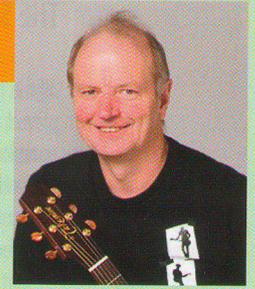




with Kevin Downing



## Creative Tuning – Part One

On many instruments you can't change the tuning as it is already set for you – the piano for example. That isn't the case for stringed instruments like the guitar as there are many different tunings a player can use to create unique effects, different chord sounds, easier fingerings, as well as many other benefits. Sometimes it does take a bit of getting your head around them, but Drop D tuning is the easiest one to begin with.

'Drop D' tuning is a guitar in regular tuning with the sixth string tuned down to D – all you do is lower the sixth string one whole step from the normal E down to D. The best way to do that is to get your chromatic tuner out and just lower the sixth string until it reads D, or play the fourth string open and lower the sixth string to match its sound one octave lower. So the tuning low-to-high would be D, A, D, G, B, E.

One cool idea for this tuning is that it makes power chords – or root and 5th chords – a lot easier to play. Notice in Exercise 1 that all the notes are at the same fret and can be played with just one finger barring the two strings. The best way to bar or finger the power chords for Ex. 1 is to use your first finger at the 3rd fret and third finger at the 5th, 6th and 7th frets, followed by the first finger at the 10th fret and third finger at the 12th fret as indicated above the tab. This exercise is the D Blues scale played in power chord style.

Exercise 2 is the D Natural Minor scale played with power chords again. Notice also that all the notes can be played with just one barring finger again. Make sure you follow the finger pattern written above the tab. It is important to spend a little time listening to the difference between the two scales. A good player can hear the difference straight away – but don't worry if you can't hear it right now, work on it and hearing the difference will come with time.

Many a songwriter has used one of these scales to invent great rock

riffs – Smoke on the Water is one that uses the Blues scale. It is a great idea to doodle around with the two scales individually and see what you can come up with, you never know but you might have the next Smoke on the Water hiding somewhere under your fingertips? You don't have to just stick to one scale pattern for your ideas as you can also combine the two scale patterns if you want to create another effect and I have done that in Exercise 3.

When playing open chords, the drop D tuning gives it a tenor guitar quality creating some real energy, which is why a lot of rock bands tend to tune down a lot. Play the first chord of Exercise 4 by itself and hear the quality of the low open D string with the open D chord. When playing open chords in this tuning you can only strum five strings for the A7 chord or it will sound bad, so make sure that you are accurate with your right hand when playing this exercise.

When you are accustomed to this chord sound, the fingering, and strum it is time to make up a song or new chord pattern using this tuning. What can you come up with?

Playing in different tunings is a lot of fun and I use many different tunings when performing live. Of course if you're doing a lot of live playing it's a good idea to have a different guitar for each of your tunings, or alternatively start a new set with a different-tuned song so that you are not wasting time between songs retuning your one guitar.

In the next issue we'll look at some other open tunings that are more unique.

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Exercise 1: D<sup>5</sup> F<sup>5</sup> G<sup>5</sup> G<sup>#5</sup> A<sup>5</sup> C<sup>5</sup> D<sup>5</sup>

Exercise 2: D<sup>5</sup> E<sup>5</sup> F<sup>5</sup> G<sup>5</sup> A<sup>5</sup> B<sup>b5</sup> C<sup>5</sup> D<sup>5</sup>

Exercise 3: 0 3 1 1 1 0 3 3 1 0 | D G/D A<sup>7</sup> D