

*The Third Hand Capo:*  
A New Frontier in Guitar

Harvey D. Reid

## Foreword

It is always an unusual and an unexpected thing when a totally new idea pops up right in the midst of all the old ideas, and is such a basic and obvious thing that everyone turns to each other asking "Why didn't somebody think of this a long time ago?" And this is especially surprising when the new idea is something that is totally practical and saves much effort, and when the new idea has basically been staring everyone in the face for years.

The new idea, of course, is the subject of this book. It is a variable, chord-forming guitar capo that instead of clamping all six strings of the guitar down at once like a normal capo, is divided into six pieces for clamping only selected strings. Guitar capos have been around for centuries, and banjo players have been using for years a capo that only clamps one of the strings, yet no one seems to have put all this together, until recently. The problem for which the chord-forming capo is the answer is also an old one.

Most guitarists use the standard tuning from bass to treble E-A-D-G-B-E, but the use of all sorts of different or "open" tunings has become more and more widespread among guitarists of all styles. And the chord-forming capo offers the guitarist the best solution ever to the problem of how to deal with the open tunings. There are many nice and new and full sounds that can be achieved with different tunings, but the hassles of retuning and relearning the fingerboard seem to prevent many from using the other tunings.

Although crude and almost-workable chord-forming capos can be made by slicing normal capos into six pieces, the only one available commercially is the *Third Hand* capo, available from the Third Hand Capo Company of Nashville, Tennessee. This design is based on a very clever mechanism invented and patented by Lyle Shabram, Jr. of Pacific Grove, California, and is by far the best and simplest method of achieving the desired results. Since "variable chord-forming capo" is such a mouthful, I have chosen to call the things "Third Hands," which seems to be as good and simple and generic a name as any. In the future, it may well turn out that all capos will be made in six pieces, since the six pieces can all be lined up to make a normal capo, and the word "capo" may come to *mean* a Third Hand.

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to Lynn Rothermich





## Chapter One

### Introduction

I assume that if you are reading this book, then you know something about guitar already. This is not a how-to-play guitar book, but is intended to show the immense usefulness of the Third Hand capo to guitarists of all tastes and backgrounds. Some topics are mentioned without explanation; you must know what barre chords are, and you must also be able to play chords that are given without fingering directions. One of the big problems when explaining capos is how to explain that you “think” you are playing in D, but because you have a capo on the second fret you are actually playing in E. If you say you are playing in E, which in fact you are, then it may confuse someone into thinking that you should play chords for the key of E, which, due to the capo, would put you really up to F<sup>#</sup>. So I have chosen to say instead that you are playing in D *position*, which means the same thing as saying that you play as if you were in D. Appendix A, page 23, will help to explain this further.

The terminology is confusing enough with a conventional capo, but is even more so with a Third Hand. If you realize that when you play a C chord with the capo on the 4<sup>th</sup> fret you are really playing an E chord you will be able to see the logic of the explanations that appear here, where this is often referred to as just a C chord. This is not done in musical ignorance, but for the sake of clarity in the explanations. It is done in the hopes that it will seem confusing only to people who know enough to figure it out; and hopefully those readers with less theory knowledge will be happy that something that feels like a C chord is called a C chord.

Another problem that I don't deal with in these pages is the naming of chords. Many common chords have familiar names and symbols, but there are just as many chords that can be easily played that do not really have official names. This seems to bother some guitarists who are accustomed to chord pictures and symbols and who like to know the name of what chord they are playing, but the fact remains that sometimes there is really no convenient name. In fact, many chords that now have names have been given them recently, as the guitar becomes more and more prevalent in our musical culture. And many names that are used for guitar chords are unclear and confusing, or actually conceal as much information as they reveal. For example, to call something a G<sup>6</sup> chord tells you that it has the note G as its tonic or root note, and that it also contains the note E, which is the 6<sup>th</sup> note of the G scale. It probably also has a B and a D and may have also an F, and the notes may be scrambled up from bass to treble in any of many ways, and yet it is just called a G<sup>6</sup> chord. There are many ways to play G<sup>6</sup> chords, and there are also minor sixths and major sixths, and sixths with added 9<sup>ths</sup> and all kinds of other things that are attempts to describe the structure of the chord from its name. There is no officially designated system for this as yet, and different sources will use different names for the same chord. In this book, I have attempted to avoid this issue, but there still are chords that are shown in diagrams for which no name is given. I feel that this is often a better way to do things than to make up some crazy name; but wherever possible a chord name is given.

Also, the chords that have been given as examples are merely examples, and should

not be taken as a complete list of all chords that you need to know. I have just selected the examples to show the usefulness of the particular situation, and to show what can be done and the kinds of sounds that can be produced. I hope that the chords given will give readers an idea of what kinds of sounds they might look for, and then they can go on and develop their own chords and ways of playing certain songs. Guitar players should be used to this sort of thing by now, since rarely are they ever given the correct and complete chords. I hope that most of those who find use for the Third Hand will understand what is meant here, and not feel slighted because there are no note-for-note transcriptions of Bob Dylan songs given here.

## How it Works

The Third Hand chord-forming capo, shown in Figure 1 on page 4, looks very much like a normal guitar capo, except that it allows the guitarist to choose which strings are clamped by the capo. It consists of just six rubber discs, one for each string, each with a flat side, and mounted off-center on a metal rod. The discs can then be rotated to either a “down” position, where the string is clamped by the disc, or to an “up” position, where the string is left untouched.

Since the width of the neck and the spacing of the strings may vary from one guitar to the next (and also from one fret position to another on the same guitar) it may be necessary to adjust the position of the discs accordingly. The plastic *side-support* should rest on the edge of the fingerboard for stability, and is especially needed when only a few strings are to be clamped by the capo. It may be necessary to reverse the position of the capo on the guitar depending on what configuration is being clamped so that the side-support is on the side that gives the best stability. For example, if you were only clamping the high E string, then you would have to have the side-support on the bass side of the fingerboard.

It is also often a good idea to actually remove the rubber discs entirely when they are not being used to clamp the strings, to allow you to gain better access to the notes that lie under or behind the capo. This will be discussed in more detail later, but is worth mentioning from the start. Let's look at what the Third Hand is really good for.

## Who Needs One?

Although with all six rubber discs in the “down” position the Third Hand works just like a normal capo, its greatest value lies in using it to clamp only certain combinations of strings. At first glance this may seem to be only a novelty or a gimmick, but on closer inspection it can be seen to be a tool of untold value to guitarists of all levels and styles.

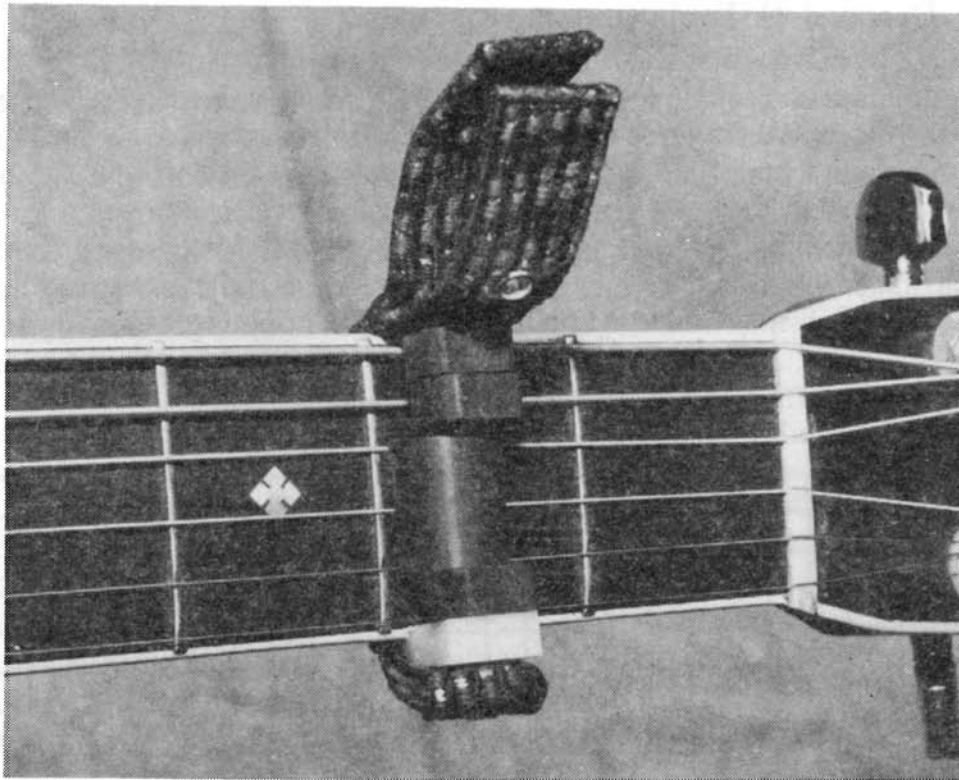
One of the greatest problems facing modern guitarists is whether or not to use the various non-standard tunings. There are many many of these so called “open” tunings that are gaining favor with all types of guitarists because of the new range of sound and fullness that they offer. However, the use of the new tunings involves a lot of problems: you either have to change the tuning of the guitar between songs, or else

carry a separate guitar for each tuning. Neither of these is very convenient, and there are thousands of guitarists who love and appreciate the sound of the open tunings, but who find it impractical to use them. The constant retuning of the guitar makes it hard to keep the guitar in tune at all, and causes a great deal more wear and tear on strings. Also, each time you put the guitar in a new tuning, you have to relearn the chords and the fingerings.

*However, the Third Hand capo allows guitarists to duplicate the sound of the open tunings (as well as many new sounds that cannot be achieved even with retuning) without retuning the guitar and without having to relearn the fingerboard.*

Read this again. If you have never played in an open tuning, the Third Hand will let you sound like you do, and if you are at all familiar with open tunings you will be shocked. You can gain virtually all the benefits of open tunings without the drawbacks. In fact, until you have put one (or two) on your guitar and tried playing, you might think that it could not possibly work — but in truth it works better than you can imagine. It takes very little time to get used to using a Third Hand, and if you wanted to, you could completely fool someone who was listening into thinking that you were in standard tuning or likewise an open tuning. And you can also produce all kinds of new sounds that do not belong to the realm of either.

**Figure 1:** The *Third Hand* Chord-Forming Capo





## Chapter Two

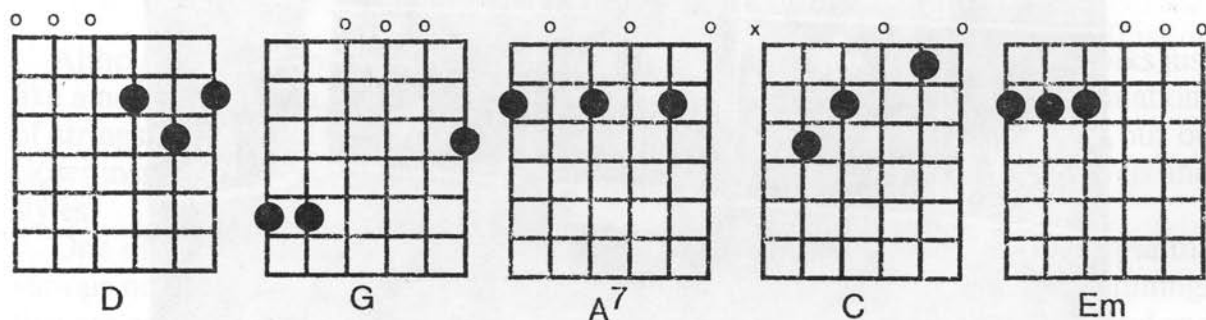
### How to Use the Third Hand

The primary use of the Third Hand is to imitate tunings, and this is as good a place as any to present the general theory of Third Hand capos. The basic idea is simple (once you know how to do it):

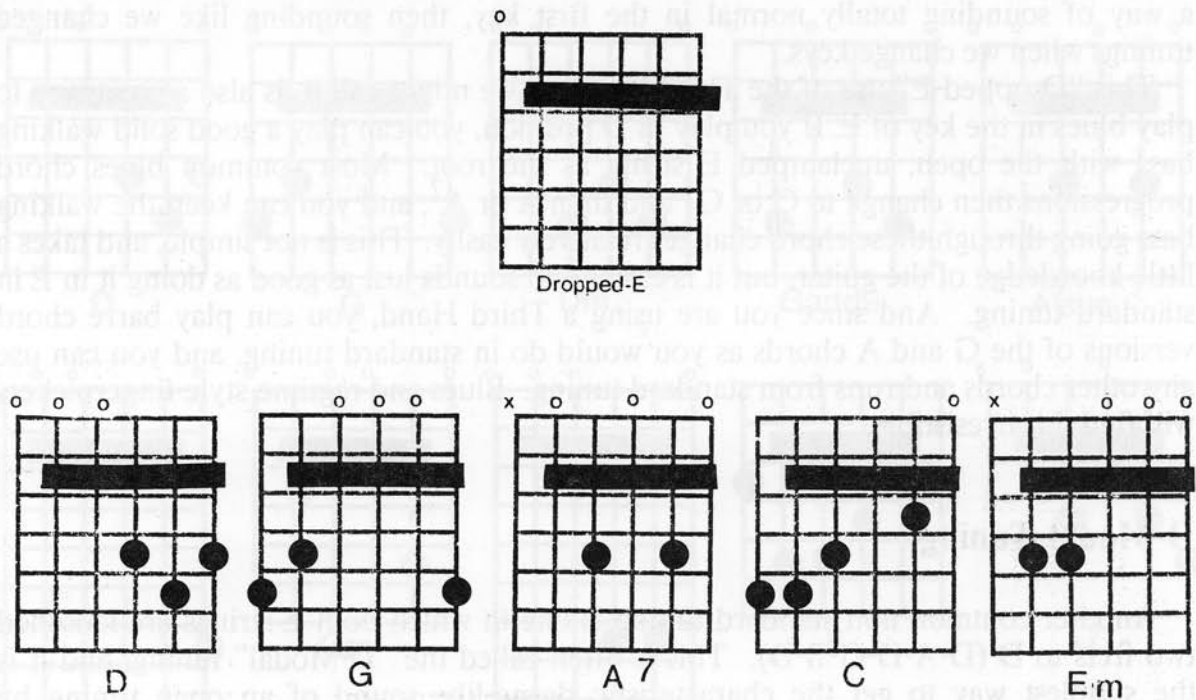
- If you are trying to imitate a tuning where strings are tightened above standard tuning—just fret those strings at the appropriate fret with the third hand to get the pitch you want.
- If the tuning is reached normally by loosening strings, you can't get the exact tuning, since capos can't lower the pitch of strings. But you can get a good imitation by raising up the pitch of all the other strings with the third hand the same amount that you were going to loosen one string. That sounds hard, but it makes sense—if you can't loosen one, raise the others.
- Almost all the examples in this book use one or both of the above rules. If you want to imitate open G, D, or other tunings that usually involve loosening strings, you might start by tuning your whole guitar down 2 frets. Then things will be pitched where you are used to them.

### Imitating Dropped D Tuning

The most common variation of guitar tuning from standard is the so-called "Dropped-D" tuning, where the bass E string is lowered two frets to D. This tuning is widely used by guitarists of all styles, and it breathes new life into the key of D by giving you a deep, rich bass root note that is not available in standard tuning. But, as with all non-standard tunings, you get non-standard chord fingerings, and you have to re-learn the fingerboard to a certain extent. Here, since only one string has been retuned, the change in the chord fingerings is not drastic, but it is great enough to cause problems. The D, D<sup>7</sup>, and Dm chords sound great, but other common chords must be fingered differently as shown:



Now, with the guitar in standard tuning, place a Third Hand on the second fret, with the bass E string left unclamped or open. Then when you play a D chord above the capo, it has the same sound as the Dropped-D tuning D chord, with the bass root. (Actually, it sounds like Dropped-D with a normal capo on the second fret.)



But when you try to play a G chord, you will find that there is no need for the altered form we used with the Dropped-D tuning, and we can play a normal G chord, just like standard tuning. The same is true of C, F, G<sup>7</sup>, and virtually all other chords. When you play A or A<sup>7</sup> you have to avoid the bass E string, but this is no worse than having to avoid the string with a D chord like you do in standard tuning. Also, *all normal barre chords and runs work the same as they do in standard tuning.* This is because you still are in standard tuning. This is a real bonus. There is no good way to play barre chords like Bm and F<sup>#</sup>m in Dropped-D tuning, but when you use the Third Hand they can be played normally. Also, any chords like the A or Am or E or Em that normally use the open bass E string can be played as barre chords. Remember that the A is really a B and the Em is really F<sup>#</sup>m, and so on, because of the capo. (The bass E note now lies under the capo, and can be fretted by reaching over the capo if desired.)

This first example of how to use the Third Hand works well as a substitute for Dropped-D tuning, but unlike real Dropped-D tuning, it is useful for playing in other keys. If you play a Dm chord, you find the same rich bass as before, but now you can play the other chords that are usually found in the key of Dm (C, F, G, Gm, B<sup>b</sup>, and others) just as in standard tuning. In real Dropped-D tuning, most of these chords are hard to play.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Actually, this is a way to play in Em, but it has the flavor of the key of Dm.



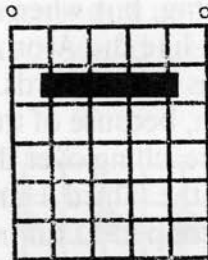
This is also a great way to play in G or C position. Dropped-D doesn't work well at all for this, but now we can play the G, F, and C chords normally if we wish, and still get the exceptionally rich sounding D, D<sup>7</sup> and Dm chords. This is an excellent way to play a song that starts in C (actually D because of the capo, right?) and then modulates (changes key) up to D in the middle of the song. Many songs do this, and here we have a way of sounding totally normal in the first key, then sounding like we changed tunings when we change keys.

This "Dropped-E" use of the Third Hand, as we might call it, is also a great way to play blues in the key of E. If you play in D position, you can play a good solid walking bass with the open, unclamped E string as the root. Most common blues chord progressions then change to G or G<sup>7</sup> and then A or A<sup>7</sup>, and you can keep the walking bass going through these chord changes relatively easily. This is not simple, and takes a little knowledge of the guitar, but it is easier and sounds just as good as doing it in E in standard tuning. And since you are using a Third Hand, you can play barre chord versions of the G and A chords as you would do in standard tuning, and you can use any other chords and runs from standard tuning. Blues and ragtime style fingerpickers will find this irresistible.

## D-Modal Tuning

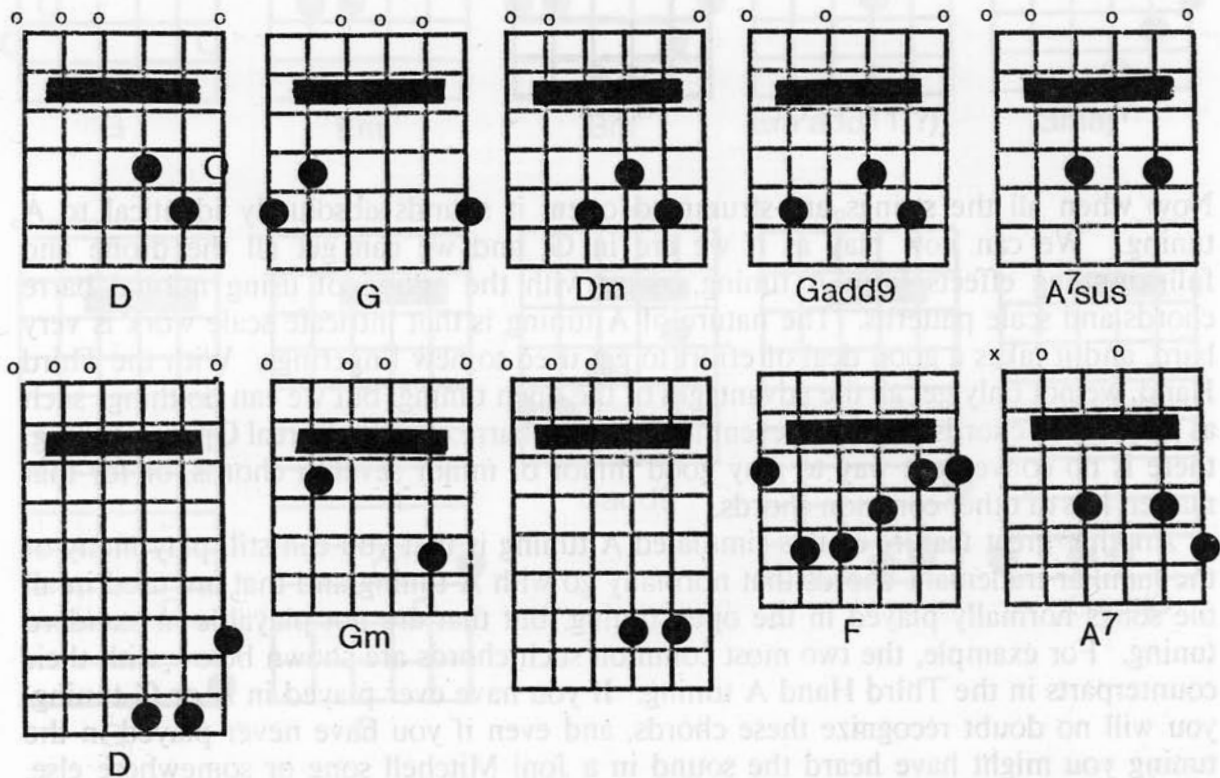
Another common non-standard tuning is one in which both E strings are loosened two frets to D (D-A-D-G-B-D). This is often called the "D-Modal" tuning, and it is the simplest way to get the characteristic drone-like sound of an open tuning by retuning the fewest number of strings. The Dropped-D tuning still sounds a lot like standard tuning, but this one sounds noticeably different. But as is always the case with new tunings, the more new and different all the chords become. In fact, it is hard to play normal sounding chords at all in this tuning.

However, as you may have suspected by now, we can sound just like we are in this tuning by using the Third Hand in standard tuning. Simply set up the Third Hand with both E strings unclamped, and with the capo on the second fret:



If you have ever played in D-Modal tuning before, you will probably recognize the sound of some of the chords that are shown in the first row below. (There are several well-known songs by Neil Young and Leo Kottke that use this tuning.) These chords are the most familiar ones in this tuning, and help to give the tuning its distinctive

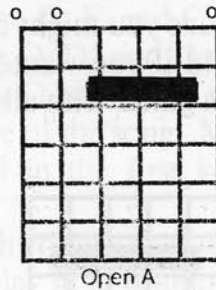
sound. Not only can you get the identical sound with the Third Hand, but you can also play normal chords, too, plus many runs you might already use. Remember that this is actually in E because of the capo, and if you wanted the exact pitch of the D-Modal tunings you would have to start with a guitar with all the strings tuned down two frets.



## Open A Tuning

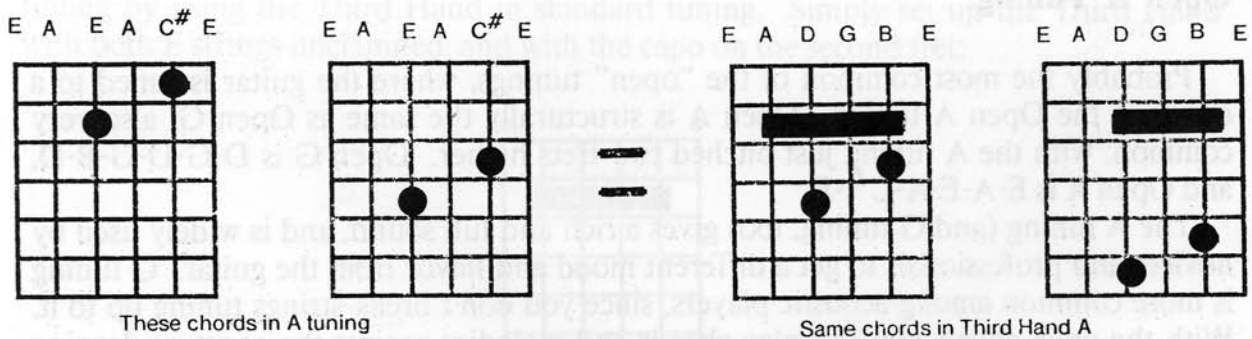
Probably the most common of the "open" tunings, where the guitar is tuned to a chord, is the Open A tuning. Open A is structurally the same as Open G, also very common, with the A tuning just pitched two frets higher. Open G is D-G-D-G-B-D, and Open A is E-A-E-A-C<sup>#</sup>-E.

The A tuning (and G tuning, too) gives a rich and full sound, and is widely used by novices and professionals to get a different mood and flavor from the guitar. G tuning is more common among acoustic players, since you don't break strings tuning up to it. With the open chord, you can play chords and melodies against the constant droning bass in the manner of the banjo, dulcimer, or other "drone" instruments. However, as expected, it is a big hassle to change back and forth from this tuning, and also the chord fingerings become totally different from normal. You can achieve all the sound and richness of A tuning with the Third Hand by placing the Third Hand on the second fret in the form of a normal A chord. Put the side-support on the bass side for stability:



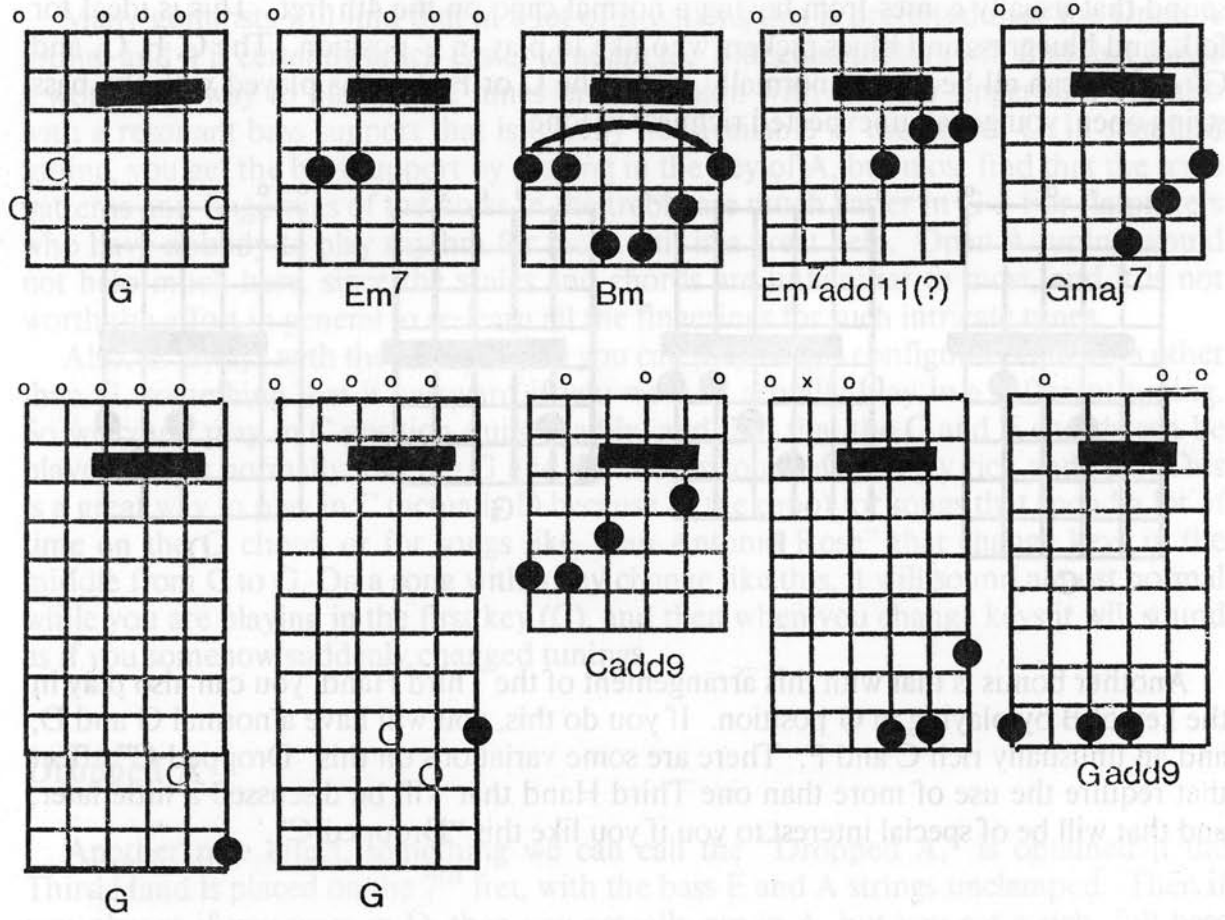
Now when all the strings are strummed open, it sounds absolutely identical to A tuning. We can now play as if we are in G, and we can get all the drone and full-sounding effects from A tuning, along with the option of using normal barre chords and scale patterns. The nature of A tuning is that intricate scale work is very hard, and it takes a good deal of effort to get used to new fingerings. With the Third Hand, we not only get all the advantages of the open tuning, but we can do things such as play minor chords or minor sevenths as normal barre chords. In real Open A tuning, there is no convenient way to play good minor or minor seventh chords, or for that matter, lots of other common chords.

Another great feature of this simulated A tuning is that you can still play many of the familiar trademark chords that normally go with A tuning and that are used in all the songs normally played in the open tuning, but that are not playable in standard tuning. For example, the two most common such chords are shown below with their counterparts in the Third Hand A tuning. If you have ever played in A or G tuning, you will no doubt recognize these chords, and even if you have never played in the tuning you might have heard the sound in a Joni Mitchell song or somewhere else. (Joni Mitchell's name is mentioned because she plays and writes extensively in G tuning.)



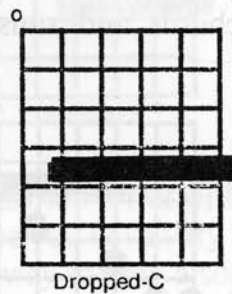
You might also try playing some of the chords shown below. They illustrate the usefulness of the Third Hand A tuning:





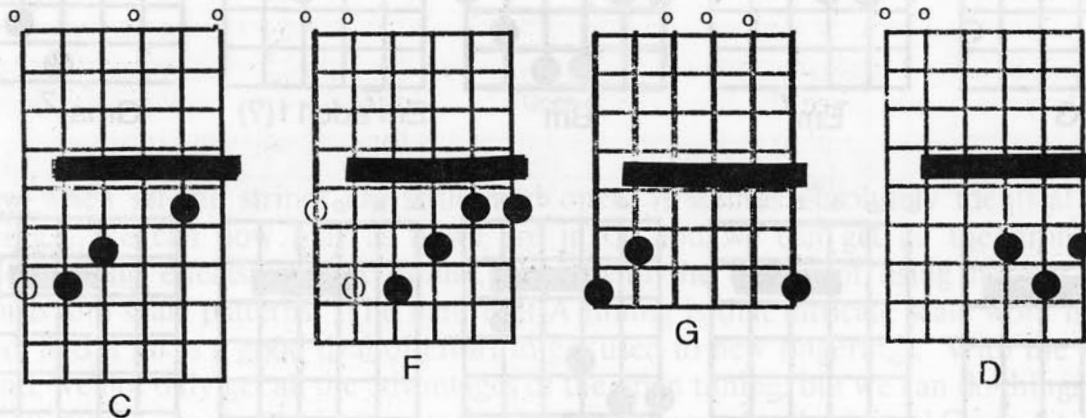
### The Dropped-C Effect

The previous examples of uses for the Third Hand involved finding ways to imitate the sound of common open tunings. There are also many many things you can do that have no counterpart in open tunings, but that sound great and are immediately useful. One of these is what we might call the "Dropped-C" effect. Put the Third Hand on the 4th fret, with only the bass E string unclamped, as shown:



If you then play in C, you are actually in E because of the capo, but you get a much richer sound than usual, since you now have a deep bass note that was not there before.

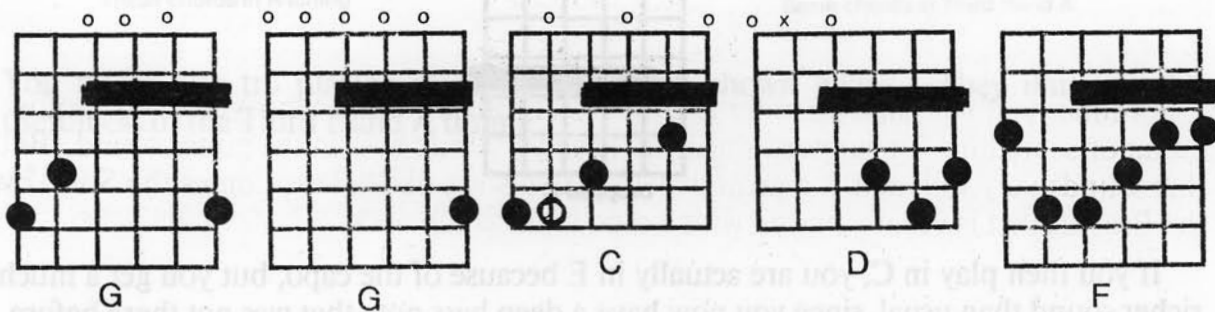
We now get all the convenience of the key of C position, but we don't get the thin sound that usually comes from having a normal capo on the 4th fret. This is ideal for folk, and bluegrass and blues pickers who like to play in C position. The C, F, G, and G<sup>7</sup> chords can all be played normally, but if the C or F chord is played with the bass string open, you get an unexpected richness in tone:



Another bonus is that with this arrangement of the Third Hand, you can also play in the key of B by playing in G position. If you do this, you will have a normal G and D, and an unusually rich C and F. There are some variations on this "Dropped-C" effect that require the use of more than one Third Hand that will be discussed a little later, and that will be of special interest to you if you like this "Dropped-C".

### Half-Open A Tuning

With the Third Hand on the second fret, with the bass E and A strings unclamped, you can duplicate the sound of still another common tuning. Guitarists often loosen these two bass strings down 2 frets each to obtain what is often called a "Half-Open G" tuning, which is sort of a compromise between Open G tuning and standard tuning. With a Third Hand capo, you can get what might be called "Half-Open A", which gives you the rich bass support of the open tuning, but that still lets you play normally in the treble. The only difference between this and the previously discussed Third Hand A tuning simulation is that you don't lose any notes under the capo in the treble, and so you can play familiar chords and runs in the treble without having to compensate for the Third Hand:

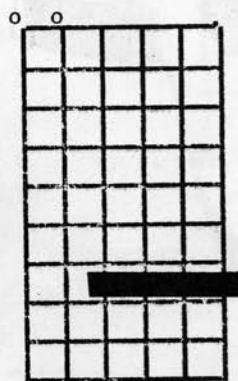


Many guitarists will find that in a lot of situations this is preferred over the Open A sound, and it is certainly much easier to adapt to. Bluegrass pickers will find that this is a wonderful way to play fiddle tunes in G position with familiar fingerings, but also with a resonant bass support that is usually not available in the key of G. In standard tuning, you get the bass support by playing in the key of A, but most find that the scale patterns and fingerings of the notes in the treble are much easier in G. For flatpickers who have nobody to play rhythm for them, this is a great help. Open A tuning would not help much here, since the scales and chords are unfamiliar to most, and it is not worth the effort in general to re-learn all the fingerings for such intricate tunes.

Also, as always with the Third Hand, you can play in this configuration in keys other than G, something that is awkward if you were to actually play in a different tuning. So we could play in C position quite readily, and find that the C and F chords can be played totally normally, but the G and G<sup>7</sup> chords sound amazingly rich and full. This is a great way to play in C (actually D because of the capo) for songs that spend a lot of time on the G chord, or for songs like "San Antonio Rose" that change keys in the middle from C to G. On a song with a key change like this, it will sound almost normal while you are playing in the first key (C), and then when you change keys it will sound as if you somehow suddenly changed tunings.

## Dropped A

Another nice effect, something we can call the "Dropped A," is obtained if the Third Hand is placed on the 7<sup>th</sup> fret, with the bass E and A strings unclamped. Then if you play as if you were in D, then you actually are in A, but you get a rich, full bass along with the sound of the treble chords being played very high on the neck:

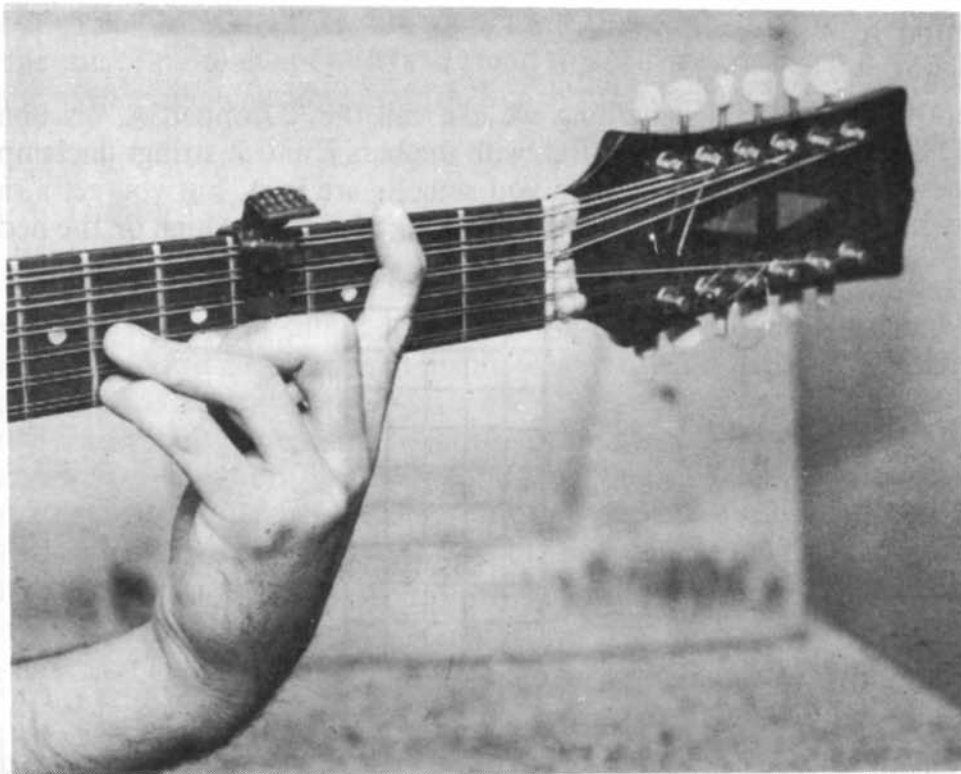
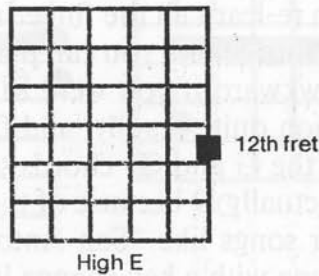


Ordinarily, if you capo up as far as the 7<sup>th</sup> fret with a normal capo, you need another guitar or something for support, since you have very little bass in the guitar sound. But this sounds very full, and is a great way to play a song like "Here Comes the Sun" by the Beatles, that is usually played with a capo high on the neck.



## High E

If you already play banjo, or want to get some banjo-like sounds, you can do any of several things. You could try putting a Third Hand on the 12<sup>th</sup> fret, with only the high E string clamped, and play in E. You'll have to have the side-support on the bass side, and you may even have to remove 5 of the discs if the string height of your guitar is more than a certain amount. This way you can drone this high E note against normal chords played on the other 5 strings, and can get a unique effect similar to the drone 5<sup>th</sup> string of the banjo.



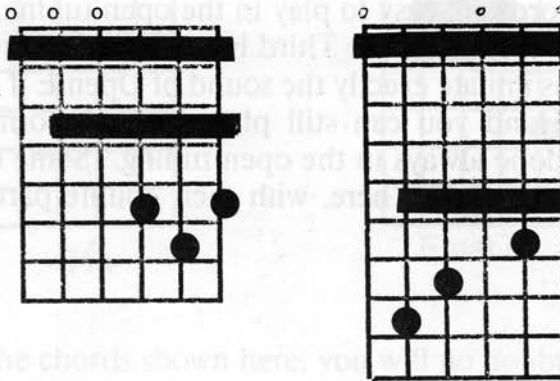
## Chapter Three

### Using More Than One Capo

When more than one Third Hand is used, even more unusual effects can be obtained. Actually, any chord or combination of notes can be clamped with one or more Third Hands; however, only a limited number of these are of any real practical value to the average guitarist. (In fact, the pointing out of practical uses of the Third Hand is the whole purpose of this book.)

#### With a Normal Capo

The Third Hand capo can be used in conjunction with a normal capo, although this merely changes the key and does not introduce any new musical effects. For example, you could play and sing in the key of F by putting a normal capo on the first fret with a Third Hand on the 3rd fret in the "Dropped E" configuration. (Play in D.) Or you could put the Third Hand on the 5th fret in the "Dropped-C" effect with the normal capo still on the first fret, and play out of C position. These are shown below:



For playing in F

In fact, any configuration of Third Hands used in this book can be pitched higher by capoing up with a normal capo. Any Third Hand capos just have to be moved up the neck the same distance as the normal capo.

#### E Tuning

With two Third Hands placed to form a normal E chord, you can achieve a very nice imitation of another very common open tuning. E tuning is normally accomplished by tuning the A, D, and G strings up to B, E, and G<sup>#</sup>, respectively. E tuning is structurally the same as D tuning, which is another very common tuning, with D tuning

just pitched 2 frets lower. (Open D is D-A-D-F<sup>#</sup>-A-D, and Open E is E-B-E-G<sup>#</sup>-B-E. The fingerings of chords in these two tunings are the same, in exactly the same manner that Open G and Open A both have the same fingerings.)

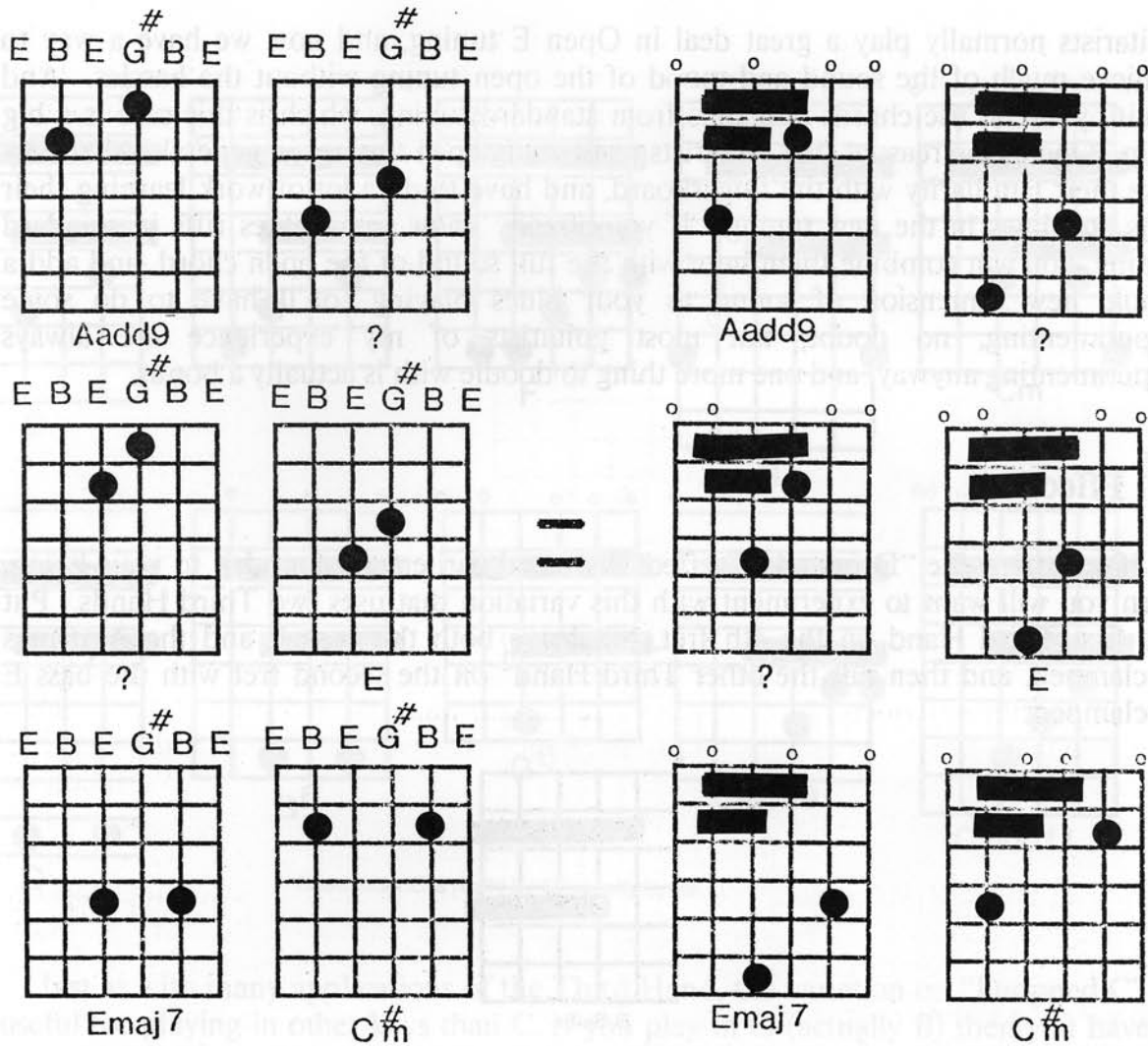


Open E

Now when the strings are strummed open, you hear an E chord that sounds absolutely identical to Open E tuning. But we don't have to re-tune, so we can use chords and scales from standard tuning as usual. The richness and fullness of the open tuning are present, but so is the familiarity of standard tuning.

Just as with any open tuning, there are a certain number of chords that are easily available that seem to be used by almost everyone who uses the tuning, and that to the tuning. Usually these chords are easy to play in the open tuning, and very difficult or impossible in standard tuning. With the Third Hand E tuning, we can play these exact sounding chords, and thus imitate exactly the sound of Open E if desired. Of course as always with the Third Hand you can still play a lot of normal sounding chords, something that can't be done always in the open tuning. Some of the more common Open E flavored chords are shown here, with their counterparts in the Third Hand imitation E Tuning:





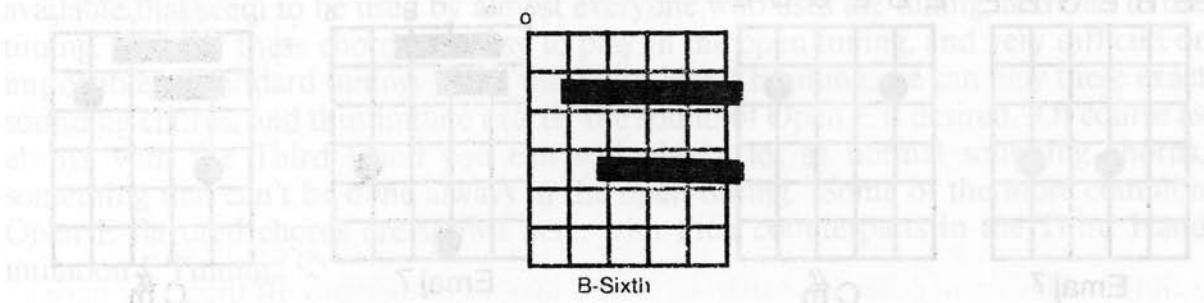
If you try to play the chords shown here, you will no doubt discover that several of them require reaching over the capo to fret notes that lie underneath. This is made much easier with a little practice, and much much easier if you remove entirely the discs that are not being used. At first, the idea of reaching over the capo may seem a bit far-fetched, but it is not that hard once you get used to it, and has the added value of startling observers. There is no real need to do this, since there are always plenty of good chords available above the capo, but the examples are given to show that it is possible and feasible to duplicate nearly perfectly the sound of real Open E. There will be people who may want to play tunes that are normally done in the open tuning, and hence they would want to get the exact sound if possible. There are many John Fahey tunes, for example, that he plays in Open E or D and that can be done nicely with the Third Hand. There is of course no reason why you would have to limit your use of the Third Hand to simply imitating what people now do with open tunings, but it is a good place to start.

Since the Third Hand is holding down an E chord here, it is now pretty easy to play some delta blues style guitar, with good strong boogie woogie walking bass lines. Blues

guitarists normally play a great deal in Open E tuning, and now we have a way to achieve much of the sound and mood of the open tuning without the hassles. And again, you can use chords and runs from standard tuning, which in this case is a big help. One of the reasons that guitarists resist using open tunings in general is that they lose their familiarity with the fingerboard, and have to do a lot of work learning their riffs and lines in the new tuning. If you already know some blues riffs in standard tuning, you can combine them here with the full sound of the open chord, and add a whole new dimension of sound to your blues playing. You'll have to do some experimenting, no doubt, but most guitarists of my experience are always experimenting anyway, and one more thing to doodle with is actually a bonus.

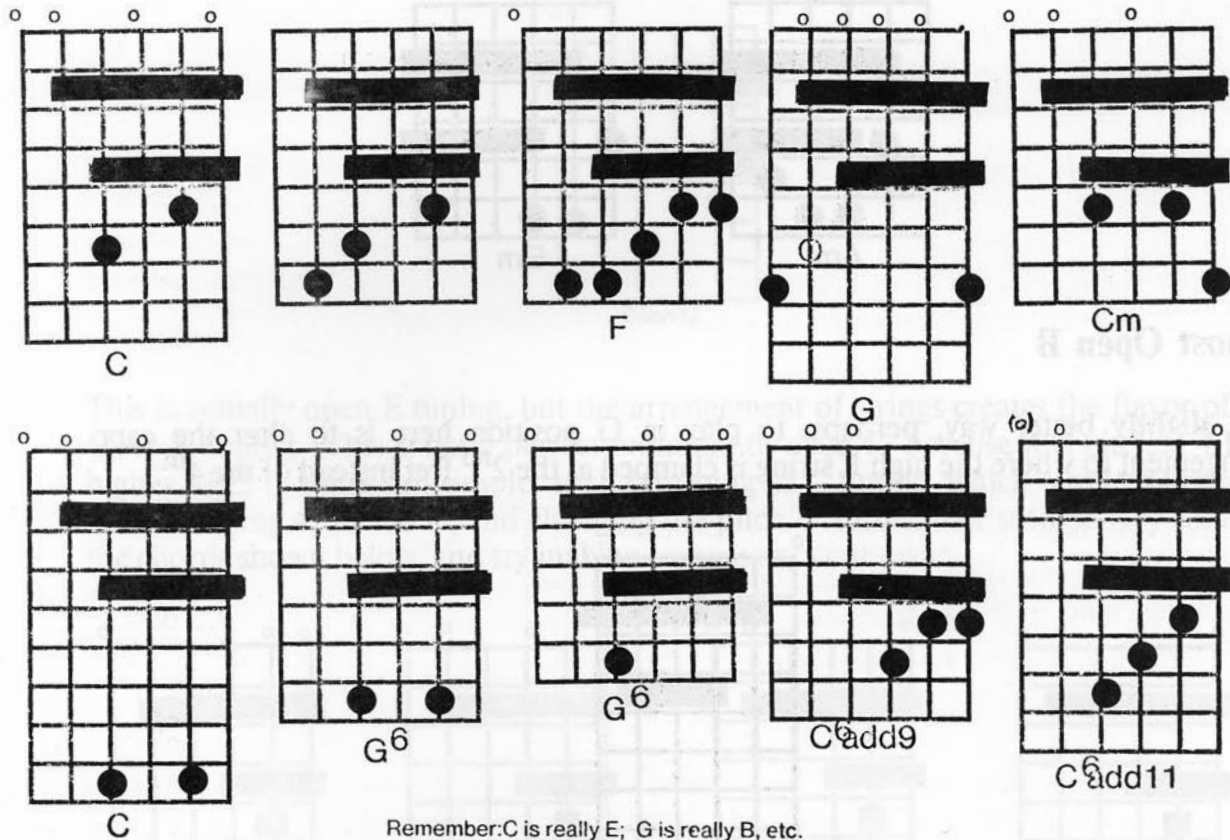
## B<sup>6</sup> Effect

If you tried the "Dropped C" effect discussed earlier and found it to your liking, then you will want to experiment with this variation that uses two Third Hands. Put the first Third Hand on the 4th fret, but leave both the bass E and the A strings unclamped, and then put the other Third Hand<sup>2</sup> on the second fret with the bass E unclamped:



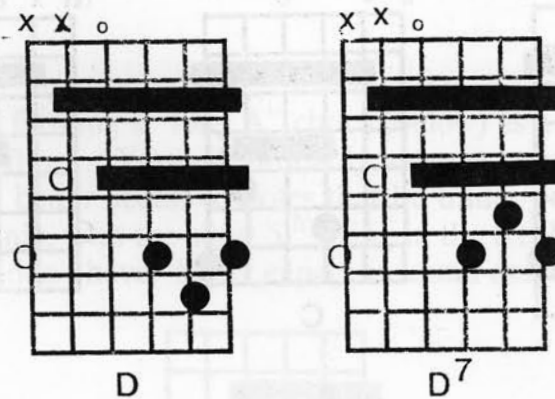
This way we get the rich sounding C chord, and also a richer than usual F and G, and a very warm sound overall. Actually, because of the placement of the capos, these are E, A, and B chords, but again we'll just call them by the names of the chords you seem to be playing for simplicity. This configuration of capos gives you almost an open B<sup>6</sup> chord when the strings are strummed open, and is typical of some of the uses of the Third Hand that are not at all obvious, even if you have spent some time using the capos. This one is one of my favorite uses of the Third Hand. Some of the chords that you might use are shown below:

<sup>2</sup>This makes it a Fourth Hand, right?

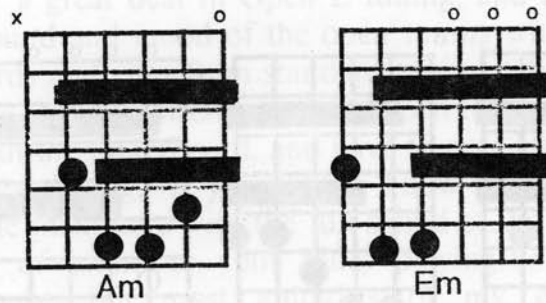


Remember: C is really E; G is really B, etc.

Just as with many applications of the Third Hand, the variation on "Dropped C" is useful for playing in other keys than C. If you play in G (actually B) then you have a rich and full G and C both, and only slightly awkward D and D<sup>7</sup>:

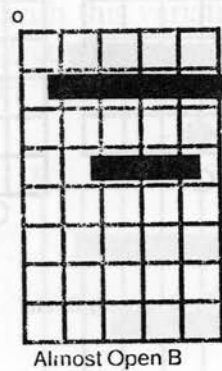


If you remove the unused discs from the capo, and can learn to reach over the capo bar, then you can play good-sounding Em, E, A, Am, and many other chords. This takes a bit more skill and practice than some of the other things we've done, but there is nothing wrong with things in life that require a little skill and practice:

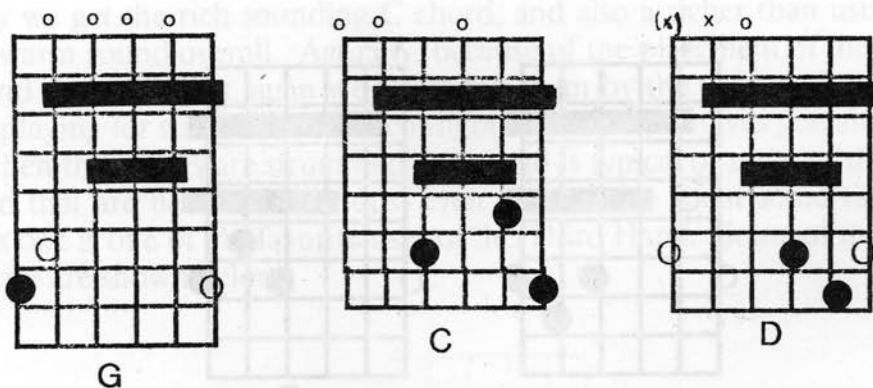


### Almost Open B

A slightly better way, perhaps, to play in G position here is to alter the capo arrangement to where the high E string is clamped at the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret instead of the 4<sup>th</sup>:



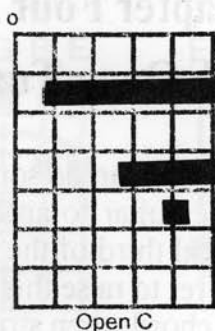
This gives almost an "Open B" tuning effect, and gives a good G, a lovely C, and a better D than before:



### Open C

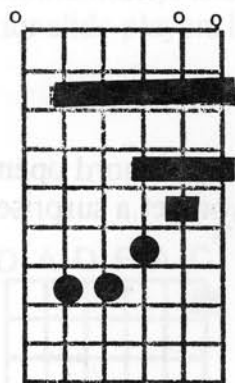
It is a bit harder to imitate the sound of Open C tuning (C-G-C-G-C-E) although it can be done with three Third Hands:



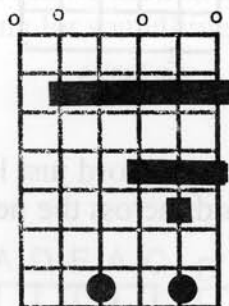


Open C

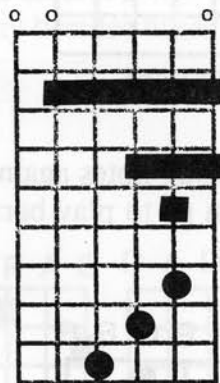
This is actually open E tuning, but the arrangement of strings creates the flavor of the Open C tuning. This is not a perfect imitation of open C, because it is pitched 4 frets higher to E, but it is still simpler than returning to C tuning, which requires lowering the bass string 4 frets to C, and changing the pitch of three other strings. Try some of the chords shown below, and try making up some of your own:



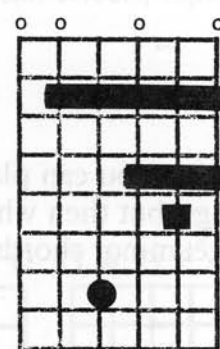
Amaj7



B7sus



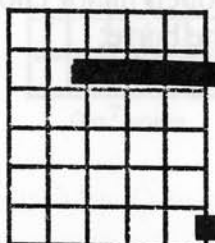
Emaj9



Esus4

### Long A

You might also try forming a "long A" chord (below) as a variation on the open A sound, to get a banjo flavor. You will probably want to remove 5 of the discs on the 2<sup>nd</sup> capo, to give you better access to notes that lie under or behind the capo. This gives you a reverse banjo, with the short 5<sup>th</sup> string in the treble side and you also have some bass that banjos don't have. Don't expect to sound exactly like a banjo when you aren't playing one.



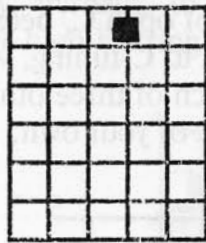
Long A

## Chapter Four

### Uses with Open Tunings

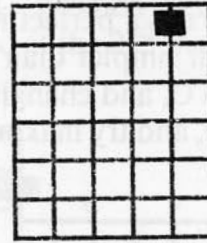
If you already play in open tunings, you can do some amazing things with the Third Hand. For example, you can tune the guitar to an open tuning such as A or E, and then loosen one more string (the musical third of the chord) to make it a minor chord. Then put the Third Hand on the first fret to raise this note back up to the major chord, so that the open strings sound a major chord when strummed open:

E B E G B E



Em tuning

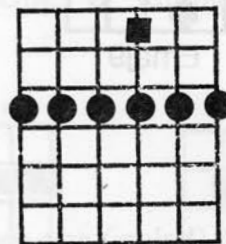
E A E A C E



Am Tuning

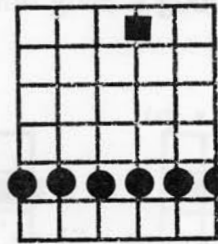
This way you can play melody notes against a drone chord just like major chord open tunings, but then when you go to play barre chords across the neck, you get a surprise and get minor chords:

E B E G B E



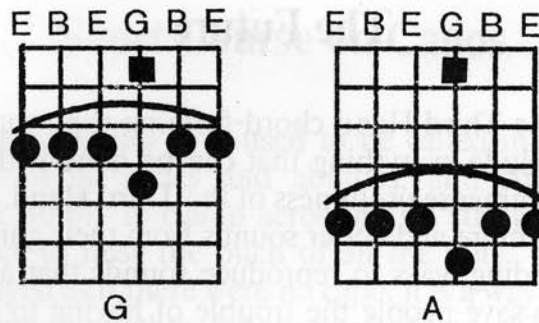
Gm

E B E G B E

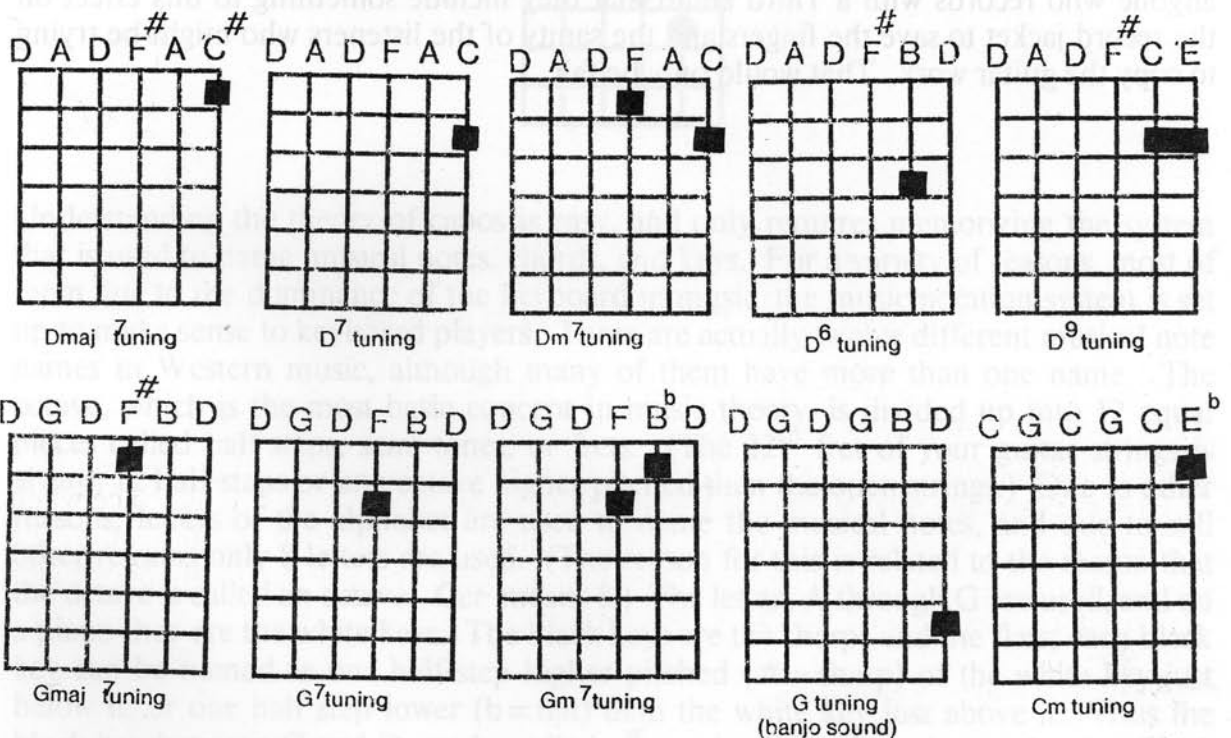


Am

This is especially nifty if you are playing slide guitar in the open tuning, since when you chord the strings with the slide you get a minor chord at each fret instead of the usual major chord. You still have an open major chord, and you can easily play major chords just by adding a finger above the barre:



There are also any number of highly specialized ways to use the Third Hand with less common tunings. The idea behind all of the examples below is to tune to some chord, and then use the Third Hand to give you an open major chord when the strings are strummed open. These will not be very useful to the average guitar player, but are worth mentioning because they are not the sort of things that you would think of immediately, and that can be used to arrange certain songs for special effects, especially for slide players looking for something to play besides blues:



## Chapter Five

### The Future

The applications of the Third Hand chord-forming capo that have been presented here certainly do not include everything that can be done with it. The intent of the book is just to show the immense usefulness of the Third Hand, and to show that it can be used by anyone to get more and better sounds from their guitar. Much of this book has been confined to finding ways to reproduce sounds that are normally done with non-standard tunings, to save people the trouble of having to retune, but the field is wide open for experimentation. The using of the Third Hand to imitate the sound of the various tunings can be seen as a way of "legitimizing" its use, to show that it is far more than just a clever gimmick. An open-minded and clear-thinking guitarist armed with one or more Third Hands could no doubt invent many more amazing things to do, and even more important, to provide more and better music for the world.

The ideas presented here are the result of my own experimentation, with a little help from my friends, and by no means represent everything that can be done. So feel free to put any number of Third Hands on your guitar or banjo in any crazy formations you can think of, as often as you like. If you find something good, send me a letter.

The only unfortunate thing I see about Third Hand capos is that if recording artists start using them it will make a shambles of the process of trying to learn things from records. It is hard enough to learn from records as it is, and I urgently suggest to anyone who records with a Third Hand that they include something to this effect on the record jacket to save the fingers and the sanity of the listeners who might be trying to copy the guitar work. That would only be fair.

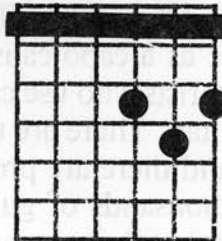


## Appendix A

### Short Course on Capos

The normal capo, or *capotasto* as it used to be called in Italy, has been used for centuries by guitarists of all styles and abilities, and still is a subject of great controversy. It is used simply to clamp across all six strings to shorten them all the same amount and hence to raise the pitch of all the notes being played. Since the chord fingerings are played as if there were no capo, it is a way of playing as if you were in one key, and sounding in another, higher-pitched key. There is no known way of using a capo to lower the key. There are dozens of different mechanisms for clamping strings that are commercially available, from elastic to springs, scissor clamps, C-clamps, buckles, and what have you. Different players have their own favorite capos, and crazy new models come out every year. *It is important to realize that the Third Hand is totally different from all previous capos, although it can be used as a normal capo.*

For example, if you had a capo on the first fret and played a song pitched in D, then you would actually be in E<sup>b</sup>, one fret or half-step higher pitched.



Understanding the theory of capos is easy, and only requires memorizing the system that is used to name musical notes, chords, and keys. For a variety of reasons, most of them due to the dominance of the keyboard in music, the music notation system is set up to make sense to keyboard players. There are actually twelve different musical note names in Western music, although many of them have more than one name. The octave, which is the most basic concept in music theory, is divided up into 12 equal pieces called half-steps, semi-tones, or frets. (The 12<sup>th</sup> fret of your guitar strings is always 12 half-steps or one octave higher pitched than the open strings.) Due to other reasons, letters of the alphabet are used to name the musical notes, and due to still other reasons only 8 letters are used. (The reason for this is related to the reason that the octave is called an octave. *Oct-* means 8.) The letters A through G are used, and on a piano they are the white keys. The black keys are the sharps and the flats; each black key can be named as one half-step higher pitched ( $\sharp$  = sharp) of the white key just below it, or one half step lower ( $\flat$  = flat) than the white key just above it. Thus the black key between C and D can be called c<sup>#</sup> or also D<sup>b</sup>. There is not always a black key between white keys as you can readily tell if you stare at a piano, and it is necessary to memorize where these are. If you play piano, this is easy, but if you play guitar you just have to live with the system and not fight it. All musical notes on guitar or piano

have one of the names shown below. Notes that are an octave or any number of octaves apart have the same letter name:

A—A<sup>#</sup>/B<sup>b</sup>—B—C—C<sup>#</sup>/D<sup>b</sup>—D—D<sup>#</sup>/E<sup>b</sup>—E—F—F<sup>#</sup>/G<sup>b</sup>—G—G<sup>#</sup>/A<sup>b</sup>—...

There is no need to discuss the intricacies of this system and to explain when a note is called B<sup>b</sup> and when it is called A<sup>#</sup>. The point is that all notes, chords, and keys are named this way, and it is important to be able to name the notes and the chords and the keys that you are playing in.

The way that all this relates to capos is that you need to be able to count up through this letter sequence to know what key you are in. Some country pickers simply refer to having the capo on the first fret as “first gear” and the second fret as “second gear” and so on, but this is not accurate enough. The idea is that whatever fret number you have the capo on simply adds that many half-steps to the pitch of the key you are in. If you were playing a G chord with the capo on the first fret, then it is actually a G<sup>#</sup> or A<sup>b</sup> chord, and likewise if the capo were on the second fret then it would be an A chord. You just simply count up through the sequence of sharps and flats, remembering that there is no sharp or flat between B and C and also between E and F. It is as simple as counting your fingers.

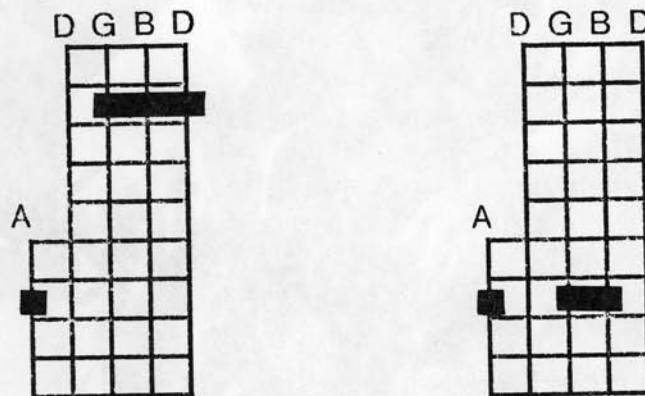
Got it? The intent of this quick discussion on capos is to make sure that you understand normal capos before you take on the Third Hand capos. For some reason, something so very simple and basic as a capo causes all kinds of strange attitudes in people. There are thousands of guitarists who use capos all the time, and it has nothing to do with what you know about guitar. There are total beginners who know very little at all about guitar who use capos, and there are professionals who have used them for years. And there are also many thousands of guitarists who insist on calling capos “cheaters” and who somehow think that they are not useful or necessary and are to be shunned by “real” guitar players. I don’t want to get into a long speech here, but it will suffice to say that people who think that way are welcome to, but they are missing out on a lot of guitar music by being so closed-minded. There is absolutely no question at all as to whether the capo enables you to do things that you could not do otherwise; since it certainly does, though it can prohibit things also. But if you think capos are worthless, try to play “Freight Train” in C<sup>#</sup> or the “Deep River Blues” in F<sup>#</sup>. Unless you have 6 fingers, you will need a capo. And now there is a new issue at stake that is going to make the subject of capos even more controversial. And that issue is the subject of this book: Third Hand chord-forming capos. If people think that normal capos are “cheaters”, wait till they see what these can do.

## Appendix B

### For Banjo Players

If you play banjo, you can also use the Third Hand to advantage, although you will of course want to remove one of the rubber discs, or maybe two, if you have a 5<sup>th</sup> string capo already. It is interesting to note that the 5<sup>th</sup> string capo on the banjo works on the same principle as the Third Hand, since it allows you to play in different keys without changing the fingerings. If you play banjo you will probably know that if you simply retune the 5<sup>th</sup> string up to A, for example, and put a capo on the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret of the other strings to play in A, then any chords or licks that involve fretting the 5<sup>th</sup> string will be different from what you would normally do in G. The 5<sup>th</sup> string capo used by almost all banjo players lets you use the same fingerings when you capo up to a new key.

Actually, the use of the Third Hand with the banjo is a very unexplored thing, and I have done only very basic experimenting with it. Banjo players use many many different tunings, and it may be possible to duplicate the sound of them with a Third Hand. Below are two of the good uses I have found. It is a very good idea to remove all the discs that are not in use, and to position the capo as far up on each fret as possible to allow you to fret the notes that are under and behind the capo. It seems to be really necessary to play under and behind the Third Hand, and only takes a short time to master:



Both of these examples are for playing in the key of D, and they offer a way of doing so without simply putting a normal capo on the 7<sup>th</sup> fret as is commonly done. The first example gives the sound of the common tuning C-G-B-D where the bass D string is lowered 2 frets to C. Try playing the standard banjo tunes like "Reuben's Train" and "Soldier's Joy" that normally use this tuning.

The second example is also a way to keep the low string sound while still playing high on the neck. Try playing "Home Sweet Home" or "Wildwood Flower" with this configuration. You will find it a little strange but not too hard to get used to, to play under and over the capo. It is assumed for both these examples that you have a 5<sup>th</sup> string capo already on your banjo, and in both cases the 5<sup>th</sup> string capo is shown to be at the A note.

## About the Author

Harvey Reid has been playing the guitar for 11 of his 25 years, and currently teaches, writes, and performs a wide variety of music. Originally from the Washington, D.C. area, he has travelled extensively around the country performing. In addition to playing guitar in the classical, country, ragtime, bluegrass, blues, and rock styles, he also performs with the banjo, mandolin, violin, autoharp, bass, and dobro. After spending three and a half years teaching guitar at the University of Maryland, he now performs in clubs and schools both as a solo artist and with various singers and groups.





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