

A Starter's
Guide to

BARITONE GUITAR

The Sleeping Giant of The Guitar Universe

Alex Gordon Hi-Fi

For Bob “Pick With Schick” Schick, my first guitar teacher.

Thank you for teaching me that I could learn to play whatever I loved to hear.

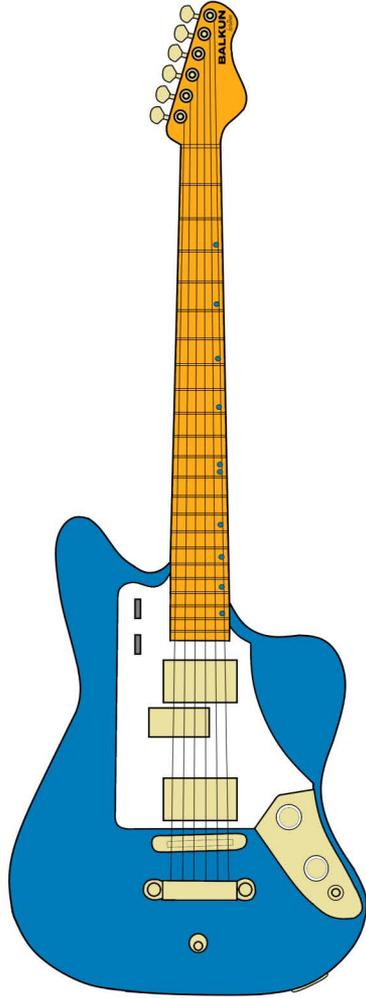


A Starter's Guide To Baritone Guitar
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BARITONE GUITAR

The Sleeping Giant of The Guitar Universe

written & illustrated by

Alex Gordon Hi-Fi

The Sleeping Giant

The baritone guitar is the sleeping giant of the guitar universe. If I had a dollar for every time someone has told me that they've never even heard of the baritone guitar, I'd currently be relaxing in my stately Swiss chalet overlooking the Alps, while sipping hot chocolate and dipping fondue. Most guitar shops don't even carry baritone guitars and if they do, there's usually only one (maybe two) and it's hidden somewhere among the hundreds of traditional guitars swaying happily on the wall.

Why the baritone guitar hasn't become a commonplace staple of the guitar world may be a mystery to me, but the baritone's undeniable appeal certainly is not. This guitar possesses a rare blend of depth and brightness and its range, flexibility and power make it a worthy ally for any six-string slinger (especially those who perform as a solo or duo act). Perhaps the following tome can poke the drowsy behemoth a bit and introduce more folks to the joys of the baritone guitar.

A *brief* Personal Baritone Guitar History

I personally discovered the baritone guitar almost 20 years ago completely by accident. At the time, I was working in a duo with a vocalist and I had been exploring the concept of extending my guitar's lower range to fill out the sound. I was honestly frustrated with working in groups (for a multitude of reasons) and loved the idea of keeping the outfit to just two members. I had also relished the concept of representing the rhythm section on my own ever since I had discovered the work of magical solo guitar conjurer, Tuck Andress, years earlier.

Spurred on by the likes of seven-string guitar inventor, George Van Eps, and multi-string innovator, Charlie Hunter, I decided to experiment with a seven-string guitar to find some low end. So one day, while teaching lessons out of a music shop, I asked one of the sales fellows if the shop carried any seven-strings in stock. He replied that they did not, but they did, however, have a baritone guitar on the racks. I countered quizzically, "A baritone?" Fascinated and intrigued, I quickly absconded with said baritone to the privacy of my teaching studio and gave it a proper test drive.

To say that it was love at first pluck would be a gross understatement. Playing that baritone guitar for the first time was almost an out-of-body experience for me. I immediately felt comfortable with this strange instrument in my hands. The bass range was new and uncharted for me and yet the familiar, six-string consciousness remained intact. I saw an entire universe of potential open up before my fingers and I knew that I was on the right path. That particular baritone guitar went home with me that very day and my musical life has never been the same since.

In the context of the duo setting where I was the sole purveyor of bass, rhythm and harmony, I discovered my comfort zone with the baritone and found pure joy in pushing and pulling the groove at my whim. It became my dream musical scenario to be “the band” all by myself, on one single baritone guitar. Eventually the duo disbanded and I continued on my lonesome for the next two decades as an instrumental solo act, adding melody to my already-full, solo rhythm section plate. I’ve exclusively played baritone guitar ever since.

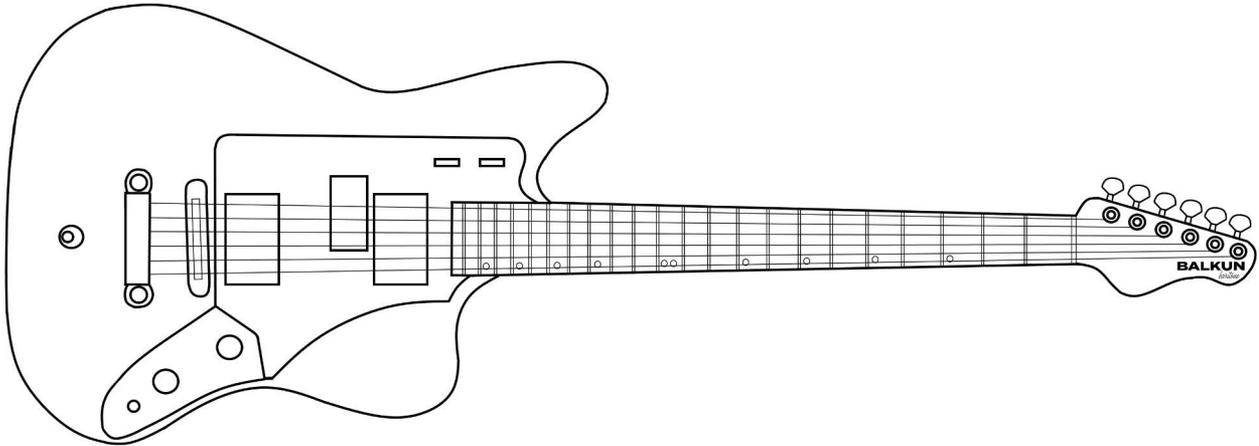
NOTE: I did wind up trying out a seven-string guitar and though I loved the added low end, I never really got comfortable with the extra string or the overall fretboard displacement it created for me. My fingers and my mind were wired for a six-string wardrobe and the seven-string felt akin to wearing a suit that was a couple of sizes too big.

An even briefer **Public Baritone Guitar History**

Though I exclusively label myself a baritone guitarist, I think it's safe to say that baritone guitars are widely considered a novelty in the guitar universe (if they're considered at all). In my experience, whenever I've met someone who owns or uses a baritone, it's typically on a "one-or-two song, special-occasion basis." Rarely do folks completely commit to a solely baritonic existence such as the one I have haplessly wrought upon myself for the past 20 years.

Historically speaking, baritone guitars have most frequently appeared in surf music, spaghetti western soundtracks and heavier types of music where tuning down to lower pitches is a standard practice. Baritone guitar was also a staple in mid-century country & western music where it would often double the lines played by the bass, in a practice referred to as "tic-tac bass." Every now and then, a baritone guitar has been able to sneakily nudge its way into the forefront of a recording. One rather famous example can be heard in the very first notes of the 1958 recording of "La Bamba" by Ritchie Valens, which prominently features a baritone guitar played by West Coast session legend, René Hall.

Though there are a number of us guitarists out here who play baritone guitars in a wide variety of genres, the baritone has never really caught on as a guitar trend by any means. Despite its closely derivative relationship with the traditional six-string guitar, the baritone guitar can be a strange and fickle bedfellow with its own specific, operating procedure that can fool any overzealous guitarist. So let's take a look at what makes a baritone a baritone.



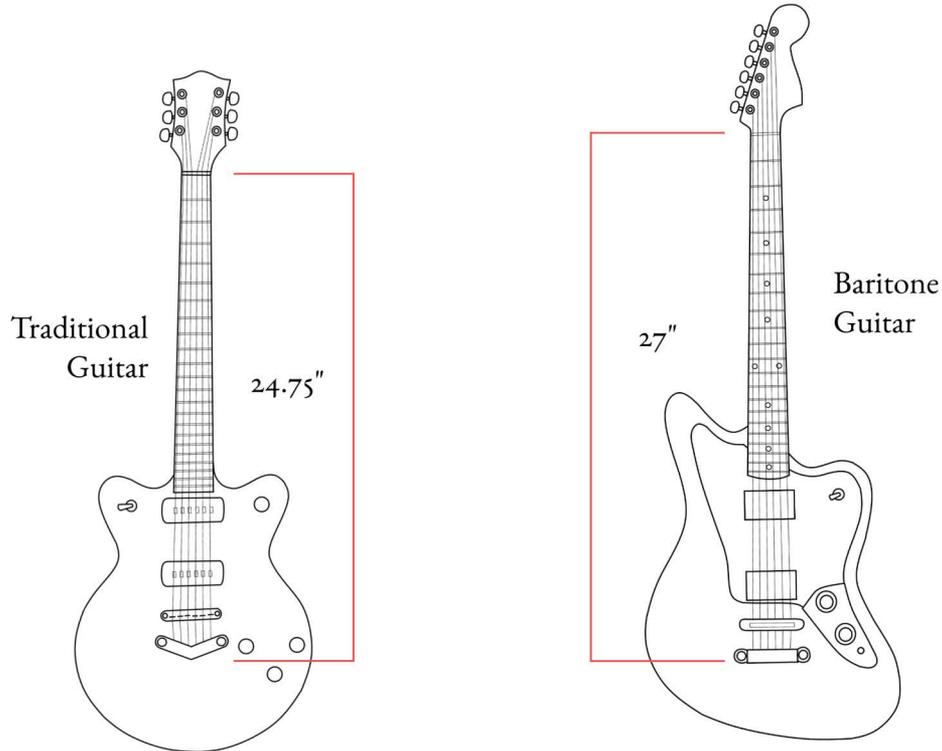
What is a Baritone Guitar?

Scale Length

Baritone guitar is a six-string guitar that is longer in scale than a traditional six-string guitar. Whereas a traditional guitar ranges from around 24 inches to 26.5 inches from the nut to the bridge, a baritone guitar ranges from around 27 to 30.5 inches. You'd be correct in assuming that a longer scale length typically means a longer or bigger guitar and sometimes (like in the case of the 30 inch scale baritones) a much longer guitar. It can be a little disorienting at first to have that extra scale length at your disposal. You might not think an inch or three could make much difference (I didn't at first), but fretting chords at the 1st fret of a 30 inch scale baritone can often feel like your hand is suddenly camped out in the next town over.

While baritone guitars can certainly run a little large in neck and body size, this is not necessarily a requirement. The scale length of a baritone guitar, as opposed to its body size or overall length from top to bottom, is the real definitive factor when it comes to

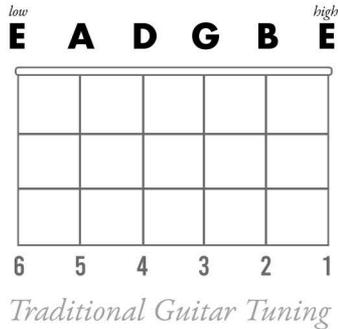
reaching solid, low-end depths. Some baritones can be built or set up in such a way that they feel very similar to a traditional guitar, size-wise, while still delivering the appropriate amount of boomy bottom you'd expect from a baritone guitar.



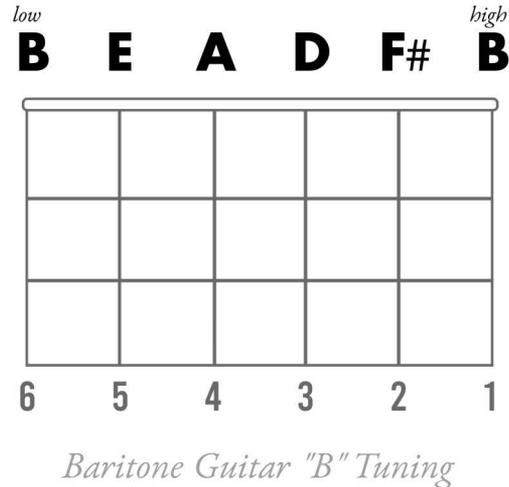
Tuning

The extra scale length of a baritone guitar allows it to be tuned much lower than a traditional guitar without the strings becoming too floppy or unplayable.

A traditional guitar is tuned to E:



Baritone guitars are typically tuned to B:



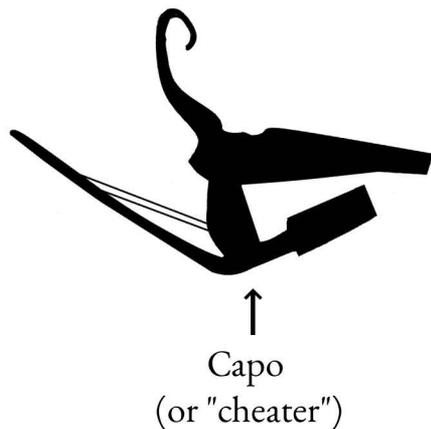
Some six-string guitars are even tuned an entire octave down from E, but these are commonly classified as bass guitars rather than baritones.

Baritones can also be tuned to A:
6 - A, 5 - D, 4 - G, 3 - C, 2 - E, 1 - A

A baritone guitar tuned to B is a fourth lower than a traditional guitar tuned to E.



If you put a capo on the 5th fret of a baritone guitar tuned to B, you could play it as if you were playing the open strings of a traditional guitar tuned to E.



Baritone Fretboard

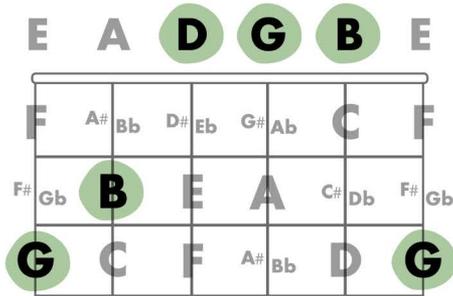
B	C	C# Db	D	D# Eb	E	F	F# Gb	G	G# Ab	A	A# Bb	B
F#	G	G# Ab	A	A# Bb	B	C	C# Db	D	D# Eb	E	F	F# Gb
D	D# Eb	E	F	F# Gb	G	G# Ab	A	A# Bb	B	C	C# Db	D
A	A# Bb	B	C	C# Db	D	D# Eb	E	F	F# Gb	G	G# Ab	A
E	F	F# Gb	G	G# Ab	A	A# Bb	B	C	C# Db	D	D# Eb	E
B	C	C# Db	D	D# Eb	E	F	F# Gb	G	G# Ab	A	A# Bb	B
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

Capo @ 5th fret

The interval shapes on a baritone guitar are the same as they are on a traditional guitar, but the notes are rearranged in completely different places because of the tuning. This means that though chords and scales all look exactly like they do on a traditional guitar, they're not the chords and scales you may think they are on the baritone fretboard.

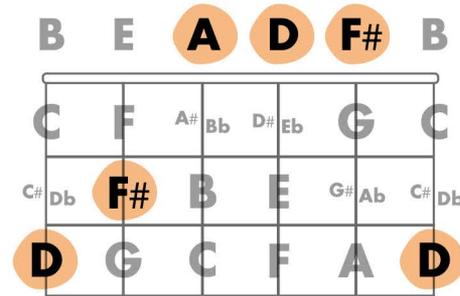
For example, you can play an old-fashioned G chord shape on a baritone tuned to B, however it will not be a G chord. It actually forms a D chord because of how the notes fall on the baritone fretboard.

Traditional Guitar Tuned to "E"



G triad = G, B, D

Baritone Guitar Tuned to "B"



D triad = D, F#, A

The Chromatic Notes *on the Baritone Fretboard*

B	C	C# Db	D	D# Eb	E	F	F# Gb	G	G# Ab	A	A# Bb	B
F#	G	G# Ab	A	A# Bb	B	C	C# Db	D	D# Eb	E	F	F# Gb
D	D# Eb	E	F	F# Gb	G	G# Ab	A	A# Bb	B	C	C# Db	D
A	A# Bb	B	C	C# Db	D	D# Eb	E	F	F# Gb	G	G# Ab	A
E	F	F# Gb	G	G# Ab	A	A# Bb	B	C	C# Db	D	D# Eb	E
B	C	C# Db	D	D# Eb	E	F	F# Gb	G	G# Ab	A	A# Bb	B
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

Selecting a Baritone Guitar

As I mentioned at the beginning of this tome, baritone guitars are typically not in great supply at most guitar shops (if at all) and therefore test-driving them can be a challenge.

Unfortunately, we baritone guitarists are often left in a position of being forced to take what we can get until we eventually find something more in alignment with our preferences. That was the case for me with that first fateful baritone guitar I accidentally happened upon all those years ago. After having various issues and problems with it, I ultimately sold it in favor of my second baritone guitar which was an amazing machine I named “Great-Grandad” (or “Pops”, for short) that went on to become my main instrument for over 10 years. The lame part was that the company who built and sold it had discontinued production of that particular model and it was no longer available new in stores at all. I then tried for years to find a different brand/model backup baritone in case something happened to “Pops”, but I continuously ran into issue after issue with other potential baritones over things like body shape, scale length, electronics, etc. and therefore could not find anything suitable. Finally, I was able to purchase an identical model of “Pops” (named “Carlyle”) from a resale website for several hundred dollars more than I had paid for the exact same baritone years earlier and I still own these two machines to this day.

This is not to say that quality, off-the-rack baritone guitars aren't available out there. There are definitely reputable companies building fine baritone instruments. It's just that they aren't always accessible without foregoing a test drive and ordering them blind online.

I say this not to discourage anyone from shopping for and/or playing a baritone guitar, but rather to illustrate the lengths that those of us who love baritone guitar will go in order to play it. It's worth the search. It's worth the time and effort to find the right one because it can be an instrument that can help fulfill so many wonderful musical and creative goals. It's going to feel somewhat different no matter which way you slice it precisely because it's a baritone guitar. If you know that going in, then you can better prepare yourself for the adjustment you'll need to make for a larger scale, a longer fretboard, bigger body, etc. Here are some things to consider when shopping.

Acoustic or Electric ?

There are acoustic and electric baritone guitars. I only play electric baritone guitar because that is my personal preference. Though they are absolutely beautiful-sounding instruments, I have found that acoustic baritone guitars just don't provide enough low-end sustain to suit my creative needs. And at the risk of alienating acoustic folks, I have quite honestly developed

an aversion to playing acoustic guitars of any type in recent years, mainly because I don't like the way roundwound strings feel on my fingers. It seems that committing to flatwounds on electric baritones has gotten me hooked on smoother fretboard transitions. I also appreciate the close-fit of a thin solid-bodied, electric guitar. All that said, I would encourage you to experience acoustic and electric baritones for yourself and make your own decision as to whether or not an electric or an acoustic baritone guitar (or both) may be in your future.

Comfort

Of course, we all want a nifty-looking guitar, but the most important factor for me in selecting any guitar has always been comfort. Heck, for years, my two mainstay baritone instruments have been black with rosewood fretboards and if you know anything about me, you'd know that I typically prefer a cheerier look as opposed to fashioning myself after Johnny Cash, but I've been willing to sacrifice appearance for comfort. I can't tell you how many times I've picked up a beautiful guitar that's worth thousands of dollars and have been immediately turned off or disappointed with its lack of design comfort. I'm aware that this is, of course, a matter of personal taste. One person's pillow is another person's boulder. All the more reason to be as particular as possible when selecting a baritone guitar.

Body Shape

I have a personal distaste for guitars with big, oversized components or dimensions that don't serve a guitar's playability. Nor am I a fan of boxy guitars with hard angles and unforgiving edges (I'm looking at you, Tele****er). I perform so often that any instrument I use must have a substantial level of convenience built into the body shape, not unlike an old pair of house slippers. To wit, a hip pocket is a requirement for me. I don't want to be constantly reminded that I'm holding a block of wood. On the contrary, I need to be able to forget that I'm holding a piece of wood so that I can focus on the job at hand: making music. I essentially want a no-nonsense, no-frills machine that is less of an external instrument and more of an extension of my body.

Necks

I like really thin, manageable necks on the guitars I use. I have relatively small hands for someone of my height and I can not stand picking up a guitar outfitted with a baseball bat for a neck. There is absolutely no reason for anyone to have to wrestle with a huge oak tree branch just to get melodic on a guitar. You can just imagine the unruliness of that size neck compounded by a 30 inch scale baritone. Things are hard enough already just trying to make

music on these things without having to scale Everest at the same time. I've tried out a good number of baritone guitars that suffer from this overblown neck size, but some, like the ones I've settled on, were much more agreeable and easier to work with. However, as with everything else, it's up to each individual and if a nice, robust, guitar neck popping out of its collar is your cup of tea, then, by all means, add another sugar and sip away.

Electronics

Pickups, wiring, etc. can all be switched out and upgraded at anytime so this ought not be a huge dealbreaker on any potential purchase, but always plug a hopeful baritone into your own rig (yes, lug your amp to the shop) before buying in order to really hear what the thing will sound like on your home court. Because we're limited in what is available to us, there are an alarming number of second-rate baritones out there (both in build-quality and in electronic quality) so proceed with inquisitive apprehension. I once saw a baritone built so poorly that the high string was resting so far to the side that it was OFF the fretboard. You literally had to push it over while playing to get it to land on the fretboard. Faulty input jacks and iffy wiring have a habit of appearing on assembly line baritone guitars, so be on the lookout.

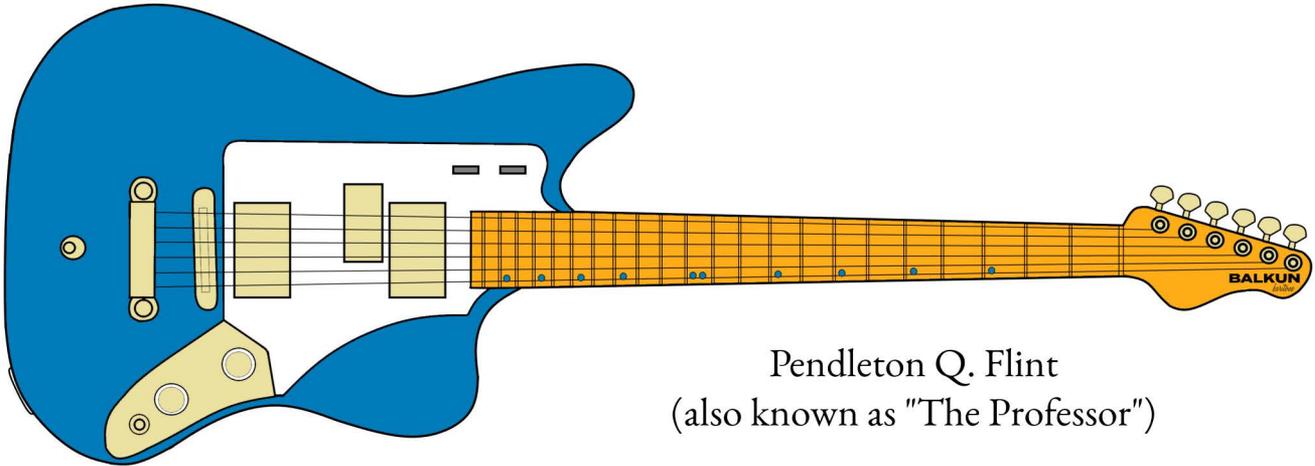
Modifications

Since I'm not mechanically inclined, I don't do any sort of repairs/upgrades myself (due to a couple of mishaps/injuries in the past, my wife also no longer allows me to use tools of any sort), but I've got extremely reliable craftspeople I can depend on to take care of those things for me. I got quite lucky with "Pops" & "Carlyle" in that they came fairly well-built and I've only had slight modifications made in the past. For example, one small change I once had done to "Pops" was having the pickup gear shifter moved from one inconvenient spot on the pickguard to another (those pickup shifters are almost always in my way).

Aside from constructing your own baritone guitar from scratch or from a kit, if you happen to be handy enough, another option could be to just take a lesser-quality baritone guitar, use it as a shell and outfit it with parts you prefer. Any baritone guitar can certainly get hot-rodged to suit one's needs and if you're one of those fortunate, tool-wielding guitarists then you stand an even better chance at finding a fixer-upper baritone with capabilities that you can supe up to be what you're looking for. Parts are easy to access with mail-order & the internet and though I'm prohibited, my wife would probably let you own and operate a soldering gun or a chisel easily enough.

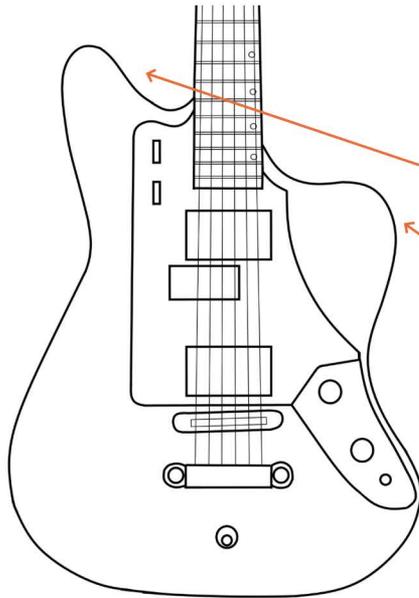
Alex Gordon Hi-Fi Baritonic Machine # 1

I've had the incredibly good fortune of meeting a bonafide baritone luthier who, as a baritone guitarist himself, really understands the nature of the beast. Master baritone luthier, Steve Balkun (balkunguitars.com) and I met online several years back and I was eventually able to commission a custom baritone from him. Not only a wizardly builder, Steve is also extremely flexible and easy to work with. He was able to deftly align some of my specific preferences with his own invaluable experience and craft a fantastic, unique baritonic machine.



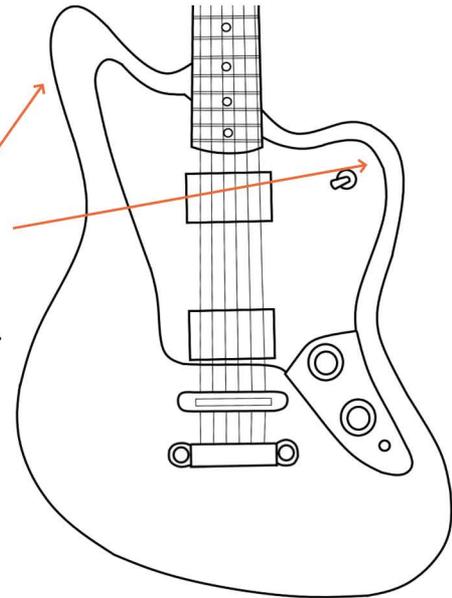
Pendleton Q. Flint
(also known as "The Professor")

The body, which is based on a (nameless company) Jaguar shape, is constructed from reclaimed old-growth Douglas Fir that was originally harvested in the mid-1800's. Steve was able to shave off a good deal of unnecessary size from the body's bottom end, while also creating a flatter edge that runs parallel to the ground when the instrument is placed on a stand or set on the floor.



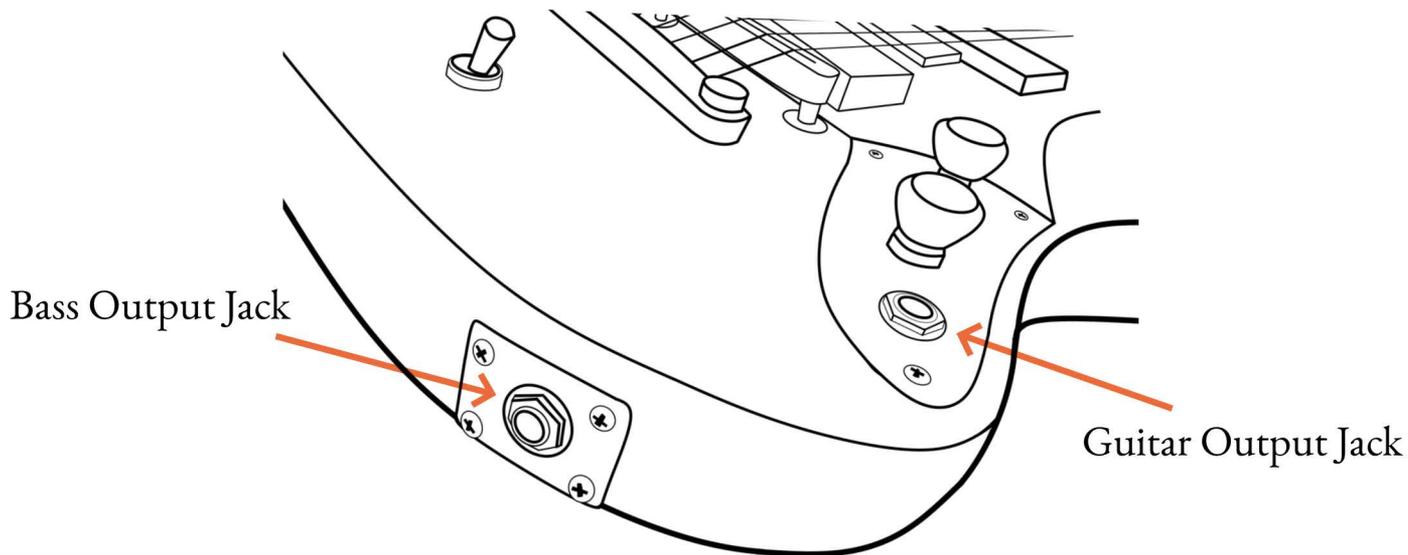
"The Professor"

Since I perform sitting down while using a guitar strap, the upper and lower horns were kept the same size to maintain a balanced position.



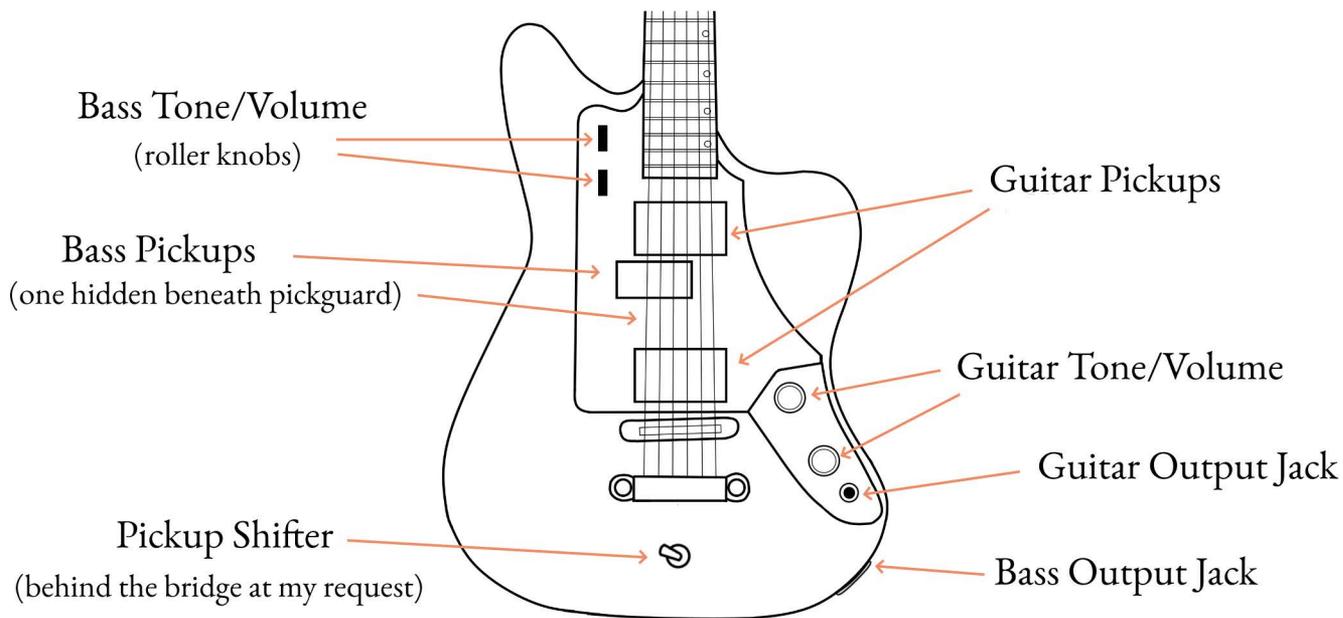
"Carlyle"

Steve suggested a thinner body width which immediately appealed to my vision of a machine that is compact and close to the hip. I also asked him to whittle the size of the headstock on the maple fretboard down as low as it could go. The scale length is 27 inches and the overall size is quite close to that of a traditional guitar (in fact, my traditional guitar is taller than my Balkun).



The electronics boast a dual output system for separate 'guitar' and 'bass' channels with one set of guitar pickups and a separate set of bass pickups, each running to its own output jack.

The bass pickups (one is hidden under the pickguard) are only placed beneath the three bass strings so as to really accent bass lines through a bass rig. With this setup, separate cables can be run from each output to their respective amplifiers. The isolated bass and guitar circuits allow for greater detail when dialing in tone on two different speakers and truly make it possible to create the purest, most complete baritone guitar sound.



Baritone Guitar Equipment

Strings

They do indeed make specific strings for baritone guitar, however traditional guitar strings may also be used on a baritone, if the baritone scale length is on the shorter end. Longer scale baritones often require a longer set of special baritone strings because traditional strings simply aren't long enough to reach from the bridge to the tuning machines.

Since I've always used shorter scale baritones, I find that heavier traditional guitar strings suit my needs just fine. Strings made especially for baritone guitar also tend to get a bit too thick on the low-end side for my taste. Here's a comparison to show you what I mean:

traditional set of 13 gauge strings:

6	5	4	3	2	1
E	A	D	G	B	E
56	46	36	26	17	13

typical set of baritone guitar strings:

6	5	4	3	2	1
B	E	A	D	F#	B
72	56	44	30	18	13

As you can see, the first few strings start out somewhat close in size, but by the 4th and subsequent

strings, the baritone set jumps ahead considerably in thickness and winds up with a 5th string that is the same size as the traditional set's 6th string. That's quite a noticeable difference.

Also, if you're used to a lighter string gauge, don't let the heavier gauges discourage you here. Taking the longer baritone scale into consideration, a set of traditional 12 or 13 gauge strings may be challenging to play when strung on a traditional guitar, but on the longer baritone scale, those same strings can feel more like 10's or 11's.

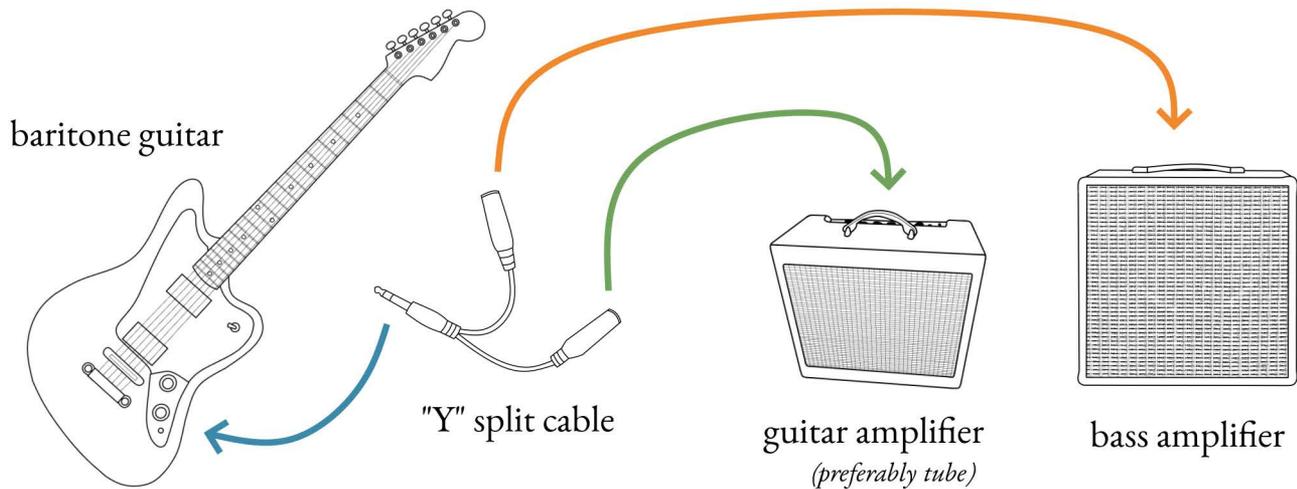
Heavier strings obviously lend themselves to a thicker, deeper tone, but a baritone is going to be deeper and thicker in tone regardless of what strings you use. Roundwound strings, which are the most commonly used electric guitar strings, tend to be very bright and crisp and that crispness can certainly still translate somewhat to a baritone guitar.

In my case, I prefer a deader sound from my strings and therefore, on my baritone, I use 13 gauge flatwound strings, which are more commonly associated with jazz guitar playing. Though I'm not a jazz musician, I like the muted, softer sound of flatwounds, especially when used for bass lines on the baritone. I also enjoy the smooth texture of flatwounds. Overall, I find that the flatwound strings combined with the baritone scale length, create a perfect tonal blend that is just right for my particular musical wheelhouse.

Amplifiers

Choosing an amplifier for an electric guitar falls under the category of personal taste and, for the most part, the electric baritone guitar is no different. Everyone has a different sonic palette and each musician envisions their own outcome in the almighty search for tone. Given that it's electric, you could obviously use any amplifier with a baritone guitar, but as a solo musician, I play baritone guitar through a bass amplifier. A smallish, lightweight, solid-state, 40 watt bass combo amp has been my mainstay for the past several years. The whole point of the baritone, for me, is the low-end and I have found that the low-end simply does not translate enough for me through a regular guitar amp. Though larger, vintage tube guitar amps can provide a great deal of low end, I personally prefer a bass amplifier. Obviously, the bigger the bass speaker, the bigger the bass sound, but since I play solo, the little 40 watt bass combo is more than enough for my needs.

Unfortunately, most baritone guitars don't come equipped with bass & guitar pickups wired to independent outputs. One great way to achieve the best of both worlds is by using a Y split cable out of the baritone's solitary output jack with one cable running to a guitar amp (preferably tube) and the other going into a bass amp. This is honestly an ideal representation of the baritone's true potential as an instrument with satisfying treble and bass ranges. The tube amp gives you the sharp punch of the highs, while the bass amp simultaneously puts across the appropriate bump to cover the lows.



As a professional baritone guitarist, I'm not in the habit of overexerting myself and so the idea of lugging two amplifiers to any job is quite unappealing. It's a rare occasion when I actually have two amps on hand for a performance. That is why I've settled on using a solitary bass amplifier for baritone guitar. It's not only more convenient to transport one amp, but the bass amp properly conveys the baritone's warmth and depth without sacrificing overall tone. On more than one performance, I've had someone walk up to me while I was playing and say that they could've sworn that I was using a hollow body electric guitar as opposed to a solid body because of how rich and thick the tone had sounded from afar. I would attribute that unintentional illusion to the use of a bass amplifier.

Pedals & Effects

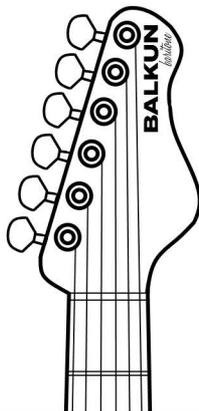
I typically use no effects when I play baritone guitar on a job, so I'm not a likely candidate to make potential pedal recommendations for baritone. I run straight into the bass combo from my baritone with a single solitary cable. Occasionally, I may use a touch of reverb, if I use anything (especially on recordings and livestreams where I run direct), but my ears generally want to hear an unadulterated guitar sound when I perform my preferred assortment of music.

That said, the use of pedals & effects is 100% a personal choice and I would never impose my minimalist insanity on anyone else. Dig in and enjoy that pedal board you've built. I'm sure there is a fascinating world of sound to be discovered there with a baritone guitar. Baritone luthier, Steve Balkun, runs his Balkun Baritones through a wide variety of pedals including, at times, an octave pedal so his baritone bass can get even lower, which I think is fantastic. Obviously, if you're going to use a baritone guitar for surf music, springy reverb is a requirement. Likewise, if you're using baritone for metal, distortion is a must.

Though I personally never use loop stations or loop pedals, I wholly appreciate the talent and skill required to use said devices and I'd wager that one could create amazing sounds with a baritone guitar and a loop pedal. I simply have a different set of musical goals which the

baritone guitar (in its natural state) lends itself to perfectly. If it's not happening in my fingers, live and in the moment, then I don't want it in there. That's always been my intention, ever since I set out to be a solo baritone guitarist. But, that outlook is not for everyone.

It's worth noting that I often err on the side of convenience when it comes to equipment of any sort. If it's something extra I have to carry, I don't want it. My load-in/load-out for jobs is as easy as can be because I bring nothing superfluous: baritone guitar in a sack on my shoulders, plus an amp & seat cushion strapped to a small hand truck, leaving one hand free to carry my thermos of coffee. I'm in and I'm out, with minimal nonsense. After years of the hustle, it's tough to beat an easy load-in.



Using a Baritone Guitar

If it hasn't been made clear yet, I feel that the baritone guitar is an exceptional, optimum choice for any solo fingerstyle guitarist. Of course, overall thinking must be adjusted somewhat from traditional guitar and that's where my Baritonic Guitar classes come in handy, but the baritone is such a full sounding instrument when played properly in a solo guitar setting. The trick is to honor the baritone's dualistic tendencies and appropriately assign each part to a bass or treble frequency. This is one area where the Baritonic Guitar classes I've created can take you to the next level of desired baritonic ascension.

One of the simplest, quickest ways I've used to explain baritone guitar to the uninitiated is to just say that it falls somewhere between a bass and a regular guitar. Even if that statement may not provide a comprehensive definition, when we investigate some of the possible applications for baritone guitar, we find that it can certainly fit into either a guitar role or bass role with a fair amount of ease. It can even do both at the same time. Hear me out.

Baritone as Traditional Guitar

Of course, you'd be sacrificing a few of the higher fret notes, but you could certainly use a

baritone guitar in place of a traditional guitar in any setting and you don't have to learn all new chord shapes and scale patterns in order to do so. You just have to adjust to the notes on the baritone fretboard being in a different spot than on a traditional guitar and proceed accordingly. You'll also want to exercise caution and be on the lookout for muddying the waters down on those low strings. Things can get cluttered down there on a baritone guitar.

Baritone as Bass Guitar

In my experience, a baritone guitar can function comfortably in place of a bass guitar (albeit a higher pitched one) in a number of musical settings. When I make ensemble recordings for myself these days, I only ever use a baritone guitar to play the bass lines and it works just fine for my tastes. The baritone fretboard may not go as low as a standard bass guitar, but with proper tonal adjustments and a healthy touch of bass-mindedness, a baritone guitar can push the groove and accent the kick drum like a champ. I've also used the baritone as bass on ensemble jobs as well with very pleasant results.

Baritone as Bass and Traditional Guitar (at the same time)

This particular application requires a good deal of skill and musicianship to fulfill, but it is my absolute favorite way to use the baritone guitar. Playing bass parts AND guitar parts at the same time on one individual baritone is perhaps the purest manifestation of the baritone guitar's true destiny. Yes, I just wrote that ridiculous sentence because I feel that strongly about the power of the baritone to function as a multi-tasking instrument.

The potential for this application is huge because it can elevate your status as a working musician to be able to essentially cover the roles of two people on one instrument, therefore opening doors to more opportunities and more income. It's akin to a keyboard player who can comp chords with the right hand while playing bass lines with the left, but doing it on a baritone guitar. This can apply to a duo setting with a vocalist (my all-time favorite) or even full-on ensembles with a drummer. I've actually been able to sell this concept to cover-gig bandleaders as a "hire one me instead of two people and pay me a little less than you would pay two of us and you still get two instruments" situation. I wound up making more than I would have if I was hired to just play guitar or bass and I got to play baritone the way I really love to play it.

I'm not talking about guitar gymnastics either. You don't have to get totally nuts to fill out the two positions on one baritone guitar. If you have any apprehension about whether or not you can pull this one off, my Baritonic Guitar classes can turn you into a dual-headed rhythm giant who can deftly use a single baritone guitar to skillfully and confidently accompany anyone, in any situation.

Baritone for Solo Singer-Songwriters

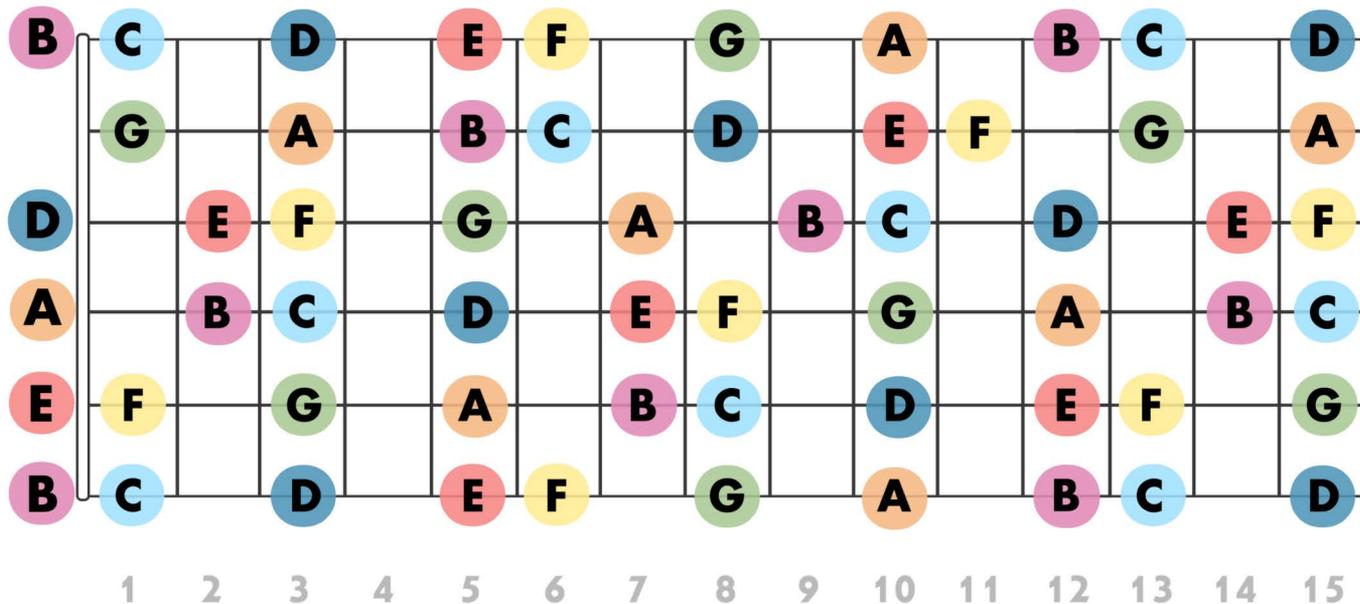
Any vocalist/singer-songwriter who accompanies themselves on guitar could benefit from enlisting a baritone guitar for solo performances. Think of how rich the sound could get if a baritone guitar was run through a rig which included a bass amp and were gently filling out the little, extra spaces behind a singing voice. The potential of baritone really widens the playing field nicely in so many ways.

Playing a Baritone Guitar

Now that you've got one of these amazing baritone guitars in your hands, it's time to reacquaint yourself with the notes in their adjusted locations. I've gone ahead and mapped out the following guitar theory basics for you to think about and use as fodder in getting familiar with your new baritone fretboard landscape.

- Major Scale
- Major Scale Intervals
- Major Scale Fretboard Patterns
- Triads (Major, Minor, Diminished, Augmented)
- Barre Chords
- Harmonized Major Scale Patterns

C Major Scale *on the Baritone Fretboard*



C Major Scale Intervals

on the Baritone Fretboard

R, 2 - major 2nd 

R, 3 - major 3rd 

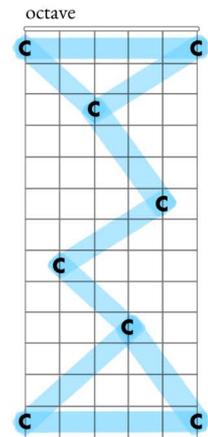
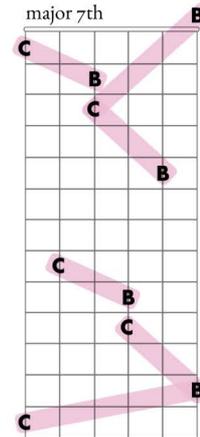
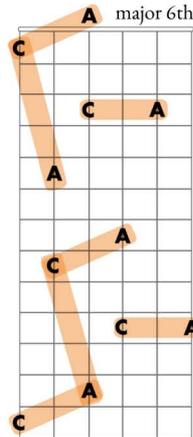
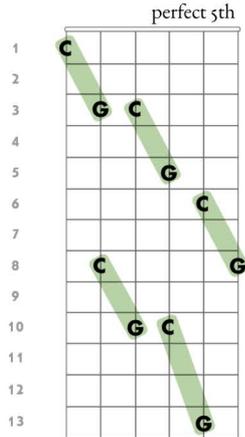
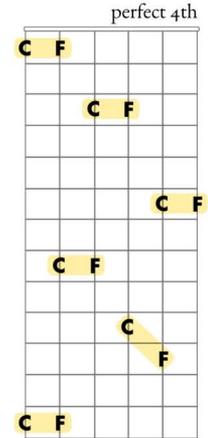
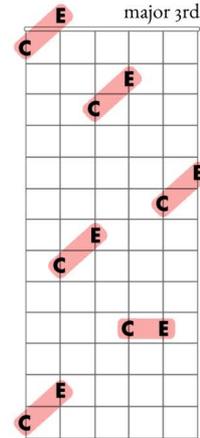
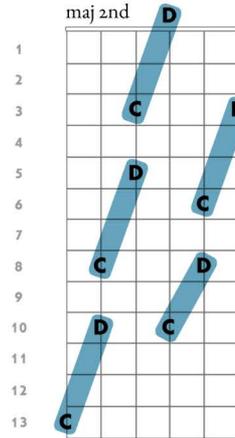
R, 4 - perfect 4th 

R, 5 - perfect 5th 

R, 6 - major 6th 

R, 7 - major 7th 

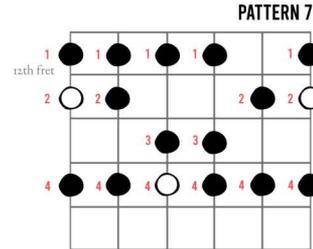
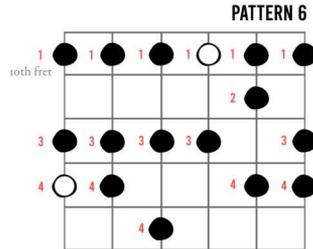
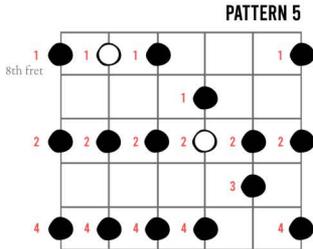
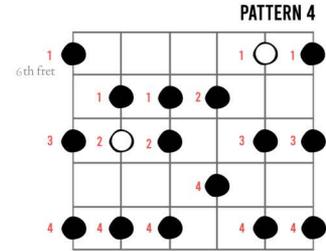
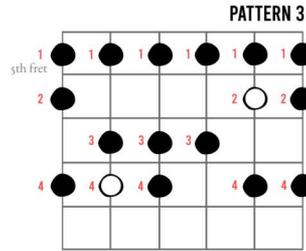
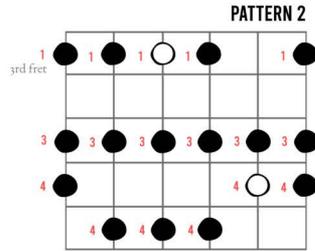
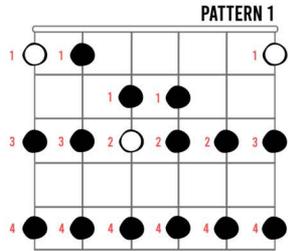
R, R- octave 



C Major Scale *all seven patterns*

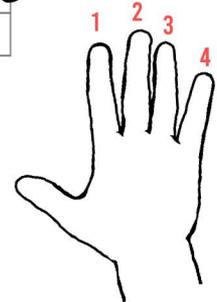


○ = ROOT



EACH PATTERN DERIVES ITS NAME FROM THE SCALE TONE IT BEGINS WITH

e.g. Pattern 4 begins with F, which is the 4th note of C major



C Major Triads

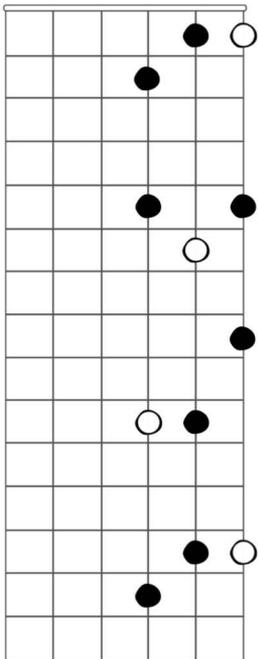
1 3 5

○ = ROOT

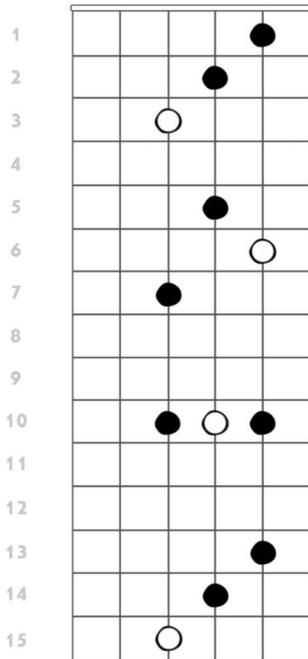
C E G



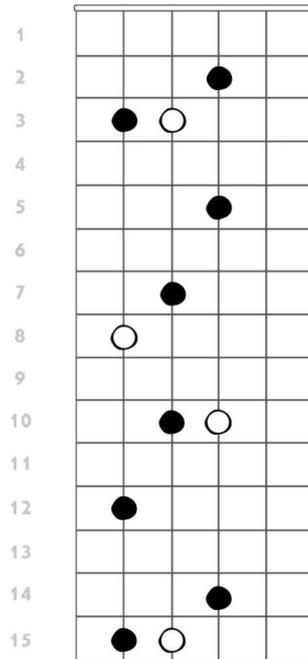
ZONE 1



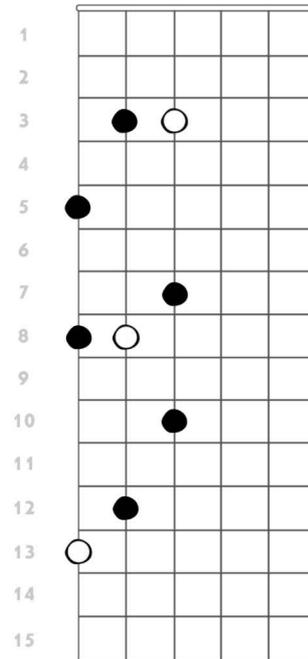
ZONE 2



ZONE 3



ZONE 4





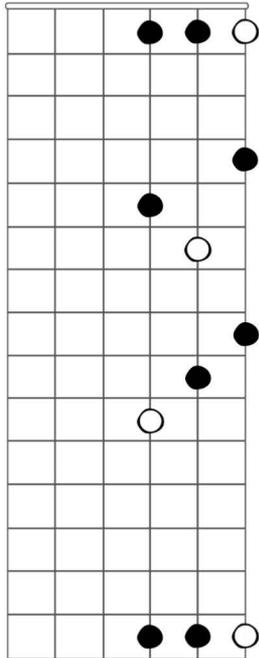
C Minor Triads

1 *b*3 5

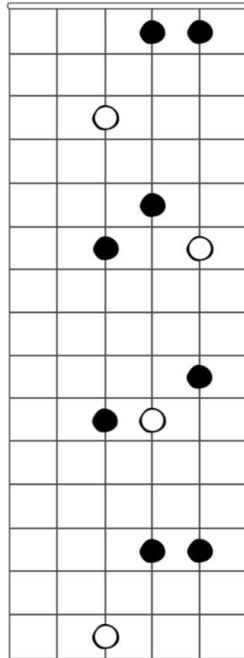
○ = ROOT

C Eb G

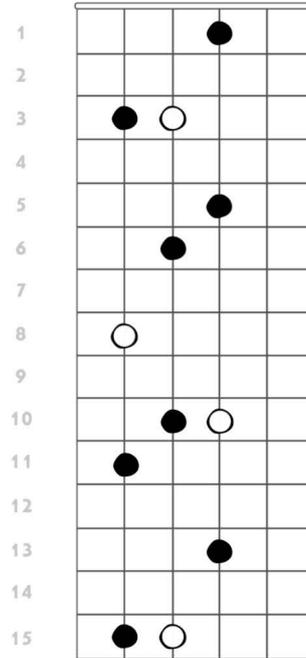
ZONE 1



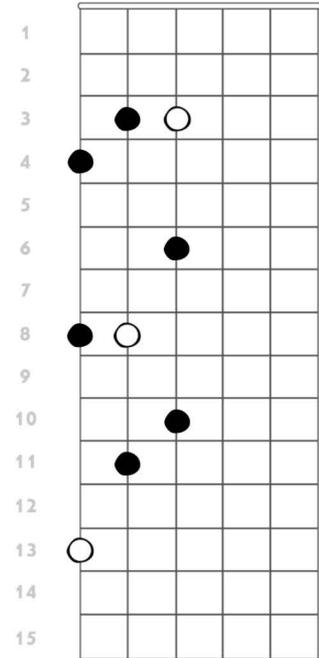
ZONE 2



ZONE 3



ZONE 4



C Diminished Triads

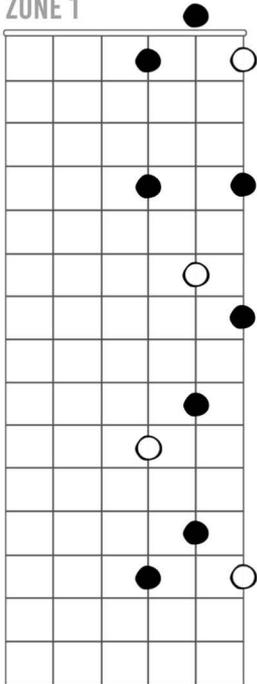
1 $b3$ $b5$

○ = ROOT

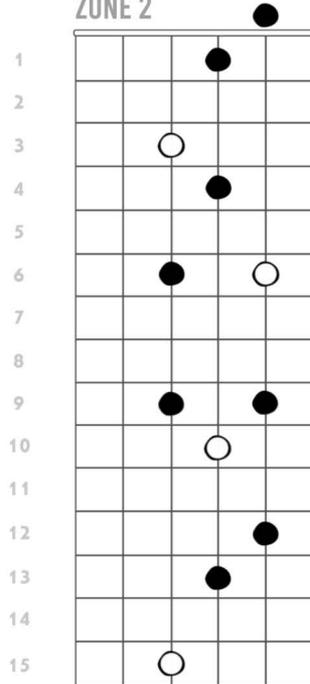
C E^b G^b



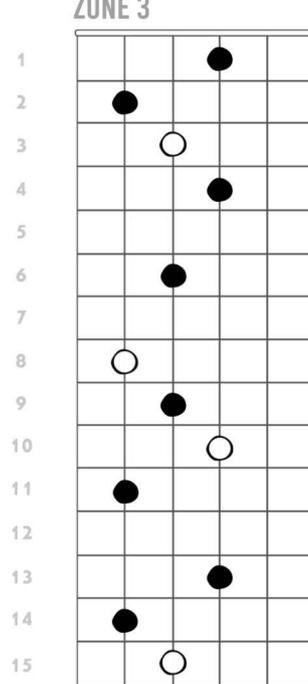
ZONE 1



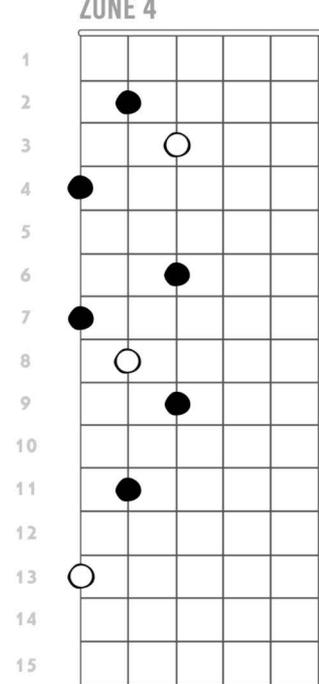
ZONE 2



ZONE 3



ZONE 4



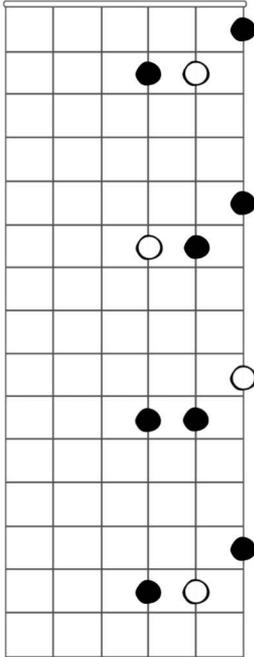


C Augmented Triads 1 3 #5

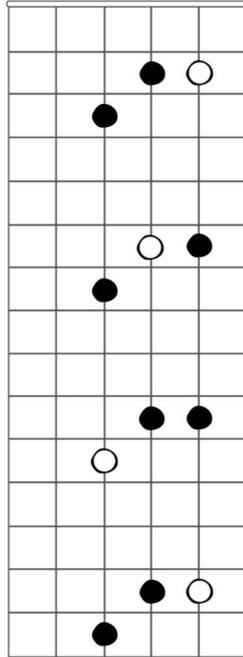
○ = ROOT

C E G#

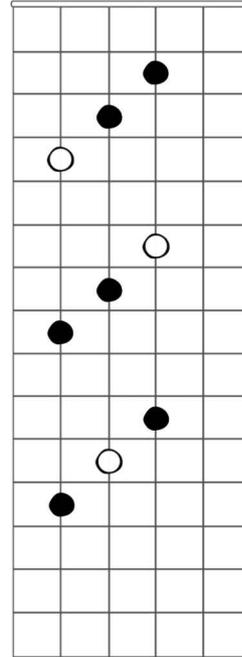
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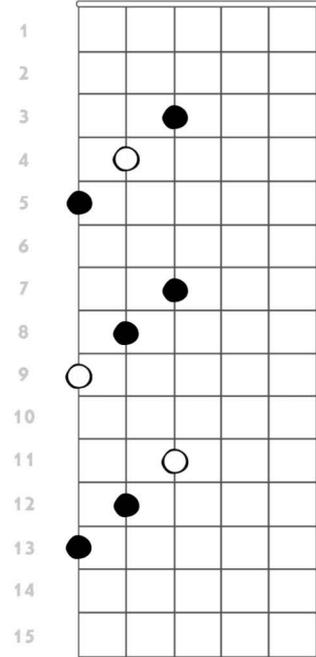
ZONE 2



ZONE 3

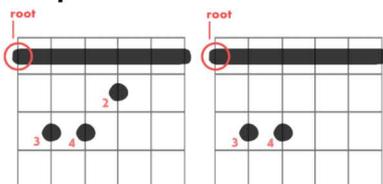


ZONE 4



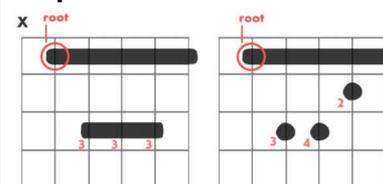
Barre Chords *root on B, E & A*

Major **Minor**



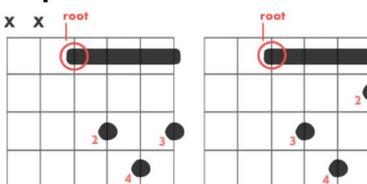
Root on B

Major **Minor**



Root on E

Major **Minor**



Root on A

A	A# Bb	B	C	C# Db	D	D# Eb	E	F	F# Gb	G	G# Ab	A
E	F	F# Gb	G	G# Ab	A	A# Bb	B	C	C# Db	D	D# Eb	E
low B	C	C# Db	D	D# Eb	E	F	F# Gb	G	G# Ab	A	A# Bb	B

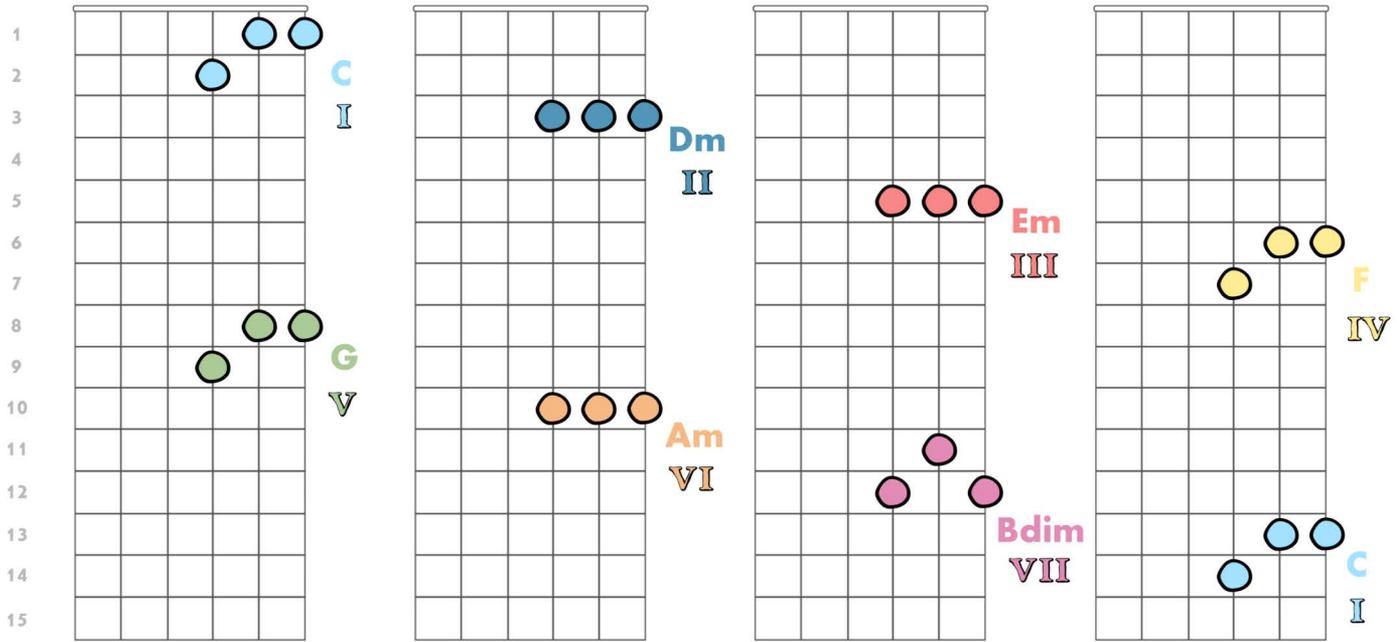
ZONE 1

1ST INVERSION
(3rd in bass)

C Harmonized Major Scale



major	minor	minor	major	major	minor	diminished
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	Bdim





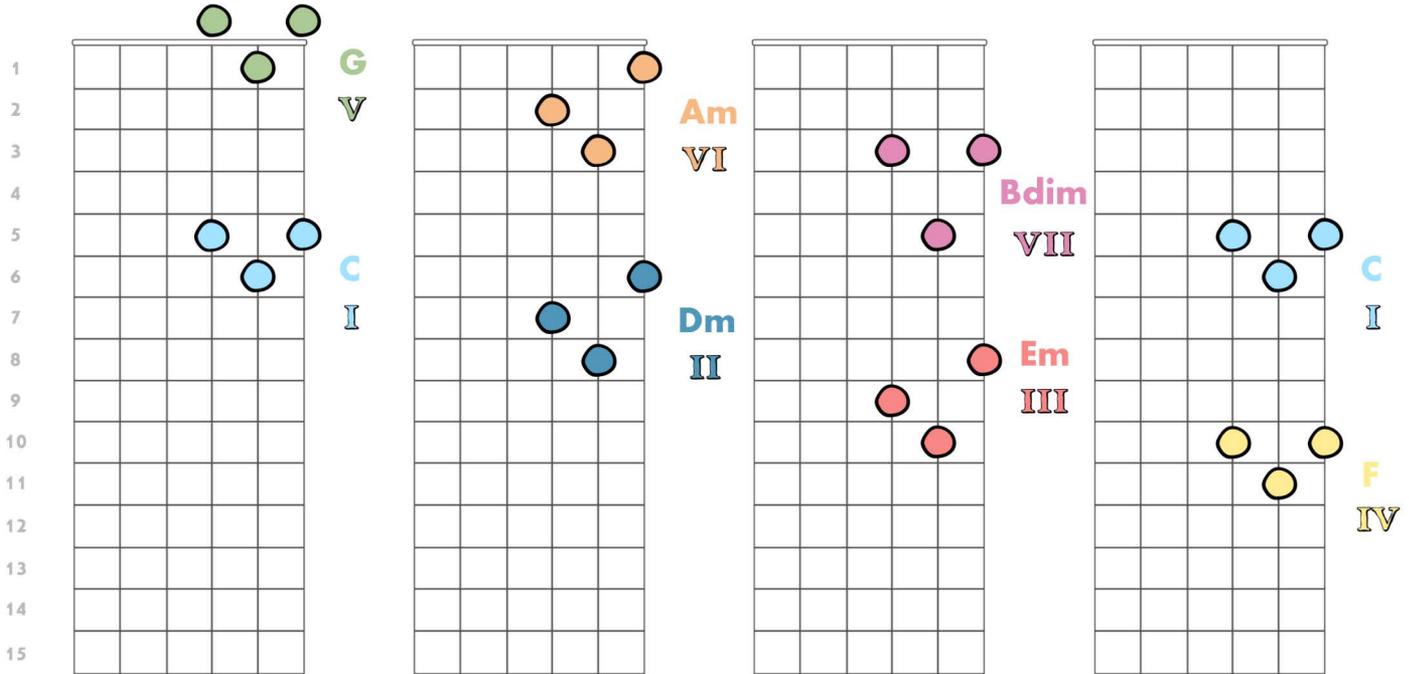
C Harmonized Major Scale

ZONE 1

2ND INVERSION

(5th in bass)

major	minor	minor	major	major	minor	diminished
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	Bdim



ZONE 1

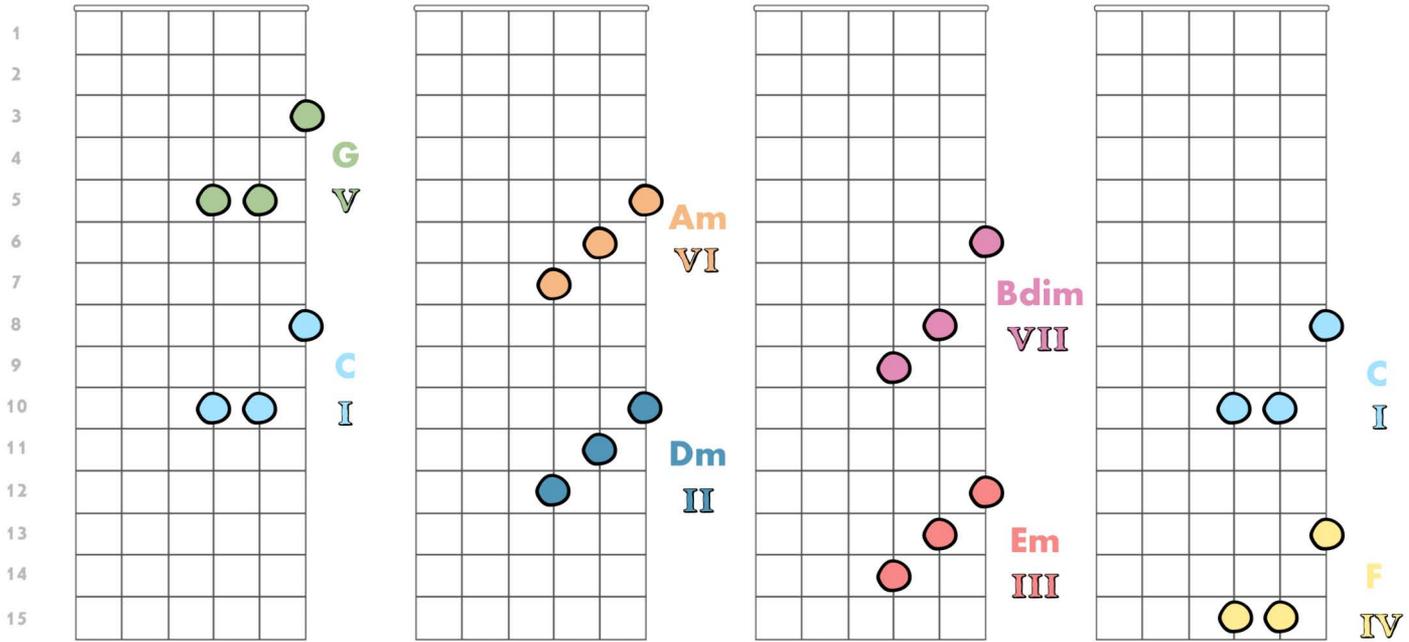
ROOT INVERSION

(root in bass)

C Harmonized Major Scale



major	minor	minor	major	major	minor	diminished
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	Bdim



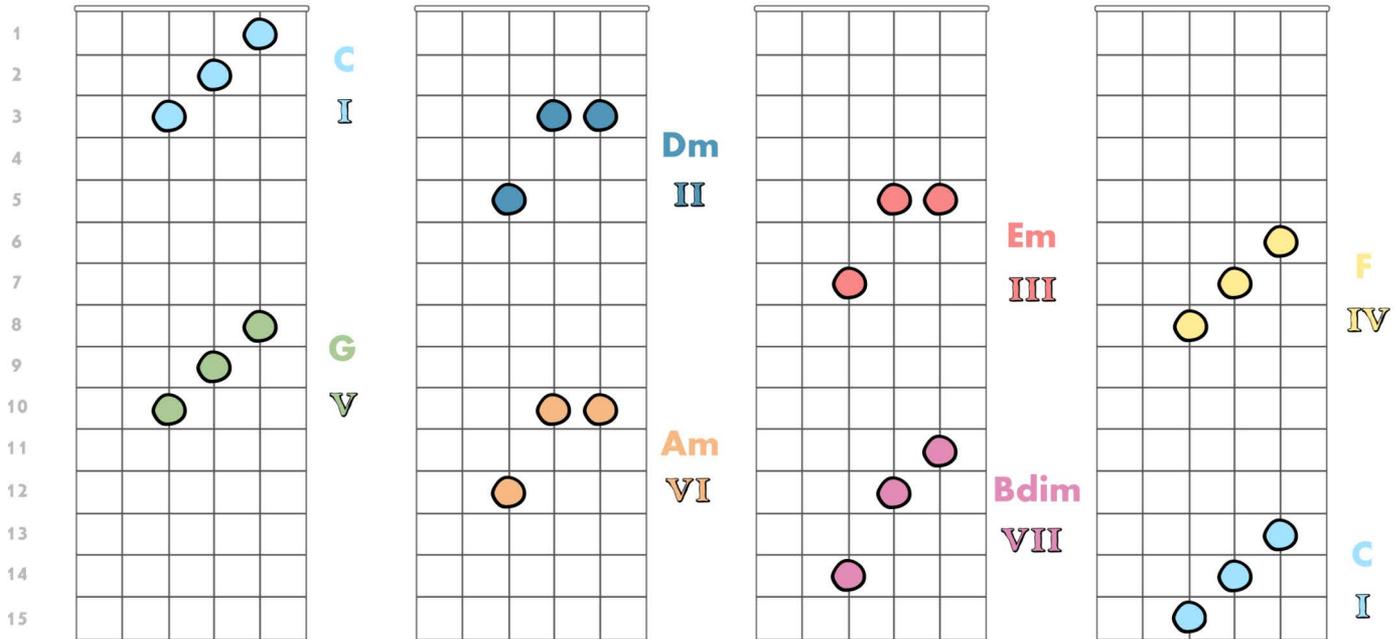


C Harmonized Major Scale

ZONE 2

ROOT INVERSION
(root in bass)

major	minor	minor	major	major	minor	diminished
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	Bdim



ZONE 2

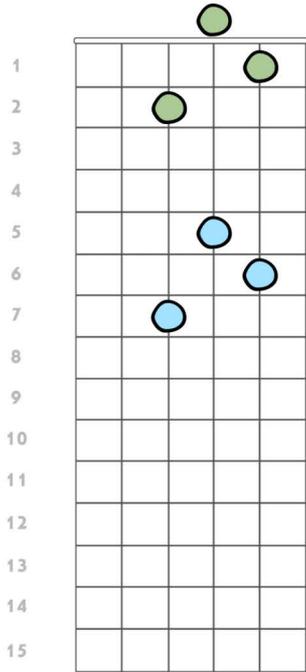
1ST INVERSION

(3rd in bass)

C Harmonized Major Scale

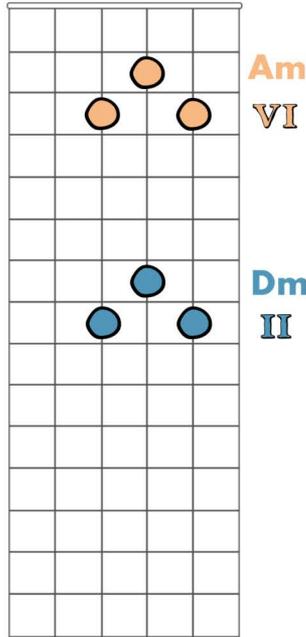


major	minor	minor	major	major	minor	diminished
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	Bdim



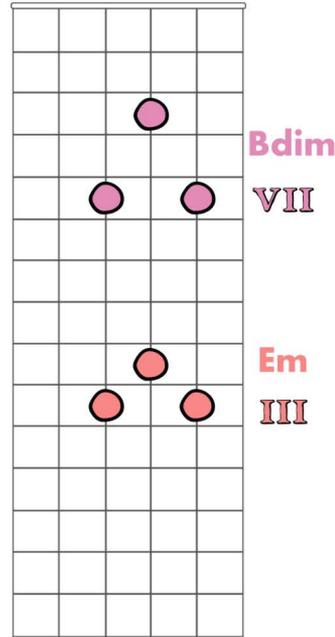
G
V

C
I



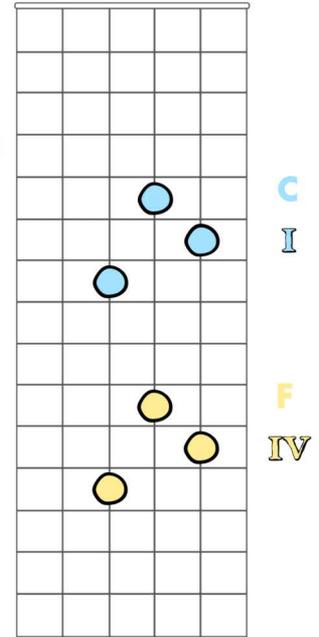
Am
VI

Dm
II



Bdim
VII

Em
III



C
I

F
IV

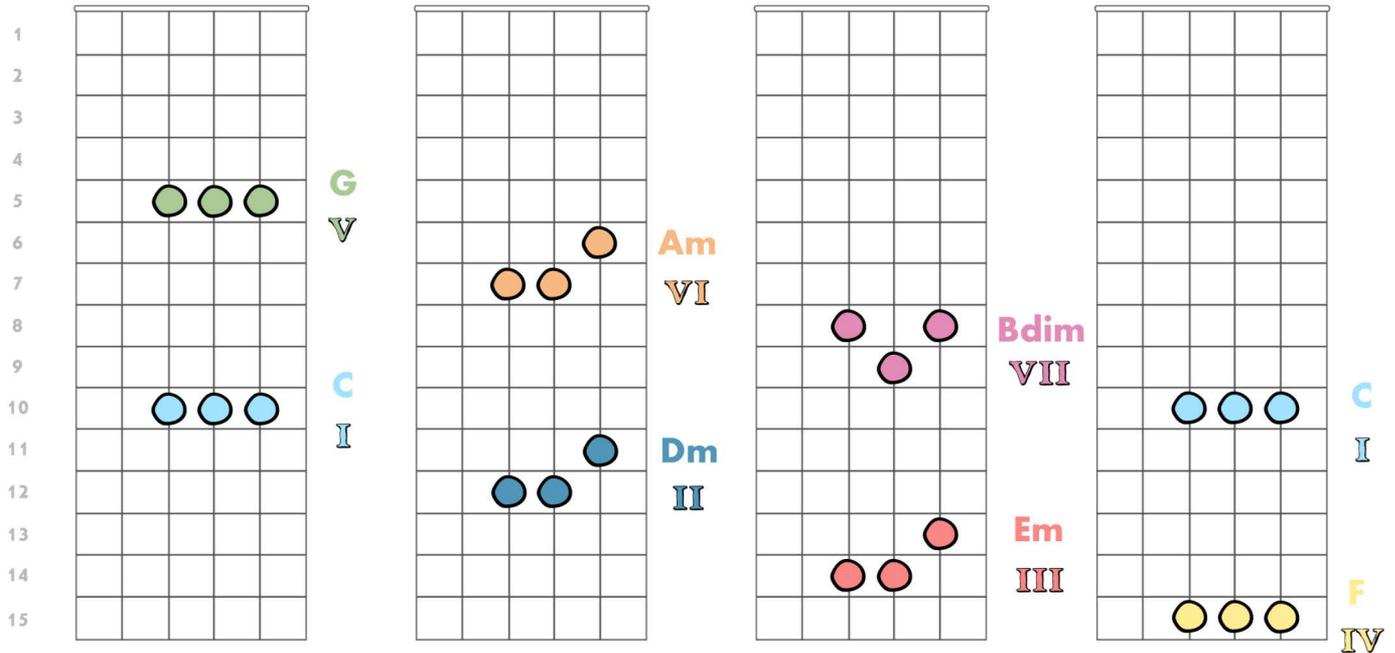


C Harmonized Major Scale

ZONE 2

2ND INVERSION
(5th in bass)

major	minor	minor	major	major	minor	diminished
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	Bdim



ZONE 3

2ND INVERSION

(5th in bass)

C Harmonized Major Scale



major	minor	minor	major	major	minor	diminished
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	Bdim

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15

C
I

Dm
II

Em
III

F
IV

G
V

Am
VI

Bdim
VII

C
I

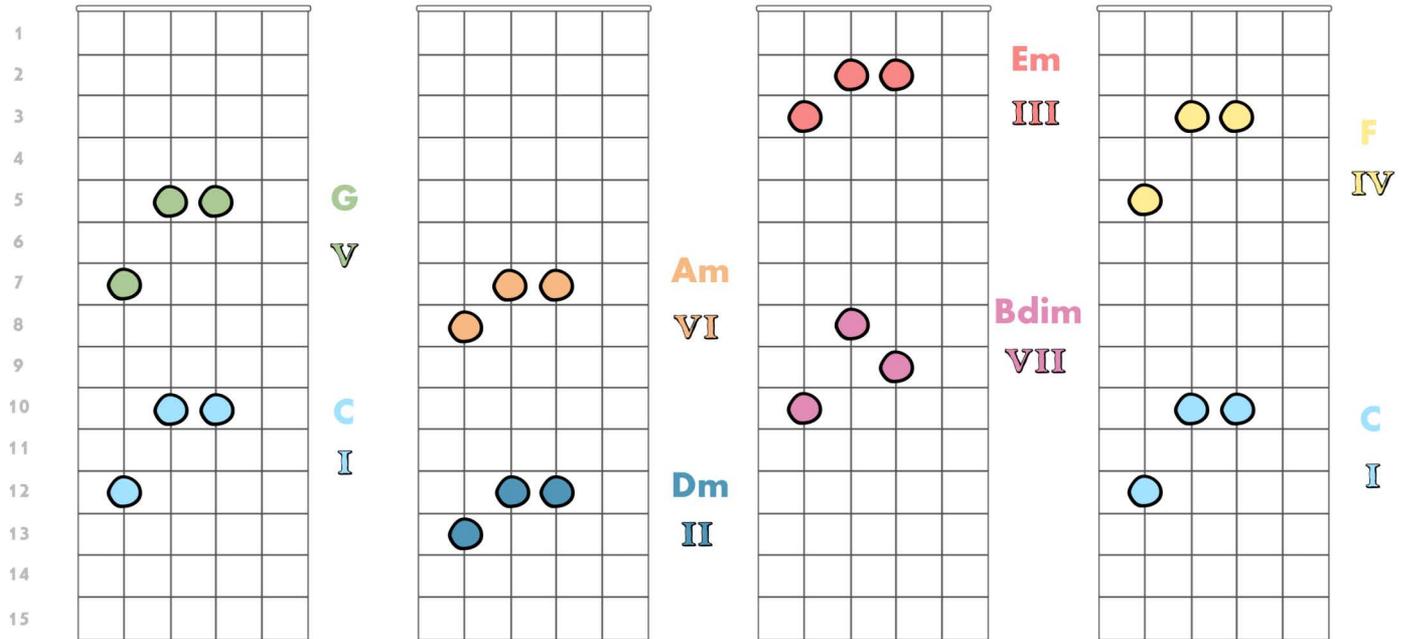


C Harmonized Major Scale

ZONE 3

1ST INVERSION
(3rd in bass)

major	minor	minor	major	major	minor	diminished
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	Bdim



ZONE 3

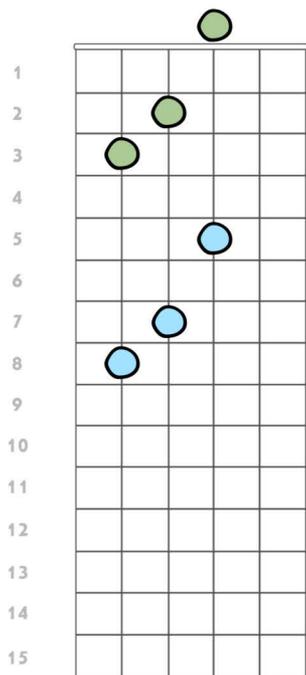
ROOT INVERSION

(root in bass)

C Harmonized Major Scale

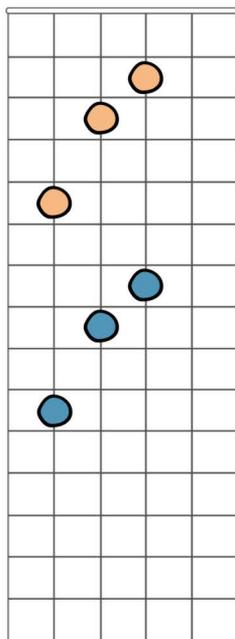


major	minor	minor	major	major	minor	diminished
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	Bdim



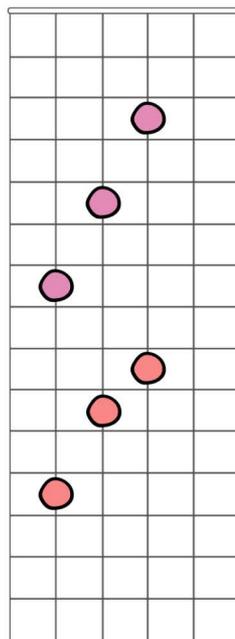
G
V

C
I



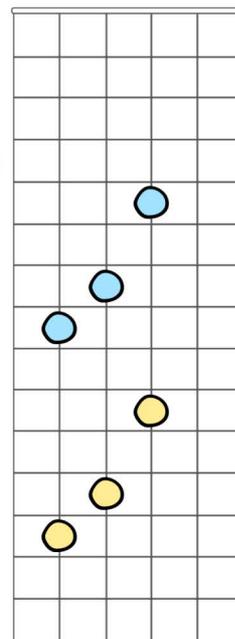
Am
VI

Dm
II



Bdim
VII

Em
III



C
I

F
IV

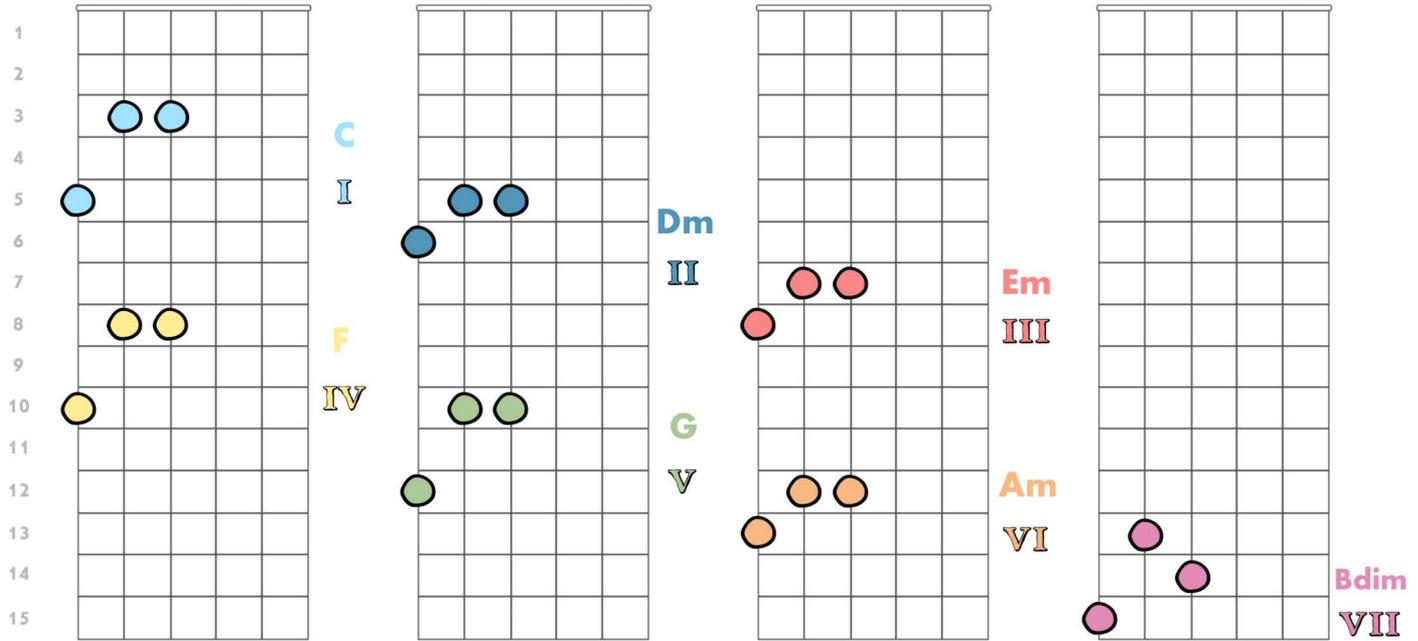


C Harmonized Major Scale

ZONE 4

1ST INVERSION
(3rd in bass)

major	minor	minor	major	major	minor	diminished
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	Bdim



ZONE 4

2ND INVERSION

(5th in bass)

C Harmonized Major Scale



major	minor	minor	major	major	minor	diminished
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	Bdim

Diagram 1: G (V) chord. Notes: G (3rd fret, 1st string), G (3rd fret, 2nd string), B (2nd fret, 3rd string).

Diagram 2: C (I) chord. Notes: C (3rd fret, 4th string), C (3rd fret, 5th string), E (2nd fret, 6th string).

Diagram 3: Dm (II) chord. Notes: D (2nd fret, 1st string), D (2nd fret, 2nd string), F (3rd fret, 3rd string).

Diagram 4: Em (III) chord. Notes: E (2nd fret, 1st string), E (2nd fret, 2nd string), G (3rd fret, 3rd string).

Diagram 5: F (IV) chord. Notes: F (1st fret, 1st string), F (1st fret, 2nd string), A (2nd fret, 3rd string).

Diagram 6: Am (VI) chord. Notes: A (2nd fret, 1st string), A (2nd fret, 2nd string), C (3rd fret, 3rd string).

Diagram 7: Bdim (VII) chord. Notes: B (2nd fret, 1st string), B (2nd fret, 2nd string), D (3rd fret, 3rd string).

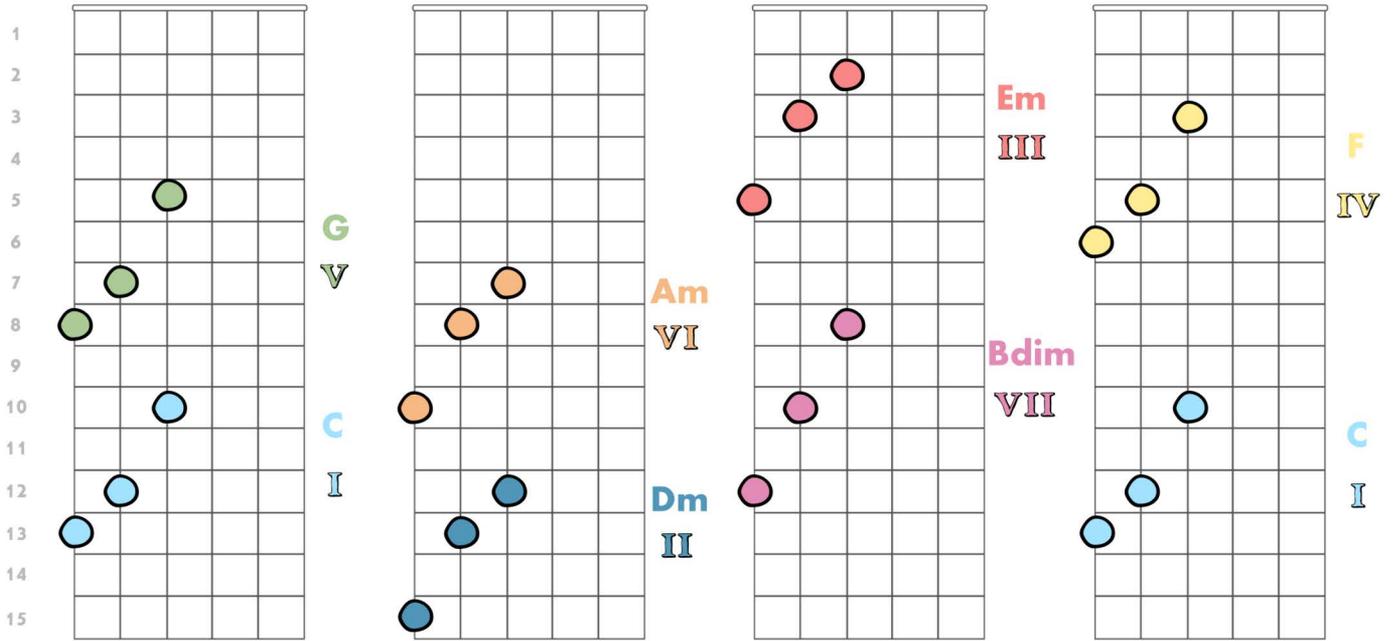


C Harmonized Major Scale

ZONE 4

ROOT INVERSION
(root in bass)

major	minor	minor	major	major	minor	diminished
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	Bdim



Who Is Alex Gordon Hi-Fi? *about the* **Author**

Alex Gordon Hi-Fi is me, Alex Gordon. I stick a ‘Hi-Fi’ on there to distinguish my presence from the other “imposterous” Alex Gordons in the world. I have been playing the guitar officially since 1988, though my six-string interest initially began in 1985, when I saw Marty McFly imitating Chuck Berry in “Back To The Future.” Not long after, that initial interest exploded into a full-blown obsession when I saw “The Buddy Holly Story.” At that point, the guitar simply had to become a part of my life. I’ve never felt as if I chose to play the guitar. A more accurate description would be that the universe suddenly smacked me across the face one day and said, “This is a guitar. Now, get to work.” So I did.

In terms of experience and “credentials”, I’ve done a bunch of stuff in the music business over the years ranging from pretty fantastic to simply demoralizing. The scuttlebutt is that the guitar and music itself are the very lifeblood of existence for me. I don’t spend a lot of time thinking about getting expensive guitars, fancier equipment or junk like that.



But I do spend A LOT of time learning how to get the sound of my instrument to be as smooth and as pure as possible with the fingers, hands and arms that my body came with. It's a work in progress.

My wife, Jes, and I have been married since 1997. Our son, Everett, was born in 2005. Since 2020, we've had an orange cat named Bubby and he's a rascal. They're the center of my universe to be sure. I love cold weather and I look forward to moving back up north soon. Winter is my favorite season by far. Some of my favorite musicians include Frank Sinatra, Thelonious Monk, Antonio Carlos Jobim, James Jamerson, Hank Mobley, Beverly Kenney, Mike Watt and Elizabeth Cotten. I dislike the sound of motorcycles, chainsaws and windshield wipers. I like to dress in the same style that my grandfather did and I drink regular and decaffeinated black coffee most of the day. And I thoroughly enjoy waking up early, a few hours before daylight, and composing music or practicing my guitar work. Nothing beats the peace and stillness of that time of day.

Thanks for taking the time to be here. I appreciate it.

- Alex Gordon

Acknowledgements

Jes for always believing in me (especially when I can't)

Ev for inspiring me ever since you were born

Tracey for being more than family

Allison for being so good at what you do

Tuck & Patti for the mentorship that has forever changed me as a musician

Steve for building The Professor and the promise of more to come

Manny, Brad, Gerry & Dan for being baritonic regulars at Guitar Casual Coffee Hour

The Analog Society for providing decades of guidance, joy and inspiration

Shawn, Paul, Christo, John Arthur and especially Alice for seeing and hearing things I don't always hear

And anyone else I forgot to mention for doing whatever I forgot about

Baritonic GUITAR™

Alex Gordon Hi-Fi



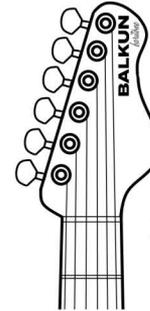
alexgordonghifi.com

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Alex plays a custom
Balkun Baritone built
by Steve Balkun in
Connecticut, USA.

For exclusive baritone guitar lessons, join
the Alex Gordon Hi-Fi Patreon page today!

patreon.com/alexgordonghifi

Lend an ear to Alex Gordon Hi-Fi solo baritonic guitar recordings at alexgordonghifi.com (as well as on the streaming platforms)



The baritone guitar is the sleeping giant of the guitar universe.

Why the baritone guitar hasn't become a commonplace staple of the guitar world may be a mystery, but the baritone's undeniable appeal certainly is not. This guitar possesses a rare blend of depth and brightness, while its range, flexibility and power make it a worthy ally for any curious, six-string slinger.

