

Back to the Roots (and Fifths)

By Mirek Patek

Back to the roots (and fifths)

In my previous article in December 2009 issue of Banjo Sessions I presented how to imitate bluegrass and frailing sound on the open tuned tenor banjo. I have used DGdg tuning based on standard tenor CGda tuning. The picking pattern offered today is useful especially for the players who use low Irish GDae tuning – slight retuning of outer strings to ADad is required. If you do the retuning to ADad, you have two pairs of the same strings a+d, separated by the octave. This setting and the low sounds of two bass strings really call for simultaneous playing of some bass notes (mainly root and fifth of the chord, hence the title) and the melody above them.

While classical guitar players use alternate uppicking of bare index and middle (and ring) fingers for playing the melody, we will use the other method for the melody – alternation of uppicking and down frailing. In fact we will use PINCH and FRAIL. What do I mean? Well – we enter the world of fingerpicking, and here the term uppicking means the upstroke with the tip of the (e.g. index) finger, frailing means downstroke with the nail of the (e.g. ring) finger over one or more strings and pinch means simultaneous upstroke with the tip of the (e.g. index) finger and downstroke with thumb. As you can see in the YouTube video, I am using the “bluegrass” fingerpicks on my right thumb, index and middle finger. On my ring finger I currently use a reversed (and shortened) Dunlop fingerpick to protect my nail – the other option is just the longer nail.

4/4 rhythm

Let's start to build the basic right hand pattern in 4/4 rhythm – I am following the attached YouTube video and the corresponding tablature of examples. We are in ADad tuning and in D chord 0000 – left hand does not press any string. Start with your right hand thumb playing bass notes D A D A on the 1st and 3rd beat of the measure (example 1 in the tab sheet). Note the order of the tones: the root of the chord is always played first, and the fifth of the chord follows. Example 2 shows the addition of your index finger on the open 1st string – this is the pinch. Thumb has to keep that root-fifth alternation all the time. Example 3 brings the ring fingernail(pick) to the scene. It downpicks the 1st string on the 2nd and 4rd beat of the measure. The hardest task is to hit the desired string. You can start by kind of downbrush over more strings (1st and 2nd) and after getting the rhythm down you can focus on the hit to the particular (here first) string only. After picking the 1st string, the ring finger can continue its movement and hit the banjo head – this adds some rhythm drive. So this is the core PINCH-FRAIL-PINCH-FRAIL pattern. Example 4 shows all the above exercises but over the chord A 0202. Hold it with your left index and middle finger and keep it held all the time. Note that the thumb changed the order of picked strings so the root of the chord is played first. After you master the hitting of „melody notes“ on the outer 1st string, play everything again on the inner 2nd string, as shown in the examples 5 and 6. After downpicking the 2nd string, the ring fingernailpick stops at the 1st string. Of course the ultimate goal is to hit whatever melody string is necessary, so you will follow with the practice of switching the hits from 1st to 2nd string and vice versa – this is not included in the video. Also there are not included the exercises of left hand grace notes (hammer-on, pull-off, slide) that can shift (syncopate) the melody notes from the beats to the off-beats or add some new notes to the off-beats.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qedqYOhOR2U>

PINCH and FRAIL - examples

T = thumbpick downstroke
 I = index fingerpick upstroke
 R = ring fingernailpick downstroke

Tab for ADad tenor banjo
 by Mirek Patek
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Example 1
D

Example 2
D

Example 3
D

Example 4
A (hold full chord 0202)

Example 5
D

Example 6
A (hold full chord 0202)

Example 7
D

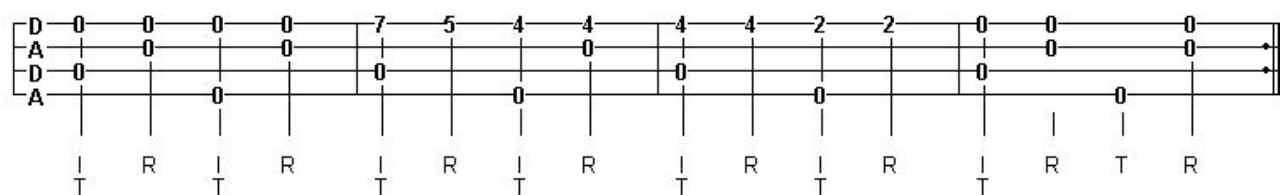
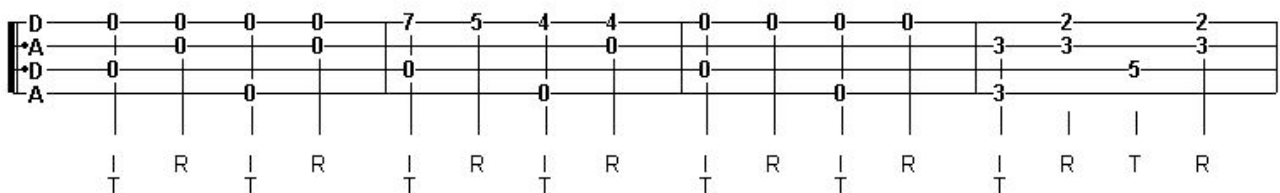
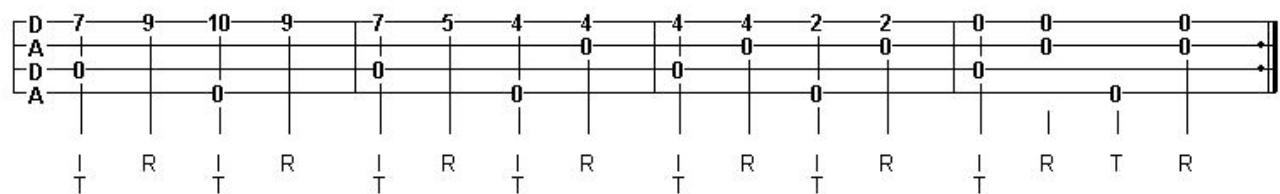
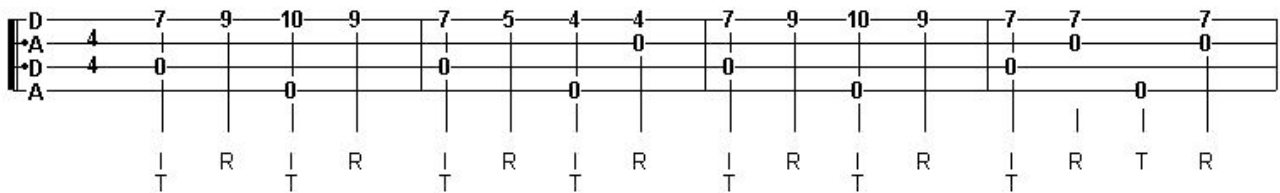
A (hold full chord 0202)

The video continues with the Old Joe Clark tune – see the separate tab. Please note that the tab shows the correct bass notes (alternation root-fifth) and not the mistakes my thumb did in the video. In the moments when there is no quarter melody note (because the melody uses half note, e.g. in the 2nd measure) your ring finger is not focused to particular string and plays the brush over 1st and 2nd string – maybe with lower dynamics. Also the index finger uppick can be omitted as in the 4th measure if there is just one whole melody note in the measure.

Old Joe Clark

T = thumpick downstroke
 I = index fingerpick upstroke
 R = ring fingernailpick downstroke

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3/4 waltz rhythm

In the 3/4 waltz time the right hand plays the pattern of PINCH-FRAIL-FRAIL and there is just one bass note at the 1st beat of the measure (example 7). What is not shown in the video is the option of playing some additional bass note e.g. in the 3rd beat. This can be played either by moving the frail from treble strings to the bass one (then there is no space for melody on treble string) or by changing the PINCH-FRAIL-FRAIL pattern to PINCH-FRAIL-PINCH. Then the additional bass note is played by thumb and there is still the space for melody uppicked on treble string. But I suggest to practice the PINCH-FRAIL-FRAIL pattern first, until it becomes automatic.

The video ends with my attempt to play the waltz tune Denver, written by Randy Sparks, the founder of The New Christy Minstrels band [Used by permission, Randy Sparks]

Cherrybell Music/Warner-Chappell (worldwide rights)]. In addition to D chord 0000 and A chord 0202 there is Bm 2420 and G played here as barre 5555. Again, the tab presented here shows the correct bass notes which sometimes differ from what I play on the video.

Denver

Used by permission, Randy Sparks,
Cherrybell Music/Warner-Chappell (worldwide rights)

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D Bm

The first system of guitar tablature shows the first 12 measures of the piece. The key signature is D major. The first six measures are in the key of D (0000), and the last six measures are in the key of Bm (2420). The tablature includes fret numbers (0, 2, 4, 7, 9) and rhythmic notation (T, R, R) indicating the timing of the notes.

D G D A D

The second system of guitar tablature shows measures 13-18. It features a key change to G major (5555) for measures 13-15, then returns to D major (0000) for measures 16-18. The tablature includes fret numbers (0, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9) and rhythmic notation (T, R, R).

D G D Bm

The third system of guitar tablature shows measures 19-24. It features a key change to G major (5555) for measures 19-21, then returns to D major (0000) for measures 22-24. The tablature includes fret numbers (0, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9) and rhythmic notation (T, R, R).

D G D A D

The fourth system of guitar tablature shows measures 25-30. It features a key change to G major (5555) for measures 25-27, then returns to D major (0000) for measures 28-30. The tablature includes fret numbers (0, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9) and rhythmic notation (T, R, R).

About the Author

My name is Miroslav, I am called Mirek. Surname Patek means Friday in Czech.



I have (unfortunately :-) no connection to the Swiss Patek-Philippe company, even if made the clock too - the [musical clock!](#)

Born in 1969, live in Prague, capitol of the Czech Republic. I am educated as MD and MBA, married, have two sons.

I played 10 years mandolin, in 1999 tried the Holoubek custom made resophonic mandola (open tuned, played with fingerpicks) which redirected me to the fingerpicked DGdg tenor banjo.

My main instrument is [Janish](#) tenor banjo tuned most of the time to DGdg. My second banjo [Capek](#) is mainly tuned to CGdg so I can manage the C tunes on frailing banjo.