

"Comfortably Numb" Pink Floyd



By Douglas Baldwin

Released as a double album, *The Wall* would have made a great single disc. Imagine cutting out some of the fat and filler, leaving a solid hour of songs like "Mother," "Goodbye Blue Sky," and, of course, the epic "Comfortably Numb." Pink Floyd's study of a rock star's nervous breakdown transcends its subject in this song, becoming a more universal reflection on the suffocation of one's inner child as a way of coping with the demands of daily living.

A STUDY IN CONTRASTS

A look at the chords used in "Comfortably Numb" reveals little about the song's emotional complexity. The verses convey generic sadness with chords in B minor (Bm-A-G-Em), while the pre-chorus brightens up with a see-

saw between D major (D-A) and C major (C-G). But it's the contrast between the two sections that deepens the emotional resonance of the song: the half-spoken vocals of Roger Waters, answered by David Gilmour's clear low tenor; and the slow and somber orchestration of the verse, followed by the wave-like string arpeggios of the pre-chorus. It's challenging to articulate these arpeggios (transcribed for Gtr. 2 as Riff B) in such a way as to mimic the bowed strings. Each note must be released as the next is played—a particularly difficult feat when two notes are played on adjacent strings at the same fret. This bit of "finger ballet" requires a roll of the index finger to articulate each note, a technique attributed to virtuoso violinist Niccolò Paganini. On the recorded guitar front, the echoed glissandos of the

slide guitar in the verse contrast effectively with the bright acoustic guitar of the pre-chorus. The acoustic guitar, by the way, is strung in "Nashville tuning," where the four lowest strings (E, A, D, and G) are replaced with lighter strings tuned an octave higher (see Acoustic Cafe, page 162).

TWO OF THE GREATEST SOLOS EVER RECORDED

The ironically triumphant chorus announces David Gilmour's first solo, a melodic excursion that underscores the "comfort" of the title with its pastoral complacency. The chords he plays over are the same "happy" major chords of the pre-chorus, and Gilmour's phras-

ing treats them as if they were the very pillows on which he rests his fevered head. Consonant chord tones abound, and gentle half-step bends and tremolo bar vibratos make his hands sound just like two balloons. As you tackle this section, try to visualize the shape of each major chord as it goes by, and use these notes as targets for memorizing Gilmour's phrasing.

In triangulated contrast to the vocal personae of Waters-as-cynic and Gilmour-as-naif, the outro guitar solo embodies all the rage and anger of a soul painfully shedding a lifetime of repression. This is certainly one of the greatest blues-rock guitar solos ever recorded, as Gilmour presents an impassioned study in how to make the minor pentatonic and blues scales come

alive. For the first minute-plus, he plays almost entirely in 7th position, as shown in Fig. 1. Any first-year guitarist worth his rock salt will know this pattern, but it's Gilmour's subtle use of bends, vibrato, rhythmic articulation, and an absolutely devastating tone

that make this solo so transcendent. Two landmarks in his phrasing occur whenever the chord cycle returns to B minor: a descending sextuplet phrase, excerpted in Fig. 2, and a traditional blues-based phrase similar to Fig. 3, which is also nestled into the second beat of the sextuplet phrase. 3

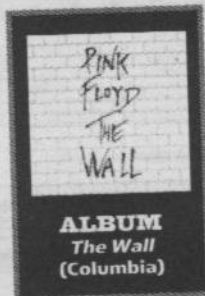
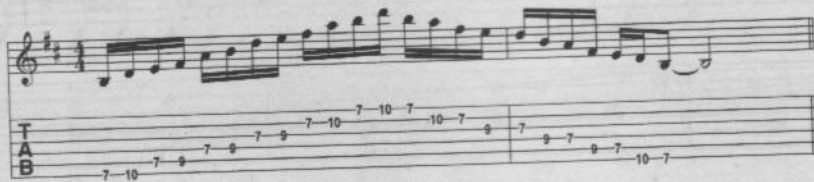


Fig. 1



Figs. 2-3



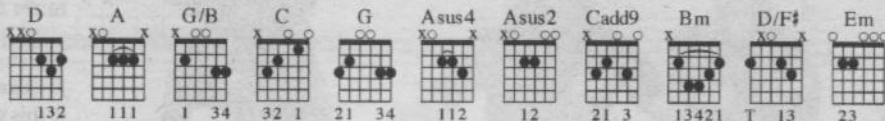
TONE ZONE

GUITAR 1: Solidbody
PICKUP/POSITION: Single-coil/Neck
GAIN: 3
EQ: Bass/Mid/Treble: 5/5/5
EFFECTS: Echo
GUITARS 4 & 5: Solidbody
PICKUP/POSITION: Single-coil/Bridge
GAIN: 9
EQ: Bass/Mid/Treble: 6/7/8

COMFORTABLY NUMB

As Recorded by Pink Floyd
(From the Columbia Recording THE WALL)

Words and Music by George Roger Waters
and David Gilmour



Intro

Moderately Slow ♩ = 65
Bm

Verse
Bm

Intro

Verse

I. Hel - lo, is there an - y - bod - y

Riff A

mp w/ clean tone steady gliss.

Gtr. 1 (elec.)

Gtr. 2 (elec.)

mp w/ clean tone

Rhy. Fig. 1

TAB

TAB

TAB

TAB

*strings arranged for guitar

A **G** **Em** **Bm**

in there? Just nod if you can hear me. Is there an - y - one — home?

End Riff A

steady gliss.

End Rhy. Fig. 1

TAB

TAB

TAB

TAB

Comfortably Numb

Gtrs. 1 & 2: w/ Riff A & Rhy. Fig. 1 (2 times)

A G Em

Come on, now.— I hear you're feel - ing down.— Well, I can ease your pain— and get you

Bm

on your feet a - gain.— Re - lax, I'll need some in - for -

A G Em Bm

ma - tion first, just the ba - sic facts.— Can you show me where it hurts?

Pre-Chorus

Gtr. 1 tacet

D

Rhy. Fig. 2

A

*Gtr. 3 (acous.)

There is— no pain,— you are— re - ced - ing.—

Gtr. 2 Riff B

5 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 6 5 7 6 5 7 6 5 7 6 5 7 6

*Nashville tuning (strings 6-3 [light gauge] are raised an octave)

D

A

G/B

A dis - tant ship,— smoke on— the ho - ri - zon.—

5 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 0 2 0 2 0 2 0 2 0 2 0 2 0 2 0 2

Comfortably Numb

C G

You are on - ly com - ing through - in waves. Your

C G End Rhy. Fig. 2

lips move, - but I can't hear - what you're say - ing. When I -

End Riff B

Gtrs. 2 & 3: w/ Riff B & Rhy. Fig. 2

D A

- was a child { I had a fe - ver. My
I caught - a fleet - ing - glim - pse

D A G/B

hands felt - just like - two - bal - loons. -
out of - the cor - ner of - my eye. -

C G

Now I've got - that feel - ing once - a - gain. - I can't ex - plain, you would not un -
I turned - to look, - but it was gone. - I can - not put my fin - ger on -

C G

der - stand. — This is not how — I am —
it now, — the child is grown, the dream is gone. — }

Chorus

Gr. 2 tacet

Asus4 Asus2

Rhy. Fig. 3

To Coda

End Rhy. Fig. 3

A G/B Cadd9 G D

Gr. 3

have be - come — com - f' rta - bly numb.

Gr. 4 (elec.)

f w/ dist.

14
15-15

Guitar Solo

Gr. 3: w/ Rhy. Fig. 2

D

A

D

w/ bar w/ bar w/ bar

14 (14) x 14 (14) 15 (15) 15 14 14 14 (14) 12 12

0 14-12-14 (14)

A G/B C G

w/ bar w/ bar w/ bar

15 15-14 14 14-12 11-9 7 12 (12) 11-9 12 11-9 9 7-7 9 7-7 9 11-11

C G

grad. bend 1/2

(11) x x 14-15 14-12 15-12 12 12 w/ bar w/ bar

10-9 9 10-9 7

Comfortably Numb

Chorus

Gtr. 3: w/ Rhy. Fig. 3

Asus4 Asus2 A G/B Cadd9 G D

I have be - come - com - for - ta - bly numb -

w/ misc. whammy bar
1/2 1 3

(7) 11 11 11 9 (9) 7 7/9 7 7 (7)

Verse

Gtr. 4 tacet

Bm Rhy. Fig. 4

A

2. O - kay, just a lit - tle pin - prick, there'll be no more

G

D/F# Em

Bm

End Rhy. Fig. 4

ah! But you may feel a lit - tle sick. Can you

Gtr. 3: w/ Rhy. Fig. 4

Bm

A

stand up? I do be - lieve it's work - ing. good. That - 'll keep you

G

D/F# Em

Bm

D.S. al Coda

go - ing for the show. — Come on, it's time — to go.

Coda

D

Gtr. 3

Gtr. 4

numb. —

8va loco P.H. 7 9

Outro-Guitar Solo

Gtr. 3: w/ Rhy. Fig. 4 (till end)

Gtr. 4

Bm

A

Gtr. 5 (elec.) Rhy. Fig. 4A

f w/ dist.

Gtr. 5: w/ Rhy. Fig. 4A (till fade)

G D/F# Em Bm

End Rhy. Fig. 4A

Gtr. 4

A

G D/F# Em

Bm

Comfortably Numb

A B D/F#

Bm

8va loco G D/F# Em P.H.

Bm

A G D/F# Em

