

# Acoustic

## NICK DRAKE STYLE ACOUSTIC GUITAR

### ON THE CD

TRACK 15-16



15. Introduction  
16. Full track

Eric Roche studies the stylistic nuances of a unique songwriter

# NICK DRAKE STYLE ACOUSTIC GUITAR

### GT RATING

EASY



Helps improve your:

- Knowledge of altered tunings
- Right-hand precision

**N**ick Drake's all too brief life was as intense personally as it was creatively. He released three albums during his lifetime and there have been a number of posthumous releases. A social recluse and famously shy, Drake suffered from clinical depression until his early death in November 1974, which was attributed to suicide by sleeping pill overdose. This makes it all the more poignant that he was unable to achieve a successful career in his lifetime, while his posthumous career continues to flourish to this day. In the 30 years since his death his fame and popularity have continued to increase. Drake's unique style, voice and his myriad altered tunings have influenced many songwriters and guitarists ever since. The simple production on his albums – often using no more than a guitar and vocal – continues to inspire contemporary artists.

For this lesson I am focusing on the nuances of Drake's unique guitar style. Not a virtuoso by any means, Drake's playing was simple yet highly melodic. Drake was known to be a perfectionist and would labour over the appropriate tuning, chord voicing and fingering for a tune for many hours. From then on, he would always play the guitar part exactly as he arranged it. Many of the parts could stand up as instrumental pieces and I have identified a few key elements for you to consider playing with.

### ALTERED TUNINGS AND A CAPO

Nick Drake used a wide variety of altered tunings and a capo. As he never transcribed his own pieces or kept notes, many of these tunings and capo positions are best guesses. His three most popular tunings were standard tuning (E, A, D, G, B, E'), Dadd4 tuning (D A d g d f#'), which

### TWO ALTERED TUNINGS

With so many to choose from I suggest you start exploring these two Nick Drake tunings:

#### B' E B e b e'

The two lowest strings are tuned down, the fourth string tuned up and the third string tuned down. You may want to consider a minimum of .056 and .042 gauge strings on the bottom to accommodate this lower tension and pitch.

#### D A d g d' f#'

The two highest strings are tuned up and the bottom string tuned down. This is a simple variation of the tuning in this month's lesson. Nick may well have tuned down a whole step and added a capo at the second fret to achieve this. Try lighter strings on the top two positions to minimise the risk of string breakage.

he often tuned a whole tone lower to C G c f e' e', and the unusual drone-like tuning of B' E B e b e', used for example on Northern Sky. There are about ten other Drake tunings documented, although these are less commonly used.

### SIMPLE DESCENDING CHROMATIC BASSLINES AND COUNTER MELODIES

Many of Drake's guitar parts feature descending lines, either in the bass part or on internal counter melodic parts (for example Free Ride). These lines often moved exclusively in semitones, or occasionally in a combination of tones and semitones (think Paul McCartney and The Beatles). This type of line can create alternating moments of harmonic tension and release. He also used simple left-hand shapes, combining a mix of open and fretted

### HELMHOLTZ NOTATION: ERIC'S TUNING NOTATIONS EXPLAINED

Hermann Von Helmholtz was a very prominent German physicist at the end of the 19th century. His research into pitch and intonation was presented in his book *On The Sensations Of Tone*. In order to correctly distinguish between all the various notes and octaves he devised a simple system of notation. Middle C was represented as c. The note an octave below was C and the note an octave above middle c was c'. The note two octaves below middle c was C' while that two octaves above was c''. And so on to cover the 7.5 octaves of the keyboard.

The guitar presents a unique problem in that it sounds an octave lower than written. True middle c should be played on the b string at the first fret. The open strings of the standard tuned guitar are, using the Helmholtz method: E A d g b e'. The method is useful for notating more unusual altered tunings for guitar, as it isn't always clear whether a string should be tuned up or down. For example, here is Nashville tuning, which requires a special gauge of string: e a d' g' b e'.

notes – shapes that could be moved up and down the fingerboard.

### A VERY PRECISE RIGHT-HAND TECHNIQUE

Nick Drake's right-hand precision and timing were remarkable. Many of his guitar parts are played in a loop style – a short one- or two-bar motif played identically over and over again. Often these short motifs were quite intricate (for example Road). As well as fingerstyle, Drake

### YOUR GT TUTOR

■ ERIC ROCHE  
See p9 for more info on all the GT tutors



used a cross between fingerstyle and strumming – a more precise style of rhythm playing that allowed him to execute melodic lines while maintaining texture and rhythm.

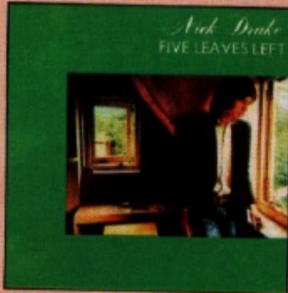
For this month's lesson I have composed a guitar part in the style of Nick Drake that features many of the above stylistic pointers. I have chosen the tuning C' G c f c' e'. It was one of Drake's more popular tunings and will minimise the risk of string breakage. I have applied Nick's rhythmic and harmonic styles from a number of his well known tunes and come up with Blue Sun. Do not be afraid to use this as a starting point for composing your own Drake pastiche.

Nick Drake: his posthumous career continues to flourish



"Drake's unique style, voice, and his myriad altered tunings have influenced many songwriters and guitarists"

**TRACK RECORD**  
POSTHUMOUS SUCCESS



Nick Drake released three albums in his lifetime; Five Leaves Left, Bryter Later and Pink Moon. As his posthumous career has grown, numerous compilations have appeared. I would recommend Way To Blue as a good starting point, although you will probably find that once you start getting into Nick Drake you will want to hear everything the man ever recorded. A recent album featuring rare recordings and newly discovered songs called Made To Love Magic has been released on Island Records.

**SOUND ADVICE**

Nick Drake's main instrument for recording was a Guild M20 – he is pictured holding it on the original cover of his second album, Bryter Later. It is an inexpensive small bodied guitar with a mahogany back, sides and top. To my ears the sound of the guitar strings on the recordings were always like that of worn steel strings, with a tone and separation approaching that of a nylon string guitar.

**NICK DRAKE STYLE PIECE BLUE MOON**

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## NICK DRAKE STYLE ACOUSTIC GUITAR

### NICK DRAKE STYLE PIECE BLUE MOON ...CONTINUED

System 3, measures 3-4. Treble clef, key signature of one flat. The guitar part consists of a melodic line in the treble clef and a bass line in the bass clef. The bass line features a repeating pattern of chords: E2, G2, C3, F3, C3, G2, E2.

System 5, measures 5-6. Treble clef, key signature of one flat. The guitar part consists of a melodic line in the treble clef and a bass line in the bass clef. The bass line features a repeating pattern of chords: E2, G2, C3, F3, C3, G2, E2.

System 7, measures 7-8. Treble clef, key signature of one flat. The guitar part consists of a melodic line in the treble clef and a bass line in the bass clef. The bass line features a repeating pattern of chords: E2, G2, C3, F3, C3, G2, E2.

System 9, measures 9-10. Treble clef, key signature of one flat. The guitar part consists of a melodic line in the treble clef and a bass line in the bass clef. The bass line features a repeating pattern of chords: E2, G2, C3, F3, C3, G2, E2.

System 11, measures 11-12. Treble clef, key signature of one flat. The guitar part consists of a melodic line in the treble clef and a bass line in the bass clef. The bass line features a repeating pattern of chords: E2, G2, C3, F3, C3, G2, E2.

NICK DRAKE STYLE PIECE BLUE MOON ...CONTINUED

BVII

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BV

15

BVII

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BV

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## NICK DRAKE STYLE ACOUSTIC GUITAR

### NICK DRAKE STYLE PIECE BLUE MOON ...CONTINUED

Musical notation for measures 23-24. The system includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. Below the staff is a guitar tablature with six lines labeled E, A, D, G, B, and E from top to bottom. Measure 23 starts with a 2 on the E string and a 4 on the A string. Measure 24 ends with a 2 on the E string and a 4 on the A string.

Musical notation for measures 25-26. The system includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. Below the staff is a guitar tablature with six lines labeled E, A, D, G, B, and E from top to bottom. Measure 25 starts with a 2 on the E string and a 0 on the A string. Measure 26 ends with a 2 on the E string and a 0 on the A string.

Musical notation for measures 27-28. The system includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. Below the staff is a guitar tablature with six lines labeled E, A, D, G, B, and E from top to bottom. Measure 27 starts with a 0 on the E string and a 4 on the A string. Measure 28 ends with a 0 on the E string and a 5 on the A string.

Musical notation for measures 29-30. The system includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. Below the staff is a guitar tablature with six lines labeled E, A, D, G, B, and E from top to bottom. Measure 29 starts with a 2 on the E string and a 0 on the A string. Measure 30 ends with a 2 on the E string and a 0 on the A string.

Musical notation for measures 31-32. The system includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. Below the staff is a guitar tablature with six lines labeled E, A, D, G, B, and E from top to bottom. Measure 31 starts with a 2 on the E string and a 0 on the A string. Measure 32 ends with a 2 on the E string and a 0 on the A string, followed by the word "Fine".