

Notes for “Don’t Stop Believin’”

Your audience’s memory of this Eighties rock anthem by Journey will be playing along in their head—from the original album, a live performance, The Sopranos, Glee, karaoke, or all of the above. But they’ve never heard it before on a harp.

My arrangement makes good use of the double-strung by using both sides for repeated notes and letting the accompaniment hand overlap the melody. The result is beautiful but still ballsy.

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. 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 an “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.

In the opening measures, I suggest alternating hands for the repeated notes. Place LH2 on the first F, RH2 on the second F, LH2 again on the third F, and finish with the RH. The pattern repeats on the next measure starting again with LH2.

F

2 2 2 2

8vb

Here’s a similar situation in m31, but in the reverse. Playing every other F with the LH gives you a bit more time to quell the buzzing than playing them all with RH.

Do you have to play it with both hands like this? Not at all. But since you have both sets of strings, why not give it a try?

31 Dm

L2 L2

a smell of wine and

8

In m100-101, place RH fingers 1, 2, and 3 on the F, E, and C so the LH has time to get down to the low C chord. The RH continues to finger 1 and 2 in the next measure.

Notice in all these examples that the numbers for the RH are always on top of the notes and the numbers for the LH are always below the notes, regardless of which staff they appear in.

What do parentheses mean? Melody notes in parentheses indicate that the note is already accounted for in the LH chord or arpeggio, so duplicating it in the RH is optional.

In m62, the big rolled chord in the LH accompaniment contains the G of “roll,” so you don’t need to play that G in the RH melody.

This doesn’t mean you *must* eliminate parenthetical notes from the RH. Duplicating them will provide additional emphasis, which is fine. But if it’s easier to do something else with your RH at these points, the parentheses help provide that option.

Analysis

The entire song uses one of two chord patterns. Once you know these patterns, ***you can stop working so hard*** at figuring out the accompaniment notes as you read. This is also a huge help in memorization.

The intro, verses, and chorus use this eight-bar pattern:

F	C	Dm	Bb	F	C	Am	Bb
I	V	vi	IV	I	V	iii	IV

Because the interludes are only four bars long, they only use the first half of that pattern.

The pre-choruses alternate between two bars of Bb (IV) and two bars of F (I), and they end with a few different chords for extra excitement.

m1-8: Introduction. As with the original, we establish a steady beat and a lick that will reappear throughout the tune.

m9-16: First half of verse 1. Characters are introduced here who will become Everypersons as the song proceeds. We're just getting started, so the accompaniment is sparse.

m17-24: Second half of verse 1. I throw in a lovely high F chord at the start of each phrase, like the original. The accompaniment sometimes goes up an octave from the first half.

m25-28: First interlude. In the original, you have to wait a bit for the guitar to fade in with the sixteenth notes. I mimic this by starting with eighth notes.

m29-36: Verse 2. This verse is the shortest: half the length of verse 1 or 3. With the accompaniment back in the low range, we've got a slightly higher note density than the first half of verse 1 as we work on the slow build. The last two bars wrap up a bit differently from what we've heard before as we plow into a pre-chorus.

m37-52: First pre-chorus. The melody goes up a register, which has a softening effect, tamping down the excitement and gathering the anticipation for a resolution. We get some rockin' chords in the last couple measures, and then we have to wait some more.

m53-56: Second interlude. I revisit the lick from the intro, appending it to 1-5-8-9 arpeggios that are going to carry into the rest of the song.

m57-72: Verse 3. For the first time, half of verse 1 combines with all of verse 2 to produce a fully realized melodic paragraph. The note density of the accompaniment is varied against a powerful mid-range melody. Our story peaks with "some are born to sing the blues," so build up to this and then let that chord ring out, followed by the gorgeous ascent when we repeat "Oh, the movie never ends."

m73-88: Second pre-chorus. By staying mid-range, we keep the intensity going. The accompaniment phrases are at their most varied and moving.

m89-102: Chorus. We finally made it! As in the original, I bring back the lick from the introduction, and now we're singing over it. The melody starts at mid-range then goes an octave higher. The accompanying arpeggios don't let up until we're six bars from the end.

m103-106: Outro. The original fades out, and I've tried to replicate that feeling with a drastic decrease in rhythmic density.

Background

“Don’t Stop Believin’” came out in 1981, and it’s been with us ever since. Before the 1900s came to a close, it would become the most downloaded track of the century. In 2007, it was chosen for [the last scene of The Sopranos](#). A few years later, it was covered multiple times on Glee.

A karaoke staple, this rock anthem gives hope to the hopeless and proclaims glory for those who already believe. Why put it on a harp? I was looking for tunes to play for the staff of St. Barnabas Medical Center in New Jersey at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Perhaps the request was a joke, but I gave it a shot.

Think about what it was like for the nurses, technicians, therapists, clerks, and patients to catch this melody through glass doors and plastic clothing, face shields and masks.

Performance notes

- Don’t worry: my arrangement doesn’t castrate the song. But you should embrace the arpeggios and rolled chords instead of pretending you’re a rock band. This is an exciting rock anthem, and now you’re doing it on a harp. If your audience recognizes it, then their memory of the song will be playing in their head. But they’ve never heard it before on a harp.
- In the intro, emphasize the three ascending eighth notes in the pattern. This lick will be repeated throughout the accompaniment.
- Remember to make them wait for it: don’t rush, especially on the pre-chorus.
- When the accompaniment is in the same range as the melody, keep the emphasis on the melody. Be careful not to let the accompaniment become as loud as or louder than the melody.
- Roll all three- and four-note chords except m51-52 and the very last chord.
- In m68, the notes are duplicated on both staves. Play simultaneously for depth.

What I changed

[Listen to the original recording by Journey](#). This is what I did differently:

- **Different key.** The original is in E.
- **Shorter non-lyrical passages.** Where long instrumental passages create a heightened sense of anticipation in a vocal performance, they drag within an all-instrumental performance.

Suggestions for your own changes

- **Add chords to the melody.** The chorus seems ripe for some thirds, no? Anywhere else?
- **Add lower notes.** If your harp has lower strings than are used in the F major arrangement, then consider playing an octave lower than written for the F, Am, and Bb chords.
- **Customize your finger placements.** I don't include brackets so that you can more easily change any placements you disagree with. Use the fingers that work best for you. Once you've settled, I suggest you 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.

Or just make it a little easier

- If you don't have the high D, then play m99-100 one octave below what is written.
- In any measure that is *almost the same* as another measure, it's okay to just pick one way and play them both the same.
- Play each verse exactly the same (same melodic rhythm, same LH).
- Play both pre-choruses exactly the same.
- The chord symbols are provided so that you can ignore the bottom staff and use the top as a lead sheet. Playing the entire tune with 1-5-8 chords is just fine.
- Drop the repeated sixteenth notes in the melody. People will be singing this in their head; you don't need to play every single sung note.
- When I play this tune therapeutically:
 - I don't use as much variety in the accompaniment. I stick to 1-5-8 chords, 1-5-8-9 or 10 arpeggios, and a little bit of 1-5-8-5-8.
 - I keep the accompaniment in the lower range throughout.
 - I use eighth notes for all four bars of m25-28 instead of ending in sixteenth notes:



- The syncopated rhythms of vocalists from the Eighties can be mastered if you use your ears with your eyes. Don't worry if you don't know how to learn a song "by ear." You already sing this one in the shower, right? So sing or hum as you play the RH alone to confirm how the melody should come out of your fingers. Now sing or hum that melody while you play the LH alone to hear how it's going to fit over the beat. Once you are comfortable with hands alone, pair them up, and play very, very, very, very slowly, preferably with a metronome.
- [Watch my recording](#) any time to hear and see how I do it.

If you like this piece...

- The recognizable, low-note-density melody makes this song appropriate for overlapping a high-note-density accompaniment in the same range. Do any other tunes in your repertoire lend themselves to this approach?
- Consider doing your own arrangement of a Journey song or another Eighties rock anthem.
- 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!