
Using capos to avoid retuning the basses.

Posted by Ronin Minstrel - 2018/04/20 07:38

Hello friends,

I've been playing my alto for a solid 8 months now, and just had my first solo concert performance along with various excellent 7-string guitarists. I'll be finishing up post-production on the video soon, and will post a link here when I'm done.

In the process of learning and performing several pieces as a soloist, as well as with my trio, I've discovered that I dislike having to retune the basses. I decided last week that I'd had enough.

I looked into harp levers-- too bulky and expensive.

I considered "railroad spikes" like banjo players use-- too destructive.

I even considered having my 8th string extension removed like James did. But... sometimes I want an open C#.

Then, in a semi-delerious state of prolonged internet browsing, I discovered my solution: the "Spider Capo". The ukulele/banjo 4-string size fits perfectly on the fretboard extension of my alto and lets me capo one string without affecting the others. That goes on the 8th string, which I can now toggle between C and C# in less than 1 second.

Some players might "Spider Capo" the other 3 basses, but so far all I've needed are the one on the 8th string and then a normal capo on the 11th string. I can now play in D and A without re-tuning. If I raise my 7th string to D#, I can do E major as well. Or, with the B string tuned down half a step, I can capo that up to B and quickly go to the key of F or Bb when needed.

Without re-tuning or using a capo, the alto really only plays in C or G (assuming you are using the extended basses). With my two capos (one spider and one planet waves NS classical), I can now play in Bb, F, C, G, D, A, and E, all with a maximum of one string re-tuned. With a couple more Spider capos, you could also get the keys of B, F#, Eb, or Ab. Not bad. B)

This is a lifesaver in concert situations where you are playing pieces in multiple keys back to back. Your audience will thank you. Guitar concerts already have enough tuning!

Sean

Re:Using capos to avoid retuning the basses.

Posted by tommyollie - 2018/06/02 07:30

Hi Sean,

It seems a great idea but could you post an image so that we can get a better idea of how it works?

Bill

Re:Using capos to avoid retuning the basses.

Posted by Ronin Minstrel - 2018/06/13 19:31

Hi Bill,

Here's a shot of it. In this setup, I'm using them for the key of E Major (concert pitch G). I've only retuned the 7th string up a half step and the capos are doing the rest.

http://altoguitar.com/images/fbfiles/files/Alto_with_capos2.jpg

Re:Using capos to avoid retuning the basses.

Posted by Ronin Minstrel - 2018/06/13 19:48

Incidentally, here is the link to that concert I mentioned. Alto guitar stuff starts at 26:10 and 1:23:00. There is some really good seven-string guitar playing in it as well.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orZCcMNOhEY&t=1555s>

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Re:Using capos to avoid retuning the basses.

Posted by silvanig - 2018/07/01 11:09

Hi Ronin Minstrel,

Congratulations on your discovery.

Besides minimizing the time needed to adjust the tone of the respective open string to another key, there are further benefits of this solution:

The effect of fatiguing the string by repeated retuning does not occur.

The tension of the string does not increase by raising the tone of the open string relatively to the base tuning of the string, so there is no impact on the tension exerted on the bridge.

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Re:Using capos to avoid retuning the basses.

Posted by Ronin Minstrel - 2018/07/03 19:43

Silvanig,

Exactly! The tension on the strings is more consistent, and the overall stability of the instrument is improved compared to retuning more strings. It's the little things in life that feel the best.

Sean

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Re:Using capos to avoid retuning the basses.

Posted by stevet - 2019/02/07 09:55

Hi Sean

Thanks for an interesting post-I plan to get a spider capo now!

Can I ask about the Planet waves NS capo you have in 11th string. Does that adjust clamp depth enough to fit the depth of the headstock ok or do you need to place a shim underneath to hold in place?

Thanks

Steve

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Re:Using capos to avoid retuning the basses.

Posted by Ronin Minstrel - 2019/02/07 19:00

Hi Steve, thanks for the question. The NS pro capo has no problem adjusting to the depth on my guitar, but YMMV.

I also should update my post... I tried spider capos on the other extension strings (besides the 8th), and because of the placement of the tuning machines, could not get them on. However, it's not that big of a deal, since the strings you are most likely to re-tune are the 8th and 11th. For the others, I just have to deal with it.

Good luck with your alto adventures!

Sean

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