

Learning* the Lap Steel Finger*board

by Curt Sheller

C6 Tuning
C E G A C E

*It's not as hard as
you think.*

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Introduction

Memorizing the notes of the six string lap steel guitar fingerboard is not as hard as one would think. Although there doesn't seem to be any pattern and the same letter can be found on every string. There is a systematic approach that can be used to help remember the notes.

The Lap steel guitar is not tuned in standard guitar tuning (E-A-D-G-B-E, low to high). Rather, it is usually tuned to an open chord, often an extended chord like a 6th, 7th, or 9th.

A common tuning for steel players is the C6 tuning. There is no standard C6 tuning; one popular tuning is C E G A C E, the focus of this book. The C6 tuning actually produces a C major chord on the lower three strings and an A minor chord on the upper, three strings. For the music theory astute this a major chord and its relative minor chord.





C6 Tuning

Finally, really learning the names of the notes of the fingerboard is a liberating musical moment. A major breakthrough in most player's learning and enjoyment of the lap steel guitar.

Knowing the names of the notes is separate from learning to read standard music notation.

Knowing the notes of the fingerboard is so important that this book is dedicated to that goal.



C6 Tuning

C6 tuning for lap steel guitar is C E G A C E.



⑥

C

④

E

④

G

③

A

②

C

①

E



Learning the Lap Steel Guitar Fingerboard

Key Frets

<i>open</i>	C	E	G	A	C	E
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In addition to the open strings, which most lap steel guitar players seem to remember, frets (5) and (7) have no sharp or flat notes.

<i>fret (5)</i>	E	Ab	B	Db	E	Ab
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<i>fret (7)</i>	F	A	C	D	F	A
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From these *key frets* other frets can be derived.

Frets (1), (4), (6) and (8) can be referenced relative to the open strings, fret (5) and fret (7) by flatting or sharpening the notes.

6 Learning the Frets



Learning the Lap Steel Guitar Fingerboard



<i>open</i>	C	E	G	A	C	E
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<i>fret (1)</i>	C#	F	G#	A#	C#	F
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<i>fret (4)</i>	E	Ab	B	Db	E	Ab
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<i>fret (5)</i>	F	A	C	D	F	A
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<i>fret (6)</i>	F#	A#	C#	D#	F#	A#
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<i>fret (6)</i>	Gb	Bb	Db	Eb	Gb	Bb
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<i>fret (7)</i>	G	B	D	E	G	B
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<i>fret (8)</i>	G#	C	D#	F	G#	C
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* See page 11 & 12 for enharmonic equivalent note spellings.

Learning the Frets 7





Learning the Lap Steel Guitar Fingerboard

When learning the tuning of any fretted instrument you next look for frets that have only one sharp. In this C6 tuning there are no frets with only one sharp.

Secondary Frets

Frets (2) and (10) have two sharps each.

fret (2) **D** **F#** **A** **B** **D** **F#**

*fret (10) **Bb** **D** **F** **G** **Bb** **D**

Frets (1) and (3) can be referenced relative to fret (2) by flatting or sharpening notes.

fret (1) **Db** **F** **Ab** **Bb** **Db** **F**

fret (2) **D** **F#** **A** **B** **D** **F#**

fret (3) **Eb** **G** **Bb** **C** **Eb** **G**

** Technically this fret (10) is A# Cx E# G Bb D. The more common enharmonic equivalents, chord spellings will be shown for simplicity for the rest of the frets.*

8 Learning the Frets



Learning the Lap Steel Guitar Fingerboard



Frets (9) and (11) can be referenced relative to fret (10) by flatting or sharpening the notes.

fret (9) A C# E F# A C#

fret (10) **Bb** **D** **F** **G** **Bb** **D**

fret (11) B D# F# G# B D#

From the open strings and four key and secondary frets the whole lap steel guitar fingerboard memorized. That is every fret and note of the fingerboard in C6 tuning. A lot easier with a system. You're never more than one fret away from knowing the name of any note on the fingerboard.

Review the frets ascending and descending, with sharps, with flats, with mixed sharps and flats. Know the fingerboard inside and out.

For C6 tuning it's helpful to know the notes of your major and minor triads.





Learning the Lap Steel Guitar Fingerboard

Chords

With C6 tuning containing a major triad on the lower, bottom three strings and its relative minor triad on the upper, higher three strings. Learning your major and minor triads in all 15 keys would be really helpful for remembering the notes of the neck.

Major

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

Major

Am	A	C	E
Em	E	G	B
Bm	B	D	F#
F#m	F#	A#	C#
C#m	C#	E	G#
G#m	G#	B	D#
D#m	D#	F#	A#
A#m	A#	C#	E#
Dm	D	F	A
Gm	G	Bb	D
Cm	C	Eb	G
Fm	F	Ab	C
Bbm	Bb	Db	F
Ebm	Eb	Gb	Bb
Abm	Ab	Cb	Eb

10 Learning the Frets

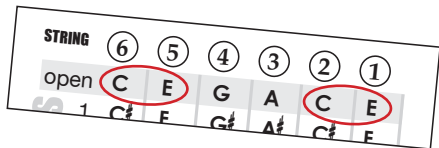




Tips For Remembering the Fingerboard

A few tips for remember the names of the notes of the lap steel guitar fingerboard and the notes of the major and minor triads.

The names of the frets on strings six and two are the same.



Strings five and one are also the same. So in reality you only have to learn four strings.

All A chords, whether major or minor, sharp or flat will always be some form of the letters “A, C and E”.

Am (A C E), **Abm** (Ab Cb Eb), **A#m** (A # C# E#), **A** (A C# A), **Ab** (Ab C Eb).



Learning the Lap Steel Guitar Fingerboard

Whether practicing, performing, reading or improvising, no matter what style you are playing. ALWAYS know the notes you are playing. This will make the notes of the lap steel guitar in C6 tuning reflexive and second nature.



Enharmonic Equivalents

Enharmonic equivalents are where the same pitch can have multiple names. If two notes have the same pitch but are represented by a different letter name and accidental (♯ ♭) they are enharmonic.

Sharps to Flats

A♯ is the same pitch as **B♭**

B♯ is the same pitch as **C**

C♯ is the same pitch as **D♭**

D♯ is the same pitch as **E♭**

E♯ is the same pitch as **F**

F♯ is the same pitch as **G♭**

G♯ is the same pitch as **A♭**



Learning the Lap Steel Guitar Fingerboard

Flats to Sharps

A $\flat$ is the same pitch as **G $\sharp$**

B $\flat$ is the same pitch as **A $\sharp$**

C $\flat$ is the same pitch as **B**

D $\flat$ is the same pitch as **C $\sharp$**

E $\flat$ is the same pitch as **D $\sharp$**

F $\flat$ is the same pitch as **E**

G $\flat$ is the same pitch as **F $\sharp$**

✂ Double sharps (✂) and double flats (bb) are possible if sticking with correct chord spelling but not needed for initially learning the fingerboard.

Learning the Lap Steel Guitar Fingerboard

Sharp and Natural Notes



STRING	⑥	⑤	④	③	②	①
open	C	E	G	A	C	E
1	C#	F	G#	A#	C#	F
2	D	F#	A	B	D	F#
3	D#	G	A#	C	D#	G
4	E	G#	B	C#	E	G#
5	F	A	C	D	F	A
6	F#	A#	C#	D#	F#	A#
7	G	B	D	E	G	B
8	G#	C	D#	F	G#	C
9	A	C#	E	F#	A	C#
10	A#	D	F	G	A#	D
11	B	D#	F#	G#	B	D#
12	same as open strings one octave higher					

Sharp & Natural Notes 15



Learning the Lap Steel Guitar Fingerboard

Flat and Natural Notes

STRING	⑥	⑤	④	③	②	①
open	C	E	G	A	C	E
1	D $\flat$	F	A $\flat$	B $\flat$	D $\flat$	F
2	D	G $\flat$	A	B	D	G $\flat$
3	E $\flat$	G	B $\flat$	C	E $\flat$	G
4	E	A $\flat$	B	D $\flat$	E	A $\flat$
5	F	A	C	D	F	A
6	G $\flat$	B $\flat$	D $\flat$	E $\flat$	G $\flat$	B $\flat$
7	A	B	D	E	A	B
8	A $\flat$	C	E $\flat$	F	A $\flat$	C
9	A	D $\flat$	E	G $\flat$	A	D $\flat$
10	B $\flat$	D	F	G	B $\flat$	D
11	B	E $\flat$	G $\flat$	A $\flat$	B	E $\flat$
12	same as open strings one octave higher					

16 Flat & Natural Notes

