

II — V — I

for solo or two electric guitars

Larry Polansky

for Brian McLaren and Carter Scholz

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for two electric guitars

GUITAR I

(II)	(V)	(I)	
D	F↓	E	(1st string)
C↓	B	Bb↓	
G#↓	G	G	
D	C#↓	C	
A	A	Bb↓	
D	G	C	(6th string)

GUITAR II

(II)	(V)	(I)	
Eb	Eb↑	E	(1st string)
Bb↑	B	B	
F#↓	F↓	F#↓	
D	D	D	
A	G	G	
D	D	E	(6th string)

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solo electric guitar

Version A

(II)	(V)	(I)	
E \downarrow ₁₁	Db \downarrow ₇	Eb ₃	(1st string)
Ab \downarrow ₇	Bb ₃	C ₅	
F ₃	G ₅	Gb \downarrow ₇	
D ₅	Cb \uparrow ₁₃	D \downarrow ₁₁	
Gb \uparrow ₁₃	A \downarrow ₁₁	Fb \uparrow ₁₃	
Bb ₁	Eb ₁	Ab ₁	(6th string)

Version B

(II)	(V)	(I)	
D \downarrow ₇	E ₃	F# ₅	(1st string)
C# \downarrow ₃	C# ₅	Bb \uparrow ₁₃	
G# ₅	F \uparrow ₁₃	Ab \downarrow ₁₁	
Bb \downarrow ₁₁	Eb \downarrow ₁₁	C \downarrow ₇	
G# ₅	G \downarrow ₇	A ₃	
E ₁	A ₁	D ₁	(6th string)

(In version A, the three fundamentals are Bb, Eb, and Ab. In version B, the three fundamentals are E, A, D. Subscripts indicate which harmonic the note is.)

Performance Notes

Play only open strings, 2nd, 3rd and 4th harmonics, and notes stopped at the 7th and 12th frets. Improvise while gradually and audibly retuning the guitar from one "section" to another. Each section has a new fundamental and tuning. The new tunings, when reached, are places of rest: let them sit for a while.

In general, retune the higher strings first, the VI strings, last. Don't tune an individual string completely before tuning other strings: gradually retune several of them to the new pitches, alternating between strings.

Try for a smooth, reverberant cloud of moving intonation. If discrete digital delays are used, timings should match the pulse of the guitar rhythms so as not to confuse the places where rhythmic patterns are prominent. If other, asynchronous delays are used in the transitional sections, they should be switched off by foot pedal for the "cadential" rhythmic sections.

Rhythm

Use one steady, fast pulse (tempo) for the entire piece. Choose three different rhythms to be played at the arrival of each new tuning. At other times, during the transitions from one tuning to another, improvise freely within and emanating from that rhythm and meter (always keeping the pulse constant). The rhythms do not have to be unison; in the first performance Nick and I played different hemiola patterns for each tuning.

For example:

II (beginning): 10/8 meter (3+3+2+2 in one guitar, 5/4 in the other)
V (G): 8/8 (3+2+3, 4/4)
I (C): 6/8 (3+3, 3/4)

A simple melodic sequence (different for each guitar) might be combined with the rhythmic patterns. For example, for the 5/4 pattern (on D):



The image shows two staves of musical notation in 5/4 time. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. Both staves contain a sequence of notes and chords, with some notes marked with a square symbol above them, likely indicating specific harmonics or fret positions. The notation is complex, with many accidentals and stems, suggesting a melodic sequence for two different guitars.

Either part in the above example might be played as 3rd or 4th harmonics, stopped strings at the 7th or 12th fret, open strings, or as some combination of all of these. Optionally, sections might be timbrally distinguished. For example: all harmonics in the first section, tapping in the second, chords in the third.

Tuning

II-V-I is a gradual modulation between three harmonic series, built on three fundamental pitches. Tunings should be as close as possible to the natural intonations of these harmonic series (D, G, C). The guitarists may either learn these intervals by ear (easily done), perform the piece with the aid of electronic tuning devices, or some combination of both.

Perfect fifths (3rd harmonic), major and minor seconds (9th and 17th harmonics), and major sevenths (15th harmonic) are extremely close to their equal (fretted) neighbors. Major thirds (5th harmonic) are a little flat (14¢) of tempered tuning (fretted). Minor sevenths (7th harmonic), “tritones” (11th harmonic), and “minor sixths” (13th harmonic) are more distant from equal. These pitches should be tuned as follows (with cents deviations indicated from the nominal tempered pitches):

II: D fundamental

C↓ (7th harmonic): 31¢ (cents) flat

G#↓ (11th harmonic): 49¢ flat (about 1/4-tone)

Bb↑ (13th harmonic): 43¢ sharp (about 1/4-tone)

V: G fundamental

F↓ (7th harmonic): 31¢ flat

C#↓ (11th harmonic): 49¢ flat (about 1/4-tone)

Eb↑ (13th harmonic): 43¢ sharp (about 1/4-tone)

I: C fundamental

Bb↓ (7th harmonic): 31¢ flat

F#↓ (11th harmonic): 49¢ flat (about 1/4-tone)

Ab↑ (13th harmonic): 43¢ sharp (about 1/4-tone)

The 11th and 13th harmonics may be heard as a “neutral” tritone/fourth and a minor/major sixth, respectively.

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Lebanon, NH

Written for the premiere performance, N.Y.C., 1997, with Nick Didkovsky.

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