

A Fun New Way to Play the Guitar!

by John Stropes

Some additional thoughts on "Hot Type"

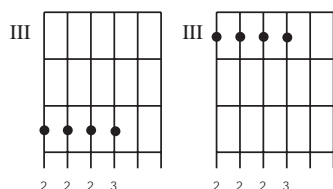
Working with the music of Michael Hedges is a great joy. The more you know, the more you realize how much more there is to know. When I transcribed the music for the book *Michael Hedges/Rhythm, Sonority, Silence*, I suspected, but did not fully realize, the significance of a technique that cropped up in only a few measures of "Rickover's Dream" and "Eleven Small Roaches." It is, in fact, so innovative and used by Michael Hedges in a sufficient number of his compositions that it should really be the central focus of another book on Michael's finger-style technique. When I transcribed "Hot Type" (from *Aerial Boundaries*, Windham Hill Records, WD-1032, 1984) it became clear to me that this revolutionary new right-hand technique has the potential to shake up the world of finger-style guitar.

Of course, it is the beauty of the composition that makes all this worth discussing in the first place. It has both a soaring melody and a powerful rhythmic drive.

A fundamental part of its rhythmic persuasiveness comes from the fact that the right hand generally moves *in* (toward the strings) on the beat and *out* (away from the strings) on the *and* of the beat. This movement of the right hand is, in fact, the structural framework for the rhythm. And I would like to concentrate here on this aspect of "Hot Type."

The following example consists of the first two measures of the A section of "Hot Type." It can be played as a loop with very satisfactory results. Why not take a chance, grab your guitar, retune to A₁ B₂ E₃ F₃ A₃ D₄ and try out this substantially new technique for the guitar? (Note: From standard tuning, the first, second, third and sixth strings are lowered until they reach the designated pitches. The fourth and fifth strings are raised until they reach the designated pitch. Believe me. This is not some kind of horrible typographical error.)

In this example, the exact left-hand configurations, and when the changes occur, are not completely obvious from the notation. Here are the configurations in chord diagrams:



The changes are indicated with vertical lines above the tablature.

The charm is that the right hand moves in a rhythmic motion—in and out. You have percussion on the *in*. (Finally you have a drummer in your band!) It's not a strug-

gle to perfect the rhythm. It's natural.

To give you an idea of how unusual this composition is, consider this: the right-hand thumb is only used to play a note which occurs on the beat 16 times in this composition! Think about it.

It is important to understand the dimensionality that is created by the use of this variety of unusual right-hand techniques. Each technique produces a distinct musical effect. And these effects work together to produce a complex musical image. It is as if each finger were playing a different instrument.

Each of these techniques may take some practice to execute accurately on a consistent basis. And it may take even more practice to put them together in an integrated system while still maintaining control over each element. But remember, even that isn't enough: you won't be getting musical results if you're still counting the strings.

This example presents the basic elements of this new, right-hand technique. But Michael Hedges has taken the fundamental twoness of this technique (*in* on the beat and *out* on the *and* of the beat) and found ingenious ways to articulate smaller subdivisions of the beat—sixteenth-note and sixteenth-note triplet subdivision—using both his left and right hands.

Michael Hedges has developed and refined this technique over many years. He uses it in such diverse compositions as "Woman of the World," "Follow Through," "Ragamuffin" and "Gospel" (which is scheduled to be released on his next recording). If you think that this technique might be a little difficult to learn, just remember the elegant question posed by Allan Piket: "How hard can it be?"

You may note the similarity between this technique and frailing on the five-string banjo. Both have a natural in and out motion of the right hand. Both use down strokes with the right-hand middle finger. Both employ percussion as a natural part of right-hand movement. But Michael Hedges does not play the five-string banjo. He developed this technique on the guitar.

If you have any questions about this material, you can reach me by phone at 414-636-9910, by fax at 414-636-9911, by e-mail at stropes@execpc.com or online at <http://www.execpc.com/~stropes>.

The complete transcription of "Hot Type" is now available from Stropes Editions, Ltd. The complete transcription of "Ragamuffin" will be released soon. To order call toll-free 800-733-2520 (USA and Canada) or 414-636-9912.



John Stropes and Michael Hedges

