

The Basics in Playing Open Tuned Guitar

by
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What you will need

A steel string guitar. Nylon stringed guitars do not work too well in open tuning. There are so many different makes of guitar these days it is difficult to recommend a particular model of guitar. Price is usually a good guide though not always. Try to borrow a guitar first and also look out for a second-hand guitar. Preferably when buying a guitar go along to the shop with someone who knows something. For second-hand guitars, particularly if bought from individuals rather than shops, try to find out the current purchase price. Ebay is a good place to look these days. When you are sure that guitar playing is for you then spend as much as you can afford you'll never regret it.

A note about strings. There are different gauges of string. You will probably find that light or medium gauge will be what you will prefer. The lighter gauge strings are easier on the fingers but they wear out quicker. Light gauge strings have .012 on the first string. Strings are important in the sound you will produce. Change them regularly don't simply wait for a string to break. It also works best if you change all the strings at once.

A capo. This is a must for playing in open tuning as it is the only way to change the key (i.e. raising or lowering the pitch of a tune). Shubb Capos are the best but they are the most expensive and most difficult to get hold of in this country. Any capo will do and all guitar shops sell them.

A plectrum or pic. Experiment with the different types of pick to find one that suits you. There are also different gauges and different sizes of pick. Fine or Medium will probably be what you need. Don't forget that picks do affect the sound that you produce and they do wear out so they need changing every so often.

The "open tuning" as compared to the "standard tuning"

When we refer to open tuning we mean that the strings are tuned in such a way as to sound harmonious to each other or "in tune" without having to use the left hand (assuming we are right handed) to finger any positions on the fret board. There are many different kinds of open tuning. In the Dances we use one based on the tuning of the Tanpura- the instrument that creates drone sound that can always be heard behind Northern Indian Classical music.

Standard tuning is the way most people who play guitar tune their guitars and here, if we don't use the left hand to finger the frets then when we play then the guitar will sound "out of tune".

The initial benefit of open tuning is that much can be done without having to learn the "chords" essential for standard tuning. But in the Dances, developing skill in open tuning definitely adds something both rhythmically and harmonically to a Dance which cannot be achieved with standard tuning. So it is not just a soft option.

Most tunes can be played in either open tuning or standard. There are some that can only be played successfully in open and some only in standard. There are enough tunes to keep you going in open tuning for

a considerable time.

Tuning

It is important that the guitar is in tune each time you play and unfortunately it can be difficult for some people to tune their guitars initially. To begin with try to get a friend to tune it for you. In the absence of a friend you will have to learn sooner yourself. If you are playing on your own the relative pitch of the instrument is not crucial but the relationship of the strings of the guitar to each other is. Successful Tuning depends on the ability to hear that the strings are either in tune or out of tune. This comes with practice.

There are also electronic tuning devices available which are excellent and though they are expensive they can be worth it. Also pitch pipes can be used which produce a sound like a harmonica. You match the sound of the pipe to the sound of the string. And if you have access to a piano and understand the keyboard you can tune to the piano

Open Tuning in the Key of G

Standard tuning

E 1st
B 2nd
G 3rd
D 4th
A 5th
E 6th

down to
down to
same
same
down to
up to

Open tuning

D
G
G
D
G
G

If you don't understand standard tuning then the above is not very helpful to you. To tune your guitar relative to itself the strings have a certain relationship to each other. As you now know it GGDGGD. As a melody this sounds like the first three notes of the nursery rhyme Ba Ba Black Sheep sung once and then an octave higher.

But the note given by one open string will match the string next to it in some way. Either it will be the same sound, as in the case of the 6th and 5th strings and the 2nd and 3rd strings or it will be a note on a certain fret. The open 1st string is the same note as the 7th fret on the 2nd and 3rd strings. So we can tune the guitar in this way.

1st string D sounds the same as the 2nd string 7th fret

2nd string G sounds the same as the 3rd string open

3rd string G sounds the same as the 4th string 5th fret

4th string D sounds the same as the 5th string 7th fret

5th string G sounds the same as the 6th string open

6th string G sounds the same as the 5th string open

When we put the capo on a certain fret this raises or lowers the key of the instrument. (i.e. the pitch at which it is played).

For the key of C place the capo on the 5th fret

For the key of D place the capo on the 7th fret

For the key of A place the capo on the 2nd fret

These four keys will cover most of the Dances you will be likely to play.

The First Steps

It could be said that Music is based on melody, rhythm and harmony. What follows is a short introduction to rhythm and melody.

Rhythm.

It could be said that Music is based on melody, rhythm and harmony. There are two main rhythms used in the Dances.

4/4. This means the rhythmic cycle repeats itself every four beats.

Count One Two Three Four. One Two Three Four. One Two Three Four.

Clap the beats if you like. This is 4/4 Time.

3/4. This means the rhythmic cycle repeats itself every three beats.

Count One Two Three, One Two Three, One Two Three, with an emphasis on the first beat. This is Waltz time. Clap the beats if you like. This is 3/4 Time.

These are not the only rhythms used in the Dances and there are variations of 4/4 (e.g 2/4) and 3/4 (e.g 6/8) as well as 5/4 and others but they are all you need to think about now.

Each repeating cycle is called in music a "bar". So in 4/4 time there are 4 beats to the bar and in 3/4 there are 3 beats to the bar. So strum this using down strokes with the right hand.

4/4- 1 2 3 4 / 1 2 3 4 / 1 2 3 4
down down down down down down down down down down

Get really comfortable with this so you can play it without any effort at all. Make sure each stroke is the same length.

Hold the pick firmly yet flexibly between the thumb and the first two fingers. The main grip is with the

thumb and first finger and the second finger acts as a stabiliser. Feel that the wrist is relaxed. Try to achieve a balance between hitting the strings too hard and too lightly. Make sure you strike all the strings in a flowing motion. After a while try varying the speed you play, between really slow and fast. Make sure you don't lose the rhythm.

Then try.

4/4 1 2 3 4 and // 1 2 3 4 and
down down down down / up down down down down / up etc

On the 4th beat of each bar the stroke is an up and a down stroke that lasts exactly the same length of time as the first 3 down strokes. If you count down/up strokes as e.g. 4/and this helps with the rhythm.

Then try

4/4 1 2 and 3 4 and // 1 2 and 3 4 and
down down/up down down/up // down down/up down down/up

Where the 2nd and 4th down /up strokes are the same length as the 1st and 3rd down strokes.

3/4 1 2 3 // 1 2 3 // 1 2 3
down down down // down down down down down down

Make sure the emphasis is on the 1st beat - Daah Dah Dah

3/4 1 2 3 and // 1 2 3 and
down down down/up down down down/up

Practice all of these variations until you can do them without thinking and can change between them effortlessly.

Learning an instrument is a journey of exploration. There is a lot of repetition. Get used to this. There is always something to notice as you go along. Practicing every day for at least short period is the best way to progress. Getting into your own physical rhythm of practicing at the same time every day can also be a good idea.

Melody

Hopefully you are familiar with some of the dance tunes already. If not get some of the recordings and start to listen – over and over. When you become proficient at the above rhythm exercises then begin to sing a tune as you do the strumming. Pick something simple like The Kalama, Sat Nam Dance or the Introductory Bismillah. (These tunes are all on the USA 1 CD).

For the Introductory Bismillah Dance use the key of G (i.e. no capo). For The Kalama and Ek Ong Kar use the key of C (i.e. capo on the 5th fret). Linking the sacred phrase in this way to your playing is the foundation of playing well for the Dances. You may not succeed in doing this the first few times. Don't worry just relax and keep trying. When you do get it you will notice that you can sing a tune and play the guitar without even

using your left hand. You could accompany many Dances in this basic way. Also this comes in useful if you are a dance leader and you need to use your left hand to demonstrate movements as a dance progresses.

Melody is based on scales. The two most common scales in western music and also the Dances are The Major Scale and The Minor Scale. The Major scale is the familiar Do Re Mi Fa So La Ti Do. Scales are always based on 8 notes. The 1st and the 8th being what is called an Octave "apart."

Scales carry on going either up or down in the same sequence of notes. So that the Do at the end of one Octave is the same note Do at the beginning of the next Octave. As an example if a man and a woman sing the same note the man's note will generally be an octave below the woman's. They sing the same note but because the natural vocal range of men and women differs they will sing an octave apart.

To play melodically on the guitar it helps to learn the scales by heart.

The Major Scale

| | FRETS | | | | |
|-----|-------------|---|---|---|--|
| S 1 | <u>OPEN</u> | 2 | 4 | 5 | |
| T 2 | | | | | |
| R 3 | <u>OPEN</u> | 2 | 4 | 5 | |
| I 4 | <u>OPEN</u> | 2 | 4 | | |
| N 5 | <u>OPEN</u> | 2 | 4 | 5 | |
| G 6 | | | | | |

To finger the frets correctly with the left hand your nails will need to be short. To fret a string, place a finger behind a fret as close as possible to the metal bar without touching it. This will help avoid either muffled sounds or rattles. You may find it painful on the fingers to start with but gradually the ends of the fingers harden up. When playing single notes the pick tends to be held nearer its lower point.

You need grip the pick slightly harder playing single notes than in strumming.

In the first instance begin on the 3rd string.

Play open 3rd string
Then 2nd fret with the 1st finger
Then 4th fret with the 3rd finger
Then 5th fret with the 4th finger

Move on to 1st string and play open 1st
Then 2nd fret with the 1st finger
Then 4th fret with the 3rd finger
Then 5th fret with the 4th finger

(If possible from the beginning get used to this fingering. Otherwise use the 2nd finger for the 4th frets and the 3rd finger for the 5th frets.)

When you are comfortable with this then go on to include the lower scale beginning on the 5th string in the same way and using the same fingering.

Practice this until it is perfect.

You will remember from the tuning diagram that the tuning we are using is GGDGGD. The 6th, 5th and 4th strings are an octave lower than the 3rd, 2nd and 1st strings. So when we play this scale we are playing it over two octaves.

Play all the notes as down strokes of the pick at first. When you are comfortable with the scale as down strokes try to alternate between down and up strokes of the pick. So that the first note you play is a down stroke; the second is an up stroke; the third a down stroke; the fourth an up stroke and so on. Learning to play in this way is the key to faster playing later on as there is an economy of movement of the right hand.

Minor Scale

| | FRETS | | | |
|-----|-------------|----------|----------|----------|
| S 1 | <u>OPEN</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>5</u> |
| T 2 | | | | |
| R 3 | <u>OPEN</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>5</u> |
| I 4 | <u>OPEN</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>4</u> | |
| N 5 | <u>OPEN</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>5</u> |
| G 6 | | | | |

As with the Major scale initially begin with the 3rd string

Play open 3rd

Then 2nd fret with the first finger

Then 3rd fret with the 3rd finger

Then 5th fret with the 4th finger

Move on to the 1st string Play the open 1st string.

Then 2nd fret with the 1st finger

Then 4th fret with the 3rd finger

Then 5th fret with the 4th finger

Again practice this until you are fairly comfortable and then go on to begin on the 5th string as in the Major scale.

Notice the different feeling the Minor Scale has compared with the Major scale. When you listen to the dance music try to decide whether tunes are in a major key or a minor key. Work with the feelings. Also try to decide whether they are in 4/4 time or 3/4 time. Another thing is try to work out which note of the scale a tune starts.

A note on the use of the capo

As mentioned placing the capo on a certain fret raises the pitch of the instrument or, as we say, it changes the key. I mentioned earlier that the four main keys used in the Dances are G (nocapo), A (capo 2nd fret), C (capo 5th fret), D (capo 7th fret). When we change a tune from one key to another, which usually in the Dances is because it is easier for most people to sing in a particular key, this is called transposing. The beauty of the

capo is that though we change the key we don't have to learn a different set of fingerings for the scales. Wherever you have the capo on your guitar treat the next fret as the 1st fret.

Playing Melodies

I have included five of the Dance tunes that give a variety of rhythms and scales. The tunes are written in a form of tablature that means you can play the notes on the guitar without having to learn to read music. You may find things work best if you concentrate on one tune at a time until you can play it without looking at the sheets. Then move on to the next tune. Also make sure you are familiar with the melodies by listening to the tapes. Get the rhythm first. This is indicated on the two lower lines of the tablature. Next try singing the melody over the strumming with the right hand. Then begin to play the melody while keeping the rhythm going. The melody is indicated on the lines beginning "**string**" and "**open**" means play the open string and a number means play the fret indicated by the number.

e.g string 3. 4 2
4. open

Where we play the 3rd string 4th fret, then the 3rd string 2nd fret and then the 4th string open.

Melody and rhythm for THE KALAMA (major scale)

This tune is on USA CD 1. Usually played in the key of C. Place capo on the 5th fret. 4/4 Rhythm.

As you have practiced the major scale you will notice that all the notes in this tune are in that scale.

| | | | | |
|------------|----------------|---------|-----------|--------------|
| | LA-----AAA | IL | LA-----A | HA----- |
| String 3 - | open open open | 2 | 4 4 | open o pen |
| 4/4 - | / / / | // | / / | / // |
| Strum - | down down down | down/up | down down | down down/up |

| | | | | | |
|----------|----------------|-----------------|-----------|--------------|---------------|
| | EL----- | AL-----LAH----- | HU | | Repeat |
| String 3 | 5 | 4 2 | open open | | Three |
| 4/4 | / / / | // / / | / // | | Times |
| Strum | down down down | down/up | down down | down down/up | |

ON THIRD TIME 4TH BAR IS LIKE THIS -

| | | | |
|----------|----------------|---------|-------|
| | LA----- | HU | MO |
| String 3 | 2 | open | |
| String 4 | | | 0 pen |
| 4/4 | / / / | // | |
| Strum | down down down | down/up | |

| | | | | | |
|----------|-------------------|--------|-----------|--------------|---------------|
| | HAM----- | MUD | DAH | RAS | |
| String 3 | open open open | 2 | 4 4 | 4 open | Repeat |
| 4/4 | / / // | / / // | / / // | / / | Twice |
| Strum | down down down/up | down | down down | down/up down | |

| | | | | |
|----------|----------------|---------|----------------|---------|
| | SUL----- | LIL | LAH----- | MO |
| String 3 | 5 5 5 | 4 | 2 2 2 | |
| String 4 | | | | open |
| 4/4 | / / / | // | / / / | // |
| | down down down | down/up | down down down | down/up |

Melody and Rhythm for SAT NAM DANCE (major scale)

This tune is on USA CD 1. Usually played in the key of C. Place capo on the 5th fret

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------|------|------|--------------|------|------|----------|--------------|---|
| | EK | ONG | KAR----- | SAT | E | NAM----- | | |
| String 3 | open | open | open | 2 | 2 | 2 | | |
| 4 | | | | | | | | |
| 4/4 | / | / | / / / | / | / | / | / / | / |
| strum | down | down | down down/up | down | down | down | down down/up | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------|------|------|---------|---------|--------|-----------|--------------|--------|
| | SI | RI | WA----- | AH | E----- | GURU----- | | |
| String 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | open | open | open | REPEAT |
| 4 | | | | | | | | TWICE |
| 4/4 | / | / | / | / / | / | / | / | / / |
| strum | down | down | down | down/up | down | down | down down/up | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------|------|------|---------|---------|--------|------|------|---------|
| | SI | RI | WA----- | AH | E----- | GURU | JI | |
| String 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 7 | 7 |
| 4 | | | | | | | | |
| 4/4 | / | / | / | / / | / | / | / | / / |
| strum | down | down | down | down/up | down | down | down | down/up |

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------|------|------|---------|---------|------|------|------|---------|
| | SI | RI | WA----- | AH | E--- | GU | RU | |
| String 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | open | 2 | 4 | REPEAT |
| 4 | | | | | | | | TWICE |
| 4/4 | / | / | / | / / | / | / | / | / / |
| Strum | down | down | down | down/up | down | down | down | down/up |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------------|----------|-----------|------|---------|--|--|
| ON THE 2ND TIME | String 3 | E----- | GU | RU | | |
| THROUGH PLAY | 4 | open open | open | open | | |
| IN THE LAST BAR | | / / | / | / / | | |
| | Strum | down down | down | down/up | | |

Notice in the 6th bar that we use the 3rd string 7th fret which is same note as the 1st string open. I use this because I prefer the fuller sound that the 3rd string gives. It is easier to play the 1st string open for this note so feel free to use the variation you feel most comfortable with.

Music and Rhythm for the MAY DAY DANCE (Maior scale)

Tune on USA Tape 5. Key of D. Capo on 7th fret. 3/4 Rhythm

| | | | | | |
|----------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|-------------------|
| 1st time | As | Sa | la-----am | Al | Lei----- |
| 2nd time | Peace | | Be----- | | With----- |
| string 1 | | | | | |
| 3 | open | open | open | open | open |
| 4 | | | | | |
| 3/4 | / / | / / | / / | / / | / / |
| strum | down down | down/up | down down | down/up | down down down/up |

| | | | | | | |
|----------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|
| 1st time | Kum | Wa | Lei | Kum | A-----s | Sa |
| 2nd time | You | And | with | | you | be |
| string 1 | | | | | open | 4 |
| 3 | | open | 4 | 4 | | |
| 4 | open | | | | | |
| 3/4 | / / // | | | | | |
| strum | down down | down/up | down down | down/up | down down | down/up |

| | | | | | | |
|----------|------------|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|
| 1st time | Lam----- | | | | As | Sa |
| 2nd time | Peace----- | | | | Peace | |
| String 1 | | | | | | |
| 3 | 5 | | | | 5 | 5 |
| 4 | | | | | | |
| 3/4 | / / / / | / / | / / | / / | / / | / / |
| Strum | down down | down/up | down down | down/up | down down | down/up |

| | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------|---------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 st Time | Lam----- | A | Lei----- | Kum----- | Wa |
| 2 nd Time | be | | With | You | And |
| String 1 | | | | | |
| 3 | 2 | 5 | 4 | open | 4 |
| 4 | | | | | |
| 3/4 | / / / / | / / | / / | / / | / / |
| Strum | down down | down/up | down down | down/up | down down down/up |

| | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 st Time | Lei----- | Kum | A----- | Sa | Lam----- |
| 2 nd Time | With----- | | You----- | be | Peace----- |
| String 1 | | | | | |
| 3 | 2 | | | 2 | open |
| 4 | | open | 4 | | |
| 3/4 | / / / / | / / | / / | / / | / / / / / / / / |
| Strum | down down | down/up | down down | down/up | down down down/up down down down/up |

Music and Rhythm for the Peace Darood (Minor scale)

Tune on USA Tape 2. Key of D. Capo on 7th fret. 3/4 Rhythm

| | | | | | | |
|----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | AL LAH | HU | MA----- | SAL | LE----- | Al |
| String 3 | open open | | open | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| 4 | | 3 | | | | |
| 3/4 | / / // | / / // | / / // | / / // | / / // | / / // |
| Strum | down down down | down down down | down down down | down down down | down down down | down down down |

| | | | | | | | |
|----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | La----- | | Mi----- | F | Ta | Hee | Da |
| String 3 | open | | | | | 2 | 2 |
| 4 | | | 3 | | 3 | | |
| 3/4 | / / // | / / // | / / // | / / // | / / // | / / // | / / // |
| Strum | down down down | down down down | down down down | down down down | down down down | down down down | down down down |

| | | | | |
|----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | Ru | Sa | La | Me----- |
| String 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | open |
| 3/4 | / / // | / / // | / / // | / / // |
| Strum | down down down | down down down | down down down | down down down |

Music and Melody for Kwan Zeon Bosai (Minor scale)

Tune on USA Tape 1. Minor Key of D. Capo on 7th Fret. 4/4 Rhythm.

| | | | | | | |
|----------|------|------|---------|------|---------|---------|
| | KWA | AN | ZE | ON | BO----- | SAI |
| String 3 | | open | open | | open | open |
| 4 | 3 | | | 3 | | |
| 4/4 | / | / | / | // | / | / |
| Strum | down | down | down/up | down | down | down/up |

| | | | | | | |
|----------|------|------|---------|------|------|---------|
| | KWA | AN | ZE | ON | BO | SAI |
| String 3 | | open | open | | open | |
| 4 | 3 | | | 3 | | 3 |
| 4/4 | / | / | // | / | / | / |
| strum | down | down | down/up | down | down | down/up |

| | | | | | | |
|----------|------|---------|------|---------|------|---------|
| | KWA | AN | ZE | ON | BO | SAI |
| string 3 | | | | | | |
| 4 | open | | 3 | 3 | open | |
| 5 | | | | | | 5 |
| 4/4 | / | / | / | // | / | / |
| Strum | down | down/up | down | down/up | down | down/up |

| | | | | | | |
|----------|------|---------|------|---------|---------|---------|
| | KWA | AN | ZE | ON | BO----- | SAI |
| String 3 | | | | | open | |
| 4 | open | | 3 | 3 | | |
| 4/4 | / | / | / | // | / | / |
| Strum | down | down/up | down | down/up | down | down/up |
