

TRIED & TRUE ALTERNATE TUNINGS

TODAY'S ALTERNATE-TUNING

mavericks are merely the latest wave of intervallic renegades. But aside from a few notable exceptions like Keith Richards and assorted electric slide players, the overwhelming majority of past alternate-tuning pioneers have favored delicate acoustic sounds, not the high-gain thunder of the bands profiled here.

But even the most bloodthirsty feedbackmonger can learn volumes from acoustic alternate-tuning masters past and present. Investigate folk-rock troubadours like Jani Mitchell, David Wilcox, Steve Stills, and David Crosby; American fingerpicking eccentrics John Fahey and Leo Kottke; "new acoustic" composer/performers such as Michael Hedges, Pierre Bensusan, Will Ackerman, and Alex de Grassi; the countless blues players who worked in open A, G, D, E, and other tunings; and British folkies like Bert Jansch, Martin Simpson, Martin Corby, and, of course, John Renbourn, whose *Guitar Player* column frequently explores non-standard tunings.

In the meantime, here is a list of proven non-standard tunings originally compiled for *Frets* magazine by Mark Hanson, a respected fingerstyle player and teacher and the author of many acoustic guitar books. Most are gleaned from the recordings of the players mentioned in the preceding paragraph.

VARIATIONS ON STANDARD TUNING

D, A, D, G, B, E (dropped D)

D, A, D, G, B, D (double-dropped D)

E, A, D, F#, B, E (Renaissance lute tuning, but a minor third lower)

D, A, D, F#, B, E (the same with a low D)

E, A, D, G, C, F (all fourths)

E, G, D, G, B, E

E, A, E, G, B, E

F, A, D, G, B, E

D, A, D, G, C, E

OPEN-CHORD TUNINGS

D, A, D, F#, A, D (D major)

D, G, D, G, B, D (G major)

C, G, C, G, C, E (C major)

C, G, C, G, A, E (C6, good for Hawaiian and Western swing sounds)

E, B, E, G, B, E (Em, used by blues great Skip James)

D, G, D, G, Bb, D (Gm)

D, G, D, G, B, E (C6)

D, A, D, F#, A, C# (Dmaj7)

D, A, D, F#, C, D (D7)

E, A, C, E, A, E (Am)

D, G, D, F#, B, D (Gmaj7)

C#, A, C#, G#, A, E (Amaj7)

F, Ab, C, Eb, Ab, Eb (Fm7)

E, C, E, G, C, D (Cadd9)

C#, G#, C#, G#, C#, E (C#m)

MODAL TUNINGS

THESE tunings suggest a particular tonal center, but are modally ambiguous. Many de-emphasize the third degree of the scale, often substituting the second or fourth degree. Some feature adjacent strings tuned to a unison. Modal tunings are good for evoking the melody-and-drone textures of Celtic, Appalachian, and Indian music, not to mention narcoleptic grunge rock.

D, A, D, G, A, D (beloved by Pierre Bensusan and Irish and British folkies)

C, G, D, G, A, D (ditto)

D, A, D, E, A, D

D, A, D, D, A, D (vintage CSN & Y)

E, A, E, E, A, E

D, A, E, E, A, A

C, G, D, D, A, E

F, A, C, C, G, Bb

C, C, C, G, C, E

E, B, E, G, A, D

D, G, D, G, A, D

D, G, D, G, C, D

C, Bb, C, F, Bb, F

C, G, C, G, C, G

C, G, C, G, C, F

D, A, D, G, C, Eb

F, Bb, C, F, A, D

E, B, E, G, A, E

E, B, E, G, C, E

G, B, E, F#, A, D

D, A, C, G, C, E

A, B, E, F#, A, D

Eb, Bb, C, F, C, D

TUNINGS WITH MINOR-SECOND INTERVALS

THESE dissonant tunings have adjacent strings tuned half-steps apart. Compare them to some of Sonic Youth's tunings.

C, G, D, G, B, C

B, F#, C#, D, A, D

D, G, D, F, A, Bb

G#, G#, E, F, B, D#

those low strings to? Or change the low strings so that they actually change the main chord."

Gossard explains that he uses three alternate tunings on *Ten* (Epic), the Pearl Jam album that helped lodge alternative sounds in the mainstream charts. "Even Flow" and "Oceans" are in open D (D, A, D, F#, A, D). "Deep" uses an unconventional open-A tuning: E, A, C#, E, A, E (E, A, E, A, C#, E, a slide-guitar staple, is much more common). And for "Gar-

den," he simply lowers the low E string to D.

Pearl Jam's rhythm guitar man gives equal credit to Jimmy Page and Sonic Youth for drawing him into alternate tunings four or five years ago. "Recently I've been really getting into it," he adds, "especially on acoustic guitars with really heavy-gauge strings. Jeff [Ament, Pearl Jam's bassist] told me about this low-B tuning that Michael Hedges uses: B, A, D, F#, B, B. I like the way heavy-gauge strings slap in that

tuning. It's one of those things where you really want to close-mike the neck."

These days Gossard is exploring tunings that have unison string pairs, like an open-G tuning with a cranked-up sixth string (G, G, D, G, B, D), or a series of tunings in which the first, fourth, fifth, and sixth strings remain at their conventional pitches but the second and third strings are tuned to a unison, yielding a quasi-12-string effect. "As soon as I retune a guitar, I