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## Playing The Classical Guitar. Part 1

author: Primarius

date: 09/21/2010

category: for beginners

### Playing The Classical Guitar: Part 1

rating: 9.6 / votes: 22

  

In this lesson I will explain some basics of playing the classical guitar and some of the techniques that are used. We will start of with general basics such as tempo, fingering patterns etc. Then we will move up to playing with the techniques "tirando" and "apoyando", we will learn about arpeggio style and polyphony. I was thinking of including some history at the start, but that's what Wikipedia is for...so let's start! There will also be a lot of interesting tabs to practice! Oh and we will also include some Metallica at the end, chances are it will be inspiring... Hopefully I won't mess up the tabs, if they are messed up, copy and paste them into notepad/word and make sure the font is Currier New.

### The Basics

#### 1. The guitar itself

In it's appearance the classical guitar resembles the acoustic. But let's note some differences. For starters the corpus or the body of the classical guitar is smaller but the neck is much more wider. The strings of the classical guitar are nylon, but the three bass strings are covered with metal. They can last for a really long time if you take care of them. I have a friend who has a classical guitar and hasn't changed it's strings for the last 6 years.

#### 2. The playing position

When playing the classical guitar one should sit in a chair and bear in mind the usual position. Sit up straight on the edge of the chair, position the guitar on your left leg (assuming you are right handed). Hold the guitar upwards in an angle that will result in the neck being in a line with your eyes. Using a foot stool for your leg is very helpful. They aren't too expensive and you can buy them at your local instrument shop or order online. Playing in the correct position will greatly help you, especially with more complex pieces of music. It gives you much more control.

#### 3. Fingernails

I'm probably going to state the damn right obvious now, but here it goes. The fingernails of your fretting hand should be kept small as to give more control of the strings your are holding. Your picking hand should have larger fingernails used for playing. It's essential for higher volume. Some players tend to use the tip of their fingers, and others like to make combinations so that they can get "the sound". You have no idea how helpful long nails are for strumming and taps on the guitar for rhythm. If you want to play flamenco, it's a must have.

#### Some basic terms

##### 1. Finger settings

In classical guitar notation you will find some of these letters and here is what they mean:

p (Latin for "pollex") = the thumb  
 i (Latin for "index") = the index finger  
 m (Latin for "medius") = the middle finger  
 a (Latin for "annularis") = the ring finger

The little finger is usually not used to pick strings. It's not an iron clad rule, modern classical guitarists tend to improvise and spice things up with it. Usually you use your thumb to pluck the bass strings and your other fingers for the other strings. Again not a rule that was engraved in stone, but stick to it in the beginning.

TAB:

```

      Q  Q  Q  Q  Q  Q  H
E |-----0-----|-----|-----|
H |-----0-----|-----|-----|
G |-----0-----|-----|-----|
D |-----|-----|-----|
A |-----|-----|-----|
E |-----|-----|-----|
  P i m a m i
  
```

repeat 3 times

Let me start by saying we use H instead of B in my country so we don't have confusions. The Q above every note represents that these are quarter notes (one whole note = two half notes = four quarter notes). The H is a half note or in this case a half note pause as represented by the "="". I've put the pause since I'm assuming your new and don't want to rush and would like a little rest before going again, once you get into it ignore the pause. All strings are played open in this example and should remind you of something from Metallica... Bellow are the letters representing the finger you should use to play these notes. So p stands for your thumb so you will use your thumb to play the first E note in the tab. Follow the rest of the pattern.

## 2. Tempo and volume

These are some tempo terms and their speed (get a metronome to practice with!):

Largo = Wide = 40-66 bpm  
 Adagio = Very slow = 66-76 bpm  
 Andante = Light and steady = 76-108 bpm  
 Moderato = Moderate = 108 - 120 bpm  
 Allegro = Fast and cheerful = 120-168 bpm  
 Presto = Very fast = 168+ bpm

\*bpm = beats per minuets, like I said get a metronome

Some terms concerning volume:

pp = pianissimo = very quiet  
 p = piano = quiet  
 mp = mezzo-piano = moderately quiet  
 mf = mezzo-forte = moderately loud  
 f = forte = loud  
 ff = fortissimo = very loud  
 < = this a crescendo and it means you increase volume  
 > = this decrescendo and it means you decrease volume

## Tirando and Apoyando

### 1. Tirando

This is a basic down or up stroke with your fingers. It's also called a free stroke or a stroke without support. Just use your thumb to strike a string downwards towards the floor or use your other fingers to strike a string upwards.

### 2. Apoyando

Now things get a little tricky, but it's still an easy concept. Lay the finger on the string you wish to play, hit the note and let your finger slip to next string and rest on it. The string you played will be given a greater volume and the string your finger slips to will not make a sound (unless you choose to do so). An example would be if you played the E string with your thumb: it would slide towards the next A string. Once on the A string the finger will stop and rest, not producing any sound. This is a stroke with rest or a supported stroke.

### 3. Tirando VS. Apoyando

For me it is useless to debate that, I will leave it to the true masters of the classical guitar. Both have advantages and will help you achieve "the sound". So saying one is better than the other and advising you to stick with it would be foolish and arrogant. Learn both, you will grow as a guitarist.

Since you've followed me up till now ( a lot of text here) let me repay you with some fun tabs to practice tirando and apoyando on.

TABS:

Parni Valjak - Sve jos mirise na nju (Steam Roller - Everything still smells like her)  
 \*explanation bellow the tab\*

T: Andante

```

|E|-----|-----|-----|-----|
|H|-----3---|-----3^---|-----3---|-----3---|
|G|---3---3---|---3---|---3---3---|---3---3---|
|D| -5-----| -3-----3- | -2-----| -1-----|
|A|-----|-----|-----|-----|
|E|-----|-----|-----|-----|
  
```

```

|E|-----| -3^-----|-----|-----|
  
```

```

|H| |-----3- |----6^---- | -6-5^----- |-----| |
|G| |-----3---|-----5- | -6-5-5----- |5---7-(7)- | |
|D| | -3/5-----|-----5- |-----5- | -5----- | |
|A| |-----|-----|-----|-----| |
|E| |-----|-----|-----|-----| |

```

First off I chose this as it was my first finger picking song. Second I didn't want to put boring tabs people usually find on these kinds of lessons. Third it is easy, fun to play and a good exercise. As you can see all of these are quarter notes. Play it slow and speed up as you advance. The notes that have "^" are meant to be louder than the others so apoyando would come in handy in there. The notes in the brackets are meant to be more silent.

## Arpeggio and Polyphony

### 1. Arpeggio

Classical music has a lot of arpeggios, it's a way to play each note that forms a chord individually. Tirando is usually used for this. A good fingering pattern is p-i-m-a-m-i or in plain words thumb-index-middle-ring-middle-index. Basically take any chord and practice for a start. Learn barre chords as well.

Random idea:

```

|E| |-----0-----|-----1-----| |
|H| |-----0--0-----|-----3--3-----| |
|G| |-----1-----1-----|-----2-----2-----| |
|D| |-----2-----2-----|-----0-----| |
|A| |-----2-----2-----|-----| |
|E| |-----0-----0-----|-----| |

```

### 2. Polyphony

When playing this you are playing several parts, or rather you are playing both bass and soprano notes. It can be quite tricky at first. Let me give you some tabs to practice.

```

|E| |0-2- |3-2--0-----0-2- |-----0-----| |
|H| |---- |-----4-----| -0-2-4---3-1- | |
|G| |---- |-----|-----| |
|D| |---- |-----|-----| |
|A| |---- |---0-----2--0--- |-----| |
|E| |3-2- |0-----| -3-2---0--2--- | |

```

This is from Bach's Bouree in Em from Lute Suite No.1

Now some tabs for practicing what we have so far. I'll give you some more modern tabs, but I'm sure you will enjoy them. If you want some classical pieces though, try Spanish Romance, great piece and not too hard.

TABS

This is Metallica's intro for "Unforgiven" the way my ear remembers it.

```

|E| |-----|-----|-----|-----| |
|H| |--0-----0-----0-----0-----1-----| | repeat 4 times
|G| | .--2-----2-----2-----2-----2-----2-----| | | |
|D| | .--2-----2-----2-----2-----2-----2-----| |
|A| | --0-----|-----|-----| |
|E| |-----|-----|-----| |

```

A pattern to arpeggio the chords Em, D and C, play it one after another and change the pattern the way you like it and you will probably get a very familiar sound!

```

|E| |-----0- |-----2- |-----0- | |
|H| |-----0---|-----3---|-----1---| |
|G| |-----0---|-----2---|-----0---| |
|D| |-----2---|-----0---|-----2---| |
|A| |-----2---|-----3---|-----| |
|E| |-----|-----|-----| |

```

Here's a tab I'm going for as I think it will help you form speed on your left hand when jumping to that fourth fret on the A string and working your way down.

```

|E| |-----0-----4-----|
|H| |-----3-----3-----5-----5-----|
|G| |---3---3---3---3-----6-6-6-| repeat one more time
|D| |---3-----6-----|
|A| |-----4-----|
|E| |-----|

```

(Almost reached the end of the lesson)

## The Strength of the Right Hand

And by right hand I actually mean your picking hand, developing speed and strength is needed to play good fingerstyle or strumming (which we will cover in part 2). This stuff tends to be boring so most people would skip it, but I recommend you last till the very end. In fact to make it more fun I made a game system for you to use.

For all of the following tabs, the thumb will be used for the 6th(E), 5th(A), and 4th(D) strings. And fingers your index, middle and ring finger will cover 3rd(G), 2nd(H) and 1st(e) strings, just like we've practiced in this lesson so far. Your goal is to master each level so that it represents no difficulty to play. Playing it perfect 10 times in a row should be enough to prove you've been successful at the task. If you make a mistake, start over.

```

Level 1
|E| |-----0-----|---0-----0-----0-----|
|H| |-----0--0-----|-----0-----0--0-----|
|G| |-----0-----0-----|-----0-----0-----|
|D| |-----0-----0-----|-----|
|A| |---0-----0---|-----|
|E| |---0-----0---|---0-----0-----|

```

```

Level 2
|E| |---0-----0-0-----0-----|-----|
|H| |---0-----0-----0-----0-----|---0--0---|
|G| |---0-0-----0-----0--0---|---0---|
|D| |---0-0-----0-----0--0---|---0---|
|A| |---0-----0-----0--0---|---0--0---|
|E| |---0-----0-0-----0-----|-----|

```

```

Level 3
|E| |-----0-0-----0-----0-----|---0---|
|H| |-----0-----0-----0-----0-----|---0---|
|G| |---0--0-----0-----0--0---|---|
|D| |---0--0-----0-----0--0---|---|
|A| |---0-----0-----0--0---|---|
|E| |---0-----0-0-----0-----0-----|---|

```

### Level 4

The final in the exercise plan and to make it more difficult we'll be adding the fretting hand here. I remember I hated my guitar teacher for this. It's silly, but a mind twister. The original Croatian guitarist who came up with this made it so it would be confusing, it stops your mind from using logic to predict what the next pattern is like, which is also good for developing music memory.

```

|E| |---1-----5-|0-----2---9---6-----|
|H| |---2-----4---|-----0---3---9---8-----|
|G| |---3/6/3-----|---12---7-----7-----|
|D| |---3/6/3-----|---12---7-----7-----|
|A| |---2-----4---|-----0-----5-----8-----|
|E| |---1-----5-|0-----4-----6-----|

```

So at the end here is another classical piece to help up synchronize the left and the right hand.

```

|E| |---1-0--1-0-----0-1-1-0-----1-0-----2-3-----|
|H| |---0---0-1-3-----3-----0-1-----0-----|
|G| |-----0-----0-----2-----0-----|
|D| |-----1-----0-----|
|A| |-----0-----|
|E| |-----|

```

That's it for now. Hope it will be useful.

POSTED: 09/21/2010 - 04:49 am

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**Dream Floyd :**

...H? I'm assuming that's a B, but I don't know anything about classical guitar [tuning].

POSTED: 09/21/2010 - 11:58 am / quote

**hildesaw :**

**Dream Floyd** wrote:

...H? I'm assuming that's a B, but I don't know anything about classical guitar [tuning].

Yep, H is how B is generally written classically, and I think they still do that some places in Europe?. Way back in the day, B flat was written as B, and B as H. JS Bach would write little themes and such that actually spelled BACH musically.

POSTED: 09/21/2010 - 12:50 pm / quote

**hildesaw :**

Superb lesson by the way!

POSTED: 09/21/2010 - 12:51 pm / quote

**IBZIC400 :**

Great lesson man, Cant wait to see the second in the series.

POSTED: 09/21/2010 - 12:56 pm / quote

**chaows :**

This would be an excellent resource for anybody who want's to learn the basic mechanics of classical guitar without paying for lessons. Kudos, the only thing wrong with it is that classical strings DO start to go bad after a month or so. However, unless you're performing regularly, or you're an audiophile, it's probably not worth the effort to change strings every month.

POSTED: 09/21/2010 - 01:42 pm / quote

**Primarius :**

Thanks people!

Yes we use H here instead of B. ☺

POSTED: 09/21/2010 - 03:20 pm / quote

**prleLTD :**

Parni valjak kje si najdu ☺ jugoslavija ☺

dobra ....

POSTED: 09/21/2010 - 04:10 pm / quote

**Primarius :**

**prleLTD** wrote:

Parni valjak kje si najdu jugoslavija

dobra ....

^^ ☺

thanks

POSTED: 09/21/2010 - 05:19 pm / quote

**corrda00 :**

So H is a note ☺

Great lesson by the way, covers most of the begginer concepts of classical guitar.

POSTED: 09/21/2010 - 07:30 pm / quote

**shreddymcshred :**

A few additions.

Classical guitars are acoustic guitars. Comparing the two is like comparing Mustangs to cars.

Secondly, nylon strings are not meant to last 6 years. It is advisable to change bass strings quite frequently. Treble strings, not being wound, last much longer. You can purchase bass or treble only sets from any legit classical guitar retailer, including stringsbymail. My basses typically show significant decay after two weeks, and are completely dead after about 2 months. Trebles are usually changed when you can see visible indents on the strings, or when the tone is noticeably poor.

I'm interested in your next article.

POSTED: 09/22/2010 - 12:40 pm / quote

**Helloween\_rox :**

**corrda00** wrote:

So H is a note

Great lesson by the way, covers most of the beginner concepts of classical guitar.

Since when is H a note?

POSTED: 09/22/2010 - 01:26 pm / quote

**Primarius :**

**shreddymcshred** wrote:

A few additions.

Classical guitars are acoustic guitars. Comparing the two is like comparing Mustangs to cars.

Secondly, nylon strings are not meant to last 6 years. It is advisable to change bass strings quite frequently. Treble strings, not being wound, last much longer. You can purchase bass or treble only sets from any legit classical guitar retailer, including stringsbymail. My basses typically show significant decay after two weeks, and are completely dead after about 2 months. Trebles are usually changed when you can see visible indents on the strings, or when the tone is noticeably poor.

I'm interested in your next article.

thank you for your input mate! 😊

I started working on it today, I need to find some of my old notes from music school before I can finish it however. I appreciate the support ^^

POSTED: 09/22/2010 - 01:56 pm / quote

**shreddymcshred :**

Since when is H a note?

In the US, and I would guess England as well, we never see or use H except in very rare occasions. This may still be commonplace in other parts of the world

POSTED: 09/22/2010 - 02:28 pm / quote

**macIII :**

I really appreciated your lesson.

POSTED: 09/22/2010 - 08:01 pm / quote

**Primarius :**

macIII wrote:

I really appreciated your lesson.

I am glad to hear that 😊

POSTED: 09/23/2010 - 10:01 am / quote

**shadow0501 :**

this was an awesome lesson, do you have any notes for fingering though cause i find the fingering on the fret board to be difficult for chords or frets down the board by five or more

POSTED: 10/11/2010 - 10:34 pm / quote

**unsettledkid :**

great lesson

POSTED: 10/15/2010 - 10:00 pm / quote

**joseche :**

I don't think it is a good idea to try to cover all these complex things on a "lesson".

Your effort is very good, and your purpose is great, but ... can I write a: how to build a house, on a post,...., I think if you really want to show something useful you have to do video

POSTED: 10/19/2010 - 01:49 am / quote

**Vypor :**

joseche wrote:

I don't think it is a good idea to try to cover all these complex things on a "lesson".

Your effort is very good, and your purpose is great, but ... can I write a: how to build a house, on a post,...., I think if you really want to show something useful you have to do video

I disagree, this is a wonderful "Introduction" article, and the pieces given to practice with happen to be pretty simple and basic. This is about the way my first couple of classes went when I took a college guitar class. Nice article,

POSTED: 10/19/2010 - 10:13 pm / quote

**Vypor :**

And to add a note: Metallica's "Nothing Else matters" might have been a better choice for demonstrating this kind of guitar playing.

POSTED: 10/19/2010 - 10:15 pm / quote

**ThatDarnDavid :**

I was thinking this ^ its a fun song to play too.

To the OP please dont leave us high and dry on lesson two! It would be a shame if you didn't continue this to part 2.

great post keep it up!

POSTED: 10/21/2010 - 03:31 pm / quote

**Kraker75 :**

wish i could play more better having a hard time kraker 75 !!!

POSTED: 10/27/2010 - 02:59 pm / quote

**liIstillrocks :**

ive been trying to play a song and could just not seem to get this part down. after reading your lesson i realized it's because i've never learned to fingerpick, so i didn't recognize the chord being played. thanks a lot 😊

POSTED: 11/02/2010 - 02:27 am / quote

**CapnKickass :**

awesome lesson. next we should learn to play flamingo by paul gilbert 😊

POSTED: 11/13/2010 - 08:36 pm / quote

**Nihil :**

This is a good idea, and to those who become successful at the basics please start taking lessons, unfortunately classical guitar is far too hard to learn on one's own or through videos, playing at this high of a level on an acoustic instrument makes shred guitar look easy.

Look into buying the Aaron Shearer books as well, his method is very widely used and taught by the top conservatories (like Peabody).

Also learn to read sheet music, the Icelandic guitar school website has many studies and pieces for free, all well written with proper fingerings.

Keep playing!

POSTED: 11/15/2010 - 02:03 pm / quote

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