

# RENO-STYLE WORKSHOP

## Reno Roots, Part 2: Arthur "Guitar Boogie" Smith

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Last time we began to explore the musical roots of Don Reno with one of his first influences, old-time fiddle tunes. Now let's move up the time line to about 1941. It was here that Don first joined "Arthur Smith and His Crackerjacks." Don stayed with Arthur until the Crackerjacks disbanded in 1943. Later that year Don joined the Army. After Don returned home from serving his country, he joined Bill Monroe in 1948. He remained a Bluegrass Boy for a little over a year, and after a short stint with Tommy Magness, Don formed his famous partnership with

Red Smiley in 1951. But Reno and Smiley were a "recording group only" during this period. So needing a steady pay check, Don returned to work for Arthur Smith in 1952, and remained with him until May, 1955, when Reno and Smiley became a full-time band. During their time together, Don and

Arthur wrote and recorded the infamous *Feuding Banjos*, aka *Dueling Banjos*. Don thought so much of Arthur that he said it took him nearly two weeks to get up the nerve to quit The Crackerjacks. Although his time with Arthur was relatively short, the impact Arthur had on Don was tremendous. In my opinion, Arthur Smith is the most significant influence in Don Reno's early musical development. You can hear a little bit of Arthur in everything Don plays.

### Little Rock Getaway chord positions:

| C  | E7 | Am | C7 | F | A7 | Dm | B <sup>°</sup> 7 | C  | Am | D | G | C  | G7 | F  | Fm |
|----|----|----|----|---|----|----|------------------|----|----|---|---|----|----|----|----|
| 14 | 12 | 10 | 8  | 7 | 5  | 12 | 6                | 10 | 7  | 4 | 5 | 10 | 9  | 15 | 15 |
| 13 | 12 | 10 | 8  | 6 | 5  | 10 | 6                | 8  | 5  | 3 | 3 | 8  | 8  | 13 | 13 |
| 12 | 13 | 9  | 9  | 5 | 6  | 10 | 7                | 9  | 5  | 2 | 4 | 9  | 10 | 14 | 13 |
| 14 | 14 | 10 | 10 | 7 | 7  | 12 | 9                | 10 | 7  | 4 | 5 | 10 | 9  | 15 | 13 |

## Little Rock Getaway

### A Part

Key of C. G tuning: gDGBD  
Based on the playing of Don Reno.  
Tab by Jason Skinner

### Little Rock Getaway—single-string variation, A part

To say Arthur was an incredible talent is an understatement. He was a singer, song writer, multi-instrumentalist, producer, music teacher, business man, Baptist minister, and even owned his own chain of grocery stores. His list of accomplishments goes on and on. But Arthur is most known for his outstanding guitar playing. His unique blend of jazz and country guitar picking has influenced countless musicians. It was with Arthur that Don was introduced to many pop and jazz standards. As a result Don went on to record his groundbreaking recordings of *Limehouse Blues*, *Little Rock Getaway*, *Birth Of The Blues*, *Beer Barrel Polka*, and *The World Is Waiting for the Sunrise*, to name a few. These recordings opened the door to new possibilities on the 5-string and paved the way for innovators such as Bill Keith, Eddie Adcock, and many others to follow. The banjo world owes a lot to Mr. Arthur "Guitar Boogie" Smith, whether we realize it or not.

So for this month's Reno Workshop we'll explore one of those old tunes that Don learned from Arthur, *Little Rock Getaway*. As with *Limehouse Blues*, Don simplified some of the chords to make it a little more palatable for 1950's bluegrass. Even though the bluegrass version may be easier than the actual jazz version it is still quite a handful. The trick to Don's version is to learn the chord positions first. So learn the chord positions shown in the chart before you jump into the tab. Just practice vamping the chords until you can move smoothly from one position to the other. Watch out for that Bdim7 chord!

The first break shown is the basic break Don did on his original recording. It is played in the key of C but Don's version could be transposed to any key since we are using primarily closed positions. There's nothing really complicated here pertaining to rolls. Once you have the positions down, the melody will fall right into place when you start rolling. For the triple stops, you can use your thumb to brush them or you can just pinch them. I prefer to brush them while muting the bridge slightly with the right hand. On his original recording, Don's second break utilized his famous "double roll" technique. If you can play *Double Banjo Blues* then you are already familiar with the double roll. Basically it's just a really fast forward roll. I did not tab this break because of space restrictions but it is actually very simple. Just use the same chord positions from the first break

but apply the double roll this time around. Again it's really all about knowing those darn chord positions! Listen to the original recording to get the idea.

Now that you have the basic breaks down, how about mixing things up with a little single-string? Don didn't do a single-string break on *Little Rock Getaway* (at least on record) but that doesn't mean *we* can't! So I've tabbed my own single-string variation of the A part. As with the first break, chord positions are also important here. But this time we'll be working out of your "C" position at the 12th fret, "F" position at the 5th fret, and "C" position at

the 8th fret. Getting your hands into these chord positions will make accessing these single-string notes much easier. Check out the corresponding sound clips on BNL's website to hear this version.

Well that's it; it's really not as hard as it sounds. Again, learning the chord positions is most important. Once you've mastered those, the rest is a piece of cake. The really hard part is finding a guitar player to play it with you! Where's Arthur Smith when you need him?! Until next time...Keep Pickin' Reno! If you have questions or comments please email me through my website at [www.renopicker.com](http://www.renopicker.com) —Jason Skinner