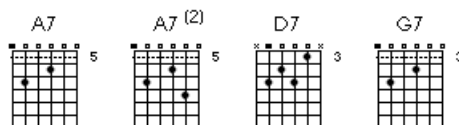


Bobby Gentry

Ode to Billy Joe



It was the ^{A7}third of June
Another sleepy dusty Delta day
I was out choppin cotton
And my brother was balin hay
And at dinner time we stopped
And walked back to the house to eat
And Mama ^{A7}hollered out the back door
Ya'll remember to wipe your feet
And then she said I got some news this mornin'
From Choctaw Ridge
Today ^{A7}Billy Joe MacAllister ^{A7}
Jumped off the Tallahatchie Bridge



Papa said to Mama as he
Passed around the blackeyed peas
Well Billy Joe never had a lick of sense
Pass the biscuits please
There's five more acres
In the lower forty I've got to plow
And Mama said it was shame about
Billy Joe, anyhow
Seems like nothin' ever comes to no good
Up on Choctaw Ridge
And now Billy Joe MacAllister's
Jumped off the Tallahatchie Bridge



Brother said he recollected
When he and Tom and Billie Joe
Put a frog down my back
At the Carroll County picture show
And wasn't I talkin' to him
After church last Sunday night
I'll have another piece-a apple pie
You know it don't seem right
I saw him at the sawmill yesterday
On Choctaw Ridge
And now ya tell me Billie Joe's
Jumped off the Tallahatchie Bridge

Mama said to me, Child
What's happened to your appetite?
I've been cookin' all morning
And you haven't touched a single bite
That nice young preacher, Brother Taylor
Dropped by today
Said he'd be pleased to have dinner on Sunday
Oh, by the way
He said he saw a girl
That looked a lot like you
Up on Choctaw Ridge
And she and Billy Joe was throwing somethin'
Off the Tallahatchie Bridge



A year has come and gone
Since we heard the news bout Billy Joe
Brother married Becky Thompson
they bought a store in Tupelo
There was a virus going round
Papa caught it and he died last Spring
And now Mama doesn't seem
To wanna do much of anything
And me, I spend a lot of time
pickin flowers up on Choctaw Ridge
And drop them into the muddy water
Off the Tallahatchie Bridge



Hinweise zu den Akkorden

A7 wird verwendet, wenn der ganze Akkord gezupft wird – A7(2) hingegen für das Rolling Pattern (Intro und zwischen den Strophen, siehe Erklärung auf der nächsten Seite).

Manchmal – je nach meiner Laune - passt anstelle des G7 auch der D7 besser (selber probieren).



Spieltipps (for English text see next page)

Das von mir verwendete Begleitpattern entspricht nicht ganz dem Original, ist aber m.E. rhythmisch adäquat, etwas abwechslungsreicher und leicht zu spielen. Obwohl oder vielleicht gerade weil die Begleitung (wie im Original) sehr simpel aber doch ziemlich "groovig" ist, geht das ganze Lied unheimlich ins Ohr.

Die wenigen verwendeten Akkorde können je nach Stimmlage natürlich auch in jedem beliebigen Bund der Gitarre gespielt werden.

ZUPFTECHNIK & PATTERN

Als Intro und zwischen den Strophen wechsele ich jeweils ab zwischen zwei Takten, wo praktisch der ganze Akkord mit sehr betontem Bass gezupft wird und jeweils zwei Takten, wo die Saiten einzeln als "Rolling Pattern" gezupft werden.

Sehr wichtig sind die "Dead Notes" (mit X dargestellt), dabei bleibt der greifende Finger der linken Hand zwar auf der Saite, drückt aber nicht mehr darauf. Wenn dann die Saite kräftig angezupft wird, ertönt nur noch ein "Schnack" (oder so). Dies gibt dem Gezupfe den nötigen "Groove".

Das hier vorgestellte Pattern soll vor allem das Gefühl für das Stück geben. Eigene Variationen und ein anderer Mix zwischen Akkordzupfen und Rolling Pattern sind natürlich immer eine gute Idee, dieses Stück lässt genug Spielraum zum improvisieren und experimentieren.

Viel Spass - Wolfgang Dick (www.drachenstein.ch)



Playing Tips (für Deutsch siehe vorherige Seite)

The pattern I use is not the exactly original one, but it's rhythmically adequate, a bit more diversified and easy to play. Although or maybe because the guitar part is simple (as it is in the original) but very groovy, it's always fun to play.

Depending on the pitch of your voice of course the few chords can also be played in each other fret of the guitar.

HOW TO PLAY THE PATTERN

For the intro and between the verses I play the chords of the song. There I switch for each chord between two measures picking the full chord with a strong bass and two measures where I pick each single string as a "rolling pattern".

Very important are the "dead notes" (shown as X), these are picked without letting the string ring (the corresponding finger of the left hand touches the string without pressing it on the fretboard), you only hear short percussive sound. This gives the "groove" which makes the picking and the song alive.

The pattern shown here shall first of all give a feeling for the song. Own variations and other mixes of picking the full chords and picking single strings (rolling pattern) are always a good idea. This song gives much freedom for improvising and experimenting.

Have fun - Wolfgang Dick (www.drachenstein.ch)

Ode To Billie Joe By Glen Hannah

So what did Billie Joe MacAllister throw off the Tallahatchie Bridge?

WHAT THE LYRICS REVEAL

The 1967 song by Bobbie Gentry (written by Gentry) is a bittersweet tale of young love and its tragic consequences in farmland America. The urban myth that grew up around the song was that the lyrics suggested Billie Joe MacAllister, the troubled title character, threw a baby off the Tallahatchie bridge; the result of an illicit union with a young girl; but do the lyrics substantiate this? What other mysteries does the song contain?

The song is told from the viewpoint of a young girl (Verse 4 - "Child what's happened..." and "Saw a girl that looked like you"), but how young or old is not clear.

The unnamed Girl sings about how she heard about the death of Billie Joe while having an everyday family meal. The Mother announces the news of the suicide of Billie Joe MacAllister to the family, but it doesn't disturb their appetite for black-eyed peas, biscuits and apple pie, suggesting that the family wasn't particularly close to the boy. The Father's comment "Well Billie Joe never had a lick of sense" (Verse 2) confirms this.

The only person who seems affected by the death is The Girl. Her lack of appetite (Verse 4) suggests the news hits her deeper than the rest of the family. The family's indifference also suggests that they are unaware of the true extent of her feelings for Billie Joe, as there is no attempt to console her or for that matter, convey the news with any sensitivity. It's just blurted out at the dinner table like any other piece of local gossip.

Verse 3 confirms that The Girl was "talkin' to him after church last Sunday Night", and Verse 4 conveys the hearsay that Brother Taylor also saw them together on Choctaw Ridge. Although the actual line is, "He said he saw a girl that looked a lot like you" (Verse 4). This leaves room for speculation that Billie Joe was with someone other than The Girl; the implication is, in the context of the rest of the song, that it was indeed she.

The final line of Verse 4 is the ambiguous one:

"And she and Billie Joe was throwing something off the Tallahatchie Bridge". The "Baby" interpretation is not supported by the lyrics. Scandalous though it may be, it is really a misinterpretation.

This line clearly states that Billie Joe was not acting alone, and that they were both participating in the "throwing". This could mean that they were both lifting and throwing the same object OR that there were a number of identical objects and they were throwing these separately. For instance, together they could have been throwing a big log from the nearby sawmill OR each of them could have been throwing stones together. The line fits either way.

The answer appears in the final verse (Verse 5).

It is a year since the suicide, and life has changed the family - the Brother is married and has left town, the Father is dead and the Mother has lost some of her will to go on. It is, in fact, the anniversary of Billie Joe's death, and the Girl sings about "pickin flowers up on Choctaw Ridge" and dropping them off the Tallahatchie Bridge. This could be interpreted as an act similar to laying flowers at a grave site, and it is, but there is more to it.

This is where some speculation comes in.

Billie Joe and The Girl have known each other for a long time. The incident in Verse 3 about putting a frog down her back at the Carroll County picture show is the mischievous act of children, so we can deduce that they have grown up together, and seen a lot of each other in passing. Billie had developed strong feelings for

The Girl over the years, but she was unaware of it. What Brother Taylor saw on the bridge that day was probably the time when he expressed his love for her.

They had been throwing flowers off the Bridge that day ("And she and Billie Joe was throwin' flowers off the Tallahatchie Bridge"). Why? Probably just to watch them float down stream. It was the youthful, carefree act of two backwoods teenagers enjoying each other's company. The mood took Billie Joe and he told The Girl of his love for her. Unfortunately, she didn't feel as strongly for him, and told him so. The pain of the rejection was too much for him to bear, and rather than live without The Girl's love, he chose to commit suicide. He chose to jump off the Tallahatchie Bridge to send a message to The Girl. She and she alone, would know exactly why he took his own life.

In light of this, the final two lines of the song reach a deeper level of poignancy.

*("And me, I spend a lot of time pickin' flowers up on Choctaw Ridge
And drop them into the muddy water off the Tallahatchie Bridge")*

THE MOVIE

In 1976, a film version of "Ode to Billie Joe" was made. Bobbie Gentry received a co-writing credit on the movie, but that does not mean...

- a) That she had a hand in writing the actual screenplay
- b) That the screenplay expanded on the original meaning of the song.

More likely, as is often the case, she was given a writing credit as a matter of form, as the bare bones of the song's story were used in the film. The screenwriter then expanded the story into feature film length adding sub-plots, additional characters etc. The film version adds another dimension to the story not found in the song. Billie Joe in the film is a repressed homosexual. He confesses his love for The Girl (called Bobby Lee in the film), only to cover his growing fear that he may be homosexual. After a sexual encounter with an unnamed man, he is unable to live with his guilt, and jumps off the Tallahatchie Bridge.

None of this story line is evident in the original song, and it is unclear if this was Gentry's original vision, or just the work of a professional scriptwriter trying to film up 100 minutes of movie time.

THE LONGER VERSION

According to one source, the original song actually ran closer to 7 minutes, but as this didn't fit in with radio station formats in 1967, the song was shortened to its current length. This may explain the lack of detail about what was thrown off the bridge. If the song was originally longer, additional verses may have shed more light on their relationship between Billie Joe and The Girl.

When was the song shortened? At the rehearsal stage? The recording stage? After the recording stage? It's possible that somewhere out there, the original 7 minute version exists on tape.

A FINAL MYSTERY

A final mystery for your consideration. Why isn't Billie Joe really Billy Joe? Does the song suggest that the title character is really a girl? Listening to the song again in this context, it takes on a completely different meaning. A lesser known opinion is that the tale is actually one of young lesbian love. However, hidden in the lyrics, Billie Joe is quietly referred to as "him" ("Brother said he recollected when he and Tom and Billie Joe. Put a frog down my back at the Carroll County picture show. And wasn't I talkin' to him after church last Sunday night?") So, Billie Joe is clearly a young man. Right? Not if you interpret the line as Brother actually saying "And wasn't I talkin' to TOM after church last Sunday night?"

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July 7, 2000

Revealing the mystery

What is Bobby Gentry saying to to the song's mystery: what did Billie Joe and his girlfriend throw off the Tallahatchie Bridge, and why did Billie Joe commit suicide?

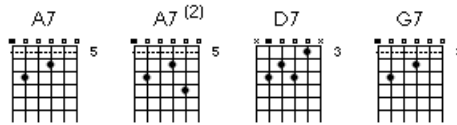
Bobbie has said that the real theme of the song was indifference. "Those questions are of secondary importance in my mind. The story of Billie Joe has two more interesting underlying themes." she says, "First, the illustration of a group of peoples reaction's to the life and death of Billie Joe, and its subsequent effect on their lives, is made. Second, the obvious gap between the girl and her mother is shown when both women experience a common loss (first Billie Joe, and later, Papa), and yet Mama and the girl are unable to recognize their mutual loss or share their grief."

The success of "Ode to Billie Joe"

By the way: "Ode To Billie Joe" topped the US charts for four weeks, reaching number 13 in the UK, and selling 3 million copies. The song won Bobbie three Grammy awards, including Best New Artist, Best Vocal Performance by a Female, and Best Contemporary Female Solo Vocal Performance. The Academy of Country Music named Bobbie Gentry its Top New Female Vocalist of 1967 (her album of duets with Glen Campbell won Album of the year in 1968). Billboard, Cashbox, and Record World nominated her as Most Promising New Vocalist of the Year. She was so popular in 1967 that Nashville's Country Music Association chose her to cohost its first awards show with Sonny James.

Sina (Original: Bobby Gentry, Adapt: Polo Hofer)

Fär ds Franz-Josi (Ode to Billy Joe)



Zu dieser Version von "Billy Joe"

Eine Version in purem Schweizerdeutsch (Walliserdeutsch, um föderalistischerweise genau zu sein). Sowohl die Wortrythmik wie auch die Art, wie Sina (<http://www.sina.li>) dieses Lied singt sind einfach absolut spitze.

To this version of "Billy Joe"

This is a Version in real Swiss-German. The way how the artist, Sina (<http://www.sina.li>), sings this song as well as the rhythm of the words is just amazing.

Es isch där drittisch Juni gsi
Ä warmä Obärwallisär Namittag
Miinä Brüdär und ich wiär hei
ds Heiw keert Laag fär Laag
Und wänn's d7 Ziit isch gsi fär Znacht si wär
heim hei alles la gah
D'Müätär het gseit putzät d'Schüä
und leet schi vorna la stah
Nachär seit schi schi heigi eppis kehrt
wännsch im Dorf si gsi
ds Franz-Josi vo där Schmittu isch ubär die
Gantär Briggu z'Brig



Där Vatär meint zär Mamma währund däm är
ds Tällär Gschwelti nimmt
i ha immär gseit dass mim Franz-Josi
eppis nit ganz stimmt
und ob i nit no heigi gredt mit ihm vor där
Chirchu nam Amt
So chunnt's halt üsa seit där Vatär und het no
äs Stuck Brot vörlangt
Är hei nu geschtär schnäll no gseh am
Bahnhof näbu dä Zigg
Und jetzt heisst's ds Franz-Josi si ubär di
Gantär Briggu z'Brig

D'Müätär seit: Wasch isch los
hesch du dä kei Appetit
Ich ha där ganz morgu kochu und du hesch
wädär Hungär no Ziit
Ja und där Pfarrär hei no schnäll äs churzus
Bsüächi gmacht
Und är hei villmal gidankt fär d'Iladig am
Sunntag zum Znacht
Är hei äs Meitschi gshe – das hei üsgseh äso wiän
ich uf du erschtä Blick
Äs und där Fran-Josi si gstannu uf där
Gantär Birggu z'Brig



Jetz isch äs ganzus Jahr vörgangu sit däm wär
di Gschicht hei kehrt
Und miinä Brüdär het ä Fröi und as Mämmi
wa grad löifu lehrt
A beeschi Gripp het gwiätut – där Vattär isch
gschtorbu dra
Und d'Müätär mag nimmä siit däm w är schi
het vörlah
Und ich gah vill zrug, cheeru där Wält där Rigg
Und kiju Blüämä äbri inds Wassär vo där
Gantär Briggu z'Brig

Hinweise zu den Akkorden

A7 wird verwendet, wenn der ganze Akkord gezupft wird –
A7(2) hingegen für das Rolling Pattern (Intro und zwischen
den Strophen (siehe Erklärung auf separater Seite).

Manchmal – je nach meiner Laune - passt anstelle des G7
auch der D7 besser (selber probieren).