

songs and toods

Larry Polansky
2005

for the Lou Harrison National Guitar
(or conventionally fretted guitar, except for tood: 85 Chords ("The Historic Tuning Problem"))

tood: schneidertood

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song: Sweet Betsy from Pike

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song: Eskimo Lullaby

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5/19/06

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tood: *schneidertood*

Tune, or detune, the strings of the guitar as distinctly as possible, not necessarily to any specific tempered or just intervals. Try to tune the instrument so that no fretted note on any string is the same as any other fretted note on any other string. That is, for example all “Es” on the VI string should be different from all “Es” (and any octaves) on the V, IV, III, II, and I string. This should be true for all “pitch classes” (fretted notes). In other words, no specific pitch should be duplicated on any two strings of the guitar. A conventionally tuned guitar tuned in $1/6^{\text{th}}$ or quartertones would not have this property, nor would the Lou Harrison National if any given string is tuned to some fretted note on any other string.

The score is written as if the guitar is tuned to conventionally: E-A-D-G-B-E.

Accented and non-accented notes

Accented notes (larger noteheads, with an accent mark) should be *much* louder than other pitches. Non-accented notes (smaller noteheads) should be treated as “shadow notes” —they may be slurred, hammered, tapped, plucked with the left hand, or any combination of these techniques. What’s important is that the accented notes should be heard as a kind of melody distinct from the rest of the pitches. All accented notes should be attacked.

Some ways to emphasize this might be:

- play the accented notes with a pick, non-accented with the fingers
- play the accented notes at the bridge, non-accented at the neck
- use a volume pedal or footswitch to sustain or bring out the sound of the accented notes

All *harmonics* are accented, and should be loud, resonant, and might be played with still a third kind of sound. They are written as the node to be fingered on the indicated string (their sounding pitch will depend on the tuning). Only the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th harmonics are used.

Accented notes and harmonics should be sustained as long as possible (through the succeeding rhythms).

String indications are extremely important. Because of the tuning system, they are not optional. They ensure that every accented note gets played once, and that each accented note is different (because of the retuning). Only the accented notes and harmonics have string indications: the non-accented notes may be played on any string.

Rhythm

There are two versions of the score, one with specific rhythms, another with those same rhythms but beams and stems removed. The second version is a kind of spatial notation. Either version might be used.

Although in the first version the rhythms look somewhat difficult, they should not be treated as an onerous, exacting requirement. Duration is more important than “rhythmic” exactness. In addition, the rhythmic notation should not be taken to determine sustain, but simply time between notes. The pulse and the measure should be respected, but within that, the player should not feel unnecessarily burdened by the complex rhythmic notation, and may use it as a guideline.

Dotted notes are shorter, and can be even quieter than the other non-accented notes. Any note can be held thru other notes before releasing, except those marked with a dot.

song: *Sweet Betsy from Pike*

For Lou Harrison and William Colvig.

Lyrics from Ruth Crawford's Seeger arrangement of the song, from *Twenty-two American Folk Tunes*, arranged for Piano, Elementary Grades, 1938 (mss. Courtesy of the Library of Congress and the Estate of Ruth Crawford Seeger) (last verse guitar accompaniment from her LH).

For guitar and voice.

For all the songs, the voice should be untrained, but strong: a clear, simple sound. No affectation. Except for the first verse, the tune is not written out. The singer should know it in his own way. Preferably, the guitarist should sing, but a second performer might be used as well. While the vocal part is notated, that should be treated as a "lead sheet" of the folk song, and may be freely (but simply) interpreted by the singer.

This piece is written for the Lou Harrison National, based on my own improvisations with the guitar. As in 4 out of 5 of these songs and toods, it may also be played on an equal-tempered guitar. Steel string (acoustic or electric) is preferable.

Most of the piece assumes that the thumb of the RH will be playing simple "drop thumb" accompaniment, although this is seldom notated. The guitarist might stick to the I-V-IV-I scheme of the tune, or play with that. But in general, except where notated (and where clearly impractical), it's nice to have a resonant drone under the melodies.

"Sweet Betsy from Pike"

Ruth Crawford Seeger, 1938

Library of Congress Manuscript

O don't you remember sweet Betsy from Pike
Who crossed the wide prairies with her lover Ike,
With two yoke of cattle and one spotted hog
A tall shanghai rooster and an old yeller dog?

The shanghai ran off and the cattle all died;
The last piece of bacon that morning was fried.
Poor Ike got discouraged and Betsy got mad,
And the dog wagged his tail and looked wonderful sad.

The alkali desert was burning and bare,
And Isaac's soul shrank from the death that was there;
"Dear old Pike county, I'll go back to you"
Said Betsy "You'll go by yo'self if you do"

They soon reached the desert where Betsy gave out,
And down in the sand she lay rolling about;
When Ike in great terror looked on in surprise,
Saying, "Betsy, get up you'll get sand in your eyes"

Sweet Betsy got up in a great deal of pain,

And declared she'd go back to Pike Country again;
Then Ike heaved a sigh and they fondly embraced
And she traveled along with his arm round her waist.

They swam the wide rivers and crossed the tall peaks
And camped on the prairies for weeks upon weeks,
Starvation and cholera and hard work and slaughter
They reached California spite of hell and high water.

One morning they climbed up a very high hill,
And with wonder looked down on old Placerville;
Ike shouted and said, as he cast his eyes down,
"Sweet Betsy, my darling, we've got to Hongtown".

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

Dennis Bathory-Kitsz engraved the score.

song: *Eskimo Lullaby*

From *Folk Songs of Canada*, by Ruth Fulton Fowke and Richard Johnston, Waterloo Music Company, Waterloo, Ontario, 1954.

For Michael Byron

For the Lou Harrison National or any other guitar (electric or acoustic).

Tuning: G-A-D-G-A-D

(VI string down to G)

Thanks to Eric Richards for giving me this book, and to my daughter Anna, for singing this song often with me. Dennis Bathory-Kitsz engraved the score.

“Eskimo Lullaby”

“Still now, and hear my singing.
Sleep through the night, my darling.
We have a tiny daughter.
Thanks be to god, who sent her.

Thanks to Dennis Bathory-Kitsz for helping to copy this score.

tood: *85 Chords (The Historical Tuning Problem)*

(for the Lou Harrison National Guitar, digital delay, and sustaining instruments or voices)
for jim tenney

Any type of delay might be used (on the guitar only). The intention is simply to sustain the harmonies.

Guitar tuning:

VI: D (1/1)
V: A (3/2)
IV: C (7/4)
III: F# (5/4)
II: Ab (11/8)
I: D (1)

The score is written as sounds as if the fundamentals and frets were tempered. That is, an E on the VI string is played on the second (or 14th) fret, an F-natural on the III string is played on the 11th fret, etc. Note that, because of the fretting of the guitar, especially on the III and IV strings (but on others as well), the notation of pitches will often differ from their closest tempered pitches. For example, the 6th fret of the II string is the ratio 121/64, sounds much closer to a tempered B, but it is notated as a C to avoid confusion. Open strings (of which there are many) are given no special notation. The guitarist simply needs to remember the “name” of the string in its new tuning, and play the notes on it as if that string and the fretting were in equal-temperament.

The notated fingerings are a tablature, and crucial to the piece.

Harmonics are notated by small diamonds above the actual sounding pitch (on the specified string). The only harmonics used are those played on the 5th (double octave), 7th (octave and a P5th), and 12th (octave) frets.

Any quiet sustaining instrument(s), or voice (optimally, the guitarist himself), can perform the sustained pitches. These should be gentle, understated, and can come in and out in any way, and should serve to help sustain the harmony. They should be in tune with the guitar. Any pitches may be doubled at any time, but pitches held through from one measure to the next (marked as white notes in the measure in which they begin), should get priority.

The piece is a set of 85 arpeggios. Each measure (arpeggio, chord) may be repeated as many times as the guitarist wants. The arpeggios do not have to be even, but measures should be of roughly equal length. The pitches of the arpeggios may be played in any order within the measure, and that may change freely over the repetitions of the measure. The guitarist should try to mark, or accent the beginning of a new measure in some way, whether by a significantly

louder note, some simple, recognizable rhythmic figure, or even by a gentle percussive tap somewhere on the guitar itself.

The fingerings of the chords/arpeggios are (more or less) meant to be held through the measure. In other words every new measure is a new fingering. If some of them prove too difficult because of the spread, the guitarist should still try and create the effect of a single chord fingering. When there are six notes in the chord, the fingering not notated, but is always VI -> I from left to right.

Tempo should be comfortable, not too fast, not too slow. But steady.

Explanation of the piece: fingering, tuning function (reference earlier pieces).

song: *Dismission of Great I*

Shaker song, learned from Mary Ann Haagen, recorded and documented on *I Am Filled With Heavenly Treasures*, The Enfield Shaker Singers, New World CD 80617-2.

Guitar tuning: D-A-D-G-G↓-C↓

I string (C): Tuned to the 7th harmonic (10th fret) of the low D strings (IV or VI), about 31¢ flat of ET. (7/4)

II string (A): Tuned to the 3rd harmonic (perfect fifth) of the retuned I string, about 19¢ flat of ET, and about 17¢ flat of the III string (G). (21/16).

Harmonics in the introduction and final B section should be played very close to the bridge. Marking the strings with colored chalk can make these harmonics easier to find.

“Dismission of Great I”

Go off, Great I, and come not nigh,
and quit my habitation.
and come no more, within my door,
corrupting my sensation.

Depart I say, flee far away,
your ways no more I'll practice.
for those who try to be Great I,
are vicious, proud and fractious.