

MUSIC FUNDAMENTALS FOR THE GUITAR

Robert Bozina

Included in this preview:

- Copyright Page
- Table of Contents
- Excerpt of Chapter 1

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Music Fundamentals for the Guitar

By Robert Bozina

Santa Clara University

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CONTENTS

Preface	v
Acknowledgments	vii
Chapter One BASIC ELEMENTS	1
Chapter Two NOTES, BEAMS, RESTS, TIES and DOTS	7
Chapter Three RHYTHM	15
Chapter Four ACCIDENTALS	25
Chapter Five MODES, SCALES, and KEY SIGNATURES	33
Chapter Six MINOR SCALES and the CHROMATIC SCALE	45
Appendix A Rhythmic Training Drills	55
Appendix B Introduction to Sight Reading: The First Position	61

PREFACE

This text is for guitar players. As guitarists know, an essential strength of the instrument is its grounding in folkloric culture and oral traditions. Learning to read music, write music, and pursue the infinite body of knowledge that constitutes music theory are adjunct to the instrument itself yet these capacities are helpful to the preservation of repertory and advancement of skills.

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In the absence of Carmen, Carmela, and Trevor, this little work would have remained forever silent. And of course thanks to “Lucy” (John Gilbert #77). Lucy’s voice tried and trued all.

Chapter One

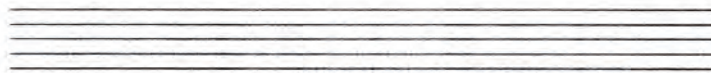
BASIC ELEMENTS

Like language that is spoken and written, music uses a set of symbols to represent sounds. Musical sounds have four fundamental components: **pitch**, **duration**, **intensity** and **tone**. Intensity refers to the loudness of a sound. The extent to which composers control loudness will vary. Generally, the more technical skill one has developed on an instrument, the more one is able to control dynamic range (intensity). In broad terms, tone refers to the quality of a sound. If we play a note on the guitar and follow by playing the same note on a flute, the character of the sound (its tone) will be different. The word “tone” is also used to refer to the sophistication and opulence of sound one has developed on his/her instrument of choice. As a rule, guitarists are required to give a great deal of attention to tone development. Acquiring the sensitivity to sound and touch necessary takes many hours of practice. The notions of intensity (dynamic range) and tone are features that influence the expressive character of the music, are often highly individualized, and frequently distinguish one musician from another. On the other hand, the notions of pitch and duration are more absolute. Pitch designates height or depth of sound. As you move up the fret board (from left to right) pitch becomes higher. Duration refers to length of a sound. The organization of sound duration becomes rhythm. Pitch and duration tell us what sounds to make and how long to make them. To convey these features, we use staff notation.

PITCH

Pitch refers to the height or depth of a sound. On the guitar, as all string instruments, the thicker the string the lower its pitch. The thickest string on the guitar is the sixth string. The thinnest is the first. The sixth is lowest in pitch. The first is the highest in pitch. As we press the strings on the fret board and move up the neck (from left to right), the pitch becomes higher. As we move back down the neck the pitch becomes lower. Pressing the strings to the fret board is called “fretting.”

To name pitches, we use a series of letters called the **musical alphabet**. The musical alphabet consists of the first seven letters of our phonetic alphabet: “ABCDEFG”. These seven letters are repeated over and over as necessary. The pitch of any conventional musical sound is identified by using one of these seven letters. The system we use to notate pitch and other musical features is called **staff notation**. The musical **staff** consists of five horizontal, parallel lines and four spaces.



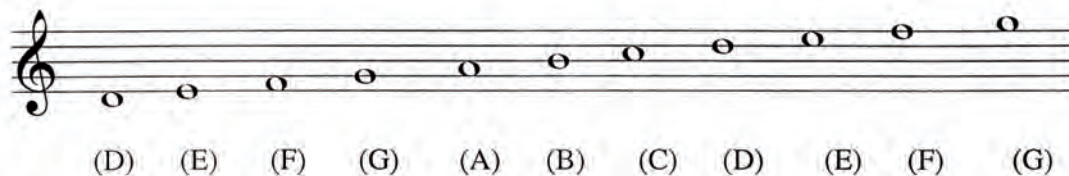
(ex. 1)

These five lines and four spaces constitute a staff (or stave). Any one of these lines or spaces may be referred to as a “degree of the stave”. In order for a stave to be complete, that is, in order for us to identify degrees of the stave with one of the seven letters of the musical alphabet, a **clef sign** is required. This is a symbol that is placed at the beginning of the stave. It fixes the letter name of one of the degrees of the stave and thereby fixes the letter name of all the degrees of the stave. There are several different clef signs and each one affects the stave differently. However, with very few exceptions, the guitar uses the **treble clef** sign exclusively. Another name for the treble clef sign is “**G clef**”. This is appropriate since the treble clef sign fixes the second line (from the bottom) of the stave as the note “G”. The treble clef sign is placed on the staff as shown.



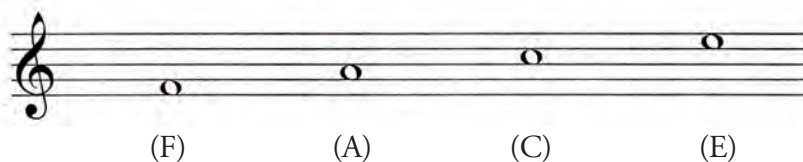
(ex. 2)

As illustrated above, the second line up on the stave (the line nearly encircled by the bottom of the treble clef sign and marked with a note in parenthesis) is now fixed at “G”. Since the musical alphabet always runs sequentially (like the phonetic alphabet), all the degrees of the stave have therefore been named. The example below shows the names of all degrees of the treble staff.



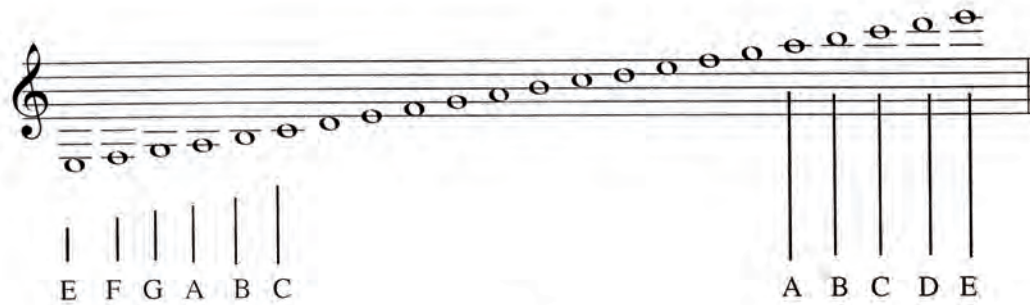
(ex. 3)

Over time and with practice, the names of the degrees are memorized. In the beginning, it can be helpful to remember the spaces of the staff spell the word “FACE”.



(ex. 4)

If one thinks of all the pitches that are possible on the fret board, it is clear there are more possibilities than the eleven degrees of the staff allow. To accommodate all the notes that are above and below those indicated on these eleven lines and spaces, we use short, horizontal lines to extend the stave upward or downward. These short, horizontal lines used to extend the stave upward or downward are called **ledger lines**.



(ex. 5)

The notes in the above example represent notes on the open (unfretted) lowest string of the guitar through the first (highest) string at the twelfth fret. Notes requiring ledger lines are named. When drawing ledger lines, each note using ledger lines must have its own independent set of lines and no more ledger lines than necessary are used. The **range** (distance from the lowest note to the highest note) in example 5 is three octaves. An **octave** is the distance from one note to the nearest note (upward or downward) with the same letter name. The total range of the guitar is about three and one half octaves.

Exercises (1a)

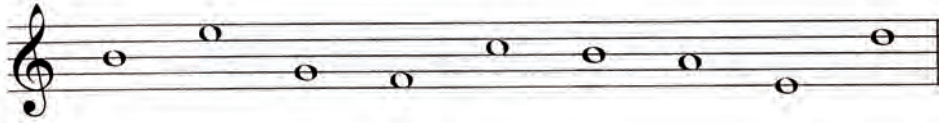
Beneath each of the following notes, write its letter name:

The image shows four musical staves, each with a treble clef and a series of notes. Below each staff is a set of five horizontal lines for writing the letter name of each note. The notes are as follows:

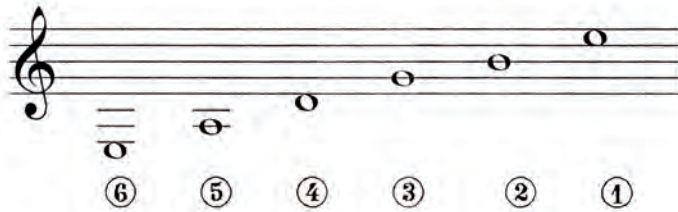
- Staff 1:** Notes are on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th lines. The notes are G, A, B, C, and D.
- Staff 2:** Notes are on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th lines. The notes are E, F, G, A, and B.
- Staff 3:** Notes are on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th lines. The notes are C, D, E, F, and G.
- Staff 4:** Notes are on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th lines. The notes are A, B, C, D, and E.

Exercises (1b)

Write octaves above and below each of the following notes. Use ledger lines as necessary.



These notes represent the six **open strings** of the guitar. They occur when strings are played without pressing the frets. In guitar notation, a string number is designated by an encircled number. (Remember, the sixth string is the thickest string and has the deepest pitch).



Exercises (1c)

Each note below represents an open string on the guitar. Write the correct note name and then string number beneath each note. Be sure to circle the string number.

Two musical staves in treble clef. The first staff has notes E2, A2, D3, G2, B2, and E3. Below the first note, the letter 'E' and the circled number '6' are written. The rest of the staff has blank lines for note names and string numbers. The second staff has notes A2, D3, G2, B2, E3, and A3. Below each note are blank lines for note names and string numbers.