9 9 5 5 5 5 9 9 7 7 7 7 9 9 9 9

If you're interested in swing and Gypsy jazz on the mandolin, check out my new book/CD set "[Gypsy Swing & Hot Club Rhythm for Mandolin](#)." Both it and the "[Parking Lot Picker's Songbooks](#)" can be found on my website: musixnow.com. Be sure to check out the Musix Newsletter section of the site. I recently posted Newsletter #11. All the newsletters contain music, TAB, and MP3s that you can download and learn.