

TAKING A G-CHORD ON A TOUR OF THE GUITAR

In the last issue of FolkWorks, we “de-constructed” a C-chord on the guitar and used what we learned to “construct” a G-chord. Now, we will extend that method to find every way to play a G-chord anywhere on the fret board. Remember that a major chord is constructed from the 1st, 3rd and 5th notes of the major scale. The 1-3-5 notes in the key of G are G-B-D. By using the same process we used last time (see www.FolkWorks.org) and continuing up the neck, we can get a map of the different ways to play a G-chord. This gives us more options and lets us select the groupings of notes (sometimes called “voicings”) that make the best fit between the chord and its musical placement. Taking only the G’s, B’s and D’s from Figure 1 produces Figure 2 showing all the possible ways of producing a G-chord on the guitar. Figures 3-10 show the various ways that a G chord can be played up and down the fretboard.

Customarily, the full fret-board is presented horizontally with the lower-numbered frets to the left. Individual chord charts, however, are usually oriented vertically with the low numbered frets toward the top. I have chosen to present the chord charts horizontally to make it easier to see how they were extracted from the notes in Figure 2.

Most people play a G chord as shown in Figure 3. This type of chord usually includes some open strings and is commonly used in folk music. To enhance the folksy sound, try adding the 3rd fret on the second string to the chord as shown in Figure 4. This brings in another D or 5th to the chord. Since the 5th is also referred to as the dominant degree of the scale, the chord is called a “double dominant”. This type of chord is heard in rock-n-roll and folk-rock. Jackson Browne’s “Take it Easy” starts out with a nice double dominant sound.

Once we start moving up the neck, the inclusion of open strings becomes less appropriate except for special effects. When a chord has no open strings it is said to be in a closed position. The nice thing about closed chords is that they are movable. Since there are no open strings every note in the chord gets promoted as you move the chord up the neck. Figure 5 is an example of a barred chord, a particular type of closed position chord where you lay your index finger down across all the strings at a particular fret. When you bar across a fret, it is as though the fret board begins there or as if you placed a capo at that fret. In Figure 5, we are playing an E-chord configuration under the bar but since we are barring at the 3rd fret the chord is promoted (moved up) from E through 1-F, to 2-F# then to 3-G.

Some people find barred chords to be too difficult to hold down or too difficult for rapid chord changes. Figure 6 is another example of the same chord without barring. If you can manage to bring your thumb around to play the 6th string while keeping your pinkie on the 5th string then you have a fully closed chord. If you can’t manage the bottom two strings then just don’t play them.

A great technique available with closed chords is the ability to damp the chord. Here’s how: play the chord then release the pressure on your left hand to stop or dampen the sound. Bluegrass musicians typically use this technique when playing back-up chords on the mandolin to create that “chunk-chunk” sound you

hear. The chord is struck all at once with a rapid brush and then the chord is dampened, giving a rhythmic punch that helps to vitalize the music. It is also used in jazz to get more rhythmic control when playing chords. Another nice technique available with closed chords is to play the chord one fret up or one fret down and then resolve it to the intended position.

If you look around the 7th fret in Figure 2, you will see what looks like the familiar D-chord position. We can use this as in Figure 7 or Figure 8 again using our newfound options. Notice a C-chord configuration a bit above the 7th fret—it can be played as shown in Figure 9. Looking at the tenth fret you should recognize a barred A-chord position as shown in Figure 10. The 12th fret is up an octave from the open G chord in Figure 3, and the patterns start to repeat. When the 12th fret is barred, you pick up three of the notes from the barred A-chord position. These are also equivalent to the three open strings as shown in Figure 3, so we have completed our journey up the neck.

What was done here with the G-chord on the guitar can be done with any chord on any stringed instrument. If you pick up a stringed instrument that you have never even seen before, all you need to know is the names of the open strings and you should be playing chords within a few minutes. Won’t your friends be impressed when they see you master the balalaika in less than five minutes?

A lot was covered this time including a tour of the entire fret board, a little about open and closed chords, some techniques to use with closed chords and, of course, how to play the balalaika in under five minutes. Try some of these techniques and stay tuned.



BY
ROGER
GOODMAN

E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F
B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C
G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#
D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#
A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#
E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F

Figure 1 - Guitar Fret Board - Note Names

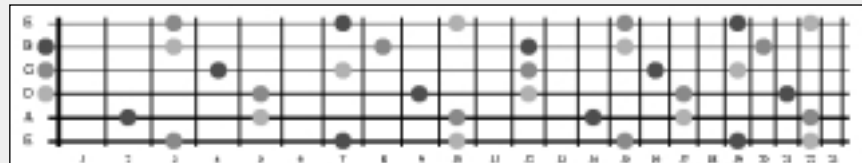


Figure 2 - All Possible G Major Chords

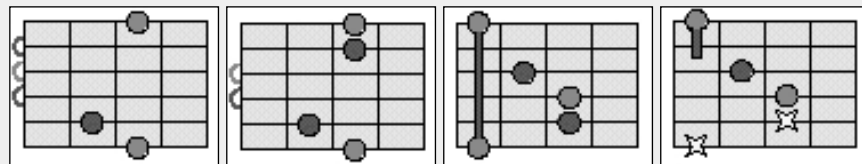


Figure 3 - G Chord - Open

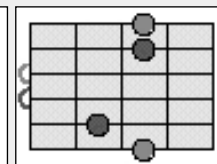


Figure 4 - G Chord - Double Dominant

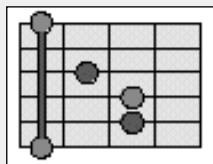


Figure 5 - Barred E - Closed - 3rd Fret

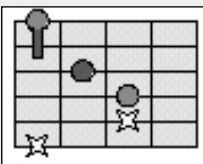


Figure 6 - Partial F - Closed - 3rd Fret

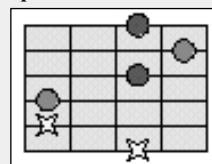


Figure 7 - D Position - 7th Fret

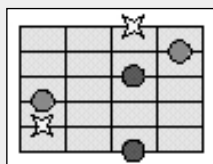


Figure 8 - Partial D Position - 7th Fret

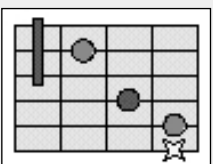


Figure 9 - C Position - 7th Fret

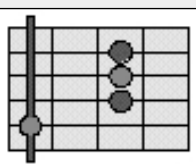


Figure 10 - Barred A - 10th Fret

Graphics generated at these web sites: <http://www.power-chord.com/gaff> & <http://www.musicwired.com>

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