

Stretch those fingers!

Here's a great exercise shown to me by two Italian classical guitarists I met at the Avignon festival in France in 1983. Franco and Lorenzo were amazing players: every morning we'd have breakfast together by the pool after which they'd get the guitars out and go through their daily exercise routine. It was incredible to watch, and after a while I got chatting to them. We established a good barter system: they taught me a few tricks, and I showed them how to play *Dill Pickle Rag* which they thought was great fun. By the end of the week I was still struggling a bit with the things they'd shown me, but these two guys were playing the ragtime piece with tremendous accuracy, shattering speed and utter lack of any kind of musicality or taste! I definitely got the better deal!

I've been passing on this exercise at workshops for many years and it really is a great way of stretching the left hand. It involves stretching the left hand, and particularly giving finger 4 a hard time. You start off easily enough with a D major 7th chord, as shown below. It's a comfortable position: one finger per fret (where have we heard that before?) on adjacent strings. The idea is to slowly move down the fretboard by moving one finger at a time. So, initially it's finger 1 that moves from fret 9 to fret 8 while other fingers remain in place. Then finger 2 moves from fret 10 to fret 9 while the other fingers stay where they are. Then finger 3 follows suit, which will probably make finger 4 feel somewhat uncomfortable. It'll feel happier, of course, when it too drops down one fret to conclude the first stage of the exercise. The whole thing is then repeated as the left hand move further and further down the fingerboard. As you get lower it gets a lot harder as the frets are further apart and the hand stretches become greater. It's very important to note that you mustn't continue this exercise when your left hand starts to hurt, which it will. Do it for as long as it's comfortable and the minute you get discomfort in the joints of fingers 3 and 4, stop. Go and do something else and come back to this one later. I wonder what happened to Franco and Lorenzo?

The musical score consists of three systems, each with a treble clef staff and three guitar strings (T, A, B). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The first system shows a sequence of chords and notes on frets 9, 8, 9, 8, 9, 8, 7. The second system shows frets 7, 8, 7, 6, 7, 6, 7, 6. The third system shows frets 6, 7, 6, 5, 6, 5, 6, 5. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 below the notes. A double bar line is used to separate the systems.