

FRETS

LESSON

CERTIFIABLE TOMMY EMMANUEL TAKES US “HALFWAY HOME”

BY VINNIE DEMASI

PROUDLY INLAID AT THE 12TH FRET

of Tommy Emmanuel's Maton acoustic guitars are the letters C.G.P. It's shorthand for "Certified Guitar Player." This honorary title came from no less an authority than Chet Atkins, and was one of only four such certifications the late, great maestro bestowed in his lifetime. No surprise that Atkins saw a protégé and kindred spirit in the Australian native; both rank among the elite of fingerstyle virtuosos, deftly combining amazing technical ability with innate musicality. Emmanuel started his career as a session ace and member of the popular rock group Dragon before going the solo-acoustic route, and through years of relentless touring and recording has built up a dedicated following of admirers worldwide.

He has twice been chosen by *GP* readers as Best Acoustic Guitarist, received two Grammy nominations, played before an audience of millions at the closing ceremony of the 2000 Sydney Summer Olympic Games, and is an Order of Australia (AM) medalist. I recently caught up with the awe-inspiring Aussie backstage before a sold-out Manhattan show where he shared the secrets behind the first few sections of "Halfway Home," the lead-off track from his 2010 album *Little By Little* [Favored Nations].

Emmanuel plays the song in dropped-*D* tuning with a capo on the 3rd fret, placing it in the key of *F* major, a key he said, "Just felt right." I've transcribed the music notation as such, but with the tab relative to the capo.

"Halfway Home" highlights Emmanuel's formidable Travis picking chops, evidenced by the driving alternate bass-note patterns shown in **Examples 1a** and **1b**. You can sound the bass notes with your bare thumb, with a thumbpick, or, as Emmanuel does, using a slight palm mute on the bass strings throughout.

Ex. 2 details the song's four-bar intro based around an *F5* to *Dm* progression. Dig the clever cascade voicing of the ascending scalar run in the second half of the last bar.

The first phrase of the song's main theme is shown in **Ex. 3**. Admittedly the voicings of the descending *F7* to *Fmaj7* on the top strings in the first bar requires some expansive fretting-hand stretches. Still, you'll want to hold these shapes down and let the notes ring out against each other. (Hint: Emmanuel grabs the dyad on the second and third strings first, then adds his first finger on the top string for the high *B♭* and high *A* notes as needed.) In the phrase's last two bars, the *B♭-A* melody notes are doubled in the bass. Grab these with your 4th and 3rd fingers respectively.

Ex. 1a

♩ = 112-120
Capo III

E B G D A D

Ex. 1b

♩ = 112-120

E B G D A D

Ex. 2

♩ = 112-120
Capo III F5 Dm F5

E B G D A D