

# Hallelujah by Leonard Cohen

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LYRICS AND CHORDS



Rebecca Bogart & Jenny Peters

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## About “Hallelujah” by Leonard Cohen

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### Cohen's Ingenious Lyrics

While Leonard Cohen (September 21, 1934 – November 7, 2016) was mostly known as a singer and songwriter, he actually got his start as a writer in the 1950s. He worked as a poet and a novelist until the late 1960s when he started his music career. *Hallelujah* is an ingeniously written composition widely thought of as the archetype of secular hymns.

Cohen started with an astonishing eighty verses of lyrics for *Hallelujah*. He cut this to a final four-verse recording which was released in 1984. But the alternate verses and lyrics sometimes came up not only in Cohen’s live shows but also in the hundreds of later covers.

Cohen wrote brilliant lyrical narratives about Biblical characters. These include King David and Bathsheba, and the tragic love affair of Samson and Delilah. These narratives coupled with thoughtful lines about love, despair, dejection and redemption make *Hallelujah* an interesting and thought-provoking song.

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### One Song, Many Versions

While *Hallelujah* was not a commercial hit initially, famous musicians such as Bob Dylan and Velvet Underground's John Cale recognized the beauty of the song. Bob Dylan performed the song in some of his shows in the late 1980s.

John Cale, on the other hand, recorded a version of it in 1991 on a Leonard Cohen tribute album. Cale's version included lyrics which were different from Cohen's earlier version. Cale requested the lyrics of the song from Cohen. Cohen then sent him several pages of the song's original verses. Consequently, Cale got to pick which verses suited him.

Jeff Buckley, influenced by Cale's version, released a cover recording in 1991. Songwriters and critics alike regard Buckley's soulfully sung version as one of the greatest songs of our time. Buckley’s "as near perfect as you can get" rendition contributed to the song finally getting worldwide recognition.

In fact, more than 300 singers from various countries have covered *Hallelujah* to date. What’s interesting is that these different covers convey different interpretations and moods depending on the performer. These range from sorrowful to joyous, fragile to uplifting, and religious to sexual. Also, many movies and TV programs have now featured *Hallelujah*, the most notable of which is the first *Shrek* film in 2001.

Finally, let’s not forget to mention that the famous ukulele virtuoso Jake Shimabukuro also included a solo ukulele cover of *Hallelujah* in his 2011 “Peace, Love, Ukulele” album. Even though the song’s lyrics are definitely unforgettable, its melody and chord progression are also most noteworthy.

## Strumming Pattern for the 1<sup>st</sup> Verse and Chorus

Use the strumming pattern shown below for most of the song. The approximate rhythm of the strum is the same as the nursery rhyme “Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water.” In case you’re not familiar with the notation, this symbol means a down strum:

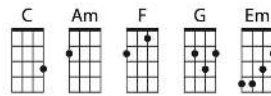


And this symbol means an up strum:



Strumming Pattern:

↓ ↑↓ ↑↓ ↑↓ ↑



12/8

3

6

9

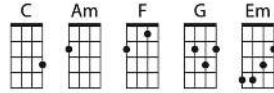
11

Chords: C, Am, F, G, Em

The musical notation consists of five staves, each representing a measure of music. Above each staff are chord names and strumming symbols. The first staff starts with a 12/8 time signature and a key signature of one flat. The chords and strumming symbols are: C (down), Am (up-down), C (down), Am (up-down), C (down), Am (up-down). The second staff has chords: F (down), C (up-down), G (down), C (up-down), F (down), G (up-down). The third staff has chords: Am (down), F (up-down), G (down), Em (up-down), Am (down), Am (up-down). The fourth staff has chords: F (down), Am (up-down), F (down), Am (up-down), F (down), Am (up-down). The fifth staff has chords: F (down), C (up-down), G (down), C (up-down), C (down). The notation uses downward-pointing triangles for down strums and upward-pointing triangles for up strums.

## Fingerpicking Pattern for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Verse and Chorus

Use the fingerpicking pattern below beginning with the chorus before the 3<sup>rd</sup> verse (with the syllable “lu”). This pattern of playing one string at a time instead of strumming all the strings at once is sometimes called “arpeggiation” or “broken chord”. Use your thumb on the G string (the one closest to the ceiling), your index finger on the C string, your middle finger on the E string, and your ring finger on the A string (the one closest to the floor).

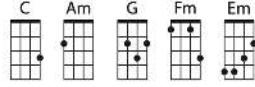


Two lines of musical notation for guitar fingerpicking. The first line shows a sequence of chords: C, Am, C, Am. The notation is on a six-line staff with a treble clef. The top line is labeled 'T' (thumb) and the bottom line is labeled 'B' (base). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 0, 1, 2, 3. The second line shows a sequence: <sup>3</sup>F, C, G, etc. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 0, 1, 2, 3. The notation is on a six-line staff with a treble clef. The top line is labeled 'T' (thumb) and the bottom line is labeled 'B' (base). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 0, 1, 2, 3.

# Tab for the Chord Melody

## Hallelujah Chord Melody

Strumming Pattern  
 ↓ ↑↓ ↑↓ ↑↓ ↑



C Am C Am

First system of musical notation (measures 1-4). The treble clef staff shows a melody in 12/8 time. The guitar staff shows fret numbers for the strings. Chords C and Am are indicated above the staff.

F C G C F G

Second system of musical notation (measures 5-8). The treble clef staff shows a melody. The guitar staff shows fret numbers. Chords F, C, G, C, F, and G are indicated above the staff.

Am F G Em Am F

Third system of musical notation (measures 9-12). The treble clef staff shows a melody. The guitar staff shows fret numbers. Chords Am, F, G, Em, Am, and F are indicated above the staff.

Am F C G C

Fourth system of musical notation (measures 13-16). The treble clef staff shows a melody. The guitar staff shows fret numbers. Chords Am, F, C, G, and C are indicated above the staff.

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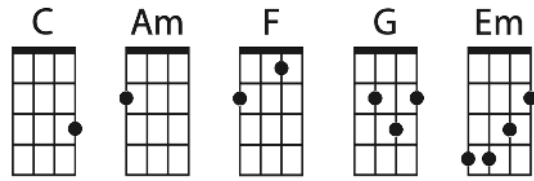
## Do What Works for You

One of the joys of playing music is that you can choose to play it in the way you like best.

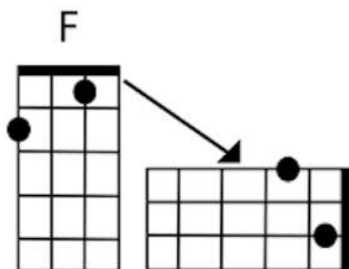
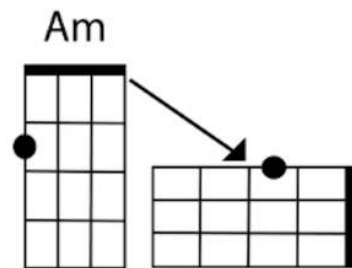
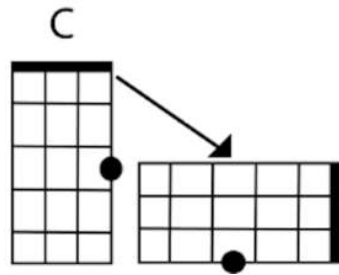
We've included the above suggestions for strumming, fingerpicking and chord melody so you can play the song the way Jenny does in the video. If you don't know how to read tab or do fingerpicking, you can strum the whole song. If you find the down-up strumming pattern too difficult, just do all down strums. And if you have a different way of strumming the song that you like better, then by all means, do it your way!

## How to Play the Chords used in Hallelujah

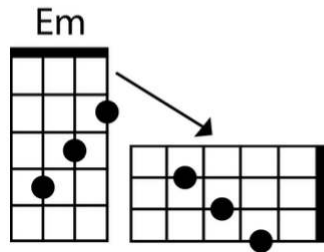
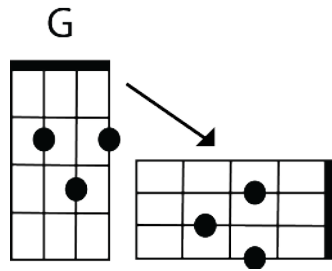
*Hallelujah* uses these chords:



Here are some more detailed illustrations of how to play the chords:



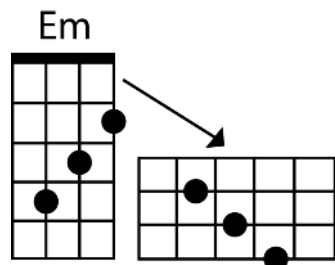




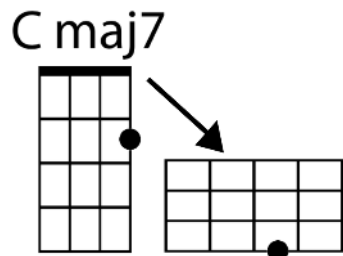
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### About the E Minor Chord

The E minor chord is the hardest chord in the song. You could play the four finger version shown at the very beginning of this section. Here is an easier way to play the E minor chord that only uses three fingers.

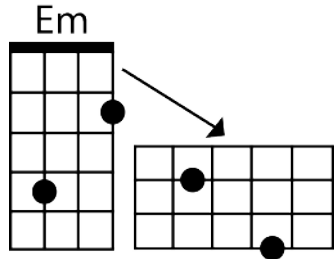


By the way, sometimes ukulele players who don't want to learn the E minor chord will substitute the Cmaj7 chord instead for E Minor.



While some players think the Cmaj7 chord doesn't sound quite as good as an E Minor chord, it will help you get through a song that might be too hard otherwise. Also, if you find your hand will not make the more difficult chord shape, it's nice to have a chord shape you can make that still sounds good. We think of it like modifying a yoga pose in a yoga class. Some people are very flexible and some are not. You have to do what is possible for you!

Here is another possible way to play the E minor chord that uses only 2 fingers:



We prefer the three-finger version because it will help you get ready to learn the B flat chord, and because the two finger version is often out of tune on soprano ukuleles. Again, it's important to find a fingering that works for you and sounds good. You can always start with learning the chord with one fingering and then switch to a different one later.

Some of you might be wondering *why* there are alternate fingerings for chords. A chord is made up of certain combinations of pitches. For example, the E minor chord is made up of the pitches of E, G, and B. A musician can play the pitches in any order from low to high and it will still sound like an E minor chord.

Also, the ukulele has four strings. So when we are playing a three-note chord on the ukulele, we are usually playing one of the chord notes twice with two different strings. One fingering might have you playing E, G, B, G, and another might have you playing G, E, B, E. Both combinations of notes sound like an E minor chord but they have different fingerings.

You can learn a lot more ukulele-friendly music theory in our book *21 MORE Songs in 6 Days: Learn Intermediate Ukulele the Easy Way*.

## Lyrics and Chords for Hallelujah by Leonard Cohen

Intro: C Am C Am

- C Am  
I heard there was a secret chord

- C Am  
That David played and it pleased the lord

- F C G  
But you don't really care for music, do you?

- C F G  
Well it goes like this the fourth, the fifth

- Am F  
The minor fall and the major lift

- G Em Am  
The baffled king composing hallelujah

- F Am F C G  
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelu-u-u...

- C Am  
Well your faith was strong but you needed proof

- C Am  
You saw her bathing on the roof

- F C G  
Her beauty and the moonlight overthrew you

- C F G  
She tied you to her kitchen chair

Am F  
She broke your throne and she cut your hair

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- G Em Am  
And from your lips she drew the hallelujah

Begin fingerpicking the chords at first F chord. Continue until the end of the song.



- F Am F C G C  
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelu-u-u-ja

Play optional chord melody solo

C Am C Am

- C Am  
Well, maybe there's a god above

- C Am  
But all I've ever learned from love

- F C G  
Was how to shoot somebody who outdrew you

- C F G  
It's not a cry that you hear at night

Am F  
It's not somebody who's seen the light

- G Em Am  
It's a cold and it's a broken hallelujah

- F Am F C G C  
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelu-u-u-ja

## Conclusion

We hope this PDF has helped you learn Leonard Cohen’s song *Hallelujah*.

We’re Jenny Peters and Rebecca Bogart, the Ukulele Sisters. We’ve been publishing books on how to play ukulele since 2013 and have sold over 50,000 copies worldwide. We believe that people playing music make the world a better place, and we’re thrilled to support you on your ukulele journey.

You can read more about us on the next page. Please feel free to [reach out to us](#) at any time if you have any questions or comments about this PDF or anything else about the ukulele.

Happy Strumming!

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**Jenny Peters** is a Grammy-nominated full-time music educator in the Chicago area. She has taught thousands of beginners on variety of instruments during her many years of teaching.

Jenny developed her unique beginner-friendly method of teaching ukulele when she learned to play in order to include ukulele to her fourth grade General Music classes. She has gone on to become a popular YouTube ukulele personality who owns seven different kinds of ukuleles!

Jenny and Rebecca have now written five books in the Beginning Ukulele Songs series: Book 1, *21 Songs in Days: Learn Ukulele the Easy Way*; Book 2, *Easy Ukulele Songs: Five with Five Chords*; Book 3, *21 Easy Ukulele Songs for Christmas*; Book 4, *21 MORE Songs in 6 Days: Learn Intermediate Ukulele the Easy Way*; and Book 5, *21 Easy Ukulele Folk Songs*. A sixth book of easy ukulele hymns is in the works. They are also authors of *Ukulele for All* published by Kjos Publishing.

The Illinois Music Educators Association has to do presentations on how to teach ukulele, and she written the subject for the magazine of the Illinois chapter of the American String Teachers Association. She is a member of the National Association for Music Education (NaFME), the American String Teachers Association (ASTA) and the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP.) Jenny plays six other instruments besides ukulele: piano, violin, viola, cello, bass and organ. She currently heads a successful elementary and middle school orchestra program. Before that she taught Elementary General Music for ten years.

Jenny has served on the faculties of Lake Forest College and the College of Lake County. She taught piano, violin and chamber music at the Music Institute of Chicago and the Lake Forest Music Institute. She holds a Master of Music in Piano Performance from the University of Illinois and Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance from the University of Washington. She earned her teacher's certification from Trinity International University in order to share her passion for music with students of diverse backgrounds.

**Rebecca Bogart** has been introducing beginners of all ages to music for over 40 years. She believes that helping more people play music makes the world a better place.

She learned to play ukulele from her sister Jenny using the method taught in Beginning Ukulele Songs series. While she has spent countless hours playing music with two hands at the piano, learning to have the left hand fret chords while the

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right hand strummed was a surprisingly challenging experience! Rebecca brings a ukulele beginner’s perspective to the Ukulele Sisters' writing team.

Rebecca has been passionate about the piano and music her entire life. She has played for audiences in Italy, taught master classes at Harvard and won more than a few piano competitions. She made her solo debut at Carnegie Hall in early 2014. Several of Rebecca's piano students have won national and international awards and been featured on NPR's radio show "From the Top". She has been a featured presenter at the California Music Teachers Association, and has recorded a CD of American solo piano music *American Retrospective*. She completed her Masters’ degree in Piano at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

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