



# GUITAR

## A Little Etude

by Jason Vanselow

In this column, I'd like to share with you the first phrase of an etude that I use with students who have been playing for a year or two and are ready to explore chords beyond the open position.

One of the most fascinating and intimidating things about playing the guitar is that almost everything can be played more than one way. And while single note lines high on the fretboard can be a fun and easy way to get a student to think beyond the third fret, chords that extend up the neck are sometimes a little daunting.

This etude uses various forms of D major, G major, and A7 chords that range from the open position versions that students should be familiar with to potentially new shapes in the seventh position. All of these shapes are fretted on first through third strings and some are the top half of some of the barre chords that students might have begun to explore already.

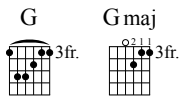


Figure A

For instance, in Figure A, we have two chords. The first is an E shape barre chord placed on the third fret. As we know, the root of this barre chord is the pitch on the sixth string and in this case is G.

The second chord shape in the figure is the top three pitches of the full chord and is called for on the second beat of the first full measure of the etude. It contains a full triad and like the full barre chord can be used on any fret. The only difference is that in this case, the root of the chord is on first string rather than the sixth. This short form of the E barre chord is used quite often in acoustic singer/songwriter styled songs as well as in many rock songs.

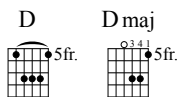


Figure B

We have a similar relationship in the chords in Figure B. In this example, the first is the full version of an A shaped barre

chord. The second is the three stringed version that is used on the second beat of the second measure of the etude. As with our first example, the short version of the chord contains a full triad but in this case the root of the chord is on the third string. This shape is also very common and in fact is used in the folk section of Led Zepplin's *Stairway to Heaven* which historically has been a mountain many beginner guitar players yearn to climb.

In addition to working on these new chord shapes, this etude also works to strengthen the student's first finger barre. In all but two of the chords, the player needs to cover the first three strings with a barre. This challenges both the stability of the player's barre in one position and their ability to move that stable barre from position to position.

This piece also serves as a good arpeggio study for the right hand. The pattern of a I m p allows the melody to be at the beginning of the beat and deemphasizes the fourth string D drone that happens throughout the phrase.

This etude can also serve as practice for bringing out melody in the context of an

arpeggio. For those who choose to play the first string melody notes free stroke, this is a good opportunity to practice listening and bringing out the melody. Another technique that can be used here is to play the melody note with a rest stroke. This is a common way in fingerstyle playing to emphasize the melody. And although it does require some practice at the beginning, it can be a valuable right hand tool to use in thick textures.

There are also two passages, the pick up measure and beat three of the third bar, that require ascending slurs. This is a good moment to practice blending hammer on passages into a musical context.

Overall, this etude covers a number of different skills. It stretches the boundaries of a student's chord knowledge, it expands a young player's use of the fretboard above open position, and challenges players to bring out first string melodies and melodies that utilize slurs.

As I mentioned, this is only the first phrase of a longer piece. If you are interested in checking out the etude in its entirety, please contact me and I would be happy to share the whole thing with you.

But even better would be for you to write your own etudes for your students that challenge students to master specific skills. This has become one of my favorite things to do as a teacher. These pieces not only

enrich my students' skills but challenge me to think about how I play guitar and what skills I find to be the most important in my own study. I hope that you will take up this challenge for yourself and your students.

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