How to Build a Chord/Melody Solo  
by Fred Sokolow

Here are some tips on the process of building a chord/melody solo, using **Red River Valley** as an example.

You don’t need to play a chord for every melody note. But you do want o play each chord change at least once. One or two chords per bar of music is usually enough.

You can play a chord/melody arrangement of any song in almost any key, but some keys are easier than others—every song has a different range (a different highest and lowest note). In some keys, the lowest note of your song isn’t on the uke. Or, the highest note is way up above the 12th fret. Chords can be played way up there, but it makes for a more difficult arrangement.

If you play **Red River Valley** in F, the lowest note in the melody is C, which is also the lowest note on the uke. This is a good start, as F is an easy key on the uke, and starting at the lowest note on the instrument means the melody probably won’t take you way up the neck.

Here’s the basic melody (Ex. 1) If you add the indicated chords to that melody, you have this basic chord/melody arrangement. Notice that a few strums or arpeggios are added to fill in the gaps between melodic phrases (Ex. 2).

Now using some of the substitution ideas from my book “**Jazzing Up the Uke**”, here’s a jazzier version of the same chord/melody arrangement (Ex. 3). Just for fun, try it in C. That key will force you to play chords up around the 10th fret. First the melody (Ex. 4). Now, add the chords (Ex. 5). You need some knowledge of up-the-neck chord stuff to do this (the book/CD **Fretboard Roadmaps for the Ukulele** will help). Notice that the 4th string makes this arrangement easier to play, as the open string harmonizes with up-the-neck, three string chords.

Finally, try it with some jazzier chord choices (Ex. 6).

Try this same process with other familiar tunes, like Woody Guthrie’s “This Land is Your Land” or Jimmie Davis’ “You Are My Sunshine”. For more examples of uke chords soloing, go to my website, sokolowmusic.com and look under “instructional material”, then click on “uke, guitar, or bass”.
