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"The How and the Tao of Old Time Banjo"

The How and the Tao of Folk Guitar

Volume One: *Getting Started*



by Patrick Costello

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There is more I'd like to say. When it comes to the guitar I could literally talk all day, but it's probably best to let the book do the talking right now.

Let's tune this puppy up and get picking.

[Patrick Costello](#)

October 2004

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The How and the Tao of Folk Guitar Volume One: *Getting Started*

by Patrick Costello

For "Dear Old Dad"

my father, my captain, my friend

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Introduction

The highest truth cannot be put into words. Therefore the greatest teacher has nothing to say. He simply gives himself in service, and never worries.

-The Hua Hu Ching

Instead of diving into the technical guitar stuff right away let' s imagine for a moment that we are sitting together on my front porch in Crisfield. Let' s say that it is just about dusk and the catbirds are in the big

rose bush next to the steps and the carpenter bees are buzzing against the screen door. Every now and then you'll see an old couple out walking together or a young couple pushing a stroller and they'll wave to us with a smile because nothing hits you quite as right as seeing two guitar players picking on an evening like this, not to mention the simple fact that people around here are pretty friendly.

I'm leaning back on the old porch swing giving you this funny kind of grin because the way you are holding your guitar right now (like you're not too sure what end you're supposed to blow into) is something I've seen more than once over the years- not to mention that it reminds me about how I felt when I was just starting out. You're sitting there trying to decide what question to ask first when I break the ice and say, "So you want to play the guitar."

It's not a question because I already know the answer. You wouldn't be here otherwise. Before you can reply I just signal you to hand me your guitar so I can check the setup and make sure you are in tune. As I'm doing that I start to talk about how I started out. "See, when I was a kid in grade school I had all kinds of hearing problems. I also had a smart mouth and a bad attitude back then so the teachers would put me in the last row of the class. I was unable to hear very much but I couldn't cause too much disruption either. As a result school was kind of a drag and I felt like I didn't really fit in."

"Well, one day the school invited this girl to come in and talk to the kids about how she lived with her handicap. She was blind and something else . . . I didn't hear everything she said because I was all the way in the back of the assembly hall and, to be perfectly honest, I wasn't all that interested."

"When the principal came out on stage and handed her this great big Guild guitar I just about went crazy. I knew it was a Guild because it was right on the headstock. I can close my eyes to this day and still see her standing there with that guitar and her guide dog. Well, she started strumming on that guitar and got the whole school singing along with an old song called My Grandfathers' Clock."

As a matter of fact, we will be playing that song in a little while.

"So she was singing this sad old song and I sat there and just about cried my eyes out. It wasn't just the song. The song is kind of sad in its own way and the music really did move me, but the whole presentation hit me like a hammer. I mean, here was this girl who had just about everything going against her and she had a whole school full of kids singing along with her."

"That was power. And let me tell you, to a kid power is a fascinating thing because they don't really have any. Adults tell them what to do at home and in the classroom and bullies thump on them in the playground. In my case, being the square peg in a school full of round holes, the show of power that blind

girl was putting on just took my breath away. I sat there with tears running down my face, my heart beating like a hammer and my head spinning with the possibilities until one of the other kids saw me and gave me such a hard time about being a crybaby that I decked him."

"As I sat in the principal's office next to the kid with a fat lip the idea of becoming a musician kind of took hold of me. I knew what I wanted to do with the rest of my life, I just didn't know how."

"There was a good bit of time between that girl visiting the school and me getting my first guitar. I began taking banjo lessons because my dad was starting to play the banjo. We had a spare banjo in the house so I figured what the heck, I'll give the fivestring a shot. I liked the banjo, but I still dreamed about getting a guitar. I even started trying to play the blues on my banjo, but it sounded more like the reds or the greens."

"I had been playing the banjo for a while, and was actually getting pretty good at it, when one day on the way home from school I found a guitar sticking out of a trashcan. It was all busted up but I patched it together with duct tape and started trying to figure out how to play it."

Right about now I'll hand your guitar back to you and make a comment about it not being too bad of a guitar- even if it's a junky old guitar. It's not a matter of being dishonest; it's just that I know from experience that a first guitar is a wonderful thing. No matter how awful it is you'll always have a special place in your heart for your first flattop box.

"Now, the reason I'm telling you all of this is because in order to get from there to here (from being a kid in Philadelphia with a scavenged guitar to sitting with you sharing some pointers) I had to embark on what was to become a lifelong journey."

"See, learning to play the guitar isn't just something you schedule. You don't pick up a guitar and say to yourself that in six months you will be playing at such-and-such a skill level. It's a bit more complicated no, that's not quite right- it's a bit simpler than that. You just have to start walking or, in this case start playing, and go wherever the road takes you. The things you see, the people you meet and the stuff you wind up doing all go into what becomes over time your own unique sound and way of playing."

"My own journey hasn't always been easy. There were times when I played so long and so hard trying to figure things out that my fingertips cracked open and I just sat there banging my head because nothing I was trying would work. Every book I picked up and almost every teacher I ran into just confused me even more than I already was. Things didn't become clearer until I started hooking up with old blues and country guitar players who kept yelling at me to go back and work on the basics. They also took the time

to show me what those basics were."

"Eventually I managed to put the puzzle together. I went from not being able to do anything right to having adventures and doing all sorts of cool and crazy stuff. I' ve played on stage with my father who (because of our shared love of music) is now my dearest friend, in front of audiences so huge it was hard to take in. I' ve jammed with blues musicians and punk rock bands. I' ve played the rain on the streets of Galway, Ireland with a bunch of guys who barely spoke English but treated me like a brother because we shared the language of music."

"As a teacher my job isn' t to teach you how to play the guitar. My job is to help you teach yourself, to make things a little easier and clearer for you than they were for me. You and I are going to spend some time on this front porch together. I' ll share the basic skills and concepts that you need to develop along with a story or two that will probably make you laugh. Through it all you have to set the pace. Pick up a lick or something to work on and then it' s just like the old timers would tell me, "Go on and work on that, and don' t come back until you can do like I showed you." "

"Don' t worry about how fast or how slow you might be learning and don' t worry about playing or sounding just like somebody else. No matter how good you become you are always going to sound like you, so you might as well start enjoying yourself from the get-go."

Right about now I' ll shake my head and say something about how I tend to talk too much and tell you, as well as myself, that it' s time to get started. We' start by going over the tuning again as the folks in Crisfield stroll on by and the carpenter bees buzz against the screen door.

-Patrick Costello

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The *How* of Folk Guitar

Great knowledge sees all in one. Small knowledge breaks down into the many.

-Chuang Tzu

If you ask five different guitar players what the term "folk guitar" means you are likely to get twenty different answers. When affordable acoustic guitars started becoming available in North America an

amazing variety of music began developing almost overnight and to this day the process is still underway.

The musicians I knew when I was growing up were interested in playing everything. These guys shared their knowledge in fields of music that ran from Delta blues and early jazz to honky-tonk country or rock and roll. At first it seemed like all of these musical styles were different, and that playing something like the blues required a separate set of skills from playing classic country songs. The cool old dudes kept telling me that if I mastered the basic skills I would start to see how everything is connected. "It' s all music, kid." Was something I heard an awful lot back in those days. The only thing I head more than that was, "The only thing that matters is the rhythm!"

Over time I figured out why they were right. The more music I played and the more things I learned the clearer it became that I could use a handful of simple techniques to make the jump from one style or flavor to another. As a result when I help somebody get started on the guitar things seem to work better in the beginning if I simply share a handful of basic techniques. The student can then use these basic techniques or, in this case, you can use these techniques to make the music that you want to play.

The whole focus of **Volume One** is to get you playing and singing simple songs. By the end of this book you will be able to play and sing folk songs using basic fingerstyle and flatpick guitar techniques. You will start making music for and with your friends and family. If that' s all you ever decide to dd' m cool with that. I mean, if all you ever learn is three chords and a simple picking pattern you can play thousands (yes, thousands) of songs! Just wait until you see how many songs you can play with one-finger chords!

Folk music isn' t supposed to be complex. There is a degree of challenge in learning any instrument but it' s not like training for a heavyweight-boxing match. You don' t have to get up at four in the morning, drink a glass of raw eggs and punch a side of beef every day to become a good guitar player. All you really have to do is love playing the guitar. Take your time and enjoy the trip. Let your natural curiosity and creativity take over and steer you along your journey.

Like my grandfather used to say, "Work smarter, not harder."

I don' t expect you to be familiar with all the songs in this book. When I was just starting on the banjo, and later on the guitar, a big part of the fun was the fact that everything was brand new. In a lot of ways not having somebody around to tell me exactly how a song should be played gave me the freedom to come up with my own ideas. Most of these songs are very old but to a beginner they are brand spanking new. The other cool thing about these songs is that you will find yourself exploring the history of the music as you start to pick up additional lyrics. In some ways every good folksinger has to be an amateur historian.

If you do get stuck on the melody line of a song I suggest that you do what I did and go exploring. Find an old guitar player in your town. Bug the local radio station to play some folk music. Browse the Internet or just make something up. There is no right or wrong way. Just follow your heart.

All right, let' s get our gear together and start playing the guitar. We' ve got a lot of picking and singing to do.

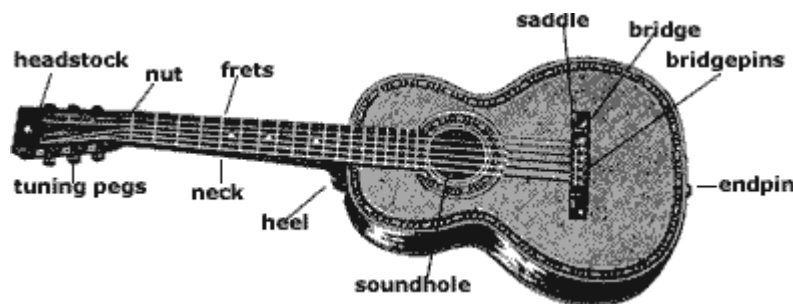
-Patrick Costello

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Gearing Up

If you are reading this book I think it' s safe to assume that you have some kind of a guitar, but just to be safe let' s take a quick look at some of the types of guitars available. The standard steel-string "flattop box" style guitar is shown in the illustration below. This is the most common type of acoustic guitar.



With the pin bridge mounted on the top of the guitar there is an amazing amount of stress placed on a guitar' s top when it is tuned up. Think about it. You have six pieces of steel wire mounted on the top of the guitar without much to anchor anything. In order to keep the wooden top from collapsing or buckling under the strain a series of braces is mounted under the top of the guitar.

Most steel-string acoustic guitars also feature an arched fretboard. This is a big plus with any guitar because it puts the strings in a position that fits the angle of your fingers. Other designs you might want to at least be familiar with include **classical**, **arch top**, **twelve-string** and **resophonic** guitars.

Classical and/or **Flamenco** guitars are built for nylon or gut strings. They usually feature a wide fretboard and, because gut and nylon strings are under less tension than steel strings, a light internal bracing

system.

The lighter bracing makes using steel strings on classical guitars inadvisable. If you string up a classical guitar with steel strings you can destroy the instrument.

Arch-top guitars have carved tops much like a violin. Most archtops feature what is often referred to as a trapeze tailpiece attached to the endpin. Archtop guitars also have a removable bridge.

Twelve-string guitars are pretty much the same as standard six-string guitars except that every string is doubled.

Resophonic guitars were developed as an attempt to amplify acoustic guitars before the advent of the electric guitar and magnetic pickups. These instruments feature either one or three aluminum cones suspended in the body of the guitar. The body of resophonic guitars can be made of metal or wood.

I'll admit that I am partial to resophonic guitars. I own two classic Dobro metal bodies and I love them both about as much as I love chunky peanut butter and B-grade horror movies.

They have the warmth of a flattop box and tons of volume when you hit them hard. The fact that they look cool is just icing on the cake.

Choosing A Guitar

There are pros and cons to any guitar type or design. Instrument builders have been searching for the perfect guitar template for a long time.

The flattop box design is the most commonly used, but there are an almost unbelievable number of variations on the basic design from massive jumbo guitars to small body parlor guitars.

There is no "best" design. You will have to try some guitars of different sizes to find an instrument that sounds good and feels good to play.

One thing you will have to expect when you are shopping for a guitar is that everybody you run into will offer advice on what you want to buy.

People will tell you that an archtop guitar is only for jazz or that a resophonic guitar is only for the blues. They'll say that you have to play a dreadnought guitar to play bluegrass or that you need a guitar made of a specific kind of wood. None of it is really true.

A guitar is only capable of doing whatever you tell it to. Standardized designs are nice in terms of fitting in but nothing is cast in stone. You have to choose your guitar and do whatever you feel is right with it.

When my dad took me to buy my first good guitar everybody in the shop was kind of horrified that I chose a metal body resophonic guitar. They even tried to talk me out of buying it. They didn't know why I was drawn to that Dobro 33-H and I had a hard time getting through to them that this wasn't just the guitar I wanted, this was the guitar I had to have. I finally shut everybody up by simply asking if they wanted to make a sale or not.

Those guys meant well, but they didn't know the whole story behind why I chose that guitar. It wasn't just the way it felt in my hands or it's great sound. There was something else drawing me that I couldn't put into words then or now . . . well, I'll admit there was that, "ooh . . . *shiny*" reaction that usually happens to guys when they are faced with chrome. But it wasn't just that. There was something about that guitar that just felt right. If I had taken the well-intentioned advice and passed on that resophonic guitar I'm not sure I would have gone on to really learn how to play. A lot of things happened to me simply because people didn't know what to make of a teenager wandering around Philadelphia with this honking big shiny guitar strapped to his back. It made people want to stop and chat or show me a lick.

You are going to have your own reasons for choosing the guitar you wind up playing and I'm not going to tell you that you are right or wrong. Just weigh your options and try to make rational decisions. Don't choose a guitar only because it has a blue finish or fancy fretboard inlays. Choose the instrument that sort of says "Hey baby, let's cruise" when you pick it up.

Cheap Guitars

Guitars can be expensive. A new or vintage top of the line guitar can cost as much as a three bedroom house in Crisfield, but expensive isn't always the same as better.

A lot of new players don't realize that some of the best guitar music ever recorded was played on cheap guitars. The early blues players used instruments from Sears and other mail order catalogs. One of the most popular brands back then was the Stella line of guitars that you could buy in furniture stores.

In the long run a guitar is just a contraption made up of wood and wire. You make the music. A great musician will sound good on any instrument.

You can buy a basically playable guitar for as little as fifty to seventy-five bucks and you can pick up a really nice acoustic or resophonic guitar that will play like a dream for around three or four hundred

dollars.

High-end instruments are nice, but you don't want to make the mistake of thinking that you have to be in an upscale tax bracket to play the guitar.

One kind of interesting factoid about high-end vintage guitars is that rich folks who never got around to learning how to play bought a lot of the really elaborate instruments made before the Second World War. A friend of mine likes to point out that professional folk musicians never really get around to making enough money to buy ultra-fancy instruments, and that the main reason a lot of those instruments survive today is that they were hardly ever played!

The really cool thing about buying a cheap guitar nowadays is that the market is flooded with instruments. Manufacturers are fighting tooth and nail to produce the best selling affordable guitar and the resulting marketing chaos is a great thing for guitar players because it has really driven the prices down on decent instruments.

The other thing to keep in mind is that guitar players tend to be kind of rough on instruments. The odds are pretty good that you are going to travel with your guitar and weird stuff can happen to instruments on the road. Heat, cold, rain, snow and tipsy old ladies trying to do the chicken dance are going to attack your instrument individually and in groups. Some of the really expensive new and vintage instruments can be kind of fragile so when you are shopping ask yourself if the guitar you are looking at can take the abuse or if it's so fancy that a scratch or a ding would drive you crazy.

So shop around and don't get too wrapped up with the packaging, hype or ruffrou. Buy the best instrument you can afford and make the most of what you have.

Things To Watch Out For

With guitars in any price bracket there are some trouble spots to look for. Make sure the neck is straight. With some older guitars, and some of the really bad new ones, there is a chance that the neck has warped or twisted. In some cases this isn't too big of a repair job but you want to be aware of that added expense when you buy the instrument.

If it's at all possible try to pick up an instrument with a solid wood top. Plywood, or even some of the new high-tech composite materials are acceptable for the back and sides of an entry-level guitar, but when used for the top they can result in a fairly weak or mushy sound. You see, on a flattop guitar the vibration of the strings causes the top to vibrate. Plywood does not react to those vibrations the way solid wood can

so the sound tends to get a little bit funky.

When you are looking at a guitar it's easy to see whether the top is made of plywood or solid wood. All you have to do is hold the instrument so that you can see the edge of the sound hole. If it looks like a sandwich it's plywood.

Give the guitar a little bit of a shake to see if any of the braces are loose. Some guitars have a battery-powered pickup installed so make sure it's not the battery that's rolling around.

Make sure that the fret wires are not pulling out from the fingerboard and that the ends of the wires do not stick out from the side of the neck to possibly catch your fingers. Look out for cracks in the neck or body. Also look at the top to make sure the pickguard isn't peeling up or that the bridge isn't buckling the top in some way. Take a look at the action, or how high the strings are from the fretboard of the guitar. You want the strings high enough so that they don't buzz on the frets, but you don't want them so high that the guitar is hard to play. Ask at the store or bring along a guitar-playing friend for support.

Be cautious about buying online. Sometimes you may find an instrument for a few dollars less than at your local music store, but you never really know what you are getting until it's been paid for and delivered.

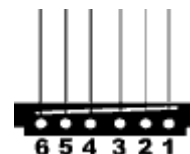
Look at it this way. When you buy from your local shop you can always stop by later for some setup advice or repair work. It's also a good place to hang out shop for the latest accessories and talk music.

Trust me, after you have been picking for a few years and the guitar you have been using every day gets sick or generally messed up there is nothing quite as reassuring as being able to take it to a shop where the folks not only know your instrument, but will treat you like family.

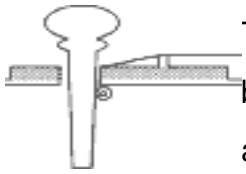
The last thing to keep in mind is what I call the "junk factor." Sometimes people make the mistake of thinking that just because a guitar is old it must be a great instrument. The thing you have to realize is that something that was junk sixty years ago is still junk today. It's just old junk.

Strings

When people refer to the strings of a guitar they are almost always numbered one through six with the sixth string being the heavy wound string on top, closest to your chin.



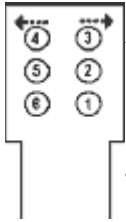
In standard steel string acoustic guitar design you will usually find a pin bridge holding the strings to the body of the guitar.



The pin bridge supports the saddle and the bridge pins. The saddle is the insert in the body of the bridge that raises the strings above the body of the guitar and the bridge pins are used to keep the strings attached to the guitar.

The diagram illustrates how bridge pins work. The ball end of the string is dropped into the hole. When the bridge pin is pushed down the string is locked into place.

Bridge pins can be pretty tight and hard to remove when you go to change the strings. I usually give them a gentle yank with a pair of pliers but you can pick up a pin-puller in any music store for a few bucks.



At the headstock the strings attach to the tuning pegs. The diagram shows you how the tuners are laid out on most guitars and the direction to wind them.

There are many techniques for securing the strings to the tuning pegs. I prefer to run the string from the bridge or tailpiece through the hole in the tuning peg and pull it tight. Then I hold the string at the first or second fret to keep it tight at the bridge or tailpiece while I loop the string back around to where I ran it through the peg. Run it through, pull it tight and then tune up. This method won't leave a lot of slack string around the tuning post and has worked well for the last twenty years or so on my guitar.

When you put on a new set of strings you are going to have some excess string hanging from the tuning pegs. You can clip it with a pair of wire cutters or you can run the excess string between your thumb and a nickel to give it a curl. It looks funky, but it works in a pinch.

Guitar strings come in a variety of styles and gauges. I use extra light gauge strings on my resonophonic guitars but for a standard acoustic guitar you might need a slightly heavier gauge to make the top of the instrument respond and react to your playing. The thing to keep in mind is that you want to find the right balance between playability and volume. Heavier strings will add some volume to an acoustic guitar but they can also make the instrument harder to play.

There are a lot of options in terms of the kind of metal that strings are made of, not to mention coated strings that are supposed to resist corrosion. The pros and cons of that stuff is really a matter of opinion. Some players swear by phosphor bronze and others will tell you about the wonders of brass strings or strings that have been cryogenically frozen. What can I say? People like to talk.

Try a few different types, brands and gauges on your own and use what works best for you and your guitar. For fragile guitars or for people with fairly weak hands another cool option is to try silk and steel strings. These strings have silk strands in the core of the wound strings. This is done to make the string

sound up to pitch at a lower tension. The sound isn't quite what you get with standard strings but they work great with some instruments and they can make the guitar easier to play.

Accessories

You will need a strap for your guitar so that you can play standing up. A strap can also help you hang on to your guitar if you are playing sitting down but it is not a necessity.

One end of the strap attaches to the endpin and the other end . . . well, some guitars come with a strap button on or around the heel of the guitar. If your guitar doesn't have one you can get your local repair shop to install one for a few dollars. The other option is to tie the strap to your headstock. I'm not too fond of that method because it can hinder movement.

With any strap it's usually a good idea to use a **straplock system**. These little doodads slide over the endpin and the strap button after you have installed the strap to keep it from slipping off. I became a big believer in straplocks after my metal body resophonic guitar slipped off the strap and broke my foot!

A music stand is another great tool to have. It will be a lot easier to follow the exercises in this book or play a tune from a songbook if you use a music stand. You can pick one up in any music store for a few bucks.

Sooner or later you will also need a capo. A capo is a clamp that fits on the fingerboard to make it easier to play in different keys without having to change chord forms. You will probably want to check your tuning after you put on a capo. Most models have a habit of putting your guitar slightly out of tune.

There are many different types of capos on the market ranging from simple elastic band units that you can pick up for pocket change to ultra-fancy models costing several hundreds of dollars. The funny thing is that they all do pretty much the same job. An instrument stand is a nice thing to have. While your guitar is a lot safer in its case I have found that an instrument that is always in a case doesn't get played as much as one kept within easy reach.

Another thing you need is a quiet place to practice with an armless straight-backed chair. As you get more proficient it won't matter what you sit on, how you sit or where you practice but in the very beginning you really want to have someplace to play without any distractions so you can concentrate.

Getting Started

In this chapter you will learn:

- How to **hold** your guitar
- About **open G tuning**
- How to **tune** the guitar
- The **thumb-brush strum**
- Basic **note values** and **rhythm**



Holding Your Guitar

I'm not going to go into a lot of detail about how to hold the guitar simply because so many factors are involved. The size and shape of the instrument pretty much dictate how the instrument is going to be held.

The most important thing when it comes to holding your guitar is balance. You don't want to have to hang on to the instrument to keep it from falling out of your lap and you don't want to support the neck with your fretting hand because your hands must be free to play the guitar.

Tuning

Of all the skills required to play the guitar tuning is probably one of the most difficult to master. It is going to take you a while to get used to how your guitar is supposed to sound. I strongly recommend that you purchase an electronic tuner. It makes learning how to tune much easier.

There are two types of electronic tuners: guitar tuners and chromatic tuners. Guitar tuners only work for the six notes of the guitar. Chromatic tuners can be used to tune any instrument.

There are quite a few makes and models on the market with a pretty wide price range. I would not recommend buying the most expensive tuner because if you start playing out you will most likely lose or drop it. I've left more than one nice tuner sitting on a park bench or in a church hall never thinking about it until I was more than halfway home. If you don't have an electronic tuner don't sweat it. I'll go over how to tune the guitar to itself later on in this chapter.

Open G Tuning

For most of this book we are going to be working out of open G tuning. We will move on to standard tuning (**E A D G B E**) near the end of this book and continue with it through Volume Two.

An open tuning simply means that the guitar strings are tuned to the notes of a major or minor chord. This means that when you strum the strings without fretting a single note you get a chord.

Right about now you are asking yourself, "Why are we starting out with an open tuning?"

Well, since you asked, I decided to start with open G simply because it lets you start playing chords without a lot of left hand acrobatics. It also gives you a chance to work on right hand picking techniques without worrying about complicated chord changes.

See, when you start out on the guitar you are faced with several challenges and the most difficult of these is learning how to train your left and right hands to perform independent actions. Standard tuning is an amazingly versatile guitar tuning (that' s one of the reasons it' s the standard) but the chord forms can be pretty difficult for a beginner to master. By starting out in **open G** we can use simple chord forms that will give you a chance to build up the strength of your fretting hand.

This isn' t new **Open G tuning** has been around for a long time. Early blues and country guitar players used it extensively, sometimes giving it the name "Spanish Tuning" possibly because of the old dance tune Spanish Fandango, but nobody knows for sure. Open G is also one of the Hawaiian "slack key" tunings. Once you start working in open G you will understand how the term slack key came to be associated with this tuning. The strings are not exactly slack, but they are at a much lower tension than standard tuning.

As I mentioned before, this will be a lot easier to do if you have an electronic tuner. I will go over the steps to tune the guitar to itself but you should know ahead of time that it takes a while to develop the skills to do this quickly.

One other thing you need to keep in mind when you are tuning is that you should only turn the tuning machines on a string that is vibrating. Strike the string you want to tune and turn the tuning peg while it is sounding. This will save you a lot of broken strings.

Let' s get our guitar tuned to open G.

In open **G** tuning:

- Your sixth string (the wound string closest to your chin) is tuned to **D**
- Your fifth string is tuned to **G**
- Your fourth string is tuned to **D**
- Your third string is tuned to **G**
- Your second string is tuned to **B**

- Your first string (the plain steel string closest to the floor) is tuned to **D**

If you don' t have a tuner you can tune the guitar to itself by following these steps:

1. Assume that the **first string** is in tune.
2. Tune the **second string** so that when you fret the second string at the third fret you get the same note as the open first string.
3. Tune the **third string** so that when you fret the third string at the fourth fret you get the same note as the open second string.
4. Tune the **fourth string** so that when you fret the fourth string at the fifth fret you get the same note as the open third string.
5. Tune the **fifth string** so that when you fret the fifth string at the seventh fret you get the same note as the open fourth string.
6. Tune the **sixth string** so that when you fret the sixth string at the fifth fret you get the same note as the open fifth string.

Take this slow and easy. Tuning a guitar is a skill that must be developed over time. When you are finished strum down (from the sixth string to the first) across the strings. If you are in tune you' ve just played an open **G** chord.

It sounds kind of cool, doesn' t it? Now that we are in tune let' s get started on picking hand technique.

The Thumb Brush Strum

The first picking pattern we are going to work with is the **thumb-brush**. It' s really easy because all you have to do is; you guessed it, brush the strings with your thumb.

Place your right hand- or, to keep lefties from feeling left out (pun not intended) your "picking hand"- so that your thumb is resting on the sixth string and your little finger is resting on the top of the guitar below the first string. I usually plant my ring and little fingers when I am strumming. Some folks just plant the little finger. Either way works as you' re only anchoring to give your hand little bit more stability.

Don' t press down too hard with your hand or your fingers and don' t get **all** tensed up. Get comfortable and set things up so that if you draw your thumb over towards your little finger you wind up strumming across all six strings.



Make sure the strings all ring out. If your anchor fingers are muting the first string readjust your position.

When you draw your thumb across the strings avoid excessive arm or wrist movement. The action here is more from your thumb than anywhere else.

Try this lightly a few times and then give it a good hard strum once or twice. **Do**



not strum up with your thumb. After you strum down just sort of roll your thumb back up to around the sixth string. Now strum down across the strings four times fairly slowly.

When I say "slowly" I don't mean to drag your thumb across the strings so that each string rings out individually. Make the brush fairly crisp. Now we have to start thinking of the strum in terms of rhythm. What we are going to do is play the strum in sets of four. We will be counting out loud each time our thumb makes a downstroke. Make an honest effort to keep your speed the same all the way through.

Ready? Lets go!

Strum down while tapping your foot. Say "**one**".

Roll your thumb back to the sixth string.

Strum down while tapping your foot. Say "**two**".

Roll your thumb back to the sixth string.

Strum down while tapping your foot. Say "**three**".

Roll your thumb back to the sixth string.

Strum down while tapping your foot. Say "**four**".

Roll your thumb back to the sixth string.

Strum down while tapping your foot. Say "**one**".

Roll your thumb back to the sixth string.

Strum down while tapping your foot. Say "**two**".

And so on . . .

Now if you noticed, we didn't put any kind of a separation between the "four" stroke and the "one" stroke. We are playing the strum in sets of four, but you are not taking any kind of a break between sets. The count just keeps repeating.

What you are playing right now is a **four quarter note strum**.

What's that, you say? What's a quarter note? I'm glad you asked because it makes a nice lead into the next part of this chapter on note values and rhythm!

Note Values & Rhythm

Do not panic when you see some sheet music in this section. We are not going to cover reading music here (we won't go into reading music until the tail end of Volume Two). We are going to look at how note values are written in order to help you get a grip on the timing of the thumb-brush strum.

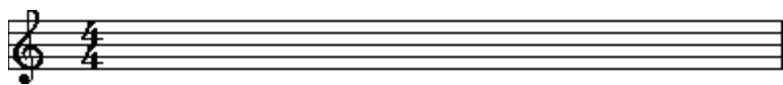
In other words, we are not worrying about notes in a melodic sense right now. We are simply looking at the time value of the note symbols in terms of rhythm.

Every note in a piece of music has a time value assigned to it. That can be a difficult concept to grasp at first because when you are just starting out on a musical instrument it's easy to assume that players just sort of pick up a guitar and start playing. As a matter of fact, I'm sure that when you first got your guitar you just picked it up and started banging on it. That's what almost everybody does because we remember the melody line of a song and kind of ignore the rhythm that holds that melody together.

I know that the idea of giving a value to each note sounds kind of complex at first, but in a lot of ways you have been working with similar concepts your whole life. For example, when we talk there is a rhythm to our speech. We separate words with pauses and sometimes we shorten or lengthen those pauses to create a dramatic effect. If we didn't use those pauses to measure out our speech everything we said would run together like this.

That's why rhythm is so important in music. Rhythm is not only the engine that drives music, it is also kind of like a canvas that we use to create pictures in sound. Without rhythm the notes would have no context and everything would just come out like noise. When you were tapping your foot and strumming the "one, two, three, four" count you were playing a rhythm in 4/4 time. What 4/4 time "means" is that we are playing the equivalent of four quarter notes for every measure of music. In order to understand that we have to look at some basic definitions of how music is written down. The note value symbols are written in what is called standard music notation.

Music notation is written on a **staff**.

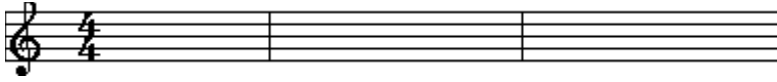


A staff is just five lines. Notes are written on the lines or in the spaces. The funky little squiggle at the beginning of the staff is a **G clef**. We will address what a **G clef** represents later on.

When you are writing music in standard notation each group of notes is broken up into a **measure**.

The **time signature** signifies the basic count for each measure. In this case the 4/4 on the staff

represents 4/4 time. As I said before, that means four beats to a measure with the quarter note getting the beat.



A line running down through the staff marks measures or bars. I call them measures and some folks refer to them as bars like in the term "twelve bar blues." Either way is right. The example above shows three measures. In 4/4 time each measure is going to have four beats.

A beat is the term we use to describe the pulse of the music.

Don't think of the measure as a stop sign. Measures are really only a way to break music into more manageable chunks.

The count for a measure is continuous. Even when the music stops, like when we play a rest, the count continues. The easiest way to remember that is to remind yourself that Sonny & Cher were right. *The Beat Goes On.*

The really amazing thing about measures is that the beats can be broken up in all sorts of ways by using whole notes, half notes, quarter notes, eighth notes and sixteenth notes. Any combinations of notes can be used as long as the combined value of the notes fits the time signature.

Let's take a look at the usual suspects when it comes to note values.

♩ A **whole note** is just that, a note that is counted for the whole value of the measure.

To get the feeling of how a **whole note** works play one **thumb-brush strum** and count, "one two three four" for each measure:



In other words, if we were playing our thumb-brush strum as a whole note pattern in 4/4 time each strum would be held for four beats.

♪ A **half note** has one half the time value of a whole note.

To get the feeling of how a **half note** works play a **thumb-brush strum** and count "one two." Then strum again and count "three four" in each measure:



So if we gave the thumb-brush strum a **half note** value each strum would be held for **two beats**.

♪ A **quarter note** has one half the time value of a half note.

This is the note value we are giving the **thumb-brush strum**. Each **strum** is held for one **beat**.



♪ An **eighth note** has one half the time value of a **quarter note**.



This can be hard to visualize at first because up to this point we have just been counting from one to four. When you are playing the thumb-brush strum you are tapping your foot for each count. You tap your foot on one, bring it back up and tap your foot on two. When you are playing eighth notes tap your foot to count "one" and as your foot comes back up say "and." Then count "two" as you bring it down again. This gives you the "1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &" count found in an eighth note strumming pattern.

It is crucial to keep an even count when you are playing. Every note is a quarter note so every note has to be held exactly as long as the note before it or the whole system gets out of whack.

Ok, work on the **quarter note thumb brush** for a little while and make an effort towards keeping the count steady. Be sure to count out loud and tap your foot. It will help you stay in rhythm.

Don' t rush this. A lot of people I share this technique with will wave the thumb at the guitar a few times and say, "I' ve got this." It' s always interesting to watch these folks when we move on to the next step and they realize that they don' t have it. Give yourself a day or two just running through this with a focus on keeping a steady rhythm. Work on playing the strum steady for five to ten minutes at a time.

We have covered a lot of material in this chapter, but if you keep things slow and easy you will be making music in no time.

When you are ready head over to the next chapter where we will begin working with chords and start playing songs!

One Finger Chords

Let' s go over what you know so far:

- How to **hold** your guitar
- About **open G tuning**
- How to **tune** the guitar
- The **thumb-brush strum**
- Basic **note values**

If you have been practicing the thumb-brush strum for a while I think it' s safe to say that you and any people nearby are sick of hearing that open **G** chord. So let' s give your left hand something to do by making and playing chords.

With six strings and only five fingers to work with learning chords on the guitar can be a real challenge. In order to make things a little easier we are going to take advantage of a feature in **open G tuning** that lets us make chords with one finger.

Look at the back of your guitar neck. Imagine that there is a line running down the middle of the neck from the back of the headstock to the heel. When you grasp the neck to make a chord you want to put the joint of your thumb along that imaginary line.



Now with the joint of your thumb on that imaginary line lay your index finger across all six strings at the fifth fret. Keep your finger just behind the fret-wire. It might help if you realize that your finger is not doing anything but pushing the string onto the fret-wire.

The fret-wire is higher than the fretboard so when you push the string down it stops vibrating right at the fret. That causes the string vibrations to shorten. This results in a higher pitched note.

You don' t have to apply a lot of pressure. Your thumb is only on the back of the neck as a guide. Don' t go crazy trying to keep your index finger perfectly straight. As long as you are not right on top of the fret you should be good to go.

Now strum across all six strings. If you are fretting the strings properly each string should ring out clearly. You have just made a **C chord**.

Sounds pretty cool, doesn't it?

The technical term for this kind of a chord is a **barre chord**. It's called that because; well, look at your finger. You are laying your finger across the fretboard like a bar.

Try the **thumb-brush strum** while you hold the **C barre chord** and then experiment with changing from **open G** to **barre C**.

Once you get comfortable changing from **open G** to **barre C** you can add in a **barre D** at the seventh fret.

That's right, if you **barre** across the seventh fret you get a **D** chord.

Now you know three chords in open G tuning! It's time to start playing your first song.

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Your First Song

Let's go over what you know so far:

- How to **hold** your guitar
- About **open G tuning**
- How to **tune** the guitar
- The **thumb-brush strum**
- Basic **note values** and **rhythm**
- The **barre-C** and the **barre-D** chords

Let's start making some music.

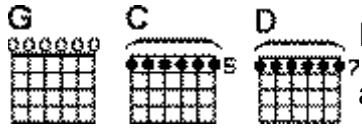
The old folk song "**Skip To My Lou**" is a great first song to sing and play because it only uses two chords:

```
G
Lost my partner what'll I do?
D
Lost my partner what'll I do?
G
Lost my partner what'll I do?
D           G
Skip to my Lou my darling.
```

"**Skip To My Lou**" is in 4/4 time. As we discussed earlier that means we will play four **thumb-brush**

strums in each measure. Each line of "**Skip To My Lou**" is two measures long. That means each line of the song will get eight **thumb-brush strums**.

All we are going to do here is sing and play the thumb-brush strum. Right now all you really want to do is get used to changing chords, playing the **thumb-brush strum** and singing at the same time. We will get fancy with this song, and others, later on in the book.



In order to help you visualize the chords for this song and some of the songs after it we are going to use **chord diagrams**. A chord diagram is simply a picture of the fretboard telling you where to put your fingers. Right now we are only using an open chord and two barre chords so the diagrams are fairly simple.

In a chord diagram the strings are laid out 6 5 4 3 2 1. The black dots tell you where to put your fingers and the little number off to the side of some diagrams tells you at what fret to play the chord.

The **C** chord diagram has a little five next to it because, you guessed it, that chord is played at the **fifth fret** and the **D** chord has a seven next to it because we play that chord at the **seventh fret**.

For "**Skip To My Lou**" I have laid out each line of the song into two measures with the quarter note thumb-brush rhythm laid out over the lyrics.

If you look at the first line and play a thumb-brush strum for each quarter note you will see that the strums in the first measure fall on certain words, and that there is a single strum after "*do*?"

Tap your foot in a steady 4/4 count while you strum and sing your way through this song. You should be able to get into the flow of it without much fuss.

"Skip To My Lou"

4/4 Time, Key of G

G



Lost my part-ner | what'll I do?

D




Lost my part-ner | what'll I do?

G




Lost my part-ner | what'll I do?

D



G



Skip to my lou my | darling

Get that smooth and you can start adding more verses:

Skip, skip. Skip to my Lou. (3x*)

Skip to my Lou my darling.

I' ll get another one prettier than you, etc.

Flies in the buttermilk shoo fly, shoo, etc.

Cat' s in the cream jar what' ll I do, etc.

**3x means sing it three times. I guess you could figure that out on your own, but I once heard a guy sing "THREE X!" at a jam session.*

Spend some time with this song. The first few times you run through it the odds are pretty good that you will have to stop and fish around for a moment before snagging that D chord. Don' t knock yourself because everybody goes through that in the beginning. Live with "**Skip To My Lou**" until you can run through it without speeding up or slowing down the rhythm and the chord changes flow smoothly.

It may take a few days or it may take a few weeks. Don' t sweat it. Slow and steady wins the race.

Once you can play "**Skip To My Lou**" without any fuss we can move to a slightly more complicated song like "**Boil Them Cabbage Down**".

I know, you are probably wondering what could be so complicated about boiling cabbages? Well, buckle your seatbelts because this is a (*gasp!*) three-chord song!

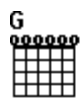
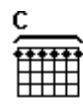
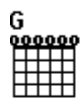
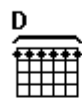
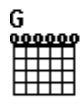

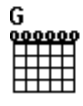
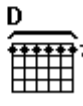
All kidding aside, throwing another chord into the mix can be a little challenging at first. It is going to take some time to get your right and left hands working together in this song because you have less time between the chord changes. In "**Skip To My Lou**" we were holding the **G** for a while, moving to **D** for a while and back to **G**. With this new song the chords change more often and the seventh measure has two chords in it. Each chord in the seventh measure is given two beats.

So you strum **open G** and **barre-D** *twice* in the seventh measure.

Take this one slow and don' t forget to sing!

"Boil Them Cabbage Down"

4/4 Time Key of G

 Boil them cabbage	 down, down
 Bake them hoe cakes	 brown brown
 The only song that	 I can sing is
 Boil them cabbage	 down

Went up on the mountain

To give my horn a blow

Thought I heard my true love say

"Yonder comes my beau"

Someone stole my old coon dog

I wish they' d bring him back
He' d chasðhe big hogs through the fence
And the little ones through a crack

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How One Finger Chords Work

Let' s go over what you know so far:

- How to **hold** your guitar
- About **open G tuning**
- How to **tune** the guitar
- The **thumb-brush strum**
- Basic **note values** and **rhythm**
- Three chords
- Two songs!

Before we move on to the next picking pattern and start learning some more songs I want to talk a little bit about the bar chords that you have been using. By now you know your **open G**, a **barre-C** and a **barre-D** chord but you don' t know why these onefinger chords work.

In order to understand why and how these chords work we have to talk about the chromatic scale.

The Chromatic Scale

In Western music (as in "Western Civilization") there are twelve notes. The twelve notes are named after the letters **A** through **G** with a half-step between each pair of letters except between **B** & **C** and **E** & **F**:

A | B C | D | E F | G |

The " | " symbol is used to represent a half step

Your half step is either a sharp (#) or a flat (b)

The half step between **A** and **B** can be called either **A#** or **Bb**.

A# means that the **A** note is raised one half step higher. **Bb** is the **B** note lowered one half step. **A#** and **Bb** are the same note and the other half steps follow the same pattern.

So with all twelve notes laid out you have the **chromatic scale**:

A	A#/Bb	B	C	C#/Db	D	D#/Eb	E	F	F#/Gb	G	G#/Ab
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

Once you understand the idea of half steps you can just write out your **chromatic scale** like this to save space and make it a tad clearer.

A | B C | D | E F | G |

The " | " symbol is used to represent a half step

There is an old saying that goes, *"If you learn one thing you have learned ten thousand things."* When it comes to the **chromatic scale** that is a true statement. Everything, and I mean everything, you do on the fretboard of your guitar is based on the chromatic scale.

One thing to keep in mind is that the **chromatic scale** can start on any note. We started with the **A** note in the example above, but on the guitar in open **G** we would write out the chromatic scale starting with a **G**. In fact, we're about to do just that.

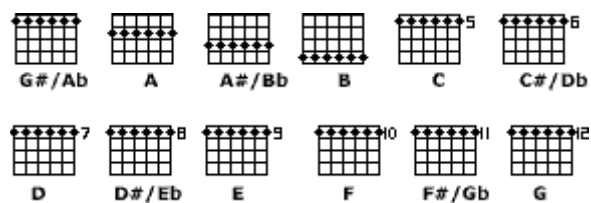
The Chromatic Scale On Your Fretboard

The frets on your guitar are laid out in half-steps. When we tune a guitar to open G the barre chords wind up following the steps of the chromatic scale.

Fret:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	G		A		B	C		D		E	F		G

If your guitar is tuned to **open G** a barre chord at the first fret *has* to be **G#/Ab** and a barre chord at the second fret *has* to be **A**. If you look at how this is laid out your barre chord at the fifth fret is **C** and at the seventh fret you get **D**. Since everything repeats itself after twelve frets you can get another **G** chord by barring across the twelfth fret.

We know that G is an open chord, so starting with the first fret:



Is that cool or what?

The Capo

The other amazing thing about this is that when you add a **capo** into the equation you can start playing in other keys without a lot of fuss.

You see, the capo works like your barre chords. If you **capo** at the second fret your guitar is now in open **A** tuning. The fifth fret and seventh fret chords we were using in open **G** both move down two frets.

So in **G** you were playing **G**, **C** and **D**. **Capo** at the second fret and everything changes **to A, D and E**.

Now look at the chord chart and see if you can figure out what you would play capoed at the third fret or the fourth fret. Try playing "**Skip To My Lou**" in **A** and "**Boil Them Cabbage Down**" in **B**.

Single Strings

This isn't just limited to chords. Each string on your guitar follows the **chromatic scale**. If you know what note the string is tuned to and you know the chromatic scale it's not a big deal to figure out all of the notes on the guitar.

In **open G tuning** the first string of your guitar is tuned to **D**:

	D	D#/Eb	E	F	F#/Gb	G	G#/Ab	A	A#/Bb	B	C	C#/Db	D
Fret:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

And now you know every note on that string. It's that simple. The cool things that it works with any fretted instrument. If you know this inside out you can pick up almost anything and play it!

Don't go crazy memorizing this. Live with the concept for a while and roll some ideas through your head as we expand on your right hand technique. We will come back to the chromatic scale and some other music theory "stuff" once we start working on the alternating bass picking pattern.

But before we get into that, let's take a look at adding some bass notes to your basic thumb-brush strum.

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The Bass Strum

By now you can play and sing a couple of songs while strumming four quarter notes per measure in 4/4

time. That' s cool, but you are not limited to just strumming. We can start to make things a little bit more interesting by breaking up the strum and adding a little bass into the mix.

Relax. This pretty easy to do, and it also opens up some really cool stuff down the road.



Put your hand into the same position that you use for the thumb-brush strum and rest your thumb on the sixth string.



Now apply some pressure with your thumb on the sixth (bass) string until your thumb pops off the string and comes to rest on the fifth string. We are not playing a full strum here. All we are doing is letting our thumb sound the sixth string.



As you sound the sixth string count, "one".

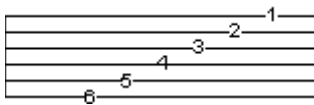
Strum down from the fifth string. As you strum count, "two".

Do you see what we are doing here? We are changing the first quarter note strum in the thumb-brush into a single bass note with a quarter note value.

With our first picking pattern (the thumb-brush) we were strumming four quarter notes. With the bass strum we are still playing four quarter notes but now the pattern is bass, strum, bass, strum.

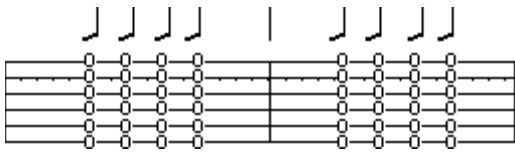
It might be easier to see this if I write it out. In order to illustrate the examples in this chapter I will have to introduce you to something called tablature. Tablature (or ' tab' for short) is just a way of writing a song down.

You have six lines. Each line represents a string on your guitar. The sixth string is at the bottom and the first string is on top.



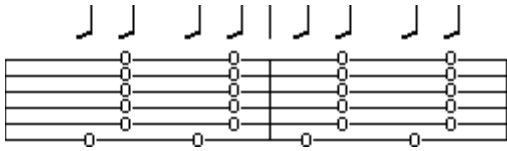
When any string has a zero you play that string open. The number on a string tells you what fret to play. So in this example you would play your sixth string at the sixth fret, your fifth string at the fifth fret, your fourth string at the fourth fret, your third string at the third fret and so on. A series of numbers running one on top of the other tells you to strum a chord.

Two measures of the open G tuning four quarter note thumb brush strum tabbed out would look like this:



The tablature shows the four strums along with the note value for each strum.

The new strum we are looking at in this chapter, **the bass strum**, is tabbed out in the next example. As you can see it has a lot in common with the thumb-brush except that we are playing the first and the third quarter note as a single bass string rather than a full chord.



Work on this strum for a little while and try to keep everything even just like you did with the thumb brush strum. Try playing some chord changes. Run from open G to barre-C until you can change chords and keep the rhythm of the picking pattern smooth.

Let's give **Skip To My Lou** a shot with the bass strum.

"Skip To My Lou" *sixth string bass*

4/4 Time, Key of G

G

D

Lost my partner what'll I do? Lost my partner what'll I do?

G

D

G

Lost my partner what'll I do? skip to my Lou my dar- ling

The bass note we are playing here *works*, but there are some simple things we can do to make the strum fit the chord progression.

In order to make the bass note fit in a little better with the strum it's usually a good idea to play the **root** of

the chord as the first bass note. In the key of **G** it would be the fifth, or G, string because that is the **root** of the G chord.

"Skip To My Lou" *fifth string bass*

4/4 Time, Key of G

G

D

To knock down my last game.

When I was down in Washington,
many more weeks than three,
I fell in love with a pretty little girl
and she fell in love with me.

She took me to her parlor
She cooled me with her fan.
She whispered to her mother dear,
"I love this gambling man"

"Oh, daughter dear, daughter dear,
how could you treat me so?
To leave your poor old mother here
and with a gambler go?"

I hear the train a-coming,
she' s coming ' round the curve
She' s awhistling and a-blowing
and straining every nerve.

"Oh mother dear, mother dear,
I' ll tell you if I can;
If you see me coming back again
I' ll be with a gambling man.

As you get more comfortable with the rhythm of this strum while you are changing chords and singing you can start accenting the count a little bit in each measure by putting the stress on the one and the three count.

"One two three four. One two three four. One two three four. One two three four."

This isn' t a big deal. In some ways, because of the layout of the bass strum you are already doing just that. It' s just a good thing to be aware of as we start moving into more complex picking patterns.

Alternating & Monotonic Bass

We have come a long way but if you have been working on the material in the preceding chapters you are ready to get into what is probably the heart and soul of folk guitar; alternating bass.

The bass strum that we worked on in the last chapter was an example of monotonic, or repetitive bass.

Monotonic bass is a single bass note played throughout the song. Monotonic bass is a useful technique to know. Blues guitar players have used it in amazingly effective ways, but it does have the drawback *sometimes* of not pushing the music or creating a sense of drive.

That's where alternating bass comes into play. In alternating bass you are playing two or more different bass notes in each measure. The effect is just too cool to put into words.

Everything in terms of our right hand position is still the same. The pattern starts off exactly like the strum we used for "Roving Gambler." You strike the fifth string with your thumb on "one" and strum down with your thumb on "two." The pattern changes slightly when you strike the sixth string on "three" and strum down with your thumb on "four."

It's not hard, but keeping track of where you are in the measure can be confusing at first. You are going to have to practice this pattern quite a bit until you get comfortable enough with it that it's almost instinctive.

Try running the example tabbed out below a few times and then work at keeping it smooth through some chord changes. Run from G to C and on down to D. See if you can keep the picking pattern together without getting lost.



As in the basic bass strum the first note we are playing (G) is the root of the G scale. The second bass string (D) is the fifth note of the G scale. The rule of thumb for alternating bass is always "root-five". The cool thing about open G tuning is that when you play a barre chord the open "root-five" pattern stays the same.

The diagram shows a D7 chord (D major with a flat 7) and a G7 chord (G major with a flat 7). Below them is a musical staff with a bass line and guitar chords. The bass line consists of a sequence of eighth notes: D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G. The guitar chords are D7, G7, D7, G7, D7, G7, D7, G7, D7, G7, D7, G7, D7, G7, D7, G7.

This isn't the only alternating bass picking pattern but it illustrates the basic concept pretty well. We will look at some variations of this idea along with how and why the "root-five" idea works. We will also take an in-depth look at scales and chord progressions in upcoming chapters. Right now let's have some fun and put the basic alternating bass strum to work while we play some songs!

"Going Down That Road Feeling Bad"

4/4 Time Key of G

The first line of the song is in the key of G major. The bass line consists of a sequence of eighth notes: G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D. The guitar chords are G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D. The lyrics are: "Going down that road feeling bad yes I'm".

The second line of the song is in the key of G major. The bass line consists of a sequence of eighth notes: G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D. The guitar chords are C, G, C, G, C, G, C, G, C, G, C, G, C, G, C, G. The lyrics are: "Going down that road feeling bad yes I'm".

The third line of the song is in the key of G major. The bass line consists of a sequence of eighth notes: G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D. The guitar chords are C, G, C, G, C, G, C, G, C, G, C, G, C, G, C, G. The lyrics are: "Going down that road feeling bad lord lord and I".

The fourth line of the song is in the key of G major. The bass line consists of a sequence of eighth notes: G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D. The guitar chords are G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D, G, D. The lyrics are: "aint gonna be treated this a-way".

I' m going where the water tastes like wine.

I' m going where the water tastes like wine

I' m going where the water tastes like wine Lord Lord

And I ain' t gonna be treated this a way.

I' m going where the weather suits my clothes, etc.

They fed me on cornbread and beans, etc.

Your Two dollar shoes hurt my feet, etc.

Takes a ten dollar shoe to fit my feet, etc.

I' m traveling down this long dusty road, etc.

I' m down in the jail on me knees, etc.

"The Red River Valley "

4/4 Time Key of G

from this valley they say you are going

we will

miss your bright eyes and sweet smile

for they

say you are taking the sunshine

that has

brightened our pathways a while

Come and sit by my side, if you love me,

Do not hasten to bid me adieu,

Just remember the Red River Valley,

And the cowboy who loved you so true.

I' ve been thinking a long time, my darling,

Of the sweet words you never would say,

Now, alas, must my fond hopes all vanish?

For they say you are going away.

Do you think of the valley you' re leaving?

Oh how lonely and dreary it will be.

Do you think of the kind hearts you' re breaking?

And the pain you are causing to me?

They will bury me where you have wandered,

Near the hills where the daffodils grow,

When you' re gone from the red river valley,
For I can' tive without you I know.

"Rosewood Casket"

4/4 Time Key of G

Theres a little rose wood casket sitting

on a mar- ble stand and a

pac- ket of love letters written

in my true love's hand

There' s a little rosewood casket

Sitting on a marble stand

And a packet of love letters

Written in my true love' s hand

Come and read them to me, sister

come and sit beside my bed

lay your head upon my pillow

for tomorrow I'll be dead

When I'm dead and in my coffin

and my shroud's around me bound

and my narrow grave is ready

in some lonesome churchyard ground

B The next two songs feature a new chord, the **B chord**. It's easy.



All you have to do is barre the fourth fret, one fret above your **C** chord.

Railroad Bill

4/4 Time Key of G

G

Rail- road Bill Rail- road Bill

B **C**

He never worked and he never will and it's

G **D** **G**

ride old Rail- road Bill

Railroad Bill was a mighty mean man

he shot the midnight lantern out the breakman's hand

And it's ride old Railroad Bill

Going up a mountain going out west

38 special sticking out my vest

And it's ride old Railroad Bill

I' ve got a 38 special on a 45 frame

How can I miss when I' ve got deadaim?

And it' s ride old Railroad Bill

Buy me a pistol long as my arm

So I can kill everybody who' s done me harm

And it' s ride old Railroad Bill

Railroad Bill too my wife

Said if I didn' t like he would take my life

And it' s ride old Railroad Bill

Darling, Oh Darling do you think I' m a fool?

Why would I leave you before the weather gets cool

And it' s ride old Railroad Bill

"Careless Love"

4/4 Time Key of G

G D G

Love, oh love oh care- less love

G D

Love, oh love oh care- less love

G B C

Love, oh love oh care- less love you can

G D G

see what careless love has done

I love my momma and poppa too (3x)

But I' d leave them both to go withyou

Oh what will my momma say (3x)

When she learns that I have gone astray

When I wore my apron low (3x)

You' d walk to me through rain and snow

Now my apron strings won' t pin (3x)

You pass my door and don' t come in

You might get by my garden gate (3x)

But you won' t get by my 38

If you listen to the alternating bass pattern you might notice that the thumb-brush and the bass strum feel sort of static while alternating bass feels like it' s moving. The back and forth notes of the bass create the feeling that the song is being pushed along. It also creates a "foot-tapping" rhythm.

Alternating bass is great, but like any technique there are times when it is not going to fit the song or, perhaps I should say, it is not going to fit how you feel a song should be played at a given moment.

With that in mind don' t completely forget the picking patterns that led up to alternating bass. You are going to run into situations where you will need to draw on another picking pattern, or break up the rhythm of an existing pattern into something new. In other words, alternating bass is more of a spice than a main course.

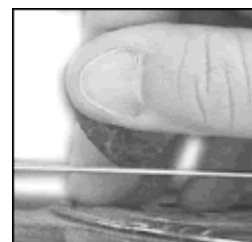
Flatpicks

As you get more and more comfortable strumming with your thumb you might want to try using a flatpick.

A flatpick, as the name implies, is a "flat pick" that you use to strum chords and pick out individual notes. You may run into old timers who refer to flatpicks as "plectrums."

Flatpicks come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes. In fact, some of the more modern flatpicks are not even flat! Today you can buy sculpted picks shaped out of bone or other materials in addition to the standard thin plastic pick. The best way to figure out what to use in terms of size, shape, weight and materials is to visit your local music shop and buy a whole bunch of picks. Everybody likes to use something different. For example, my father likes the teardrop shaped Fender thin tortoiseshell picks and my favorite pick is a super-heavy hard plastic generic pick that a publishing company was handing out as business cards.

Hold the flatpick between your thumb and index finger. In the beginning it' s usually a good idea to keep your hand position the same as when you are playing the thumb brush strum with your anchor fingers resting on the top of the guitar. Make sure that the pick is not hitting the strings at an angle and don' t let the pick flop around.



Other than that, the rest is pretty much up to you. You will have to experiment a little bit on your own to adjust your technique in terms of how to hold the pick to suit yourself. It' s pretty intuitive, so go with your gut.

Do you *have* to use a flatpick? No, but I do think you should give it a try. With only one or two exceptions

the rhythm patterns covered in this book can be played either with your fingers or a flatpick. It's a good idea to try both techniques just to help you get a better idea of what you may want to focus on down the road.

Start with four quarter note strums to each measure. Once you get comfortable with that try the bass strum and then the alternating bass strum. Up to this point we are only strumming down across the strings. Don't start strumming up and down just yet. We will get into upstrokes later on in the book.

Don't be afraid to play some songs with your fingers and other songs with the flatpick. In the long run it's a case of six of one, a half dozen of the other because in both cases the technique in question is simply a way to manipulate rhythm.

That's kind of cool when you think about it.

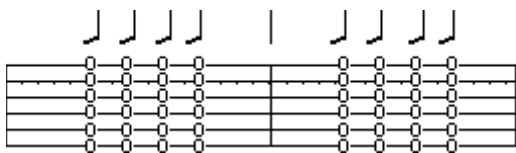
As we continue through the book experiment with the picking styles. As we address the 3/4 time strum in the next chapter be sure to try it with a flatpick.

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Playing In 3/4 Time

Everything we have been playing up to this point has been played in 4/4 time. Now we are going to take a look at 3/4 time or "waltz time", the other popular time signature used in folk guitar. I know, right now you are thinking "time signature?" When I say that a song is in 4/4 time that four slash four or four over four is a time signature. Up to now we have just taken for granted that 4/4 means four beats to a measure. Now we are going to work on 3/4 time which is three beats to a measure. See the connection? 4/4 time equals four quarter notes to a measure and 3/4 equals three quarter notes to a measure. Nothing to it, right?

In **4/4 time** we play four quarter note strums with a count of "one, two, three, four."



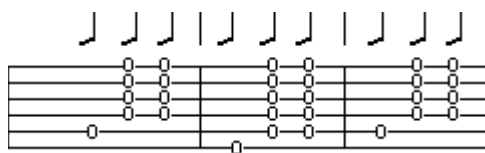
In **3/4 time** we play three quarter note strums with a count of "one, two, three."



three quarter note strum

It's a simple idea, but getting used to this new rhythm can be a little ricky. You have spent so much time working on developing a picking pattern in 4/4 time that 3/4 is probably going to feel a little strange. Try just working on strumming three beats or strums per measure for a little while and as you get more comfortable start blending in the alternating bass pattern.

In a basic picking pattern for **3/4 time** you are only playing one bass note in each measure. To alternate the bass string in this setting you simply change your bass string in each measure.



Some folks think it's easier to count a pattern like this out as "**Five**-two-three, **Six**-two-three" where five and six are the bass strings. Try playing "**Who's Gonna Shoe Your Pretty Little Foot?**" in 3/4 time. Play it at a fairly slow speed and work on keeping that waltz feel to the rhythm. If the alternating bass pattern drives you crazy you can just play a monotonic bass using the fifth string, or just play three thumb brush strums in each measure.

"Who's Gonna Shoe Your Pretty Little Foot?"

3/4 Time Key of G

G

Who's gonna shoe your pretty little foot?

C **G**

Who's gonna glove your hand?

C **G**

Who's gonna kiss your red ruby lips?

D **G**

Who's gonna be your man?

Who' s gonna shoe your pretty little foot?

Who' s gonna glove youhand?

Who' s gonna kiss your red ruby lips?

Who' s gonna be your man?

Momma will glove my hand.

Sister will kiss my red ruby lips

I don' need no man.

I don' t need no man poor boy

I don' t need no man.

Poppa will shoe my pretty little foot

I don' t need no man

The longest train I ever did see
Was sixteen coaches long.
The only girl I ever did love
Was on that train and gone.

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Time Signatures

By now you can play a picking pattern in two time signatures, 4/4 and 3/4. As you start to explore different kinds of music you are going to occasionally run into songs that are played in different time signatures. So it might be useful to understand just what that 4/4 time signature symbol really means.

The number on top of a time signature tells you how many beats to play in a measure. We already know that in 4/4 time we play **four** beats to a measure and in 3/4 time it is **three** beats to a measure.

The bottom number tells you what note to count. The two time signatures that we are already familiar with (4/4 & 3/4) both tell you that the quarter note gets the beat. However the bottom number does not *always* have to be 4. It can be 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, etc.

/1 - tells you that the **whole note** gets the beat

/2 - tells you that the **half note** gets the beat

/4 - tells you that the **quarter note** gets the beat

/8 - tells you that the **eighth note** gets the beat

/16 - tells you that the **sixteenth note** gets the beat

For example:

3/4 is 3 quarter notes per measure.

5/2 is 5 half notes per measure.

6/8 is 6 eighth notes per measure.

2/4 time is used often in marches and polkas. You may also find it in old time and bluegrass music. It's almost identical to 4/4 time except that in 2/4 time you play two quarter notes to a measure.

"Cut time" is a variation of 4/4 time. It is actually 2/2 time. The reason that it is called "cut time" is that the

note values are cut in half. For example, a half note winds up with the time value of a quarter note and a whole note winds up with the time value of a half note.

6/8 time is a little bit tricky at first because it is so different from 2/4, 4/4 and 3/4 time. Your /4 time signatures are "duplet" time signatures. That just means that every beat is made up of two eighth notes (two eighth notes= one quarter note.) Your normal count in 4/4 time is 1 2 3 4 and your normal count for 3/4 time is 1 2 3.

In 6/8 time you wind up counting to three twice. In a single measure of 6/8 time we would count "one-two-three, two-two-three." If you look at it, playing in 6/8 time is really just a matter of doubling everything up from your count in 3/4 time.

You don' t have to go crazy trying to memorize this. We are not going to go into 6/8 time in this book, but when you start heading out to jam sessions it may come up so it' s a good idea to at least be aware of how things work.

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The Carter Strum

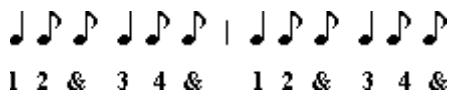
So far we have kept our right hand picking patterns in groups of quarter notes. That' s cool and you can play a lot of music that way, but there are some simple tricks that we can use to spice up the rhythm.

Every picking pattern that we have played up to this point has been made up of quarter notes. That' s the logical place to start because, as I pointed out in the last chapter, the time signature tells you to play four quarter notes in 4/4 time and three quarter notes in 3/4 time.

That' s a great framework to start with, but as I mentioned in our earlier discussion on note values you can use any combination of notes in a measure as long as they "add up" to the value dictated by the time signature. In 4/4 time we can hold a whole note for four beats, play two half notes, a half note and two quarter notes, eight eighth notes or any other combination that fits the instructions in the time signature. Once we can grasp that concept all kinds of really cool possibilities open up for picking patterns.

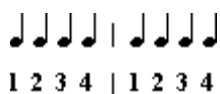
We started out playing four quarter note strums in 4/4 time and then we went on to bend that quarter note strum into an alternating bass pattern. What we are going to do now is cut two of those quarter notes in half. It' s not as complicated as it might sound. All we have to do to cut a quarter note in half is replace it

with two eighth notes. In this case we are going to replace the quarter notes on beats "two" and "four" with a pair of eighth notes.

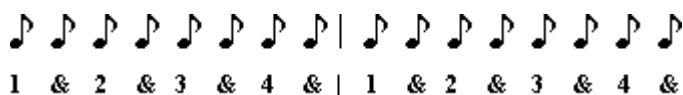


As you might have noticed, this changes the rhythm for each measure. It is easy to understand how the rhythm changes if we go back and take another look at how we count measures composed of quarter notes and eighth notes.

In a measure of quarter notes you count out and tap our foot on each beat.



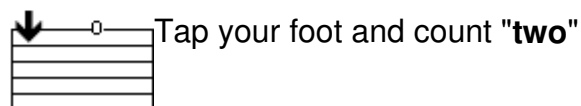
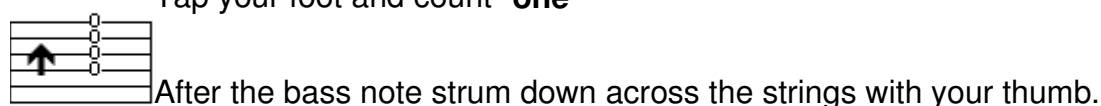
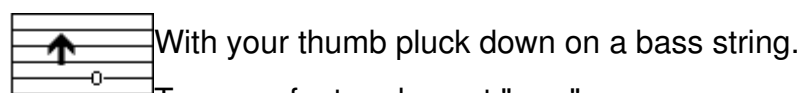
In a measure of eighth notes each beat is counted as "one and". You tap your foot on "one" and as your foot is coming back up you count the "and".



In this new picking pattern we are going to play a quarter note and two eighth notes twice in each measure. The new count is "one two and, three four and".

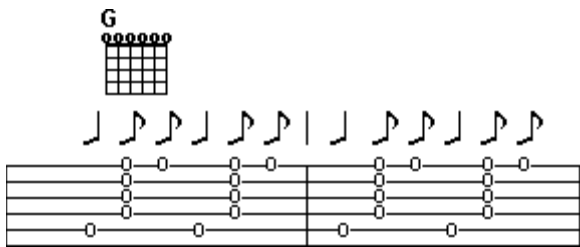


In order to break those quarter notes in half we are going to add an upstroke to our guitar Strum:



As you bring up your foot after the "two" count, pick up on the first string with your index finger.
Count "**and**"

The example below shows how the picking pattern comes together:



When you practice the Carter strum it will help you get into the rhythm if you call out the name for each part of the strum.

Let's give each major part of the Carter strum a label of some sort. We'll call the bass note "**bump**," the thumb-strum "**dit**" and the index finger picking the first string "**ty**." Because the strum and the thumb happen right after each other we'll write it out as **bump dit-ty**.

On the bump tap your foot. Bring your foot back up. ♩

As you tap your foot again strum down for the dit. ♪

As your foot is coming back up pick the first string for the ty. ♪


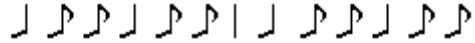
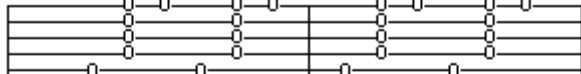
Now, if the **bump** has a quarter note value and the **dit** and **ty** have eighth note values that means the **dit** and the **ty** part of the strum both have to be half as long as the **bump**. This is because with an eighth note value the **dit** and **ty** together equal one quarter note.

If you try this with a flatpick keep in mind that the "down, down, up" pattern remains the same. Let's take a shot at using the Carter strum on a song you already know.

"Skip To My Lou"


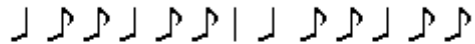
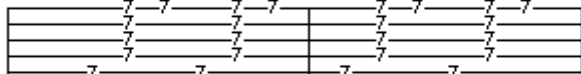
4/4 Time Key of G

G




Lost my partner what'll I do?

D



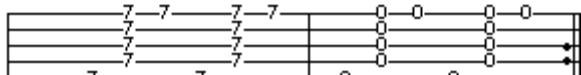
Lost my partner what'll I do?

G

Lost my partner what'll I do?

D **G**

Skip to my Lou my darling

Take it slow and easy. Getting the timing of this strum down to a point where you can keep a steady rhythm may take a while. Go back through the songs you already know and try them with the Carter strum.

Then give "**Handsome Molly**" a shot.

"Handsome Molly"

4/4 Time Key of G

G

Wish I was in London or some other seaport

D

town I'd set myself in a steamboat and

G

sail the ocean round

While sailing on the ocean,
 While sailing on the sea
 I'd think of Handsome Molly
 Wherever she might be.

She rode to church on Sunday,
 She passed me on by
 I could tell her mind was changing
 By the roving of her eye

Like I said in the chapter on alternating bass, the Carter strum is way cool but it's not the be-all-end-all of guitar techniques. As you go back through the songs that you already know you will sometimes spot a tune where that picking pattern just won't fit. One of the things you have to constantly look at is whether the rhythm pattern you choose for a song is what the song really needs. Don't try to force things just because you want people to notice that you can play a fancy picking pattern.

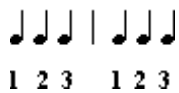
Oh yea, I guess you are wondering why it's called the Carter strum. Maybelle Carter used a lick like this in her early recordings with the Carter Family. She didn't really "invent" the lick (banjo players had been using a similar idea for a long time before Maybelle) but she was so associated with it and people loved

her so much it just sort of became "her" picking pattern.

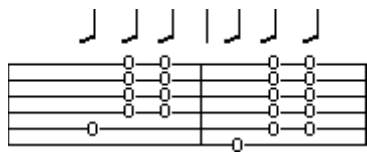
The Carter Strum In 3/4 Time

This pattern also works great for some songs in 3/4 time. The only thing that really changes is that we have to break up two consecutive quarter notes into eighth notes.

In the standard 3/4 time strum we play three quarter notes in each measure.

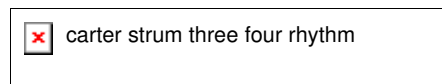


Tabbed out that boils down to either three strums in a measure or, as in this example, a bass note followed by two strums in each measure.



When we start experimenting with playing the Carter strum in 3/4 time we can break up two of the quarter notes to get a rhythm of "1 2& 3&".

This is a quarter note followed by four eighth notes.



In tab you would get something like the pattern laid out on the right. The "down up" pattern we used for the eighth notes in 4/4 time still applies, but this time we have to do it twice.



There is an easy way to remember this. Keep in mind that with eighth notes the notes played while tapping your foot are strummed down and the notes played when you are bringing your foot up for the "&" are strummed up.

Let's try this pattern with **Danville Girl**". It's a hobo song. You've got to know at least one hobo song if you play folk guitar. I think it's actually a law in some states.

To save space (it's kind of a long song) I left the chord diagrams out of this arrangement. By now you

should be pretty comfortable with the barre chords so it shouldn't cause any problems. When you play "Danville Girl" don't rush the song. This is a pretty laid back song so just let it sort of mosey along.

Danville Girl 3/4

Time Key of G

My pocket book was emp-
ty my heart was full of
pain ten thousand
miles a- way from home
bumming the railroad train

My pocket book was empty

My heart was full of pain

Ten thousand miles away from home

Bumming the railroad train

I was standing on the platform

Smoking a cheap cigar

Listening for that next freight train

To carry an empty car

Well I got off in Danville
Got stuck on a Danville girl
You bet your life she' s out of sight
She wore those Danville curls

She took me in her kitchen
She treated me nice and kind
She got me in the notion
Of bumming all the time

She wore her hair on the back of her head
Like high-toned people do
But the very next train that come down the line
I bid that girl adieu

I pulled my cap down over my eyes
Walked back down to the track
Then I caught a westbound freight
And never did look back

Like I said, you have to know a little bit of train lore if you play folk guitar. Guitars and trains are so joined in American folklore that it' s almost mandatory to know a few train and hobo songs.

The good news is that a lot of the train songs out there are pretty cool. Songs like "**The Wabash Cannonball**", "**The Wreck Of The Old 97**" and a few of the others I have transcribed for you later on in the songbook section are a blast to play and people love to sing along.

Sometimes it helps to know a little bit of train-related folklore to introduce a song like this. I was playing "**The Wreck Of The Old 97**" with my dad outside of our tipi on a camping trip a few years ago when an old guy named Steptoe (is it me, or is that just about the coolest name you' ve ever heard?) wandered over and started talking about how he saw the Old 97 after the wreck when he was a boy in Virginia!

For a hobo song like "**Danville Girl**" you might want to talk to your audience about the hobo code.

See, the hoboes used to leave little symbols here and there so the next guy down the road would know where to go for a handout or to watch out for a mean railroad bull. My father is convinced that his dad' s hoagie shop in suburban Philadelphia had a hobo code symbol marked on it somewhere because guys

would be walking by the shop, stop dead in their tracks like they just spotted something and then head inside to ask for a meal. I am proud to say that my grandfather never turned them down.

Here are a few hobo code symbols to get you started. You can do some research on your own to learn more. It's not exactly guitar-related, but it is kind of cool.



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Fretting Exercises

Up to this point we have been focusing mostly on the picking hand while limiting the fretting hand to fairly simple barre chords. Now it's time to put the fretting hand to work with some new chord forms and other cool stuff. Before we start going crazy with chord forms it might be a good idea to learn a simple exercise that, among other things, will get you used to using your fingers on the fretboard.

This is a little snippet of the G scale. We'll get into the whole G scale a little later on, but for right now this is a nifty little run to work on.



The "two rules" I mentioned earlier in this chapter still apply. You want to fret the first fret with your index finger, the second fret with your middle finger and so on.

All we are really doing here is plucking single strings with our thumb, or with a flatpick.

Now let's take that exact same run, but this time we are going to play it with our index finger across the first fret. I changed the first note to a strum this time so you can "hear" the new chord before you play the lick.



Overall, not too much has changed except that now the "two rules" get twisted a little bit. With our index finger tied up making an Ab barre chord we are forced to play the lick with our middle and ring fingers.

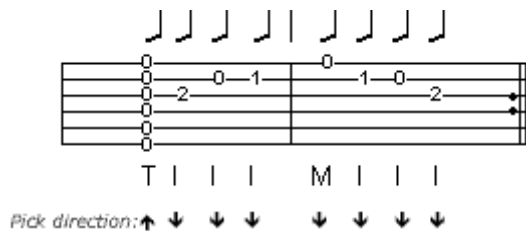
At first this might seem really confusing, but if you spend some time practicing the lick you will get more comfortable with it.

Once you can play this in Ab move up to the second fret (we call it going "up the neck" because the notes are moving up in pitch) and play it in A. Then keep moving the pattern up the neck and back down.



Mess around with this for a little while and give yourself a chance to build up your finger strength. As I said before, when you start getting mushy or dead notes or if your hands start to hurt, stop and move things around a little bit. You will have to find the best hand position for your body.

If you want to "fancy up" things a little bit try picking this pattern with your fingers. I have marked out the first lick with some tips on what finger to pick the string with. T=thumb, I=index and M=middle. Keep your little finger resting on the top of your guitar and just take it easy.

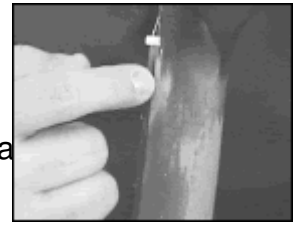


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Three Finger Chords

By now you are probably sick and tired of playing barre chords. We are now going to look at some chords that use two and three fingers.

When you start making these new chords you should make an effort to keep the thumb of your fretting hand in roughly the same position as when you play barre chords. That is, with the ball of your thumb centered on the back of the neck. That's a good position for your fretting hand with some chords, but you will sometimes have to shift things around. In the image on the right you can see where I have worn the finish off of my guitar neck. There is a worn spot along the centerline of the neck, but there is a second worn spot where my thumb sometimes rests closer to the edge of the fretboard.



We all have different sized hands and as a result each of us has to tailor chord forms to our individual needs. As long as you can fret strings cleanly and make chords that don't have any dead strings you should be fine.

One thing to avoid is the "no pain no gain" attitude. Guitar chords in any tuning can be a challenge to learn while building up your hand strength, but this isn't a situation where "feeling the burn" is going to toughen you up. Hand pain is your body's way of telling you that you are doing something wrong.

If your hands hurt when you hold a chord form for a measure or two stop what you are doing and move your hand around to a more comfortable position.

Another thing that you need to know before you start making chords is how to choose which fingers to use. There are two simple rules that you can fall back on. The first rule is that, where feasible, you work in four fret blocks with each finger assigned to a fret. In other words, you use your index finger on the first fret, your middle finger on the second fret, your ring finger on the third fret and your little finger on the fourth fret.

Unfortunately things are not always laid out in a way that will let you follow the first rule. Quite a few chords use several strings fretted at the same fret, and that's where the second rule comes into play.



If you have to fret several strings on the same fret, as with the C chord diagrammed on the left, assign a finger to each string starting with the sixth string. In other words, to make the C chord in the diagram your index finger would fret the second string at the first fret, your middle finger would fret the fourth string at the second fret and your ring finger would fret the first string at the second fret.

The reason we have to lay things out this way is simply because we want to avoid crossing our fingers up on the fretboard. If everything was laid out in a random fashion making fast chord changes would be next to impossible. Making the C chord this way makes moving to our next chord much easier.

D



With this D chord you would fret the third string with your index finger, the second string with your middle finger and, you guessed it, the first string with your ring finger.

Nothing to it, right?

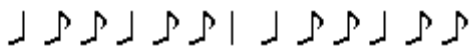
If you look at the chord diagram for the C chord you will see that the sixth string is marked with an x. That is telling you not to play that string. You could fret the sixth string with your thumb on the second fret, but I don't recommend trying that just yet. Give yourself some time to get more comfortable forming chords with your fingers before you start adding in the thumb.

Not using the sixth string in a C chord means that you have to change your "root five" bass pattern. You don't have a low C note available so you have to compromise things a little bit. Don't panic, in the long run art is really nothing more than creative compromising. Take a look at the G, C D chord progression tabbed out below. I have given one option for this "problem." Mess around with it a little bit and see what you can come up with on your own.

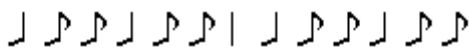
Let's try this pattern with a neat little Irish Song called "I'll Tell Me Ma" The Irish band I used to play with years ago called this one "Playing Post Office". It is a pretty straightforward three-chord song except that the song has three sets of two verses with a separate chorus for each set.

"I'll Tell Me Ma" Verse

4/4 Time Key of G



verse 1: I'll tell me ma when I go home the
verse 2: They pulled my hair and stole my comb,



verse 1: boys won't leave the girls a-lone
verse 2: well that's al-right till I go home

"I'll Tell Me Ma" chorus

4/4 Time Key of G

She is handsome she is pretty she is the belle of

Belfast City She is courting one two three oh

please won't you tell me who is she?

I' ll tell me ma when I go home,
the boys won' t leave the girls alone.

Pull my hair and stole my comb,
well that' s all right ' till I gabbme.

She is handsome, she is pretty

She is the belle of Belfast City

She is courting one two three

Please wont you tell me who is she

Albert Mooney says he loves her so

and all the boys are fighting for her.

They knock the door and ring the bell

saying "oh my true love are you well?"

Out she comes as white as snow

rings on her fingers and bells on he toes.

Albert Mooney says he' ll die

if he doesn' t get the girl with the roving eye

You might find the fact that we are changing the bass picking pattern with each chord change a little challenging at first, but you might as well get used to the idea. When we move into standard guitar tuning this is going to be an almost constant thing. We kept things consistent measure to measure with barre chords so you could get used to the rhythm. The next step is to keep the rhythm steady no matter what you are doing with the bass line, and later on when you start adding melody into the mix.

Don' t worry about mistakes. They go by so fast that people will most likely only notice if you stop and begin shaking your head trying to apologize. Just roll with the rhythm and be aware that in folk music you can' t really hit awrong note as long as you are in the rhythm and following the chord progression.

Our next step is to learn a few more chords. Then it will be time for you to start coming up with your own way to play some songs.

Before you head into the next chapter go back through the songs you already know and give yourself a chance to review the thumb-brush, bass strum, alternating bass and Carter strum picking patterns in 4/4 and 3/4 time

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Major & Minor Scales

Early on in this book we went over the chromatic scale in terms of using it to figure out barre chords in open G tuning. We started with open G. When we bar across the first fret we get an A flat chord. If we keep moving along the fretboard we wind up with another G chord at the twelfth fret.

In order to discuss chord progressions, chord construction, transposing and melody we have to have an understanding of how major and minor scales are built. Don' t worry, people make a big deal about music theory being difficult but with what you already know about the chromatic scale this is going to be pretty easy, and it will lead you into some really cool stuff down the road.

Major and minor scales are modes of the chromatic scale. To put it simply, major and minor scales are nothing more than a way of shuffling the chromatic scale to create specific patterns. When a song is in the key of **G** it means that the song is played out of the **G** scale. Actually the technical term is something like "the key of G is a major mode with a root of G", but talking that way makes my brain hurt. We are not going to get into modes just yet.

To figure out the notes of the **G scale** we need to lay out the **chromatic scale** starting with our **root** note. The **root** note in a major or minor scale is always the same as the key you are creating a scale for. To create an **A** major scale you use **A** as your **root** note. For an **E** major scale your **root** note would be **E**.

We are going to write out a **G major scale** so the **root** note is **G**:

G | A | B C | D | E F | G

Now if you notice we started on **G** and ended on **G**. That second **G** is called the **octave**. It is the same note as the root but higher in pitch. In order to make this **chromatic scale** into a **G major scale** we need to pick seven notes out of the twelve notes in the **chromatic scale**. In order to do that we just follow a simple formula:

Root, whole step, whole step, half step, whole step, whole step, whole step, half step

G is the **root**.

1. a whole step from **G** is **A**
2. a whole step from **A** is **B**
3. a half step from **B** is **C**
4. a whole step from **C** is **D**
5. a whole step from **D** is **E**
6. a whole step from **E** is. . **F#** or **Gb**. We' ll call it **F#**
7. a half step from **F#** is **G** which gives you the **octave**

So your G scale is:

G A B C D E F# G

If we start the scale on the third string (G) we would come up with something like the tab below, but that isn' t the only G scale on the fretboard. Start with a G note anywhere and just follow the whole and half steps to get a G scale!



Lets figure out a **C scale**.

Lay out the **chromatic scale** with a **root** of **C**.

C | D | E F | G | A | B C

Follow the pattern of whole steps & half steps:

Root, whole step, whole step, half step, whole step, whole step, whole step, half step

And our **C scale** is:

C D E F G A B C



Find a **C** note on your guitar and see if you can figure out where the whole and half steps fall on the fretboard on your own. Then try it with other root notes.

Now this stuff is really nifty to know but I am pretty sure that right about now you are thinking, "How is this going to help me play the guitar?"

Down the road you will find that being able to use scales in your guitar playing will let you come up with melody lines and variations of melody lines without any real effort, but most importantly at this stage major scales help you figure out chord progressions.

Before we move into chord progressions lets take a quick look at the minor scale.

Minor scales work under the same concept as major scales in that you create them by following a series of whole and half steps along the chromatic scale. Minor scales just use a different set of whole and half steps. The crazy thing about minor scales is that there are three different versions of the minor scale:

Natural Minor, **Harmonic Minor** and **Melodic Minor**. For right now we are only going to concern ourselves with the **natural minor** scale

The **natural minor** scale is the most common of the three minor scales. It works under the same concept as your major scale in that you have a root note followed by a series of whole steps and half steps. The difference is in the way the whole steps and half steps are laid out:

Root, whole step, half step, whole step, whole step, half step, whole step, whole step.

To create an **A natural minor scale** the first step is to lay out the **A** chromatic scale:

A | B C | D | E F | G | A

A is the **root**.

- A whole step from **A** is **B**
- A half step from **B** is **C**
- A whole step from **C** is **D**
- A whole step from **D** is **E**
- A half step from **E** is **F**
- A whole step from **F** is **G**
- A whole step from **G** is **A**

So our A minor scale is:

A B C D E F G A



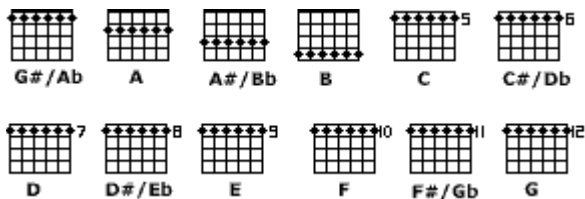
That' s probably just enough information to get you into trouble, but you needo know a little bit about this to understand how chord progressions work. Have some fun messing around with finding scales, but don' t go crazy with it just yet. Master the rhythm first, then worry about the melody line

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Chords In G Tuning

Before we get into figuring out chord positions it might be helpful to learn something other than barre and three-finger chords. When we get into The Nashville Number System in the next chapter we will be discussing minor chords and chord progressions. Let' s go over some of the chord forms used in open G tuning.

Early on in this book we talked about how the barre chord in G tuning follows the chromatic scale. Staring with open G you get G#/Ab with a barre at the first fret, A at the second fret and so on.



The barre chord is not the only chord form that follows this pattern. Every chord is going to follow the chromatic scale up and down the fretboard. This is kind of neat because you only have to learn a few chord forms to learn all of the chords.

Major Chord Positions

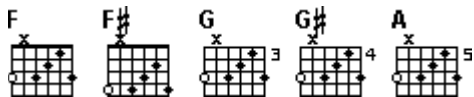
All of the chords that we have been working with so far have been major chords. A **major chord** is made up of the 1st, 3rd and 5th notes in the scale.

A **G major chord** is made up of the notes **G-B-D**. If you play those three notes together anywhere on the fretboard you have a **G major chord**.

There are two types of chord positions. Open position chords have one or more open strings and closed position chords don't. That's easy to remember, isn't it?

In some of the chord forms shown in this and subsequent chapters you may notice a white dot marking one of the strings. That white dot indicates an optional string. You can fret it if you want to or you can just think of that string as being crossed out for that chord form.

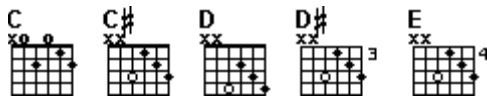
The first form that we are going to look at is called the **F position** because its first position on the fretboard is an F chord.



There isn't any need to write out every single F position chord on the fretboard because it follows the same idea as barre chords. The chord one fret up the fretboard (towards the bridge- I know it seems like going down, but we call it going "up" the neck because the notes are getting higher in pitch). . .where was I? Oh yeah, the chord one fret up from the F position A chord at the seventh fret has to be A#/Bb. It can't be anything else because it follows the chromatic scale.

It also works the other way around. The E chord is an F position chord "cut off" by the nut. The next chord position is called the C or D position depending on who you talk to. Some folks call it the C position because the first chord we use is the C chord, other folks call it the D position because D is the first

closed position chord using this form.



After E at the sixth fret you get and F chord at the seventh fret and so on.

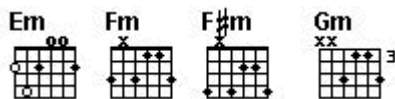
Minor Chord Positions

Minor chords are made up of the same three notes as a major chord, but in a minor chord we flat the third note. That means we lower the pitch of the third note of the chord by a half step. So, a G minor chord would be **G-Bb-D**.

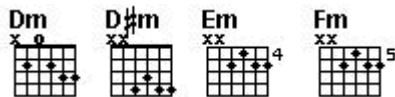
Minor chords have a dark, moody sound. Sometimes people will say that minor chords are sad or spooky, but that's really something that depends on how you use them. The best way to describe them is that they just sound different from major chords.

There are three main minor chord positions. All of them continue along with the chromatic scale.

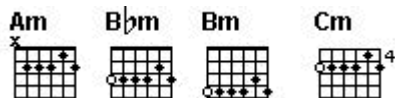
The E Minor Position



The D Minor Position



The A Minor Position

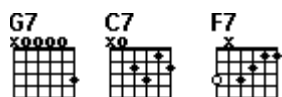


Seventh Chord Positions

A **seventh chord** is a major chord with one extra note. The extra note is the flatted seventh note of the scale. A **G7** chord would be **G-B-D-F**.

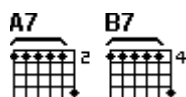
Seventh chords have a variety of uses. In folk music you often see seventh chords tossed into a chord progression just before a chord change. This works because seventh chords have this funny way of creating a feeling of tension that leads into a chord change.

The three most common seventh chord positions are diagrammed below.



Any barre or G position chord can be made into a seventh by dropping your pinky on the first string three frets below the barred fret.

In other words, if your barre at the second fret with your index finger and put your pinky on the first string at the fifth fret you would get an A7 chord. Barre across the fourth fret and place your pinky on the first string at the seventh fret and you get a B7 chord.



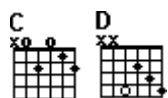
One seventh chord form that is kind of a redheaded stepchild in open G tuning is the D7 chord.



It is moveable, but it's kind of awkward so most players don't treat this as a moveable position.

Using A Capo

Think of your capo as an extra finger playing a barre chord for you. The cool thing about that is you can play in just about any key with a few simple chords. For example, if you capo at the second fret and play a C chord you wind up playing a D chord.



It's easy to understand using the capo if you look at your chord positions. The C and D chords both use the same chord form at different positions on the fretboard. Using a capo lets you play with those relationships to make transposing songs into new keys easier.

Capo at the second fret and play as if you were in G and you wind up playing in A. Capo at the second fret and play in C and you wind up playing in D.

Capos can be a lot of fun because you can take a simple song and try it in a whole bunch of keys until you find something comfortable to sing in.

Now, if we capoed at the fourth fret and played as if we were in G we would wind up playing in B. What would we be playing in if we capoed at the fourth fret and played as if we were in C? If you said, "E" you've got it!

The Limitations Of Open G Tuning

You may have noticed that once you get past the first couple of frets in open G tuning chords there are a lot of strings marked with an "x" because there isn't a feasible way to play them. That's kind of the big drawback to this tuning. Open G is a great way to start out on the guitar, but like any other open tuning it starts to get shaky when you add in more advanced chording.

That is why you will find chord diagrams for standard tuning near the end of this book. One of the reasons standard tuning (**E A D G B E** from the sixth string to the first) became the most common tuning is that it lends itself to an amazing variety of chord forms that make use of all six strings. The drawback to standard tuning is that some of the chord forms are fairly demanding on the left hand. Working in open G for the time being will give you a chance to build up your hand strength before you dive into standard tuning.

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Chord Progressions

To put it simply, when you play a song with more than one chord in it you are playing a chord progression. While it is true that you can theoretically write a song that uses every possible chord most of the time you will be working with just a few chords. In "**Skip To My Lou**" we played two chords (**G** and **D7**) and in "**Careless Love**" we played four chords.

While it's easy to look at a song when it's written down and say that we are going to play so many measures of a G chord and so many measure of a D chord it's another thing entirely to walk into a jam and pick up the chord progression by ear. In order to do that we have to understand how chord progressions are built.

The Nashville Number System

The Nashville Number System is a trick that musicians use to figure out chord progressions on the fly. It

is an easy tool to use if you understand how music works. It has been around for about four hundred years but sometime during the past fifty years Nashville got the credit.

To non-musicians the **Nashville Number System** seems pretty mysterious so there are some funky ideas and urban legends floating around about it. The funniest example of this was in an old episode of the television series Magnum PI where the plot revolved around bad guys using the **Nashville Number System** as a sort of secret code!

The **Nashville Number System** uses major scales to figure out which chords to play in a given key. This is useful in two ways. In one application you can use the number system to figure out a chord progression as you are playing the song.

Another way to use the number system is to figure out how to play a song in a different key. This is called *transposing* a song.

You start out by writing down a scale, in this case G major.

Then number each note:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G

The notes numbered **1**, **4** and **5** (**G**, **C** and **D**) will be your major chords for the key of **G**.

Go back and look at all the songs in the key of G that we covered earlier. You will notice that almost all of them use some combination of **G**, **C** and **D**. Some songs will only have two of the chords but most of the time you will see all three.

The note numbered **6** is going to be your relative minor. In this case **Em**.

Every root chord has a relative minor chord. I do not want to go too deep into music theory here but every major key has a unique number of sharps and flats. The key of **C** has no sharps or flats and the key of **G** has one sharp (**F#**.) The same rule applies to minor keys.

Any minor key that has the same number of sharps and flats as a major key is the relative minor of that major key.

The key of **Am** has no sharps or flats. Therefore it is the relative minor of **C**.

The key of **Em** has one sharp so it is the relative minor of **G**.

It is good to know your relative minor chords (the 6 chord in the number system) because you can swap them around in some situations. If you are playing a song and cannot remember how to make an **Am** chord you can just play a **C** chord. It is different but it is close enough that you may get away with it.

The note numbered **2** is going to be both a minor chord and a major chord. In this case **Am** and **A**.

Number 3 is where it gets kind of neat because in folk music this is often referred to as an "off chord." In the key of **G** your off chord is **B**.

Your **6** chord can be played as a major chord as well. But it is kind of funky. You will really only use the major **6** once in a great while. An example of the **6** chord in action can be found in "**Salty Dog**".

In some songs like "**Little Maggie**" you might run into what some players call a mountain seven. That is when you flat the 7 chord. That is why "**Little Maggie**" goes from **G** to **F** rather than **G** to **F#**.

The important thing to remember is **1- 4- 5**. That is the way to find the three most commonly used chords in any key. Don' t go all goofy with this and start yammering about 2 chords at a jam. **The Nashville Number System** is great but it is just a tool. Simply knowing the chord progression is not enough. Let' s take a look at a more formal approach to figuring out chord progressions before we go into using them.

Minor Keys

The Nashville Number System is great for figuring out chords on the fly but if you want to work out a chord progression in a minor key it gets a little clumsy.

When we talked about the Nashville Number System earlier in the book we numbered each note of the scale with an Arabic numeral. In a more formal music theory setting we have to use Roman numerals to number each note. This allows us to use upper case numerals for major chords and lower case numerals for minor chords.

For a **major scale** the first, fourth, fifth and eighth notes of the scale will be major chords marked with upper case numerals. The second, third and sixth notes of the scale will be minor chords marked with lower case numerals. The seventh note is ignored for now. A C major scale marked out this way will look like this:

I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi		I
C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C

This winds up exactly the way it did for the **Nashville Number System**. It changes when you lay out a chord progression from a **minor scale**.

In a **minor scale** the first, fourth and eighth notes are marked with lower case numerals to indicate minor chords. The third, sixth and seventh notes are marked with upper case numbers to indicate major chords. The fifth note will be marked as a minor chord with a lower case number in a natural minor scale. In a harmonic minor scale the fifth note can, in some cases, wind up being played as a major chord. The second note in a minor scale, like the seventh note in a major scale, is ignored.

An **A minor** scale marked out this way will look like this:

i		III	iv	v	VI	VII	i
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	A

What this tells us is that in a chord progression in the key of **A minor** we can play **Am, C, Dm, Em** or **E, F** and **G**.

Playing & *Feeling* Chord Progressions

Once you start to get familiar with the 1-4-5 chord progressions for a few keys the next step is to begin familiarizing yourself with how they sound and, more importantly, how they feel.

It might sound crazy at first, but when you play a chord progression while you are singing you can start to feel the flow of the music pushing the chord changes.

Take a song you already know and change it into a new key. Let' s use **Red River Valley**" for this example because we have already played it in G. For this exercise we' ll play it in D.

When we played "

" in G we used the G, C and D chords. It so happens that G, C and D is the **1-4-5** progression for the key of G. In order to play the song in D we have to transpose the song. This is easy. The 1-4-5 progression in the key of D is D, A and G. If we compare the two **1- 4-5** chord progressions:

	1	4	5
G:	G	C	D
D:	D	A	G

All we have to do is go through the song and change the chords to the new key. The G chords are now D chords, the C chords are now A chords and the D chords are now G chords.

Right about now you are starting to look at the bottom of this page for the song laid out in D for you, but this time I am not going to write it out. You are going to work it out on your own.

Grab your guitar and make a D chord. Any D chord will do. Since we are playing "**Red River Valley**" in D it' s a fairly safe bet that the firstchord is going to be D. This isn' t always the case, but nine times out of ten it' s a safe bet.

Strum a D chord and sing the first line of "**Red River Valley**".

D
"From this valley they say you are going"

When you get to the words "they say" that D chord should feel a little off. It's next to impossible to put this into words, but once you start singing the melody there should be this feeling like something should change.

In the key of D our options for that next chord are fairly limited. It's either going to be an A chord or a G chord. Let's try a G chord.

D G
"From this valley they say you are going"

Whoa, that doesn't sound right at all, does it? Let's try it with an A chord instead.

D A

"From this valley they say you are going"

After you play the A chord that feeling that something has to give comes back. So do we go to G now, or is it D? I'm not going to give you the answer because part of making this work revolves around you working with chords and learning how to recognize not only when a chord change comes along, but where it needs to go.

The only way to do that is to play a whole bunch of songs, which is what we are about to start doing in the next chapter.

In the following pages I have provided the lyrics and chord progressions for a handful of songs. Run through them with one of the basic guitar strums and sing the lyrics. It may seem a little bit awkward at first because I have not provided any measure lines, but I left those out for a reason. Part of putting this puzzle together involves learning how to feel out the rhythm and chord progression of a song on the fly. In order to play the songs in this section you are going to have to look at the time signature and come up

with a picking pattern that flows with the lyrics and the chord progression.

Relax. You can do this. I' ll prove it to you. Let' s play one together.

"Will The Circle Be Unbroken"

4/4 Time Key of G

```
G
I was standing by my window
      C          G
On a cold & cloudy day.
G
When I saw that hearse come rolling
G          D          G
For to carry my mother away.
```

Here are the lyrics and chords to the great old country-gospel tune "**Will The Circle be Unbroken**". Just about everybody knows this tune, and just about everybody loves this tune so it' s a great choice for an exercise.

We know from the information provided that the song is in 4/4 time in the key of G.

The first line of the song only uses a G chord, but the sixty-four thousand dollar question is "how *many* measures?" Well, to figure that out pick a 4/4 time strumming pattern, grab a G chord and start playing and singing. Try to sing the song the way you have heard it performed by other musicians. The phrasing is usually something like, "I was stan-ding by my win-dow. . ."

If you play around with it you' ll find that first line is held for two measures. Once we know that things get a lot easier because , as you may or may not have noticed, lyrics usually stay within a framework of measures. If the first line is two measures the second line is most likely two measures.

Sure enough, that second line turns out to be one measure of a C chord and one measure of a G chord.

Now work out the rest of the tune on your own.

"Will The Circle Be Unbroken"

4/4 Time Key of G

```
G
I was standing by my window
      C          G
On a cold & cloudy day.
```

G
When I saw that hearse come rolling
G D G
For to carry my mother away.

Chorus:

Will the circle be unbroken?
By and by, Lord by and by.
There' s a better home a waiting
In the sky, Lord in the sky.

Lord, I told that undertaker
"Undertaker please drive slow
For this body you are hauling,
Lord, I hate to see her go."

Well I followed close behind her
Tried to hold up and be brave.
But I could not hide my sorrow
As they laid her in her grave.

I went home, my home was lonely
Since my mother she was gone
All my brothers, sisters crying
What a home so sad and forlorn

Find three or four songs that you really like and just play them constantly for a few days. Then pick another three songs. It may be a little tricky at first to figure out the song if you have never heard it but if you look at the lyrics there is a certain kind of poetry to them. Spend some time singing the lyrics while strumming and changing chords. After a while it all just makes sense.

If you really want a recorded version of a tune there is an almost limitless number of resources. Check your local library for recordings. Ask a musician friend to help you. Bug your local radio stations to start playing more folk music. Surf the Internet. Sites like <http://www.mudcat.org/> and <http://www.honkingduck.com/> have an amazing number of free sound files to work with. Look around and see what you can find.

Don' t think you are limited to these tunes. Pick up a copy of Rise Up Singing, The Folksingers' Wordbook or any other songbook. Then play anything and everything that catches your fancy. The important thing is

to start working on getting the feel of a chord progression. When you are not practicing listen to recordings and see if you can spot where chords change in the song.

Most importantly, have fun!

"Mamma Don' t ' low"

4/4 Time Key of G

G
Mamma don't 'low no
G
Banjo playin' round here
G
Mamma don't 'low no
D7
banjo playin' round here
G
Well, I don't care what
G
mamma don't 'low
C
Gonna play banjo anyhow
G
Mamma don't 'low no
D7 G
banjo playin' round here

Mamma don' t low no
cussin' and swearin' ' round here etc.

Mamma don' t low no
guitar playin' round here etc.

"Riley The Furniture Man"

4/4 Time Key of G

G
When I was a poor boy, oh so sad
C
That Riley from Virginia took
G
Everything I had
Chorus:
G
Riley's been here
D7 G
got my furniture and gone!

Now it makes no difference to a rich man
with all his fancy clothes
if you don' t pay Mr. Riley
you got no place to go.

Riley come to my house
and these are the words he said
throw that cracker driver out
and load that poster bed.

Now Riley he' s a rich man
off poor folks like me
every Sunday morning Riley
gives to charity.

"Sailor On The Deep Blue Sea"

4/4 Time Key Of G

G C
It was on one summer's evening
G D7
Just about the hour of three
G C
When my darling started to leave me
G D7 G
For to sail upon the deep blue sea

Oh he promised to write me a letter
He said he' s write to me
But I have not heard from my darling
Who is sailing on the deep blue sea

Oh captain can you tell me
Where can my sailor be?
Oh yes little maiden
he is drowned in the deep blue sea

Farewell to friends and relations
it' s the last you' ll see of me

I'm going to end my troubles
by drowning in the deep blue sea

"Roll In My Sweet Baby's Arms"

4/4 Time Key of G

G
Ain't gonna work on the railroad
D7
Ain't gonna work on the farm
G
lay 'round this shack till the
C
mail train comes back
G D7 G
And I'll roll in my sweet baby's arms.

Chorus: Roll in my sweet baby's arms

Roll in my sweet baby's arms

I'll lay 'round this shack

till the mail train comes back

And I'll roll in my sweet baby's arms.

Sometimes there's a change in the ocean

Sometimes there's a change in the sea

Sometimes there's a change in my own true love

But there ain't no change in me

"The Sweet Sunny South"

4/4 Time Key Of G

G
Take me back to the place
D7
where I first saw the light
G C
to the sweet sunny South take me home
G C
where the mockingbird sings me
G D7
to sleep every night
G D7 G
oh why was I tempted to roam?

I think with regret of the dear ones I left
of the warm hearts that sheltered me then
of the wife and the family of whom I' m bereft
for the old place again I do sigh

Take me back let me see what is left that I knew
can it be that the old place is gone?
Dear friends from my childhood indeed must be few
and I must face death all alone

"Shady Grove"

4/4 Time Key of Em

Em D
Cheeks as red as a blooming rose
Em
eyes of the prettiest brown
G D
she's the darling of my heart
Em
prettiest girl in town

Chorus:

Shady Grove my little love
Shady Grove my darling
Shady Grove my little love
I' m bound for Shady Grove

I went to see my Shady Grove
she was standing by the door
shoes and stockings in her hand
little bare feet on the floor

I wish I had a big fine horse
and corn to feed him on
a pretty little girl to stay at home
feed him when I' m gone

"Looking Out A Window"

4/4 Time Key of G

G
While looking out a window
G
a second story window
D
I fell and broke my eyelash on the pavement
G
go get the Listerine
C
sister wants a beau
G D G
and a boy's best friend is his mother!

They spanked him with a shingle
which made his panties tingle
because he went and socked his little brother
we feed the baby garlic
so we can find him in the dark
and a boy' s best friend is his mother!

Looking through the knothole
in grandpa' s wooden leg
who will bring the cows in when I' m gone?
go get the axe there' s a flea on Nellie' s ear
and a boy' s best friend is his mother!

"Over the Mountain"

3/4 Time Key of G

G C
I'm always lighthearted and easy,
G D
Not a care in this world have I,
G C
Because I am loved by somebody,
G D G
Who's sitting home waiting for me.
Chorus:
C G
She's over, just over the mountains,
D
Where the little birds sing on the trees,
G C
In a cabin all covered in ivy,

G D G
somebody is waiting for me.

She lives far away on the mountains,
Where the little birds sings on the trees,
And the cabin' s all covered in ivy,
And somebody is waiting for me.

"Salty Dog"

4/4 Time Key of G

G E
Let me be your salty dog
A
or I won't be your man at all
G D G
honey let me be your salty dog

Sitting on the corner
with the low down blues
a great big hole in my new shoes
honey let me be your salty dog

I pulled the trigger
and the gun said go
You could hear it way down in Mexico
honey let me be your salty dog

"The Black Velvet Band"

3/4 Time Key of G

G
Her eyes they shone like the diamonds
D
you'd think she was queen of the land
G Em
with her hair hung over her shoulder
C D G
tied up with a black velvet band

As I went walking one morning
not meaning to stray very far

A watch she pulled from her pocket
and slipped it right into my hand
on the very first day that I met her
bad luck to the black velvet band

Before judge and jury next morning
I was called out to appear
a gentleman claimed his jewelry
and the case against me was quite clear

Seven long years transportation
right down to "Van Dieman' s land"
far away from my friends and companions
to follow the black velvet band

4/4 Time Key of G

Chorus:

C G D
Oh, Susanna, don't you cry for me

G
I come from Alabama with

D G
my banjo on my knee

I had a dream the other night
when everything was still
I dreamed I saw Susanna
A-coming down the hill

A red rose was in her cheek
A tear was in her eye
I said to her Susanna girl
Susanna don' t you cry.

"Corrina, Corrina"

4/4 Time Key of G

G
Corrina, Corrina
D G
where you been so long?
G
Corrina, Corrina
C G
Where you been so long?
D
Ain't had no loving
G
Since you've been gone.

I' ve got a bird that whistles
I' ve got a bird that sings (2x)
If I ain' t got Corrina
I ain' t got a thing

"Shenandoah"

4/4 Time Key of C

C F C
Oh Shenandoah, I long to see you
F C
away you rolling river
Am G Am
Oh Shenandoah, I long to see you
C F C
Away, we're bound away
Am G C

Cross the wide Missouri

For seven years I' ve been a rover

Away you rolling river

For seven years I' ve been a rover

Away, we' re bound away

' cross the wide Missouri

Oh Shenandoah I love your daughter

Away your rolling river

Oh Shenandoah I love your daughter

Away, we' re bound away

' cross the wide Missouri

"Eggs and Marrowbone"

4/4 Time Key of Em

Em

There was an old woman in our town

G

And in our town did dwell

G

She loved her old man dearly

Em

But another man twice as well

She went down to the doctor

To see what she could find

To see what she could find

To make her old man blind

"Feed him eggs and marrowbone

And make him sup them all

It won' t be todong before

He won' t see you at all"

She fed him eggs and marrowbone

And made him sup them all

And it wasn' too long before

He couldn' t see her at all

"Now that I am old and blind
And tired of my life
I' ll go to the rivers edge
And there I' ll end my life"

"To drown yourself, to drown yourself
Now that would be a sin
So I' ll go with you to the rivers edge
And there I' ll push you in"

The old woman took a running jump
To push the old man in
The old man he stepped aside
And the woman she fell in

She cried for help, she screamed for help
And loudly she did bawl
The old man said "I' m so blind
I can' t see you at all!"

She swam along, she swam along
Till she came to the rivers brim
The old man got a great long pole
And pushed her further in

Now the old woman is dead and gone
And the Devil' s got her soul
Wasn' t she a gosh-darn fool
That she didn' t grab that pole?

Eating eggs and marrowbone
Won' t make your old man blind
So if you want to do him in
You must sneak up from behind

"The Wabash Cannonball"

4/4 Time Key of G

G
From the great Atlantic Ocean
C
to the wide Pacific Shore
D
From the Queen of flowing mountains
G
to the South Belle by the door
G
She's long and tall and handsome
C
well known by one and all
D
She's a modern combination
G
called the Wabash Cannonball
Chorus:
G
Listen to the jingle
C
The rumble and the roar
D
riding through the woodlands
G
to the hill and by the shore.
G
Hear the might rush of engines
C
hear the lonesome hobo squall
D
riding though the jungles on
G
the Wabash Cannonball

The Eastern states are dandies
so the Western people say
from New York to St. Louis
and Chicago by the way
through the hills of Minnesota
where the rippling waters fall
no chances need be taken on
the Wabash Cannonball

Here' s to Daddy Claxton
may his name forever stand
he will always be remembered

by the ' boes throughout our land
his earthly race is over and
the curtain ' round him falls
we' ll carry him to victory on
the Wabash Cannonball

"The Titanic"

4/4 Time Key of G

G
Oh they built the ship Titanic
C G
to sail the ocean blue
G
and they thought they had a ship
A D
that the water would never go through
G
but the Lord's almighty hand said that
C
ship would never land
G
it was sad when that
D G
great ship went down
chorus:
C G
It was sad, it was sad
G
it was sad when that
B
great ship went down
G
husbands and wives
C
little children lost their lives
G
it was sad when that
D G
great ship went down

Oh they left the coast of England
a thousand miles from shore
when the rich refused to associate with the poor
so they put them down below
where they' d be the first to go
it was sad when that great ship went down

They swung the lifeboats out
o'er the cruel and raging sea
when the band struck up with
"nearer my God to thee"
Little children wept and cried
and the waves swept over the side
it was sad when that great ship went down

"Sweet Betsy From Pike"

3/4 Time Key of C

C G C
Did you ever hear tell of sweet Betsy from Pike
G
who crossed the wide prairie with her lover Ike
F C F C
With two yoke of oxen and an old yellow dog
G C
A tall Shanghai rooster and a one spotted hog
Chorus:
C G
Singing toora la roolah la roola la la

One evening quite early they camped on the Platte
'twas near by the road on a green shady flat
where Betsy sore footed lay down to repose
while Ike gazed with wonder on that Pike County rose

They stopped at Salt Lake to inquire the way
when Bringham declared that Betsy should stay
But Betsy got frightened and ran like a deer
while Bringham stood pawing the ground like a steer

Long Ike and sweet Betsy attended a dance
Ike wore a pair of his Pike county pants
Sweet Betsy was covered with ribbons and rings
says Ike "You' re an angel but where are your wings?"

"The Wreck Of The Old 97"

4/4 Time Key of G

G C
Well they gave him his orders in Monroe Virginia
G D
Saying, "Steve you are way behind time
G C
This is not 38 but it's Old 97
G D G
You've got to put her into Danville on time!"

Well he turned and he said to his black & greasy fireman
"Just shovel on a little more coal,"
and when we cross that White Oak Mountain
you can watch Old 97 roll!"

It' s a mighty rough road between Lynchburg and Danville
On a line with a three-mile grade
It was on this grade that he lost his air breaks
You can see what a jump that he made.

He was coming down that grade making ninety miles an hour
When his whistle turned into a scream.
He was found in the wreck with his hand on the throttle
He was scaled to death by the steam.

"The Streets of Laredo"

3/4 Time Key of C

C F C G
As I walked out in the streets of Laredo
C F C G
As I walked out in Laredo one day
C F C G
I spied a poor cowboy all wrapped in white linen
C F G C
all wrapped in white linen as cold as the clay

"I can see by your outfit that you are a cowboy"
these words he did say as I proudly stepped by
"Come sit down beside me and hear my sad story,
got shot in the breast and I know I must die."

' twas one in the saddle I used to go roaming
' twas once in the saddle used to go gay
' twas first to the drinking and then the card playing.
Got shot in the breast and I' m dying today."

"Let six jolly cowboys come carry my coffin.
Let six pretty girls come carry my pall.
Throw bunches of roses all over my coffin
throw roses to deaden the clods as they fall."

Oh beat the drum slowly and play the fife lowly
and play the dead march as you carry me along.
Take me to the green valley and lay the earth o' er me
for I' m a poor cowboy and I know I' ve done wrong."

Oh we beat the drum slowly and played the fife lowly
and bitterly wept as we carried him along
for we all loved out comrade so brave, young and handsome
we all loved out comrade although he' d done wrong.

"Stagolee"

4/4 Time Key of C

C
Stagolee was a bad man
C7
Everybody knows
F
He Spent one hundred dollars
C
Just to buy a suit of clothes
G C
He was a bad man, oh cruel Stagolee

Stagolee shot Billy de Lyons
What do you think about that?
Shot him down in cold blood
Because he stole his Stetson hat
He was a bad man, oh cruel Stagolee

Billy de Lyons said, "Stagolee
Please don' t take my life
I' ve got twdittle babies
And a darling, loving wife
You' re a bad man, oh crueStagolee"

"What do I care about your two little babies
Or your darling, loving wife?
You done stole my Stetson hat
and I' m bound to take your life"
He was a bad man, oh cruel Stagolee

The judge said, "Stagolee, what are you doing here?
You done shot Billy de Lyons
You' re going to die in the electric chair
You' re a bad man, oh crueStagolee"

Twelve o' clock they killed him
With his head held up high
Twelve o' clock they killed him
I was glad to see him die
He was a bad man, oh cruel Stagolee

"Jessie James"

4/4 Time Key of G

G C G
Jessie James was a lad who killed many a man
D
He robbed the Glendale train
G C G
And with his brother Frank he robbed the Chicago bank
D G
He'd a heart and a hand and a brain
Chorus:
C G
Jessie had a wife to mourn for his life
D
Three Children they were brave
G C G
But that dirty little coward who shot Mr. Howard

Has laid poor Jessie in his grave

It was Robert Ford, that dirty little coward
I wonder how he does feel
For he ate of Jessie' s bread and slept in Jessie' s bed
And he laid poor Jessie in his grave

It was on a Wednesday night and the moon was shining bright
They robbed the Glendale train
And the people they did say for many miles away
It was robbed by Frank and Jessie James

Jessie James was a man, a friend to the poor
He' d never see a man suffepain
And with his brother Frank, he robbed the Chicago bank
And stopped the Glendale train

It was his brother Frank who robbed the Gallatin bank
And carried the money from the town
It was in this very place they had a little race
For they shot Captain Sheets to the ground

It was on a Sunday night and Jessie was at home
Talking with his family brave
Robert Ford came along like a thief in the night
And laid poor Jessie in his grave

The people held their breaths when they heard of Jessie' s death
And wondered how he came to die
It was one of his gang called Little Robert Ford
He shot poor Jessie on the sly

This song was made by Billy Gashade As soon as news did arrive
He said there was no man with the law in his hand
Who could take Jessie James when alive

Cool Rhythm Tricks

Once you have the basic strumming and picking patterns down you can have some fun experimenting with the rhythm to come up with interesting, and sometimes just plain cool, stuff to enhance your playing and singing.

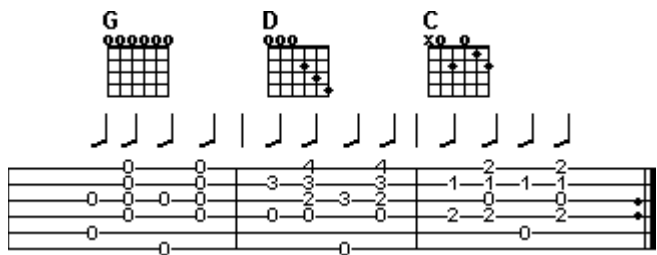
The Pinch

The pinch is a fingerstyle-specific technique that works well as a stand-alone concept or as a lead in to "Travis Style" guitar.

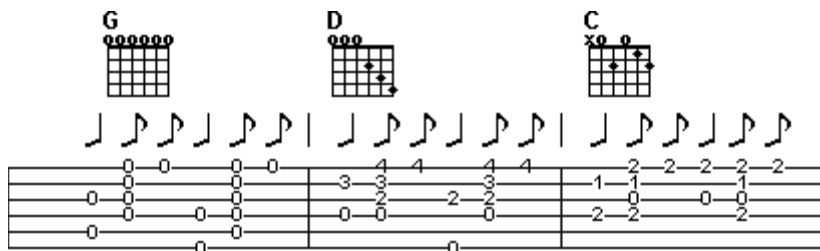
The pinch, as its name implies, is simply playing two strings at the same time with your thumb and your index or middle finger in a sort of pinching motion. The thumb is picking down and your finger is picking up. Which fingers you use really isn't an issue.



An easy way to get started is to play a pinch followed by a strum.



When you add the pinch to the Carter strum you can get some interesting effects.



Most of the time your bass strings on the pinch will go back and forth with the "root five" pattern, but you can play the pinch on any strings.

Another cool use for the pinch is to play it between notes.

The pattern tabbed out here features a pinch followed by a single note. I suggest using one of your fingers for the single notes rather than your thumb. Run through this a few times until you can play it at a steady rhythm and then we can play a cool scale with alternating bass lick.

If we take the same little scale pattern we were using in the fretting Exercises chapter and blend it into this pinch/single note/pinch pattern we get a really neat sound from the scale being played against an alternating bass.

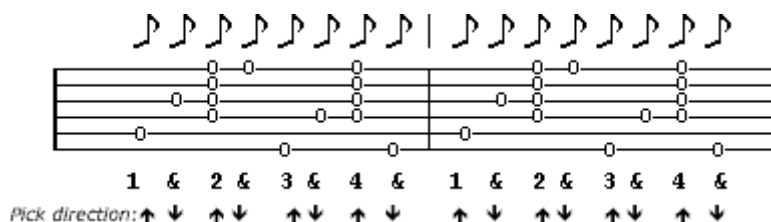

scale with alt bass

Once you can do this out of open G try it with your barre chords. It' s a great way to get ready for the country, ragtime and blues material we will be covering in Volume Two, and it' s one of those little licks you can play on the front porch and convince your neighbors that you are a way-cool guitar guy or gal.

The Bump-a-dit-ty

We figured out the Carter Strum by taking a two quarter note strum and cutting the second quarter note in half. That' s cool, but we don' t have to leave that first quarter note alone. We can cut that note in half and play a string of eighth notes.

You can play this with your fingers or with a flatpick. If you are using a flatpick for this lick keep in mind that we are now playing a string of eighth notes so we have to start picking up and down.

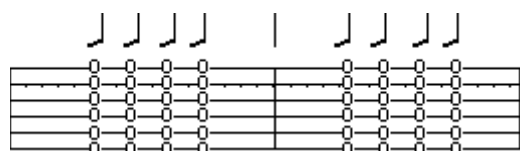


1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

Pick direction: ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓

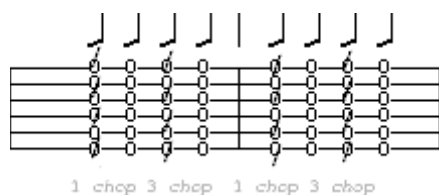
Chopping & Vamping

Chopping and vamping are techniques that you can use in your rhythm playing. Chopping is a variation of strumming. When strumming in 4/4 time you might simply play four quarter note strums counting 1-2-3-4



1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

When you chop the idea is not to play anything for the 1 and the 3 count of the measure. So you would play: rest-strum-rest strum or 1- chop 2- chop.



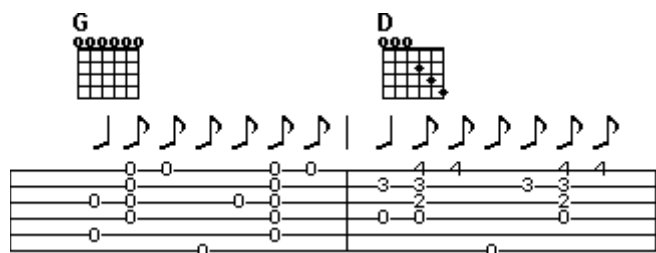
You are still playing a 4/4 time rhythm but it feels a little bit different. Chopping creates a sort of tension behind the music. This is one reason that bluegrass mandolin players use the technique so much.

You may notice that the chop sounds kind of goofy with an open chord on your guitar because the strings keep ringing. A way to enhance the chop is to play closed position chords along with a left hand technique called vamping.

To vamp a chord let your fingers lighten up and return to the strings right after the strum. This cuts the ringing of the chord short.

Mixing Things Up

As you get comfortable with the basics you can start mixing picking patterns. For example, the pinch and the bump-a-dit-ty work well together.



You could use the pinch to accent a measure or phrase in the music.



In fact, you can mix up these patterns into anything you want.



The trick is to shape the rhythm to suit the effect you want while still keeping the timing of the measure within the boundaries set by the time signature. In a lot of ways the only difference between musical styles like a sad honky-tonk country song and a ragtime blues guitar solo is how you treat the rhythm and phrasing of the measures. Experiment with all of the picking patterns we have gone over here and try mixing them up to change the way a song feels.

Arpeggios

An arpeggio is simply a chord played as single notes rather than strummed.



This is a great technique to use with chord progressions. Playing an arpeggio for one measure each of a chord progression like Am, C, D, F will give you a sound that kicked off more than one 60' s garage band. Playing an arpeggio while playing a G, B, C, A, G, C, D chord progression will give an effect like the piano in the oldies rock favorite *Sea of Love*.

Harmonics

Harmonics or "chimes" are loud resonant notes made by lightly touching a string just over the fifth, seventh or twelfth fret. The trick is that when I say lightly I mean lightly touch the string. You don' t want to put much pressure on the string. Just touch it directly over the fret.

You can use harmonics as single notes or as barre chords. If you make a barre chord harmonic over the fifth fret it is essentially a C chord. Over the seventh gives you a D chord and at the twelfth . . . (remember our barre chord chart?) Right again! You get a G chord. Try playing an arpeggio while holding your finger over the twelfth fret harmonic for a neat effect.

Putting It All Together

"My Grandfather' s Clock is a great song to try playing with a mix of different techniques and picking patterns.

My Grandfather' s Clock 4/4 Time Key of G

G D G C
My grandfather's clock was too large for the shelf

G D G
 So it stood 90 years on the floor.
 D G C
 It was taller by half than the old man himself
 G D G
 But it weighed not a pennyweight more
 D G
 It was bought on the morn of the day that he was born
 D
 And it was always his pleasure and pride
 G D G C
 But it stopped short, never to run again
 G D G
 When the old man died
 Chorus:
 G C G
 90 years without slumbering (tic toc, tic toc)
 G C G
 His life second numbering (tic toc, tic toc)
 G D G C
 But it stopped short, never to run again
 D G D
 When the old man died

In watching it' s pendulum swing to and fro
 Many hours he spent as a boy
 And in childhood and manhood
 the clock seemed to know
 And to share in his pleasure and joy.
 For it struck 24 when he walked through the door
 With a blooming and beautiful bride
 But it stopped short, never to run again
 When the old man died

Now my grandfather said that of those he could hire
 Not a servant so faithful he found
 For it wasted no time and it had but one desire
 At the end of each week to be wound
 And it stayed in its place not a frown upon its face
 And its hands never hung by its sides
 But it stopped short, never to run again
 When the old man died

The only tricky thing about this song is the chorus. The word slumbering is played as a half measure of C

and a half measure of G. In the last line of the chorus old, man, and died are each held for a full measure.

You have a lot of options when it comes to working out an arrangement of this song. For example, you can play the chop through the chorus or maybe an arpeggio. For the "tic-tock" you can come up with something at the twelfth-fret harmonic using single notes, strumming or arpeggios.

The trick isn't to play this the way you think I play the song or how somebody else plays it. You have to experiment a little bit and come up with something that fits your own vision of the song but still makes musical sense.

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Blues & Slide

You can't talk about folk guitar without mentioning the blues. I don't want to get into what the blues "is" simply because a lot of the definitions that people throw around when they are talking about the blues only seem to confuse everything. Let's just leave the definitions to something like, "If you have to ask what it is you don't understand it yet."

A lot of folks tend to break down blues progressions into bars or measures. You'll hear people talk about twelve and eight bar blues quite a bit and while there isn't anything wrong with that, it kind of misses the one thing we really need to be aware of as guitar players and that's how the progression feels. The blues isn't about technical perfection as much as it is about feeling. You always have to make musical sense, but you have to be cool and confident enough to do that without getting wrapped up in defining terms or putting things into categories.

To be honest, I almost never count out a blues progression as so many measures of one chord and so many measures of another chord. Trying to think about that while really feeling what I am playing confuses things too much. Like I said in the chapter on chord progressions, you get to a point where you can feel the tension building up to a chord change. When it comes to playing the blues being able to take that feeling of tension and play it against the rhythm is the core of almost everything you are going to do.

One of my favorite blues songs is a really simple little song called "Troubled In Mind". My father and I always have a blast with this one because the lyrics match up with an old folk saying here in Crisfield that goes, "*The sun don't shine up the same dogs butt every day!*"

Troubled In Mind 4/4 Time Key of G

G G7
I'm troubled in mind
C C7
I'm blue but I won't be always
G D G D
Oh that suns gonna shine on my back door someday

Lord I all you women, lord I love you all the same
But I don' t love youenough to change your name.

I' m gonna lay my weary head on some lonesome railroad line
Let the 219 ease my troubled mind.

Right about now you most likely wondering why there is a D chord floating out in space at the end of the song. That D chord is the turnaround. A turnaround does just that. It turns the song around and leads you back to the first line of the next verse or chorus.

Ending the song on the D (or V chord) leaves the listener hanging. The song almost has to go back to the G (or I chord) to make the song feel complete.

To get a clearer picture of what we are doing here lets tab out a simple quarter note strum version of this song.

Troubled In Mind

4/4 Time Key of G

Guitar tablature for the song "Troubled In Mind". The piece is in 4/4 time and the key of G major. The tablature is divided into three systems, each with a chord diagram and a strumming pattern above the staff.

System 1: Chords G, G7, and C. The lyrics are "I'm troubled in mind I'm blue but I won't be al".

System 2: Chords C7, G, and D. The lyrics are "ways oh that suns gonna shine on my backdoor some".

System 3: Chords G and D. The lyrics are "day".

Once you get comfortable with the idea of strumming a turnaround you can start experimenting with playing more complex versions. I don't want to get too heavy into the theory side in this book, but the basic idea of playing a fancy turnaround is to sort of walk up to the chord change.

In this second version of "Troubled In Mind" I have added a simple turnaround pattern to the end of the song. Don't get nervous because this is really easy. All we are going to do is play an eighth note pattern that walks the fourth string up three frets against the open third string.

Guitar tablature for a simple turnaround pattern. The pattern is in the key of G major and consists of an eighth-note walk on the fourth string (D4 to G4) against the open third string (G3).

The tablature shows the following notes on the fourth string: 0, 1, 2, 3. The third string is open (0).

When we blend this into the song the results are kind of cool.

"Troubled In Mind" *with turnaround*

4/4 Time Key of G

G 000000

G7 000000

C 555555

I'm troubled in mind I'm blue but I won't be al-

C7 555555

G 000000

D 777777

ways oh that suns gonna shine on my backdoor some-

G 000000

D 777777

day

In order to dress up the turnaround even more we can use something called a triplet.

Simply put, a triplet is where you play three eighth notes in the space of two eighth notes. The timing can be a little tricky at first, but the basic idea is that an eighth note triplet has the same time value as a quarter note.

In the new turnaround we are going to play three eighth note triplets and a single quarter note to fill up the first measure. You are going to play each triplet as a single quarter note so the count is going to be "one, two, three, four." That's going to feel kind of weird at first so give yourself a little bit of time with this lick in order to get comfortable with it.

3 0 3 2 0 2 1 0 1 0

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 1 & 2 3 4

sl.

The other trick we are adding to this new turnaround is a slide. A slide is pretty much what the name implies. You slide a note or chord up or down the fretboard. In this case we are sliding the barre D chord.

Strum an open G chord and while it's still ringing drop your index finger somewhere between the second and sixth fret (it's up to you) and drag your finger to the seventh fret.

Nothing to it, right?

Try adding this new turnaround to "Troubled In Mind".

This isn't the only turnaround you can play in G. Try this second example once you get comfortable with the first one.



This example works under the same concept as the earlier turnaround except that we are playing two fretted notes together in a pattern that moves down the neck.

Slide Guitar



We can't talk about the blues in an open tuning without mentioning slide guitar.

Slide guitar involves using a (you guessed it) slide to fret chords and individual strings.

Slides can be made out of just about anything. Cigarette lighters, pocketknives, a piece of bone, the neck of a wine bottle (hence the term "bottleneck") or the leg of an

aluminum chair all make decent guitar slides.

Years ago the only way to pick up a slide was to scrounge around and use whatever was handy. Today commercial slides are available in a range of styles and designs that is almost hard to take in. It's impossible to say what makes the best slide because everybody has a favorite style.

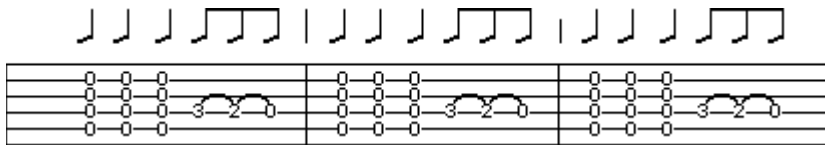
Using a slide is easy. You just wear it on one finger.

The decision on which finger to use is up to you. I usually wear a slide on my pinky but some of my friends swear on using the ring finger and once in a while I'll run into somebody who uses the middle or index finger. Your best bet is to try wearing it on a few different fingers and use whatever works best for you.

Playing with a slide is deceptively simple. You don't want to press down with the slide but rather just let it rest lightly on the strings. If you get a clakety-clack sound when you use the slide you are pressing too hard. Lighten up your touch until you get a clear note. You can play any of your barre chords with the slide as long as you make sure the slide is right on top and straight with the fret. The real trick to playing with a

slide boils down to knowing when not to use it. People tend to go crazy at first, but the really great slide players only use the slide as a seasoning.

For example, Son House would play a simple pattern where the open G chord was broken up by a double pull-off. A pull-off is where you fret a note and pull your finger off the string while it is still ringing. In this example we are playing the fourth string at the third fret with our ring finger and the fourth string at the second fret with the middle finger. When you strike the string pull off the ring finger and then the middle finger for something like the pattern tabbed out below.



You can run that pattern for the G chord and then slide into the next chord.

Using the slide sparingly makes the times you do use it all the more effective.

If you really get into slide guitar you may want to experiment with setting up your instrument with a slightly higher action. It's funny, but sometimes the really cheaply made guitars with warped necks that you can pick up at flea markets and pawn shops for less than fifty bucks make excellent slide guitars. It may be worth your while to pick up a second guitar just for slide playing.

Lap Style

Another way to play slide is to lay the guitar across your lap. This is sometimes called "Hawaiian style" because Hawaiian musicians popularized the technique. One tricky thing about playing the guitar this way is that you will need a really high action. You can buy an extension nut that raises the strings, or you can loosen the strings and stick a #2 pencil under the strings right after the nut.

In order to play chords with the guitar in this position you will need to use what is called a steel. This is one of the reasons that this style of guitar is sometimes referred to as steel guitar. A guitar steel is a really heavy piece of metal that comes in a variety of shapes. You use the steel in pretty much the same way as a guitar slide but you don't wear the steel on your finger. The steel is usually held between the thumb and forefinger with the rest of your hand resting lightly on the strings. This lets your hand dampen the sound of the steel riding up and down the strings. You can't really play anything but barre chords with a guitar steel, but if you experiment a little bit you'll find that you can slant the steel to imply different major, seventh and minor chords. Lap style is a kind of unusual approach to the guitar in this day and age, but it was used to great effect in the 1920's and 1930's by Hawaiian musicians as well as early blues and country musicians.

The pedal steel guitar so prevalent in today's country music is a modern development of the old lap style so it's obvious that this technique has a lot of potential.

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Standard Tuning

We have come a long way with open G tuning. Now it's time to move on to standard tuning.

Standard tuning is the standard for a good reason. Open G is great and the chords are easy on your hands but standard tuning is much more flexible when it comes to playing in other keys, working with bass lines and just about everything else. It's the standard guitar tuning for a reason. It works for anything and everything.

The downside to standard tuning is that some of the chord forms can be a little bit hard on your fretting hand. That's the main reason we worked in open G tuning for most of this book. Learning the proper form for making chords in standard tuning will be a lot easier now that you have strengthened up your hands a bit.

In open standard tuning:

- Your sixth string (the wound string closest to your chin) is tuned to E
- Your fifth string is tuned to A
- Your fourth string is tuned to D
- Your third string is tuned to G
- Your second string is tuned to B
- Your first string (the plain steel string closest to the floor) is tuned to E

If you don't have a tuner you can tune the guitar to itself by following these steps:

1. Assume that the first string is in tune.
2. Tune the second string so that when you fret the second string at the fifth fret you get the same note as the open first string.
3. Tune the third string so that when you fret the third string at the fourth fret you get the same note as the open second string.
4. Tune the fourth string so that when you fret the fourth string at the fifth fret you get the same note as the open third string.
5. Tune the fifth string so that when you fret the fifth string at the fifth fret you get the same note as the open fourth string.
6. Tune the sixth string so that when you fret the fifth string at the fifth fret you get the same note as the open fifth string.

If you strum across the strings you will discover the other kind of funky thing about standard tuning: it sounds awful when you strum the open strings. We are not tuning to a chord anymore so in order to play anything we are always going to be fretting at least one string.

Lets take a shot at playing our first chord in standard tuning!

The G chord can be a little tricky at first because you have to stretch across all six strings, but if you position your hand properly it' s really nothat bad.



As you can see in the photograph, my thumb is not on the centerline of the neck. It is resting on the edge of the fretboard. This lets me swing out my wrist a little bit and that puts my fingers in a position that minimizes the reach for the fifth and sixth strings.



Proper hand position for a G chord

If you look at the image of my hand position when I play a C chord you will notice that the angle of my wrist and forearm has changed.



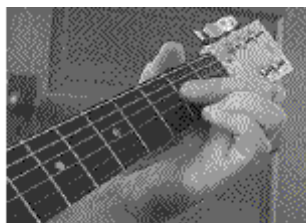
Proper hand position for a C chord

Not only that, my thumb has also moved so that the guitar neck is now cupped in the space between my thumb and my index finger.

The whole trick to making cords easily in standard tuning is working out how to position your hand so that your fingers can just drop down onto the proper strings.

Even when we make a chord that is closely related to the C chord like Am the entire hand and wrist

position changes, but this time the movement is a little bit subtler.



Proper hand position for an Am chord

If there is any rule to forming chords on the guitar in standard tuning it is that you can never "lock" your hand into a single position. Every chord you make may require altering the position of your wrist, hand and forearm.

There is one chord position that has driven aspiring guitar players throughout history to tears: The **F chord**.



The problem with the F chord is that you have to fret all six strings . . .but you only have four fingers and a thumb to work with.

This isn' t a hard chord to play if you think out the hand position. Look at the way my hand is positioned for the C and G chords. You will see that the F chord requires a different wrist angle and the thumb is wrapped around in order to fret the sixth string.



Proper hand position for an F chord

To illustrate how the angle and position of your entire hand changes when you move from chord to chord I captured the change from a G to an F chord on film and broke it down into still images.



G chord



F chord

Wrapping your thumb around to fret the sixth string when you make an F chord is not going to be easy the first few times you try it. If you really have trouble you can ignore the sixth string for a little while, but don't bypass this altogether because in a lot of ways getting this down will really help you play with proper hand position.

I can't stress enough how important it is to be conscious of your hand position when you start working on chords. If something hurts stop and move things into a more comfortable position. Don't buy into a "feel the burn" philosophy with this because pain is your body's way to telling you that something is wrong.

I made a real mistake when I was starting out. I followed the directions in various books and tried to make chords with my hand pretty much locked into a set position. It made progressing really tough and I wound up having some serious trouble with my left hand. Things got to the point where my hand would actually go numb after a few songs. Believe me, this is not a good thing. In order to solve the problem I wound up going back to square one and spent three months in a lakeside cabin in Maine forcing myself to forget everything I thought I knew about making chords and training myself to play in a way that didn't tear up my hands. I liked living in Maine. It's a pretty state and folks there are really nice, but relearning the guitar and forgetting a whole lot of bad habits wasn't exactly a lot of fun.

To sum it up, you might as well learn it right when you start out because no matter how long you put it off you are going to have to learn it somewhere down the road.

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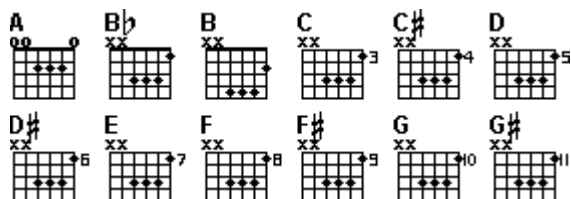
Chords & Scales

Just like the overview of G position chords earlier in the book, chords in standard tuning move up and down the neck following the chromatic scale. I'm not going to go over that again simply because the only thing changing here is the fingering used to make the chords.

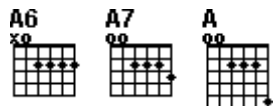
Major Chord Forms

The A Position

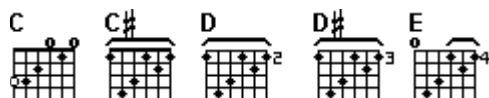
Just like the A position in G tuning, this chord form follows the chromatic scale up and down the neck.

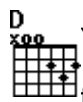


These variations of the A chord form are also movable up and down the neck:



The C Position



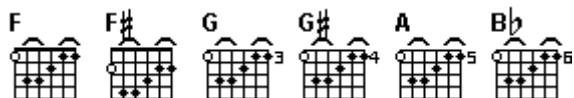
 You have a few options when it comes to moving a C position chord. You can barre across the "top" fret with your index finger, or simply play the first three strings as if you were playing a D chord.

You can play a D chord without fretting the last three strings because the open D and A strings fit with the D chord. Once you take this chord up the neck you have to fret the last two or three strings as shown in the chord diagrams above or limit yourself to using the first three strings alone.

The seventh position for this chord form is also movable:

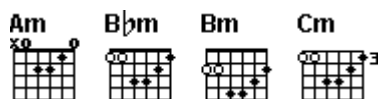


The F Position

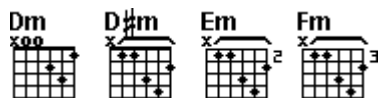


Minor Chord Forms

The Am Position



The Dm Position



The Em Position



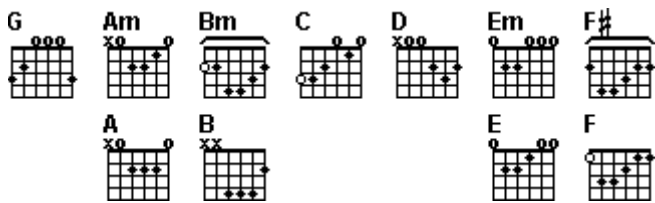
Chord Progressions

The easiest way to memorize chords (trust me, you are going to have to know a lot of chords down the road so easy is a really good way to go) is to learn chords for each key using the Nashville Number System.

For example, let's write out a G scale **G A B C D E F# G**

(go back to the chapter on [scales](#) if you need to remember how we build the scale)

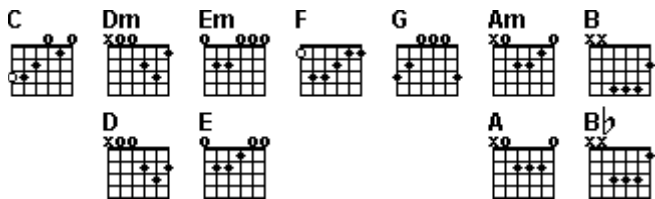
If we use the Nashville Number System we can create a mini chord chart with the chords most often used in the key of G:



Let's do two more together.

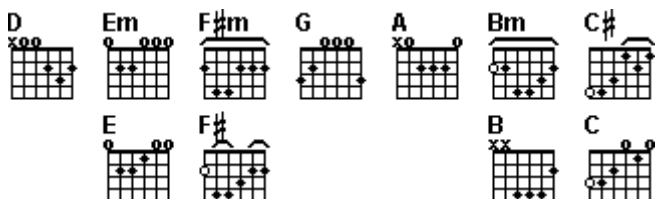
For the key of C we write our C scale: **C D E F G A B**

Then using the Nashville Number System we can create a chord chart for the key of C:



For the key of D we write out our D scale: **D E F# G A B C#**

Then using the Nashville Number System we can create our chord chart for the key of D:



Try working out other keys like E and A on your own.

Scales

Since we are talking about using scales to figure out chord progressions we might as well keep going and take a look at how scales relate to chord forms.

As I said earlier in the book, a major chord is made up of the 1st , 3 rd and 5th notes in the scale. If you think about it you can see how to find a major scale out of a chord form.

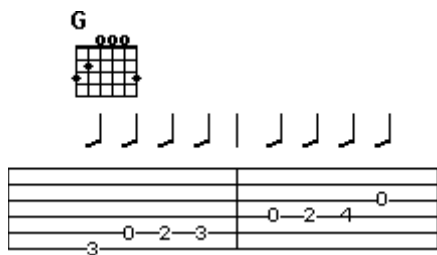
Let' s start with G. As you remember, the notes of the G scale are **G A B C D E F# G**.



☐ We know the sixth string in standard tuning is tuned to E. When we make a G chord we fret the sixth string at the third fret. If we remember the chromatic scale we know that this gives us a G note (**E-F-F#-G**) and the **root** of the G scale.

The second note in the G scale is A, which just happens to be the same note the fifth string is tuned to.

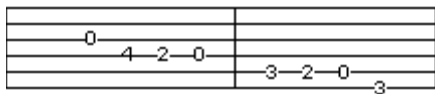
The third note of the G scale is B. Fretting the fifth string at the second fret gives us a B note. The fourth note of the scale is C, which is the note you get fretting the fifth string at the third fret. The fifth note of the G scale is D, which is the note you get playing the open fourth string . . . are you seeing what' s happening here? We are just running down each string until we come up to the note on the next open string. If you keep following the notes of the G scale you wind up with the scale pattern laid out below.



Nothing to it, right?

This isn't the only G scale you'll find on the guitar. There are scales ~~all~~ over the fretboard, but we are just going to look at a few of them on the bass strings for right now. In Volume Two we will go deeper into major and minor scales, but for right now I just want to introduce you to the concept and get you working on some simple scales to lead into bass runs. Run through that G scale a few times and then try it backwards.

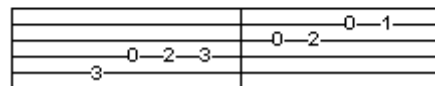
G



Now try playing this scale back and forth while you are holding the chord. You' ll have to move a finger here and there but you will find that the whole scale is within easy reach of the chord form.

Let' s look at a C and D Scales and try to play them while working out of æchord form. Try running both of them backwards on your own, then do the same thing with the E, F and A scales.

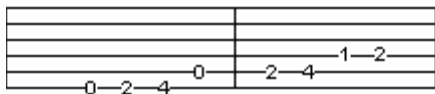
C



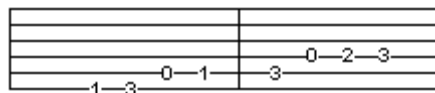
D



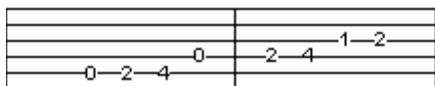
E



F



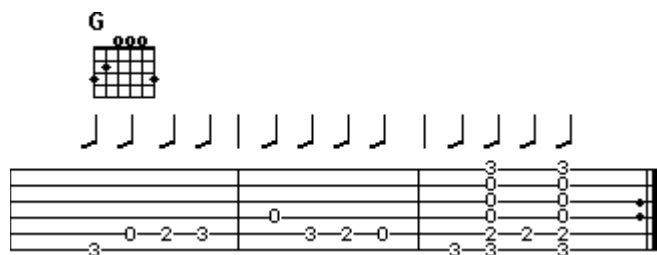
A



Spend some time running up and down each of these scales. It'll help you get used to how they sound and it's a great finger exercise to get you ready for the next exercise.

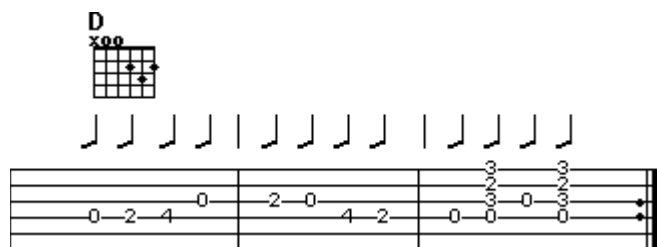
Scale Exercises

Once you get comfortable running through those basic scales the next step is to mix them into your basic picking patterns. The easiest way to start doing this is to try the little pattern tabbed out below.



All we are doing is playing the first five notes of the scale and then turning around and walking back to the root. If you look at the third measure you will see that the root note of the scale winds up acting as the bass note for the bass strum.

Let's try the same thing with the D scale.



Work up the C scale on your own and then start experimenting with putting these patterns together to create chord progressions. Try running from G to C, back to G and then to D. Then try throwing this scale pattern into some songs like "**Going Down That Road Feeling Bad**".

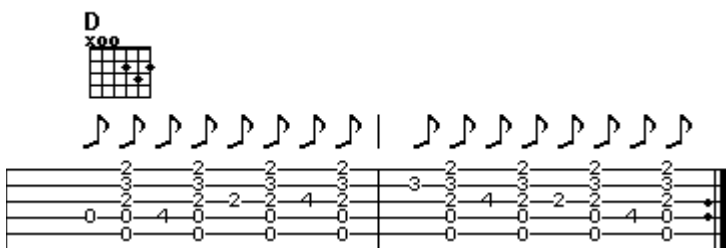
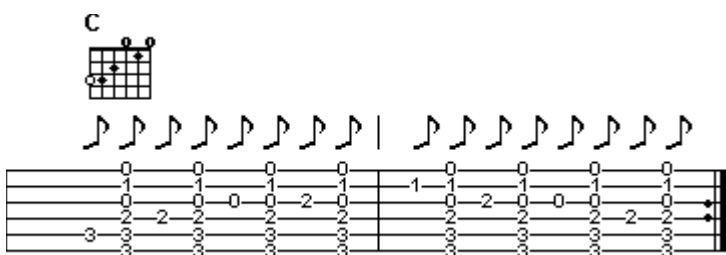
Boogie-Woogie Bass

Another cool trick you can use with a major scale and a chord form is a simple "**boogie-woogie**" bass line. Ledbelly used this strum to great effect in songs like *Good Morning Blues*.



In this example we are strumming eighth notes and playing bass notes in a pattern out of the major scale. The pattern here isn't exact this is more a matter of feel than a specific technique. Most of the time you will play the first, third and fifth notes of the scale (the same notes you use to make a major chord, which explains why this sounds so good in a chord progression) changing one or two notes on the way down the scale. Most of the time you will change something every time you run through this lick.

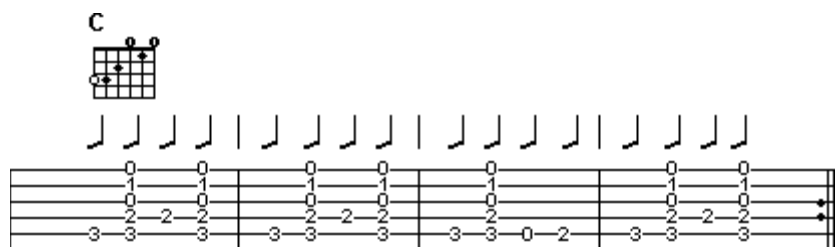
Experiment with this strum out of the C and D chords and then try using it on songs like "**Corrina, Corrina**".



Bass Runs

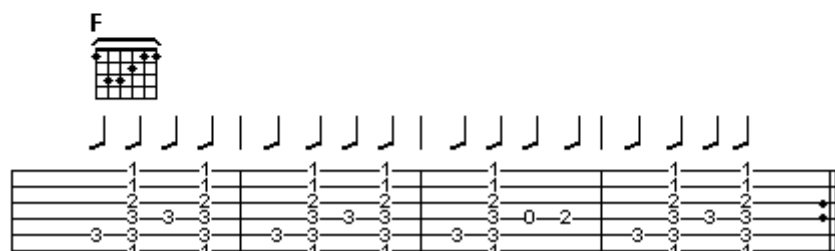
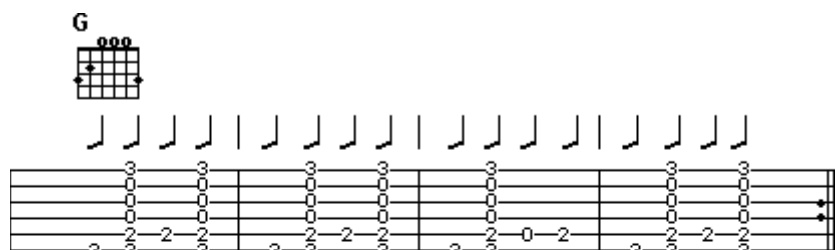
Bass runs are licks that run through part or all of a measure to lead through a chord change. I usually break them into two groups, static bass runs and leading bass runs.

Static Bass runs don't really go anywhere. I usually stick them in a measure to accent a lyric or to make a long stretch of a single chord sound a little bit more interesting.

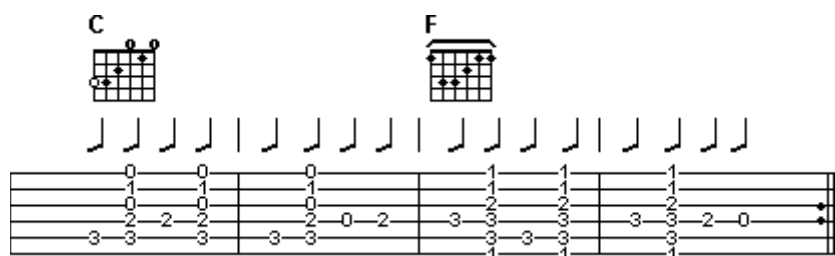


If you run through this a few times you will notice that all we are really doing is running the first few notes of the C scale in the middle of a series of bass strums.

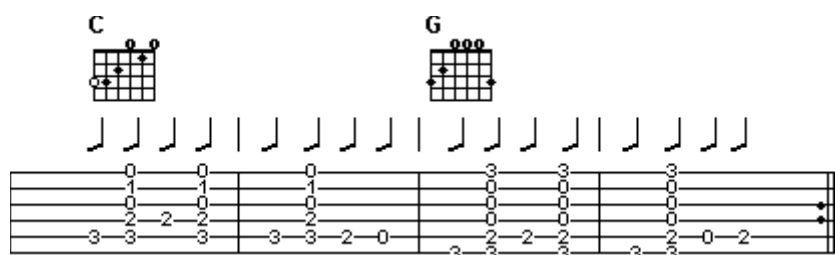
If we look at the same run out of G and F chords we will see the same lick played out of different scales.



Bass runs can also guide you through a chord change if you run from the root note of a chord to the root note of the next chord in the progression.



In this example we are running up the scale to lead into the F chord and then running back down the scale to the C chord. Try the next example that runs from C to G.



Where Do I Go From Here?

We have covered a lot of ground together in this book. In fact, there is enough information laid out here to keep you busy for a couple of years but the question I am always asked by my banjo and guitar students is, "Where do I go from here? What do I learn next?"

The answer to that question really depends on you. Some folks learn a couple of chords and leave it at that. That' s cool. After all, Woody Guthrie wasn't exactly a technically brilliant guitar player but he went on to change the world with his songs.

Some folks go on to develop amazing techniques, and that' s cool too as long as you don' t get so wrapped up in technical perfection that you stop having fun.

There is a story about a martial arts student who went to his sensei saying, "I am devoted to mastering this style of karate. How long will it take me to master it?" The sensei replied casually, "Ten years." The student said impatiently, "But I want to master it faster than that. If I work day and night and focus only on becoming a master, how long will it take then?" The sensei smiled and said, "Twenty years. Right now you are in too much of a hurry for me to teach you anything so it may take longer than that."

It' s going to take you a while to work through everything in this book, butt' s going to take even longer if you don' t get out and have some adventuresDon' t get too wrapped up in how many hours a day you practice or how fast you are progressing. Just take some time to go out on the front porch to sing some songs. Go to jam sessions and festivals. Have some fun making music with other people.

When you go to your first jam you' re going to feel like the most useless person who ever lived. Everybody goes through that. It' s one thing to play a song at home alone, but it' s another thing entirely to play in time with a group of people. Everything is going to be going by so fast that it will seem impossible to join in, but if you keep going and relax you' ll start rolling with the music and after a while you will be wondering how you ever thought it was hard.

When you go on to **The How and the Tao of Folk Guitar Volume Two: *Getting Good*** you will learn more about bass runs in country, blues and rock music as well as a lot of cool stuff like playing Reggae rhythms, advanced fingerstyle and flatpick techniques and a lot more about scales and music theory.

Everything in Volume Two will be built on the core skills that you have picked up here.

Volume Two is going to cover a lot of neat stuff, but don' t be in too much of a rush to move on to advanced guitar techniques. Take some time to enjoy and really learn how to use the skills presented here. Trust me, you don' t have to be an expert musician or have a ton of music theory knowledge or fancy guitar gear to go out and have some fun making music. I think a big part of developing as a musician and as a person involves learning about what you don' t need. For example, when I first went into business I spent a lot of money on fancy computers, software and other high-tech equipment only to find that the best tool I had was between my ears. None of the stuff I bought really did the business a lot of good because it turned out that all I needed was a word processor. It' s hard to learn things that way, but I can' t complain because it' s been a great ride up to this point. As you progress and grow into a guitar player you will find that the simple answers we tend to brush off are usually the answers we come back to later on in our journey.

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The Tao of Folk Guitar

The word Tao means, literally, "way."

The word comes from ancient China and was used by some pretty interesting philosophers like Lao Tzu as a way of explaining that things sometimes work better when you just follow your own path.

When I sat down to put this book together I wanted to present the basic skills you would need to find your own "way" to making music on the guitar. I also didn' t want to put too much of my own stamp on the techniques I was sharing. The best solution I could come up with was to break the book into two parts. A "How" section that just laid out the tools and a "Tao" section that offered some friendly advice on what you could do with those tools.

The upcoming pages are little more than a collection of anecdotes and ideas presented with no intention other than to make you laugh and maybe give you a gentle nudge so that you will take your guitar out the front door and go have some adventures.

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Harmonica Joe

"Hey kid, you want to make a couple of dollars?"

I wasn't so naïve that I didn't know the usual course of action a kid was supposed to take when an old man in a raincoat asks a question like that. But this guy looked pretty harmless, and I was curious about the huge chromatic harmonica he had pulled out of his pocket, so I didn't run like hell.

He was waving the harmonica around like a wand as he started talking again. "You break out that guitar and we can make a few bucks. Maybe get us some lunch. Maybe make enough to get some burgers to take home with me. Come on kid. Play a tune with Harmonica Joe."

I was on the boardwalk in Atlantic City looking for something to do while my grandfather trolled the slot machine pits in one of the casinos. He wasn't really interested in gambling. Oh, he might toss a few bucks into the slots but he was really interested in talking to the little old lady bingo queens. These trips were more about a technically free bus ride (they would charge you ten bucks for the trip and then give you a roll of quarters at the door) and a chance to bird-dog down by the ocean. I only came along because mom thought somebody needed to keep an eye on him.

I was in the habit of taking my guitar with me everywhere I went back then. It made things like taking a bus trip kind of rough because the case was so big and heavy, but I figured you never know when you might run into a chance to play so I kept it with me. We would make this trip every once in a while and sometimes I could sneak in and play some slots. That wasn't too much fun because whenever I managed to hit a jackpot grandpop would claim my winnings. It was funny. He didn't have a problem with me gambling, but he did have a problem with letting me keep what I won. On this particular trip one of the security guards stopped me at the door. I guess the sight of a kid dragging this huge guitar case around while ogling the cocktail waitresses was kind of hard to miss. I tried to con my way through by giving the security guard a big grin and saying "I'm with the band."

It didn't work. If anything, it made everything worse.

Grandpop wasn't much help. He just hollered "Ah, it serves you right for being a wise guy!" as they threw me out. He even kept my free roll of quarters. So I had the boardwalk to myself on a cool day. I had no money and nothing to do. I started wandering around looking at the tourists and the wannabe gangster types until I saw the old guy covered with birds.

He was trying to eat a hotdog in this arthritic kind of slouch. He looked like his back was too messed up to

stand up straight. The pigeons and seagulls were lined up on his back and shoulders trying to reach around his head and swipe a piece of his lunch. There were so many birds piled on him that I couldn't really see his face. As I walked over to get a better look he noticed me and brought his head up to look me in the eye, well, he tried to but a seagull hopped up on his hat.

"Hey old timer. That's a pretty good trick with the birds."

"Help me out here kid. Get these damn birds off of me!"

I cracked up. I dropped my guitar case and started swatting at his passengers. They were pretty fearless and it took a little bit of work to get rid of them all.

"Hell of a thing when a man can't eat his lunch." He said. Then my guitar case caught his attention and he asked me if I knew how to play.

"A little," I said. "But I'm not really that good."

He thought about it for a second and asked me if I wanted to make a few bucks as he waved his harmonica.

So there I was wandering down the boardwalk following this little old man with a crooked back. He was talking a mile a minute and I had a hard time understanding everything he was saying. Part of it was the way he talked, but I was also trying as hard as I could not to break out laughing. He still had his slightly used and pigeon-pecked hotdog in one hand and his harmonica in the other and as he talked he swung them around like batons.

"Now the first thing we have to do is find ourselves a spot. You've got to have a good spot. In front of the casinos is no good because everybody going in or out is either broke or saving up to go broke. You know the house always wins? Don't gamble son, it'll ruin you as quick as a showgirl. I should know. Now we want a spot where we can hit the couples. Couples are good because if you sing to the girl her boyfriend has to throw you a tip or she'll think he's ~~sh~~ael."

"So we sing to the girl and we find a good spot."

"That's right! You're getting the idea. I might get myself some lunch today, told you my name was Harmonica Joe? I used to be on the radio." He started to sing, "Hello and what do you know? It's Harmonica Joe on the ra-di-oh! "

We wandered around until Joe found a spot he liked. We were close to a couple of tourist trap shops with cheesy t-shirts and salt water taffy baskets on display.

"Now here' s what we' ll do. I' ll call the songs. You know any jazz tunes?"

"No."

"Good. Then that' s what we' ll play. You get to a chord you don' t know ~~just~~ give your hand up and down across the strings and smile at the people. Out here they can' t hear you so if they see you moving around like you' re playing they will think the ocean is just drowning you out."

He went over some more things like how to casually draw attention to my guitar case so people would think to toss in some money and how you have to play standing up so people won' t think you' re lazy.

It was pretty cool because Joe really had this system down. We worked the people passing by just as easy as you please while we played. When a couple stopped to listen he would fuss over the girl and take her by the hand to do a couple of dance steps. When a family stopped he would stoop down and fuss over the kids, which was my cue to look at the dad and give a little cough as I lightly kicked my guitar case to rattle the change.

The whole time this was going on Harmonica Joe talked to me about performing. He talked some about the places he had been, but most of the time he talked about how the game works. He said that entertaining people wasn' t just about playing well, you also had to be able make them feel good about listening to you.

I' m not sure how long we played that afternoon. Time just sort of flew by because I was having so much fun playing and watching Joe work his audience. It all came to a halt when Joe all of a sudden kicked my guitar case closed and shoved it under a bench in one sweeping motion of his foot. The next thing I knew Joe had stashed his harmonica in his pocket and just sort of stood there like he was asking me the time or something.

I couldn' t figure out what was going on until the cop walked over.

"Nice try, Joe. But I' ve been watching you two for a while now."

"Why hello officer. It' s a lovely day isn' t it?"

"Joe, how many times have I told you that I don' t want you out panhandling omy boardwalk?"

"Panhandling? You' re acting like every musician out on the street is some kind of bum!"

"Joe, you *are* a bum." Before Joe could say anything the cop turned to me. "Who are you?"

I gave him a big grin and said, "It' s ok. I' m with the band."

He didn' t seem to think that was any funnier than the security guard did. "So you' re out here learning to be a bum?"

"I thought I' d give it a shot. If things don' t work out I could always be a . . ."

Joe cut me off right in the middle of the punch line. "He' s just a kid playing a little bit of guitar for old Joe. Nothing wrong with that is there, officer?"

The cop gave me the hairy eyeball for a moment. I gave him my best grin again and he finally relaxed and started to laugh.

"Well, you guys didn' t sound too bad. Matter of fact you sound better than the guys further down the boardwalk, but they ain' t breaking the law because they have a license."

I started to say something but Joe kicked me and gave me the signal to keep my mouth shut.

The cop looked at us again, gave a deep sigh as he shook his head and said, "I' m going to take a walk. When I come back I want both of you gone. I' m sick of telling you this Joe. I don' t want to see you again today."

So that was that. Time to hit the bricks. I was sad that it was over but I had a great time and, whether he knew it or not, Joe had taught me a lot about performing. It also hit me right about then that I was dead tired. This had been a lot of fun but it was also a lot of work.

I dragged my guitar case out from under the bench and was kind of shocked at how much money the marks had thrown in. There was a lot of change but there were quite a few ones and fives.

Joe took a peek at the money and his face brightened up. "Not a bad take for a little bit of work. Fifty-fifty sound good to you?"

I thought about it for a second and decided that I could do one better than that. I scooped up the money and handed it to Joe. "Here. You take it and get yourself those burgers."

Joe tried to argue with me but I wouldn' t hear about it. I told him that it was the least I could do in return for some of the tricks he had shared with me (and in the years afterward knowing how to rustle up a few bucks on the street has gotten me out of more than one bad scrape) and that the only thing I would probably do with my half was give my grandfather another shot at the slots. We said our goodbyes and Joe gave me a quick hug before he disappeared into the crowd.

I was squaring away my guitar case when my grandfather came running over shouting, "What the hell have you been up to?" Apparently he had seen me handing Joe a fistful of money because he started yelling at me about hanging out with bums and giving money away.

We took a walk up and down the boardwalk to kill some time before the bus came back to take us home. Grandpop carried on the whole time that Joe was just going to go get drunk with the money and that I was a total jackass for thinking otherwise.

"Ah, I don' t care grandpop. I liked the old guy and I think you' re wrong about him. You don' t know the guy. He' s just going to buy some cheeseburgers."

"If you believe that you must be stupid. Don' t you know anything?"

We were walking past the McDonalds on the boardwalk when Joe stepped out lugging this big bag of cheeseburgers and a large cup of coffee. He spotted me and started waving the bag shouting, "God bless you boy! I got my lunch and I got some to take home! Goodbye, and don' t forget old Harmonica Joe!"

I shouted back, "Hello and what do you know? It' s Harmonica Joe on the a-di-oh!"

He did a couple of quick dance steps and shuffled off into the crowd.

For the first time in my life my grandfather didn' t have anything to say.

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Finding Mississippi

Before the Internet and before compact disks there was the radio.

Now I know you' ve heard the radio before, but it' s easy to forget how powerful it was back in the day when

it was just about the only way to hear any music.

For the old guitar players I used to hang around with it was big AM stations like WWVA and WSM. By the time I was a kid the AM band was pretty much all news and really weird religious broadcasts so my lifeline to the music world was the folk show Sunday nights on WHYI.

Every week I would take a stack of cassette tapes and sit all night with my finger on the record button of my boom-box. As soon as the DJ played something interesting I would hit ' record' and by the next morning I had a stack of tapes that I would listen to all week. You couldn't just record the whole show because folk radio was, and I guess still is, always trying so hard to make everybody happy that you never knew what kind of downright weird stuff was going to be played. I liked the old blues records and some of the other stuff, but I didn't want to save things like Hungarian goat herding music or old protest songs about obscure politicians.

I had been doing this for a while when one night this record came on that started with an old guy talking about coffee.

As soon as he said "Coffee time" I hit the record button because this guy's voice was just so cool. It was the kind of voice you'd expect to hear if a bluebird was ever able to have a conversation with you. All sort of sing-song and kind of cheerful in a sad sort of way. As if he had seen too much of the world but wasn't going to let it bring him down. It was something a kid in Philadelphia didn't get to hear very often.

Then he started to play the guitar and I was never quite the same.

I'm not going to try and put the music into words because I don't think anything I could say would draw the right image. It was just the coolest thing I had ever heard. I sat there listening to this guy singing about his favorite brand of coffee and playing his guitar and I just about lost my mind. After the DJ came on and said that the song was Coffee Blues by some guy named Mississippi John Hurt I rewound the tape and listened to it another three times. Then I dragged out my guitar and spent the rest of the night on the back steps driving the neighbors crazy trying to figure out just what this guy was doing.

I spent days trying to work out the picking patterns and when that didn't work I went to a music book store and started looking for more information on this guy. I wound up working for a slumlord cleaning out a pair of apartments vacated by a cat lady to make enough money to buy those books.

The other guys in my high school had centerfolds taped inside their locker doors, but I had a black and white photo of Mississippi John Hurt sitting on a park bench with his guitar case propped up next to him in

my locker. When somebody noticed it my explanation was, "someday I' m going to be that cool."

There was just one problem. The stuff in the books didn' t make sense.

Oh, they were well written and had lots of pictures to look at. There were interviews and stuff like that, but I started to get the feeling that the people who made these books wanted to talk about this music rather than teach it. The songs they covered were laid out in tablature but there was almost never any kind of general picking pattern that you could use throughout the song. It seemed that playing fingerstyle blues guitar required learning a song note-by-note and that seemed impossible to me.

I fought through the tablature until my fingers bled. I' m not being dramatic here. I know that local guitar heroes like to throw that "play until your fingers bleed" line like some kind of macho catchphrase but I can tell you from personal experience that it' s neither macho nor fun.

I ran through this stuff for so many hours that my fingertips looked like they had been chewed up by a cheese grater and still nothing I was doing made any sense. After a few months my left wrist started to swell up and I started tying my hand open with a bandanna handkerchief pinned inside my coat sleeve to brace my hand open when I was in school.

It was maddening because I wanted to play so badly and all I was doing was just that, playing badly. After a few months of putting myself through the wringer I wound up sitting on the back steps with my left hand in a bucket of ice and my right hand holding a guitar that I just couldn' t play. It hit me that wasn' t going to be able to do this and I just about cried my eyes out.

I gave up for a while. I would run through simple stuff on the guitar but I wasn' t happy because I still couldn' t figure out how to play the way I wanted to play. I stuck to the banjo and told myself that I just didn' t have that "it" that lets you play the guitar. I kept on taking my six-string with me everywhere, but I kind of felt like the guitar had betrayed me somehow.

Right about then Pop took me up to this picking party a friend of ours was putting on. He ran a music shop and was having this sort of get-together for his customers. I brought my guitar but I wasn' t expecting to do much with it.

I was kicking back under the pavilion when this little guy came over. He wanted to show me a banjo he had made. It wasn' t a bad looking banjo, and to top off there was an elaborate and pretty detailed naked lady inlaid on the resonator. The girl on the banjo was holding a panther on a gold chain and the whole thing was well done but kind of weird. Trust me, when a high school kid sees a picture of a naked woman

and can only think wow! That' s kind of weirdyou know something isn' t quite right.

"Now what in the hell are you showing a kid that for?"

I looked up and there was this huge old guy talking to the fellow who had made the banjo.

"Something wrong with you, buddy? Showing a kid that sort of thing, what are you thinking?"

I tried to tell the big guy that it wasn' t a big deal but he turned to me pointed to my guitar case, and said "Get your guitar and come with me."

I started to blow the guy off. I don' t like taking orders and I was stillpouting about my lack of any guitar skills so taking my guitar with this guy didn' t seem all that appealing at first. Then I took a look at the guitar he was carrying.

It was a Guild dreadnought and it was just about played to death. The fretboard was all gouged up and the finish was worn off the top of the guitar around the sound hole, but the creepy thing was that everything else on the guitar looked pretty new. It hit me that this guitar was only a few years old and this guy had put all of this wear on it in a fairly short period of time.

I got the feeling that I had better just go along with him and see what was going to happen. This had the potential to get real interesting.

We wandered to the far side of the picnic grounds and he flopped down on the grass, cracked his knuckles and went right into a Mississippi John Hurt song. As he was playing he started talking.

"This isn' t a bad guitar, but it' s already on its second fretboard. I wear them out every few years and once you gouge up the wood on the fretboard bad enough it gets kind of hard to keep hitting the notes just right."

I couldn' t think of anything to say. I just stood there like an idiot staringat the guy' s hands. His fingertips were so calloused that they looked more like claws, but they were just dancing around the strings.

"You just going to stand there kid or do you want to pick a bit? I don' t careeither way, I just didn' t want to leave you with that guy. Naked women with panthers? On a banjo? It' s just wrong"

I shook myself out of my daze and pulled my guitar out of its case. He looked at my chrome-plated Dobro 33-H and gave a little nod of approval. "Ah! You play the blues, do you? Let me hear you play something."

"Maybe I ought to just listen for a while. I can't seem to figure this stuff out."

He shook his head. "Let me hear what you've got and maybe I can help."

I figured it would be pretty lame to back out so I started fumbling through one of the songs I had been working on from the guitar books.

When I was halfway through the song I glanced over at the guy and he was just staring at me with this look of horror on his face. I stopped playing and the guy said, "My God, that was so bad I couldn't even tell what song it was! What do you think you are doing kid? I've got to ask because you sure ain't playing that guitar. That was bad enough to hurt my feelings!"

I threw my arms in the air in exasperation. "That's the problem, the books don't make any sense! I keep trying to play these songs and everything comes out sounding like garbage. Man, this just sucks!" I told him about all of the trouble I was having. Then I pulled one of the tab sheets from my guitar case and handed it to him.

"Oh that book! No wonder you're so confused. These guys treat everything measure by measure and never tell you how anything works." He crumpled up the piece of paper in his big claw like hand and threw it back into my guitar case. "Tune up, kid and let me show you how it works."

We went over the basics together. Play a simple rhythm and sing. Then start messing with the rhythm. He taught me the chord progression to Coffee Blues and My Creole Belle and had me play rhythm while he messed around with the melody.

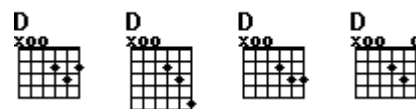
"Your alternating bass goes through it all the time. Start working on that and always try to make your first bass note the same as the name of the chord you are playing. If it's a C chord your first bass note should be a C. The second bass note ought to be a five, you know what that is?" I shook my head and he rolled his eyes and muttered something about books. "You'll

figure out the five later on. Right now your best bet is to just mess with it and go with what feels right.

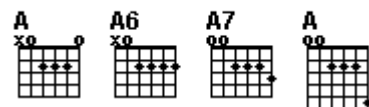
When you can play the rhythm start moving your fingers around inside the chord form. Play me a D chord. Good, now take your pinky and put it on the first string at the fifth fret and hold on to that D chord. Don't look at me like that. I know it's a reach. Now strum that and then lift your pinky off the first string so the 'normal' D chord rings out. "

"Hey, that sounds pretty cool!"

D chord variations in standard tuning:



A chord variations in standard tuning:



"Yeah, yeah, yeah. Now go back to your plain old D chord. Take your ring finger on the second string at the third fret and flatten it out so that you are hitting the first string too. Strum that, and then move your ring finger so it's just hitting the second string. Now the whole time your middle finger is still on the first string at the second fret, right? Strum that regular D chord and then lift up your middle finger so the first string is open."

"Now if you keep playing with chords like that you'll start to find all sorts of melody lines. The trick is to keep the rhythm steady. If you've got the rhythm down you'll be able to fish around and play those melody notes." He went on to show me a similar idea using the A chord, but told me to figure some G chord variations on my own

I told him that this was pretty cool, but it wasn't what the books said to do. The books said these old blues players were doing something a lot more complicated than that.

"Well, you don't want to go against that. Those guys have been a real help up till now, haven't they?"

"Yeah, you've got me there. So how do I get this sound? I want it so bad and nothing is working."

"That's the problem. You want to do what you call 'the cool stuff' right away and that won't work. You've got to build up to it."

"If I do that will I play like Mississippi?"

He broke out laughing. "Hell no. I've been playing longer than you've been alive and I can't play like Mississippi John Hurt. Nobody can. You can only play like yourself."

"But those guys in the books. . ."

"Oh, you can get a song or two down note-for-note, but that's not the blues. The guys who do that kind of thing can't do anything but copy people. The only ideas they ever seem to have were thought up for them by somebody else."

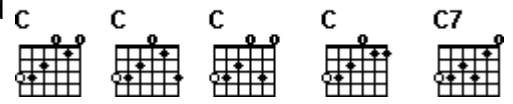
He leaned back and started running through some song in the key of D. I played rhythm while he kept on talking.

"Mississippi lived his life. You've got to live your life. You're not an old black man from the Delta. You can play the same music and sing the same songs but it's always going to be different because you're different people. You've got to be yourself, kid."

He left it at that. We played a few more songs and then my dad wandered over and joined in with his tenor banjo. When it came time to start heading for home I thanked the old guy for giving me the tips and told him that I had a lot to think about. He just grinned at me and said that I would figure it out someday if I just gave myself some time.

Over the next few weeks I started messing with the chord tricks he had shared with me on the D and A chords. When I tried the same sort of thing with a C chord everything came together. By the end of the night I

C chord variations in standard tuning:



had a simple but cool sounding arrangement of Stagolee put together along with the beginnings of a few other tunes.

I jumped up and started running around the back yard in the rain waving my arms in the air yelling, "I've got it! I've got it!" like some kind of crazy person.

I may have been a tad overenthusiastic. It took me years to actually get to a point where I even remotely thought of my playing as "good" but the funny thing was that people started complimenting me the first time I played my mongrel version of Stagolee in public. My dad got involved and started playing back up rhythm on his tenor banjo so I wouldn't start drifting out of the rhythm on more complicated songs. After a while I stopped thinking about Mississippi John Hurt. I just played the guitar the way I thought it should sound and tried my best to make musical sense. What I played changed from what I thought somebody else was doing into what I felt at the moment. I can play Mississippi John Hurt songs nowadays, but I like to twist things around and make the song suit how I feel.

I started out looking for the secret of somebody else's music and kept coming back confused and frustrated. When I decided to forget all of that and just start playing the guitar I found what I was looking for, and a lot more. I guess you could say I set out to find something in Mississippi only to find out that the answers to my questions were out on my own front porch.

You didn't think I would tell you that story without showing you what I came up with for Stagolee, did you?

In this tab file I have laid out the chord progression in quarter note strums with some bass runs mixed in. If you look at the chord progression you will see the "melody" is played by fretting the first string in your C and F chords with your little finger.

I wrote this tune out using strums so you would have a chance to work out the picking pattern on your

own. The pattern I usually use for this one is "bump-a-dit-ty, bump dit-ty" or four eighth notes followed by a quarter note and two eighth notes. I usually play the first string as a pinch to kick off each measure in order to bring out that first string melody note.

Have some fun with this song and see what you can come up with!

"Stagolee"

4/4 Time key of C

C C C C

I remember one Sep-tember on a cold and rainy night

F F F F F C

Stagolee and Billy de Lyons had an awful fight he was a

G G7 C

bad man oh cruel Stagolee

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It's A Sin

When we started billing ourselves as *The God Knows We Tried String Band* people here in Crisfield assumed that we were a gospel act. People would say, "They *have* to play gospel music. They got God in the name of the band, don' t they?" and then go on to invite us to perform at a pot luck supper or some such thing expecting us to play songs like *Rock Of Ages* or *The Old Rugged Cross* in a church hall full of Methodists eating tuna casserole.

The problem was that we didn't know that much gospel music. When you grow up in an Irish Catholic household Protestant hymns are not something you hear all that often. Our idea of gospel music was stuff like *I Saw The Light* or almost bluegrass tempo versions of *Uncloudy Day*, *When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder* and *Will The Circle Be Unbroken*. The Methodists didn't know how to handle that much rhythm in their music, and more than one performance was interrupted by somebody getting up and witnessing.

The first time that happened I didn't quite know what to do. Dear old Dad and I were just sort of standing up there with our guitars and banjos wondering if we were supposed to leave or start playing some kind of rousing background music like *Battle Hymn of the Republic* to add some drama. It kind of upset the rest of the folks too because they already knew the stuff the penitent was witnessing about. Crisfield is the kind of town where everybody knows each other's business so the guy who was pouring out his heart and unburdening his soul wasn't really dishing out any news that hadn't already been discussed weeks ago over coffee at Gordon's Confectionary.

Sometimes the witnessing was kind of surreal. There was this one service that featured a preacher in a red wool suit (it was the hottest day of the year and the hall wasn't air-conditioned) talking about Barabbas, but he kept calling him *Barnabus*. "And they said, give us Bar-knee-bus!" Pop said that he was just trying to show everybody what hell was going to be like if we didn't all behave. I allowed as I was going to be good from that point on.

After a while the folks started inviting us to play our music rather than hymns. I felt kind of weird the first time we tried playing *The Old Rugged Cross* only to have somebody in the back row yell out, "Play You Dirty Old Egg Sucking Dog!" I glanced over to the preacher who nodded and said something about God having a sense of humor and to just go ahead and (sigh) play the song about dogs that (even deeper sigh) suck eggs.

After a while we just became part of the church scenery throughout town. Given that there are more than twenty churches in Crisfield that was an awful lot of pot-luck suppers. To this day I can't see Jello without breaking out into *In The Garden*. We were two Catholic folk musicians who didn't quite get the whole Protestant thing but were part of the family anyway. Every once in a while we would crank out our overdriven version of *I Saw The Light*, but after Miss Gladys (the head church lady) got up and hollered, "I can't listen to this. I'm not Church Of God, I'm a Methodist!" as she ran out of the room one evening we figured it would be best if we stuck to playing Folk and Honky-Tonk Country in the church halls.

We were invited one weekend to play with a traveling preacher from Tennessee and I while I was kind of hesitant after my past experiences with folks witnessing I figured, "what the heck?" and agreed to be part

of the entertainment at the revival. The traveling preacher was this little guy with a big white beard who had this sort of vibe going with him that is really hard to describe. He really believed he was doing what he was put here to do and he honestly loved God. He preached like he was introducing people to his best friend. I know that might sound kind of hokey, but this guy was just cool.

The revival wasn't as much of a culture shock as I thought it would be. The evangelist knew how to preach in a way that wasn't too big on the fire and brimstone stuff and he was a pretty good guitar player.

By the time he was getting ready to move on to the next town I liked and respected the guy. He didn't even blink when people asked us to play *You Dirty Old Egg Sucking Dog*. He just played along with us and pointed out afterwards that God even loves egg-sucking dogs.

Right before he was getting ready to leave he complimented me on my guitar playing and I did what I almost always did back then. I went into to whole, "Aw, shucks, I'm not really that good" routine.

The next thing I knew the preacher turned on me just about as angry as I've ever seen anybody. He was jumping up and down and waving his guitar like he wanted to bonk me over the head. I was trying to figure out what I did or said to upset him while Dad was looking at me from across the room with that, "What have you gone and done now?" look when the preacher started talking.

"I gave you a compliment. I was trying to tell you how much I enjoyed playing the guitar with you and your dad and you have to turn around and insult me. How could you?" I started trying to say something but he was in full-blown Southern preacher mode. He wasn't talking angry anymore, it was worse than that. He was talking passionately like he really wanted me to understand this.

"False modesty isn't just a sin, Patrick. It's insulting. When somebody gives you a complement about your music that person is trying to say, 'hey, thank you for sharing with me!' and when you start that sandbagging routine you're telling that person that he's stupid, and even worse you're trying to get them to keep stroking your ego telling you how good you are. When a person comes over to compliment you they might want to ask you about something else, like as an icebreaker, to lead into maybe asking for help learning the guitar. If you love music so much would you want to drive that person away? Is it so hard just to accept the compliment like a man and say, Thank you?"

It was one of the few times in my life that I didn't have some kind of snappy comeback. I just stood there and waited for him to catch his breath. After glowering at me for a moment he said, "You play very well, Patrick. I really enjoyed your music."

I grinned at him. "Why thank you, Pastor Charlie."

He shook my hand and said that there was hope for me yet.

Ever since then I have tried to avoid making the common guitar player' mistake of answering a compliment with the "aw shucks" routine. The amazing thing about it is that the preacher was right. Nine times out of ten the compliment really is an icebreaker. My honest and direct, "thank you" is usually the opening for the person to say how he' d always wanted to play the guitar othe banjo and I always wind up sitting down and going over the basics with him or her. I make a new friend, and I get to do what I love to do by sharing the licks and tricks I picked up from the cool old dudes with a new musician.

It' s easy to do the false modesty thing. Sometimes it' s hard to accept a compliment because people are, by nature, pretty bashful. Looking somebody in the eye and just saying thank you takes, as the preacher pointed out, a measure of character.

So when somebody tells you that you have done a good job, even when you are convinced otherwise, just smile and say, "Thank you." You' ll probably make a new friend.

And if you ever hear *You Dirty Old Egg Sucking Dog* being played at a tent revival I guess Dear Old Dad and I are to blame.

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Musical Chairs

Even a fish wouldn't get into trouble if it kept its mouth shut.

-Dear Old Dad

Don' t get me wrong; I love my father. He' s my best friend and a great guy but he can sometimes take being oblivious to a Zen-like state that only some politicians in the Regan era have ever come close to matching. My dad is the guy who decided to play St. James Infirmary Blues, a song played at New Orleans Funerals, when we were visiting a friend in a hospice! When I tried to explain that this particular song might not be the best choice for the occasion he just blinked at me and said, "But it' s a good song and I like it."

On an interesting side note, everybody in the hospice; the nurses, the other folks visiting family members and even the patients all grooved on our version of St. James Infirmary Blues. Pop just grinned at me and said, "See, I told you it was a good song."

Like I said, he' s a real sweetheart, but sometimes he can be a littleoblivious and once he gets into that mode you just can' t get through to the guyLike the day he tried to get a Quaker to sing along with him on some old IRA songs. "Patrick, what does being a Quaker have to do with not wanting to sing an IRA song? The politics might stink but it' s still a good song."

To make matters worse, once you start getting frustrated with his obliviousness he starts telling you that he' s not the one with the problem. Once that starts happening even my mother, who is probably the closest thing to a saint as I' ll ever meet on this earth, can get as angry as a wet hen. This onlymakes everything worse because Pop will calmly point out that he' s not the onegetting angry. . . sometimes it' s like being trapped in a Vaudeville sketch.

Anyway, Pop was in full super-oblivious mode the day the old guys took our chairs and that was kind of what set everything into motion.

We were at this little fiddle festival in Pennsylvania and we were looking for a spot to run through the songs we were going to play before we went up on the open stage. We were both pretty new to the whole performing thing so we were both kind of nervous.

Ok, we were terrified.

We had found a spot under a shade tree that morning and set up our chairs and a cooler so we could kick back and pick all day, but as the day progressed everybody started congregating around our shade tree and with all of these instruments banging away we couldn' t hear ourselves think. In order to rurthrough our "set list" (we were so new to the game that using words like "set list" gave us shivers up and down our spines) in relative peace Pop decided to find a new spot to practice.

I asked him if he wanted to bring the chairs. He said we could come back for them. After walking around for a while Pop found a spot he liked and we stood there running through our songs and everything was groovy. Then Pop asked me to go get the chairs. For some reason I started getting a feeling of impending doom as soon as he asked me.

Now I' m not talking about lawn chairs here. These were a pair of fancy campchairs that Pop had gotten years go from this ultra high-end camping store. They fold up into these canvas bags so they are easy to

carry, they don' t have armsso you can play your guitar or banjo all night long comfortably and they were comfortable. As a matter of fact we still take them with us on the road. These are really nice chairs.

I went back to where we left the chairs and lo and behold there were these two fat old guys sitting in them. One was playing a guitar and the other had a mandolin. They looked about as happy as any two guys you' ve ever seen in yourlife. I thought about saying something and decided that they weren' t hurting anything and walked back without the chairs.

The first thing Pop wanted to know was, "Where are my chairs?"

"There' s these two old guys sitting in them."

"Who?"

"I don' t know*Old* guys."

"Let them get their own chairs."

"I think they kind of did."

"Go get my chairs."

"But Pop, there' s these old guys. . ."

"Go. Get. My. Chairs."

Oh God, he was going into oblivious mode. I started to think of some way out of the situation. Throwing myself in front of a bus would have been an option, but where was I going to find a bus in the middle of a cornfield? I held my arms up to sky thinking, "Take me now, Lord." I was caught between a dad and a hard place and I couldn' t think of any way out of the situation.

"Do we really need the chairs right now?"

"Listen to me. Go. Get. My. Chairs"

"But. . ."

"Go. Get. My. Chairs"

So I stomped back across the field bemoaning my fate. I wasn' t surprised thatthe two old geezers were

still happily perched in our chairs like a couple of buzzards on a fresh road kill. I took a deep breath, reminded myself just how much this sucked, and walked up to them.

"Hey guys, you' re making some nice music there."

The old guy with the mandolin beamed up at me. "Thanks kid. We' re just kicking back here. Somebody left these chairs in a really nice spot."

"Yeah, about those chairs. . ."

"I' ll tell you, we' re not as young as we used to be. Should have brought some chairs for ourselves but just our luck we found these! It' s too hot to be out walking around at our age. You want to pick a few with us, kid?"

"Actually, I kind of need your chairs. Well, these are my chairs and I need to take them over there."

"Oh, you want to sit down?"

"Ah, not really. I' m getting ready to go on stage. Pop just wants the chairs over there now."

The old guys were not happy. They didn' t want to give up the chairs and didn' t want to go back and explain to Captain Oblivious why I wasn' t bringing the chairs back. When they saw that I was also taking the cooler (our cooler) they got even more worked up. I was hot, I was nervous about going on stage and I knew there was no way to win so I just took a deep breath and said, "Give me back my ' blanketyblank-blank' chairs."

Except I didn' t say "blanketyblank-blank."

That got the message across. My relatives are mostly blue collar types so I kind of learned how to swear from professionals. Even as a kid I could cuss bad enough to make these old guys wince. They left muttering about foulmouthed kids not having any respect nowadays and that someday the shoe was going to be on the other foot. I didn' t feel great about what had happened, but I told myself not to worry about it.

After all, what could a pair of old guys do?

As I walked up with the chairs Pop started saying that maybe we should have just let the old guys have the chairs. It' s not like they were hurting anything."You make a big deal about everything, Patrick. You always overreact."

I was too speechless to do anything but drop the chairs and wander off by myself for a moment. I told myself to chill out. That it was all over and that the rest of the day would go smoothly, I had had my disaster of the day.

I was still telling myself that when I climbed up on the stage with Pop. I was still telling myself that as we said hello to the crowd and started our first song.

I stopped telling myself that when I saw the two old guys grinning at me from the side of the stage.

Years later while watching the old rerun of the Twilight Zone episode where William Shatner sees the gremlin on the airplane wing I had a flashback of those two old guys at the edge of the stage.

They gave me a little wave, a big grin and then the mandolin player swung his instrument up into playing position. He started quietly chopping along with us. He fell into our rhythm as easy as you please.

I thought the old guys were going to let bygones be bygones. I sort of nodded at them and gave them a big friendly grin.

The guitar player grinned back, but it wasn't a friendly grin. He looked at the mandolin player and they nodded to each other like they were getting ready to launch some kind of plan. I started trying to signal Pop that something was up, but he just gave me this puzzled look and gave me a frown and a slightly emphatic nod to let me know that my solo was coming up and I had better get myself together.

I was, not for the first time that day, caught between a dad and a hard place. I took a deep breath, closed my eyes for a second and got ready to kick into the solo for Wreck Of The Old 97 when all of a sudden I heard this mandolin playing some crazy off the wall rhythm.

It was just enough to completely throw me out of time with the music. I blew the solo and had to really struggle to get back into time with my dad. Pop was looking daggers at me and between verses mouthing,, "What the hell is wrong with you?"

I glanced over at the old guys and they were laughing so hard they were doubled over. The song came around to the next solo and I looked over to see the mandolin guy getting ready to throw me off again. I pleaded to him with my eyes. I mouthed, "I'm sorry" to them.

They only laughed harder and the mandolin player shot his cuffs and dramatically got ready to play.

My solo came around again and once again the mandolin kicked in just at the right point and threw me off

again. On my one side the old duffers were nearly in hysterics and on my other side Pop was giving me his patented ' wait until thøide home' scowl .

I glanced over at the mandolin player again. He batted his eyes at me and gave me a little "toodle-loo" wave of his fingers. His buddy cracked up. I glanced over at Pop and he was mouthing, "It' s your ass."

"Oh man," I thought to myself, "I am so screwed."

We played three more songs and at some point in every song the old guy with the mandolin kicked in and threw me off. It was like the maneuver you see the cops use on reality TV where the police will give a speeding car this little bump just in the right spot and send the other car flying end over end. After a while just the anticipation of that mandolin kicking in was enough to throw me off.

I have never played this badly, before or after, in my entire life. I was getting my backside kicked up and down the stage by an old guy who knew exactly what he was doing. This was a payback, and I was finding out firsthand that paybacks really are hell. We got through the set and the audience gave us the kind of applause you get when you do badly and everybody is trying to be nice. Pop was asking me what went wrong and I told him I' d fill him in later.

I wanted to go find those old guys.

They were waiting for me not too far from the stage. I walked up to them and they were looking at me like they didn' t know what to expect. I think even they knew the joke had gone a wee bit too far. I mean, they had practically pulled my pants down in front of a couple of thousand people. I looked at them both and gave a little chuckle as I shook my head and said, "I' ll tell you guys something, that was a pretty good trick with the mandolin. Are we even now?"

"Oh yeah, kid. We just figured you needed to learn a little lesson. No hard feelings?" I thought to myself, a lesson? Why you nasty old goat those were my chairs . . . ah, let it go, Patrick. You' ve been got and you' ve been got good. If you don' t let this go the next time will be worse." So I took a deep breath and said, "Not if you tell me how you knew how to throw me off like that!"

He said that was easy. I was so tense and worked up that all he had to do was give me a nudge and my nerves would do the rest.

Not a bad trick.

So we all shook hands and laughed it off. I promised that if one of them swiped our chairs down the road

I'd either let it slide or let Pop get his own stinking chairs and that was pretty much that.

As I was walking away the mandolin player said, "I'll tell you what kid, the look on your face was priceless!" And we all broke out laughing, at least they did. I just sort of gritted my teeth and said something about buzzards under my breath, but the guitar player started mimicking the way I looked on stage and even I had to laugh so it ended on a good note.

Well, almost. I still had to explain everything to Pop. That wasn't going to be easy because he was still in oblivious mode and he wanted to strangle me for making an ass out of both of us on stage. The first thing he asked me when I walked back over to him was, "What the hell was wrong with you?"

"The old guys were getting even about the chairs."

"What old guys?"

"The guys in our chairs. Remember; Go. Get. My. Chairs?"

"I didn't say it like that. Why didn't you just let them have the chairs?"

I took a deep breath. "Pop, I told you there were old guys in the chairs and you said. . ."

"You didn't say they were musicians. See, you got mouthy with somebody and it backfired on you. You're just like your grandfather. Everything is a confrontation with you. . ."

I interrupted him and explained what had happened with the mandolin guy and that everything was cool now and that I had "learned a valuable lesson about life."

All the way home Pop kept on reminding me that none of this would have happened if I had just let the old guys use the chairs. I didn't argue with him Pop drives me crazy sometimes, but the upshot to this whole misadventure was that I had learned a cool new trick, sorta-kinda made a pair of new friends and had managed to make a fool out of myself in front of a whole lot of people without dying.

Besides, occasionally oblivious or not, I still love the guy.

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Going With The Flow

... the mind is desperate to fix the river in place: Possessed by ideas of the past, preoccupied with images of the future, it overlooks the plain truth of the moment.

-The Hua Hu Ching

There is a story about an old man who was walking along the edge of a mighty river one day when he slipped and fell into the water. Witnesses were horrified to see him swept away into the rapids and they rushed downstream convinced that there was no way such a frail old man could survive the sheer force of the river. By the time the crowd got downstream they were shocked to find the old guy sitting on the bank of the river wringing out his socks. When he was asked how he survived the rapids he just shrugged and said, "I didn' t fight the current. When the river went left, I went left. When the river went right, I went right. I accommodated myself to where the water wanted to take me. That is how I survived."

When you go out to your first jam session you are going to feel like you are caught in the rapids. By the time you realize that a chord change is coming everybody else in the group will have already played that chord change and will be getting ready for the next one. It' s frustrating, but every person who eveplayed a musical instrument has gone through it.

Part of the trick of getting through that stage kind of requires the same kind of logic the old man in the story used to survive the rapids. Rather than planning out ahead of time how the song is going to turn out you have to just sort of roll with the music. When a chord change comes along you just play it without thinking too much about it. I know, to a person who hasn' t been playingthe guitar for a while that looks and sounds like a feat of magic but it' sreally just the end result of a lot of practice.

Keep things simple. To a beginner, simple might mean just playing the thumb-brush and following the chord progression while an advanced player might think something else but the logic still applies. When you start going to jam sessions don' t worry about playing perfectly or impressing anybody. Just playyour guitar and focus on playing in time with the group.

When you run into something that gives you trouble make a note of it and use your practice time until the next jam to focus on getting stronger on that technique. At the next jam you' ll find a new problem to work on. It never really ends.

Just play, sing and enjoy playing the guitar. Learn to roll along with the music and you' ll find the "rapids" of a jam session as easy to play through as a walk in the park.

Get lost

This is the part where I say to you "Get lost. Go on and work on that. Don' t come back until you can do like we showed you."

There is more I' d like to share with you. There are more songs, more techniques and more stories but that is going to have to wait until Volume Two. In the next book we are going to go over some cool blues and country guitar licks and tricks as well as more music theory and more stories.

I' ll tell you about Amish Elvis, The Banjo and Doughnut Marching Society and the day the bagpiper attacked. But for right now, you' ve got enough stuff to work on. In the end there is always more to learn. That' s the amazing thing about music. It' s a path that just keeps going.

I wish you the best. I hope the guitar brings great joy to your life and the lives of the people around you. I hope you are never embarrassed to sing. I hope you are never afraid to try. I hope that you manage to ignore the people who say it can' t be done.

Remember to look around you. If you see a need fill it. Always be willing to make time to show somebody a lick or two. When you have a bad day make a donation to charity in the name of somebody you really don' t like. Be the change you want to see in the world. And never step in anything soft.

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