



High-Strung/ Nashville Tuning

by Ed Mitchell

Introduction

As the name suggests, High-strung/Nashville tuning was born in the home of country music. But that doesn't mean you have to be a country musician to use the tuning on your guitar. You don't even have to wear a big hat. If you've never heard the terms 'High-strung' or 'Nashville' tuning before you've almost certainly heard this amazing tuning in action. Back in the 60s, Keith Richards of The Rolling Stones was in San Antonio, Texas. While he was in town Richards learned the secret of Nashville tuning from the guitarist in country legend George Jones' band. A few years later, Keith used the tuning on one of The Rolling Stone's greatest songs, Jumpin' Jack Flash. Listen to the song's intro and you'll hear two acoustic guitars being strummed by Mr. Richards – one tuned to open D with a capo and another in Nashville tuning. It's clear that Keith liked to experiment, and if you like to get creative with your guitar sounds then Nashville tuning is perfect for you. Intrigued? Let's learn some more about this exciting alternate tuning method...

So what is High-strung/ Nashville tuning?

Think of High-strung/Nashville tuning as potentially the greatest 12-string guitar you've ever heard... but it's so much more than that. This tuning can transform even the most familiar chord sequence into something fresh and inspirational. Instead of splashing out on expensive effects pedals to kick-start your imagination, try High-strung/Nashville tuning.

Nashville tuning uses the octave strings from a 12-string guitar string set. So, to achieve this tuning you simply have to change the strings on your guitar. How simple is that? Back in the days of Jumpin' Jack Flash a guitarist interested in Nashville tuning would head down to their local music store and hope that they had the correct gauge single strings to make up a suitable set for Nashville tuning. Often they would have to purchase a full 12-string pack which would work fine but they would be left with six regular strings that they didn't actually want.

These days, guitarists can purchase ready-made High-strung/ Nashville string sets from D'Addario for acoustic ([EJ38H phosphor bronze](#)) and electric guitar ([EXL150H](#)). It takes the guess work out of introducing yourself to the wonderful world of High-strung/Nashville tuning.



Stringing your guitar

When you have your High-strung/ Nashville strings it's time to get them on your guitar. When you remove the existing strings on your guitar always take the time to clean your fingerboard and frets: Planet Waves produces a full range of special cleaning products to clean, nourish and protect your guitar. ([learn more](#))

When you have fitted the High-strung/Nashville strings to your guitar you'll need to get them in tune. The high E and B strings are tuned to regular pitch – as they would be on a regular electric or acoustic guitar. The remaining strings (G, D, A and low E) are tuned an octave higher than a regular guitar – just like they would be on a 12-string guitar. Use a good quality guitar tuner – Planet Waves Universal Tuner for instance - to make sure that you don't go too far and snap the strings. That would be very frustrating!

Using Nashville or High-strung tuning

A Nashville tuned guitar sounds great played solo, but most fans of this tuning use it to accompany an existing guitar track that they have recorded. It creates a fantastic shimmering 12-string sound... but that's just the start. Imagine if you could separate the regular and octave strings on a standard 12-string guitar. You could have the regular strings on one side of the stereo field of your recording and the octave strings on the other. That would sound huge!

That's exactly what you can do with Nashville tuning. You're playing two different guitars remember so you can create some incredible effects. Speaking of effects; because you're laying down separate guitar tracks you can assign effects to one guitar only or use completely different effects on each guitar. By now your mind should be racing as you think of all the possibilities that Nashville tuning can present to you.

Hear High-strung/ Nashville tuning in action

In addition to the classic intro of Jumpin' Jack Flash there are plenty of other great rock songs that feature Nashville tuning. You can hear Keith Richard's one-time band mate Mick Taylor playing a high-strung guitar on The Rolling Stone's Wild Horses. Rush guitarist Alex Lifeson used Nashville tuning on his acoustic guitars during the recording of the band's Permanent Waves album. You can also hear the tuning employed by guitarist Richard Williams on the classic Kansas track Dust In The Wind from the band's 1977 album, Point of Know Return.



It's not only classic rockers that have injected life into their songs with Nashville tuning. Johnny Marr of The Smiths used the tuning to create a huge 12-string sound on the song The Headmaster Ritual (from Meat Is Murder). Other users of Nashville tuning include Ry Cooder, David Gilmour of Pink Floyd and Joe Satriani. And we haven't even mentioned the countless country stars and session guitarists that have employed the tuning in Nashville. Add yourself to this illustrious list of guitarists and find new ways to use High-strung/ Nashville tuning in your music.

Getting a bit crazy...

Experiment people. Use a Planet Waves capo to change the pitch of your Nashville tuned guitar. Capo it high and add mandolin-like flourishes to your recordings. Add some delay for a magical sound. Lay down the kind of solos that would be too difficult to play on a regular 12-string guitar. High-strung/ Nashville makes that possible.

Conclusion

No matter what style of music you play High-strung/ Nashville tuning can invigorate your guitar playing and recordings. It's so easy and inexpensive to try this amazing tuning and once you've tried it, you'll never look back. Enjoy!