

# Guitar Trio (1977)

## for three electric guitars, electric bass and drums

### by Rhys Chatham

#### Performance instructions

The version on the recording is from the early eighties and is only eight minutes in length. We are going to do a version that is twenty minutes, which is what we did prior to 1982. In the original (long) version, slides by the visual artist Robert Longo were shown, which we will do for this version as well. Additionally, we will be doing the piece with a minimum of 6 electric guitars, electric bass and drums.

General background and orientation:

The primary melodic and harmonic vocabulary for this piece consists of the overtones generated by the electric guitar. As we all know, there are many ways to get overtones out of a guitar. In Guitar Trio, we elicit different overtone areas by playing over pre-determined frets on our fretboard.

If you play a low E with a medium gauge flatpick at a steady eighth note rhythm (at between 126 -132 bpm) directly over the 5<sup>th</sup> fret, you'll hear one set of overtones in addition to the fundamental frequency (low E). If you play over the 7<sup>th</sup> fret, you'll hear another. So the way we get melodies in this piece is to play for 8, 16, 24, 32 or 64 beats (any multiple of 8, really) directly over each of these respective frets, thereby shaping the sonority of the composite waveform of the frequencies that your guitar is generating in relation to the other guitars of the ensemble.

The frets that seem to work best for this music are the 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> frets. Play over them for multiples of 8 beats and try to make varying melodies with the overtones. You'll hear it, don't worry. And through subtle inflections of your picking technique, you can elicit different overtone regions, even within the context of the same fret!

In addition to these frets, from time to time, the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> frets can also be played.

So basically, you'll be playing over the dotted frets on your guitar. In this band, we play using the "dot system". ;-)

Do this on your own at first, then do it with the recording, if you want to get a head start on things. In performance, you will have to listen constantly to how your sound affects the overall sonority of the ensemble.

Because the overtones generated by the guitar are quite soft, it is for this reason that we play G3 (Guitar Trio) at relatively high volume levels, in order to hear the subtlety and poetry of the soft overtones (i.e. we play this piece LOUD!). You'll want to significantly boost your guitar in the frequency area of 1.2k (mid-range frequency) if you have a bandwidth booster box, or on your amp. Otherwise, set the midrange on your amp to a high setting. Set the treble boost on your amp to "high", if you have one.

Those with sensitive ears or tinnitus can use earplugs (the "EAR" brand is highly recommended...) during the rehearsal and possibly as well as for the performance.

On your guitar, use the pickup setting closest to the bridge of your guitar.

There are three sections in the piece to learn, which we will do at the rehearsal/soundcheck.

They are:

1. The "one-string section", where we play solely on the low E string of the electric guitar at a moderate tempo (126-132 bpm);

2. The “three-string section”, where we play low E, a “B” (on the A string), and an E (on the D string), i.e. an E1/B/e2 power chord (the other strings are damped);
3. The “six-string section”. Here we play all six strings in an Em7 chord. You just have to finger a B on the A string, the rest is open. So the pitches are: Low E1 (open), B, d (open), g (open), b (open) e3 (open).

Strumming technique:

In the one-string and three-string section, we use a combination of 8<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> notes for the basic rhythm (listen to the record for ideas). But during the three-string section, in addition to the basic rhythm, we also tremolo (i.e. 32<sup>nd</sup> notes). So be sure to practice your tremolo technique along with the CD. Be prepared to play a tremolo for a sustained period during six-strings at a tempo of at least 144 bpm.

So basically, you make up your own rhythmic patterns throughout this piece, forming a logical counterpoint to the rhythm you hear me playing on the recording.

Here is the form of the piece:

The first time we do the piece, which will last around 20 minutes, the drummer only plays high hat. The bass player plays exactly like on the recording, except the events unfold over a longer period of time, but the riffs used should be like those of the recording (originally played by Michael Boone Brown in 1982).

First we play on one string. We start with just me, the drummer and bass player, and then I cue in the guitarists one by one, so everything is really relaxed in terms of entrances.

Then, after a time, I start playing on 3-strings in advance of everyone else, and on my cue, the entire band (meaning the guitarists, since the drummer and bass are always playing) come in on my cue, all together, REAL SOFT (!!!) and take 16 bars of 4/4 to get real LOUD (i.e. a 16-bar crescendo on three strings (E/B/e2) from the “1-string section” into the “3 string section).

We play the “3-string section” for a while (4 minutes, maybe), then I start playing on 6-strings by myself. Then, on my cue, we do the same thing as before: Everybody comes in together on 6-strings, really softly, and does a 16-bar crescendo to full volume (i.e. loud-as-fuck!)

This section will go on for a while and is fun to play.

After this 6-string section, on my cue, everybody cuts out except me and the drummer. When we cut out (on a ring, i.e., an open 6-string Em7 chord on the downbeat), I will be playing softly on one string (low E), and then we repeat the above form once, with exactly the same cues, but the sections will be a little bit shorter the 2<sup>nd</sup> time through.

When we get to the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> time through, I give a cue and we play a final chord on the downbeat (i.e. I go: “one --, uh two --- ; uh one, two, three, four, FINAL HIT), which we let ring into silence.

And that’s the end of the piece. < applause >

Then, after the applause, we announce the names of the players, and then say we’re gonna do another number. And we do the same piece, EXACTLY the same piece... AGAIN! Except this time, the drummer will be playing on the full kit. And we will show the slides by Robert Longo.

The experience in doing this a second time will be completely different and MUCH more intense. The first 20-minute version is usually kind of lyrical and delicate (relatively), since the drummer is only playing on the high hat. But with the full kit, everything changes.

I must say, that writing these instructions out like this makes play the piece sound MUCH more complicated to play than it in fact is. In this century (the 21<sup>st</sup>), it has never taken more than an hour to teach G3 to everyone's satisfaction and comfort level. So please don't worry about anything.

A special note to the drummer:

For the first set on the high hat, you can start out with a basic quarter note beat, and gradually, over the 20-minutes, get more complex and frilly, evolving into a kind of Max Roach kind of high hat solo kinda thing, maybe. Anyway, may the force be with you, it always works out fine. Don't worry too much about this section, you'll know what to do by instinct, I promise.

For the second set, hit the drums real hard, yet somehow poetically. The snare drum sound has gotta be AWESOME... I like LOTS of fills, so pull out every over-the-top fill lick you know and use it in this piece. Lots of ride and crash cymbals. Don't be afraid, out of politeness, to be a rock n roll hero, i.e., don't hold back.

What I'm saying here is that this piece is essentially a 20-minute solo for you, first on high hat, then on the full kit. Listen to the record to get an idea of what I'm after. The recorded version (David Linton), though the definitive one and completely inspired, was a bit tamer in terms of fills than the one Jonathan Kane (of Swans fame, who joined the band later) used.

Anyway, you get the idea, I'm sure you'll do great.

For the 2<sup>nd</sup> version with the full kit, I'd like you to do the entrances at the beginning of G3 and at the break in the middle (where the guitars cut out), pretty much the same way as on the recording.

A special note to the bass player:

Listen to the recordings to get ideas what to play, and feel free to add your own creativity to it. You don't have to play exactly what you hear on the recordings, think of the recordings as a kind of guideline. We start the piece with just me and the drummer. Then I bring the other guitarists in, one by one. Once all the guitarists are playing, I will cue you to start playing. the drummer enters with you on a regular backbeat rhythm. You can hear an example of this on the Chicago recording.

Preferred equipment:

G3 sounds best on a Fender Telecaster or Stratocaster, or a G&L. However, it must be noted that whammy bars on Strats affect the tuning, so they should be avoided (whammy bars). Bring a guitar with a Fender kind of sound, if at all possible. If all you've got is a Gibson (which we also like, though for other purposes), we'll live with it.

A digital tuner is necessary, one that you can refer to during the performance, in case you go out of tune over the 20 minutes we will be playing. Please borrow one, if you don't own one already.

A medium guitar pick works best because there is a lot of fast tremolo work in this piece. I HIGHLY recommend the Jim Dunlop 60 mm (orange) pick. It is the one the works best for G3.

100 watt amps work best for this piece. If at all possible, it should be a clean amp, a distorted sound does not work well with G3. If the only 100 watt amp you have is a Marshall, then turn the preamp down to "2" and you can turn the master up high. To give you an idea, for this piece, I use a Roland Jazz Chorus 120. But any amp can work as long as it is clean.

The bass player in my bands usually goes through a big Ampeg or Trace-Elliott (400 watts minimum).

Here is a chart of the cues given in the piece, you can consider this the "score":

## Guitar Trio score

### One string section

1. RC & drummer enter together (no bass) on 1-string.
2. Rhys brings the guitarists in, one-by-one.
3. Bass enters then on Rhys' cue (in 2<sup>nd</sup> version drummer brings in backbeat here)
4. Everybody plays 1-string for quite a while (c. 5 minutes total).

### Three string section

5. Rhys enters on 3-strings (alone, while everybody else continues on 1-string).
6. On RC cue, all guitarists enter on a 16 bar crescendo into 3-strings. (soft to loud).
7. We continue together with 3-strings. (c. 3 minutes total)

### Six string section

8. Rhys enters on 6-strings (alone, while everybody else continues on 3-strings).
9. On RC cue, guitarists do a 16 bar crescendo into 6-strings.
10. We continue together with 6-strings.
11. Drummer should watch out for RC cue: on cue, he should take a 32 bar drum solo (consisting entirely of fills)
12. We play for about 32 or 64 more bars (depending) after the drum solo, and then cut out on Rhys' cue. The cutoff will be on the downbeat (on a 1), let the chord ring into silence. Which will reveal Rhys and the drummer playing on one string. (4 minutes total)

Repeat the form (but the sections will be a bit shorter).

For the ending in 6-strings the 2<sup>nd</sup> time through, the drums can play the solo like before, but after the solo, end on a really driving back beat riff (refer to the record for ideas). After 32 bars, we all end on the downbeat (which I count off), and let the chord ring.

1st 20 minute version: high hat only

2<sup>nd</sup> 20 minute version: full kit + RL slides.