

Notes for “Crazy”

This Country-politan song, made famous by Patsy Cline, was written by a not-yet-famous Willie Nelson. The attitude of the protagonist has been described as variously “bemused,” “bittersweet,” and “cathartic.” What is it to you, and how can you bring that emotion into your playing?

My double-strung arrangement sets accidentals in the LH prior to playing, allowing the song to proceed without lever flips. The optional lever flip at the very end can be easily eliminated, making this song a great opportunity to practice flipping on the right with an easy recovery if you can’t get it in time.

Double-strung finger placement notation

What do the R and L mean? My notation generally keeps the accompaniment in the bottom staff and the melody in the top staff. This does not always correspond to which hands are used, particularly when one of the accidentals is needed.

I use R or L to give special attention to notes that should be played with the “other” hand.

When the RH helps with the accompaniment, I indicate this with R or R# in the bottom staff. When the LH helps with the melody, it gets L or L# in the top staff.

To make this even more visibly separate, all numbers for the “other” hand are on the inside of the staves, and all numbers for the “expected” hand are on the outside.

Some of the Rs and Ls are recommendations, particularly for echoed notes. But when an accidental is called for, that means you must use the side with the corresponding lever, so the **R** or **L** is bold.

In the opening measures, place LH fingers 1 and 4 on the high C# (top staff) and lower Bb (bottom staff). The **Ls** are bold, because the C# and F# are set on the L side.

After the RH plays D and F (top staff), it can optionally continue down to the low Bb and A (bottom staff) to give the LH time to place fingers 1 and 4 on the F# and Eb.

The Rs are not bold, because playing those notes with the RH is optional.

The image shows a musical score for the first three measures of the song "Crazy". The score is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The first measure has a treble clef with a sharp sign (F#) and a bass clef with a flat sign (Bb). The second measure has a treble clef with a sharp sign (F#) and a bass clef with a flat sign (Bb). The third measure has a treble clef with a sharp sign (F#) and a bass clef with a flat sign (Bb). Fingerings are indicated by L1, R2, and L1. Chords Bb and Eb7 are indicated above the staves. The number 4 is written below the bass staff in the second and third measures.

In m7-8, m15-16, and m31-32, there is a pattern of repeated notes in the base: a C-D-E triplet followed by a slower C-D-E run. To let the strings ring out, I suggest playing each of those three notes with a different hand.

The Rs aren't bold, because this is optional. Try it to see what the effect is, and then judge for yourself if you want to use it.

In m19-20, there's only one note in the melody. Everything else is accompaniment, so there's nothing for the RH to do...except help out with the Bb.

Because you have a B natural set in the LH, you need the RH for the Bb, so the Bb's **R** is bold.

It's technically possible to play all of the other notes with the LH, but since the RH has nowhere else to be, I've made suggestions for it to play the Bb in some other nice hand positions via un-bolded Rs.

A similar situation occurs in m36 in a shorter period of time: the melody is just holding, while the accompaniment has a lot of notes, plus an accidental.

Again, the RH must help with the Bb (bold **R**). And since it has nothing else to do in the melody, we're going to give it a few other notes, particularly that low D so the LH doesn't have to reach all the way down there after playing the diminished chord.

Analysis

m1-4: Introduction. We immediately hear accidentals, big rolled chords, and a varying rhythm. We know this will be a classy piece. Many listeners will recognize the first few notes, where I emulate Floyd Cramer's slip note piano style, as he in turn emulated steel guitar players, sliding in from a half-step below.

m5-12: First verse. Here we go. The singer sets the stage by describing their feelings.

m13-20: Second verse. The chord progression is the same as verse 1 until the last three chords. There are slight variations to the rhythm. The singer explains that this is a sad song of love lost, and we can all probably relate.

m21-28: Bridge. The two halves of the bridge have similar rhythms, but the chords are different. Continuing the sentiment from verse 2, the singer asks what we all ask sometimes, "Why did I get myself into this mess when I should have known better?"

m29-32: Third verse. It's only half as long, but verse 3 has the same chord progression and similar rhythm to the start of the first two verses. The emotional peak of self-pity occurs here.

m33-36: First outro. The same chords and similar rhythm from m3-4 are used in m33-34. After all, we can't introduce a new theme when we're trying to say, "Woe is me; I will never learn."

m37-40: Second outro. We start with the same chords and similar rhythm from m35-36 and finish with the same chords as the introduction. "Again, I'll just never learn."

Background

In 1961, Willie Nelson was just exiting the Fifties with the rest of a prosperous America: slicked-back hair neatly trimmed, wearing a suit. He looked like every black & white TV dad.

He'd already written some successful tunes, but Nelson wasn't famous yet, whereas Patsy Cline had recently been hired on staff at the Grand Ole Opry.

Nelson wanted a man to perform "Crazy," but the singer he approached said it was too girlie. Cline thought so, too. She was not a fan of Nelson, not a fan of this genre, and not a fan of this particular song.

But the sound of "country" music was changing from twangy to classy. Cline's producer, Owen Bradley, had already restricted Cline from adding her beautiful yodel embellishments on his recordings. Bradley wanted her to continue to move towards the more lush, lounge-y sounds he had already established with "I Fall to Pieces," where he used the tinkly piano of Floyd Cramer and the smooth backing tones of The Jordanaires, both of whom recorded with Elvis.

Cline reluctantly agreed to participate in the similarly sophisticated production of “Crazy.” There was no score; just [Nelson’s demo](#). Cline didn’t like Nelson’s hesitant, choppy (crazy?) vocal phrasing, so she smoothed it out. [Read NPR’s interview with some of the studio musicians](#).

Since then, this Countryopolitan song has been given a variety of interpretations, from “bemused” to “bittersweet” to “cathartic.” What is it to you, and how can you bring that emotion into your playing?

Performance notes

- *Wow, this looks hard; how do I count this?* I scored the phrases similar to Patsy Cline’s recording so that what goes into your eyes more closely matches what comes out of your fingers. This means your brain isn’t fighting the cognitive dissonance of a score that looks nothing like what you want to play, so you can use your processing power elsewhere. Learning the rhythm by listening will be a hundred times easier than trying to learn it by reading.
- *Why should I even use your score then?* Having my correctly notated score allows your eyes to cue your fingers with reminders about where to put the notes rather than using the dots and lines as your primary source. I’m not suggesting you learn the whole song by ear, just the sense of the phrasing.
- I’ve included the lyrics so you can sing along in your head and emote through your fingers.
- Roll most of the chords—this is a classy pop/jazz number—but know that they’ll have more effect if you don’t roll every single one of them.
- When the LH comes up into the melody, make sure that you use the same force that the RH has been playing with. Similarly, the RH needs to diminish in emphasis when it is used for accompaniment.
- The fermata is your chance to take a breath before the big finish. Don’t rush that breath. Then, don’t rush the finish. Take your time and pause as needed through to the end.
- Don’t worry about counting the last measure: it’s just a drawn-out rolled chord with a pause on the bottom note. In addition to being extra heartfelt, it gives you a little bit more time to get that F natural down.

What I changed

The best arrangement I’ve found is Hal Leonard’s [Patsy Cline – Original Keys for Singers](#), which was made from her recording of “Crazy” on the album of the same name. Here are the biggest differences.

- **Phrasing.** While I’ve matched some of Cline’s recorded phrasing better here than in the Hal Leonard notation, it’s still not exactly as she sings it. And it shouldn’t be. That recording was one performance. I doubt she sang it the same way twice, and I hope you fiddle and adjust

when you play mine. The biggest difference I can point to is m30. I made the whole measure quarter notes within triplets, and she sings it with more variation.

- **Ornaments.** Cline sings with slurs and subtle turns that sound too fancy when translated to this instrument. I only used one of these in the melody (m27-28) and a couple grace notes (slip notes) in the accompaniment.
- **No low F# in the melody.** The G in m5 should be an F# wherever that phrase happens.
- **A few different chords:**
 - m2: I used Eb7 instead of Eb9.
 - m5, m13, m29: I eliminated the Ab from the last beat.
 - m11: I used Gm7/F instead of Bdim7.
 - m23: I added the transitional Gm7/D.
- **No key change.** Many songs of this genre end by repeating the last verse or so a half step higher. Bb major to B major on a lever harp? No, thank you. Instead of repeating the entire third verse and outro, I repeat only the outro, staying in the same key.
- **She goes down, I go up.** Cline always sings the second syllable of “crazy” lower than the first syllable. In the very last vocal phrase, I go higher instead. Madness!

Suggestions for your own changes

- **Make it longer.** After m28, go back to m5 and then play all the way through to the end. This is closer to Nelson’s original demo.
- **Add low B flats.** If your harp has strings below C3, consider adding the low Bb at least, if not other lower notes.
- **Use a B natural in m34’s accompaniment.** Using all the notes in the outro’s G7 chord sounds delicious, but it involves a lever change on the left or other modifications to grab this chord on the right. I recommend flipping the left B natural at the end of m33 (you might have to muffle it while you flip), then flipping it back to Bb just before or after the E in m35.
- **Class it up!** Please alter the swing, the pauses, the emphasis. Try not to play it the same way twice. (*If I never play it the same way twice, doesn’t that go against your mandate to always have the score match what I play?* Yes. So, now what? The only way to remove the mismatch in what your eyes see and what your fingers play is to stop looking... Consider memorizing?)
- **Customize your finger placements.** The reason I don’t include brackets is to allow you to more easily change any placements you disagree with. **L** or **R** in bold means that you must use that side due to accidentals set in the levers. Anything not bold is just a suggestion. Use the fingers that work best for you. Once you’ve settled, draw swoops to “capture” the areas that are played by the “other” hand to make these easier to see. You can also draw your own brackets.

- **Listen to other versions.** Compare [Nelson's demo](#) to [Cline's recording](#), and then listen to [Linda Ronstadt](#), [Chaka Khan](#), [Shirley Bassey](#), [The Kills](#). What can you incorporate from their vocal phrasing or other choices?

Or just make it a little easier

- Stop listening to me saying that you need to make your own phrasing and play it different every time: instead, pick the one way of doing a phrase that feels and sounds best to you, and play all of those phrases the same way. :-)
- Remove the grace notes from the first two measures:



- In m33-m34m, change the 1-5-10 chords to 1-5-8.
- Using the chord symbols like a lead sheet, just play 1-5 quarter notes as accompaniment.
- Eliminate the lever flips at the end by removing the grace notes and playing Gs for the pickups in m38-39 instead of F#s:



- The section above that breaks down the arrangement is provided to help you memorize. A little bit of time spent up front on analysis can make things easier in the long run.

If you like this piece...

- Is there another tune with jazzy chords you've wanted to arrange that you can accomplish now by putting the accidentals in the LH?
- Does your approach to this song inspire you to alter the phrasing in any of your other repertoire?
- Record yourself, and post on YouTube and Facebook, especially the groups for [Double Strung Harp](#), [Celtic Harp](#), and the [Virtual Harp Venue](#).
- [Leave a review](#) on SheetMusicPlus, [like and comment](#) on YouTube, and tell others about my arrangement. Enjoy!