

CLASSIC BANJO FRETBOARD MAPS AND SOME BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT EARLY TUNINGS AND HOW TO READ THE OLD NOTATIONS, ETC.

1. History of “classic” banjo tunings (raised bass tunings shown in parenthesis).
 - a. Up to the 1850’s
 - i. cFCEG (cGCEG)
 - ii. dGDF#A (dADF#A)
 - b. 1850’s to 1860’s
 - i. eAEG#B (eBEG#B)
 - c. 1860’s to 1890’s “AMERICAN”
 - i. eAEG#B (eBEG#B)
 - d. 1860’s to present “ENGLISH”
 - i. gCGBD (gDGBD)
 - e. 1890’s to present AMERICAN
 - i. gCGBD (gDGBD)
 1. Of course, the “standard” tuning of the 1890-1940 period is now usually called “Drop C” (sometimes “Concert C” or just “C”). Bluegrass changed the “standard” tuning to gDGBD (formerly “raised bass”), which is now called “G” tuning.
2. Notation
 - a. “A” notation means the lowest possible note is an “A”. “D” notation means the low note is a D. “C” notation means the low note is a “C”. This has nothing to do with the actual key; it is merely the way banjoists named the different conventions.
 - b. Notation usually follows the tunings.
 - i. Find the lowest note in the score to best determine the tuning used.
 1. Example: if the lowest note found in the score is an A (below middle C), then the tuning is probably going to be eAEG#B.
 - ii. Look at the chord stacks and compare to the fingering shown.
 1. Example: if the fingering shows 5 or 5B (indicating a 5th position barre) and the notes on 3rd, 2nd and 1st strings are AC#E, the tuning is going to be either eAEG#B or eBEG#B (then either go back to looking for the lowest note or continue on).
 - iii. Look for bass string fingering.
 1. Conventions of banjo notation evolved over time but it is common to see melodies or “runs” played on the 4th string. These are usually shown by a circled number 4 below the staff...and are often accompanied by fret numbers. So, if you see that happening,

you can decode which tuning is meant for that string based on the fret and string and note shown. Whew!

3. Transposition and notation

- a. Notation/tuning standards between English and American sheet music evolved differently.
 - i. As early as the 1860's, American tutors were writing music in "A" but tuning their banjos in "C". This meant that the banjo was considered a "transposing instrument", much like a trumpet or a sax. Still, many tutors never mention this and students were playing "A" notation tuned to "A" tuning well into the 1890's (here in America).
 - ii. English banjoists were tuning to C and playing from notation written in C from early on. They called the "A" notation "American". There was much arguing in magazines of the day which was better. The C tuning and notation won and by the 1890's even American publishers had stopped using the old "A" notation. The banjo stopped being a "transposing instrument".

4. How to use the fingerboard maps to generate TAB.

- a. Figure out the notation being used vs the tuning. See 2.b above.
- b. Read the notation directly and input the fret numbers on the string lines as usual.
- c. Because all the tunings shown in para. 1 have the same relationships from string to string, the TAB is essentially independent of specific tuning. Thus, if you create TAB from "A" notation (eAEG#B) but tune your banjo to gCGBD, the music that comes out will be fine...just in a higher (tonally) key (in this case, three tones higher). Example, if the original was in 4 sharps (Emaj) then the music will sound in Gmaj. If the original was in Amaj (3 sharps) then the music will sound in Cmaj, etc., etc.

5. When should you use what tuning?

- a. If you play with others, the group needs to determine what is best. Usually this means that you'll default to something comfortable like Cmaj or Gmaj and play in either gCGBD or gDGBD tuning. Most of the other players are going to want chords to play along...that's a whole 'nuther dissertation!
- b. If you play by yourself, you get to choose! Many people really like the lower tunings like "A" or "D" and simply play them in their native tunings. I usually play early tunes (1840-1870) in "D" tuning because I like the sound. If the piece was written in the 1870-1880 era, I often use the "A" tuning and anything past that goes into the "C" tuning.

BANJO FRETBOARD MAP, “D” TUNING (dGDF#A)

“D” TUNING					
	5 TH	4 TH	3 RD	2 ND	1 ST
0		G	D	F#	A
1		G#	D#	G	A#
2		A	E	G#	B
3		A#	F	A	C
4		B	F#	A#	C#
5	D	C	G	B	D
6	D#	C#	G#	C	D#
7	E	D	A	C#	E
8	F	D#	A#	D	F
9	F#	E	B	D#	F#
10	G	F	C	E	G
11	G#	F#	C#	F	G#
12	A	G	D	F#	A
13	A#	G#	D#	G	A#
14	B	A	E	G#	B
15	C	A#	F	A	C
16	C#	B	F#	A#	C#
17	D	C	G	B	D
18	D#	C#	G#	C	D#
19	E	D	A	C#	E
20	F	D#	A#	D	F
21	F#	E	B	D#	F#
22	G	F	C	G	G

“D” TUNING (raised bass)					
	5 TH	4 TH	3 RD	2 ND	1 ST
0		A	D	F#	A
1		A#	D#	G	A#
2		B	E	G#	B
3		C	F	A	C
4		C#	F#	A#	C#
5	D	D	G	B	D
6	D#	D#	G#	C	D#
7	E	E	A	C#	E
8	F	F	A#	D	F
9	F#	F#	B	D#	F#
10	G	G	C	E	G
11	G#	G#	C#	F	G#
12	A	A	D	F#	A
13	A#	A#	D#	G	A#
14	B	B	E	G#	B
15	C	C	F	A	C
16	C#	C#	F#	A#	C#
17	D	D	G	B	D
18	D#	D#	G#	C	D#
19	E	E	A	C#	E
20	F	F	A#	D	F
21	F#	F#	B	D#	F#
22	G	G	C	G	G

BANJO FRETBOARD MAP, “A” TUNING (eAEG#B)

“A” TUNING					
	5 TH	4 TH	3 RD	2 ND	1 ST
0		A	E	G#	B
1		A#	F	A	C
2		B	F#	A#	C#
3		C	G	B	D
4		C#	G#	C	D#
5	E	D	A	C#	E
6	F	D#	A#	D	F
7	F#	E	B	D#	F#
8	G	F	C	E	G
9	G#	F#	C#	F	G#
10	A	G	D	F#	A
11	A#	G#	D#	G	A#
12	B	A	E	G#	B
13	C	A#	F	A	C
14	C#	B	F#	A#	C#
15	D	C	G	B	D
16	D#	C#	G#	C	D#
17	E	D	A	C#	E
18	F	D#	A#	D	F
19	F#	E	B	D#	F#
20	G	F	C	E	G
21	G#	F#	C#	F	G#
22	A	G	D	F#	A

“A” TUNING (raised bass)					
	5 TH	4 TH	3 RD	2 ND	1 ST
0		B	E	G#	B
1		C	F	A	C
2		C#	F#	A#	C#
3		D	G	B	D
4		D#	G#	C	D#
5	E	E	A	C#	E
6	F	F	A#	D	F
7	F#	F#	B	D#	F#
8	G	G	C	E	G
9	G#	G#	C#	F	G#
10	A	A	D	F#	A
11	A#	A#	D#	G	A#
12	B	B	E	G#	B
13	C	C	F	A	C
14	C#	C#	F#	A#	C#
15	D	D	G	B	D
16	D#	D#	G#	C	D#
17	E	E	A	C#	E
18	F	F	A#	D	F
19	F#	F#	B	D#	F#
20	G	G	C	E	G
21	G#	G#	C#	F	G#
22	A	A	D	F#	A

BANJO FRETBOARD MAP, “C” TUNING (gCGBD)

“C” TUNING					
	5 TH	4 TH	3 RD	2 ND	1 ST
0		C	G	B	D
1		C#	G#	C	D#
2		D	A	C#	E
3		D#	A#	D	F
4		E	B	D#	F#
5	G	F	C	E	G
6	G#	F#	C#	F	G#
7	A	G	D	F#	A
8	A#	G#	D#	G	A#
9	B	A	E	G#	B
10	C	A#	F	A	C
11	C#	B	F#	A#	C#
12	D	C	G	B	D
13	D#	C#	G#	C	D#
14	E	D	A	C#	E
15	F	D#	A#	D	F
16	F#	E	B	D#	F#
17	G	F	C	E	G
18	G#	F#	C#	F	G#
19	A	G	D	F#	A
20	A#	G#	D#	G	A#
21	B	A	E	G#	B
22	C	A#	F	A	C

“C” TUNING (raised bass)					
	5 TH	4 TH	3 RD	2 ND	1 ST
0		D	G	B	D
1		D#	G#	C	D#
2		E	A	C#	E
3		F	A#	D	F
4		F#	B	D#	F#
5	G	G	C	E	G
6	G#	G#	C#	F	G#
7	A	A	D	F#	A
8	A#	A#	D#	G	A#
9	B	B	E	G#	B
10	C	C	F	A	C
11	C#	C#	F#	A#	C#
12	D	D	G	B	D
13	D#	D#	G#	C	D#
14	E	E	A	C#	E
15	F	F	A#	D	F
16	F#	F#	B	D#	F#
17	G	G	C	E	G
18	G#	G#	C#	F	G#
19	A	A	D	F#	A
20	A#	A#	D#	G	A#
21	B	B	E	G#	B
22	C	C	F	A	C