

LEARNING MADE EASY



2nd Edition

Classical Guitar

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Play your first
classical guitar melodies

—
Get to know
scales and arpeggios

—
Become acquainted with
classical guitar repertoire

Mark Phillips

Guitarist, arranger, author

Jon Chappell

Award-winning guitarist, author



Classical Guitar

2nd Edition

by Mark Phillips and Jon Chappell

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand

Classical Guitar For Dummies®, 2nd Edition

Published by: **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**, 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774, www.wiley.com

Copyright © 2022 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey

Published simultaneously in Canada

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise, except as permitted under Sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the Publisher. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

Trademarks: Wiley, For Dummies, the Dummies Man logo, Dummies.com, Making Everything Easier, and related trade dress are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc., and may not be used without written permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

LIMIT OF LIABILITY/DISCLAIMER OF WARRANTY: WHILE THE PUBLISHER AND AUTHORS HAVE USED THEIR BEST EFFORTS IN PREPARING THIS WORK, THEY MAKE NO REPRESENTATIONS OR WARRANTIES WITH RESPECT TO THE ACCURACY OR COMPLETENESS OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS WORK AND SPECIFICALLY DISCLAIM ALL WARRANTIES, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION ANY IMPLIED WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. NO WARRANTY MAY BE CREATED OR EXTENDED BY SALES REPRESENTATIVES, WRITTEN SALES MATERIALS OR PROMOTIONAL STATEMENTS FOR THIS WORK. THE FACT THAT AN ORGANIZATION, WEBSITE, OR PRODUCT IS REFERRED TO IN THIS WORK AS A CITATION AND/OR POTENTIAL SOURCE OF FURTHER INFORMATION DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE PUBLISHER AND AUTHORS ENDORSE THE INFORMATION OR SERVICES THE ORGANIZATION, WEBSITE, OR PRODUCT MAY PROVIDE OR RECOMMENDATIONS IT MAY MAKE. THIS WORK IS SOLD WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THE PUBLISHER IS NOT ENGAGED IN RENDERING PROFESSIONAL SERVICES. THE ADVICE AND STRATEGIES CONTAINED HEREIN MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR YOUR SITUATION. YOU SHOULD CONSULT WITH A SPECIALIST WHERE APPROPRIATE. FURTHER, READERS SHOULD BE AWARE THAT WEBSITES LISTED IN THIS WORK MAY HAVE CHANGED OR DISAPPEARED BETWEEN WHEN THIS WORK WAS WRITTEN AND WHEN IT IS READ. NEITHER THE PUBLISHER NOR AUTHORS SHALL BE LIABLE FOR ANY LOSS OF PROFIT OR ANY OTHER COMMERCIAL DAMAGES, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO SPECIAL, INCIDENTAL, CONSEQUENTIAL, OR OTHER DAMAGES.

For general information on our other products and services, please contact our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 877-762-2974, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3993, or fax 317-572-4002. For technical support, please visit <https://hub.wiley.com/community/support/dummies>.

Wiley publishes in a variety of print and electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some material included with standard print versions of this book may not be included in e-books or in print-on-demand. If this book refers to media such as a CD or DVD that is not included in the version you purchased, you may download this material at <http://booksupport.wiley.com>. For more information about Wiley products, visit www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022930688

ISBN: 978-1-119-87302-0

ISBN: 978-1-119-87316-7 (ebk); ISBN: 978-1-119-87315-0 (ebk)

Contents at a Glance

Introduction	1
Part 1: Getting to Know the Classical Guitar	7
CHAPTER 1: An Acoustic Guitar in a League of Its Own	9
CHAPTER 2: Getting Ready to Play	21
CHAPTER 3: Deciphering Music Notation and Tablature	43
Part 2: Starting to Play: The Basics	59
CHAPTER 4: One Note at a Time: Playing Simple Melodies	61
CHAPTER 5: Rolling the Notes of a Chord: Arpeggio Technique	83
CHAPTER 6: Practicing Scales in First and Second Position	101
CHAPTER 7: Exploring Musical Textures	123
Part 3: Improving Your Technique	137
CHAPTER 8: Flat-Fingered Fretting with Barres	139
CHAPTER 9: Getting a Smooth Sound with Slurs and Trills	149
CHAPTER 10: Coloring Your Sound with Tone-Production Techniques	161
CHAPTER 11: Scaling the Musical Ladder beyond Second Position	177
CHAPTER 12: Combining Arpeggios and Melody	195
CHAPTER 13: Combining Left-Hand Techniques While Playing up the Neck	217
Part 4: Mastering Classical Guitar Repertoire	229
CHAPTER 14: Playing Pieces by the Guitar Greats	231
CHAPTER 15: Early Guitar Music from the Renaissance and Baroque Eras	251
CHAPTER 16: The Guitar Comes of Age: The Classical, Romantic, and Modern Eras	269
Part 5: The Part of Tens	289
CHAPTER 17: Ten (Or So) Classical Guitarists You Should Know	291
CHAPTER 18: Ten Things to Do When Shopping for a Classical Guitar	297
Part 6: Appendixes	303
APPENDIX A: Basic Guitar Care and Maintenance	305
APPENDIX B: About the Online Tracks and Videos	315
Index	323

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
About This Book	1
Foolish Assumptions	3
Icons Used in This Book	4
Beyond This Book	4
Where to Go from Here	5
PART 1: GETTING TO KNOW THE CLASSICAL GUITAR	7
CHAPTER 1: An Acoustic Guitar in a League of Its Own	9
Defining What a Classical Guitar Is (and Isn't)	10
Knowing What a Classical Guitar Looks Like	11
Recognizing How a Classical Guitar Physically Differs from Its Peers	14
Beyond Physique: Identifying Other Unique Attributes of Classical Guitar	17
Player's form and technique	17
Musical knowledge and skills	19
CHAPTER 2: Getting Ready to Play	21
Situating Yourself	21
Taking your seat	22
Supporting the guitar: Leg position	23
Embracing the guitar: Arm support	24
Placing your hands correctly	25
Approaching the Strings with Your Hands	28
Fretting the strings: Left-hand form	28
Preparing to pluck: Right-hand form	29
Stroking the strings: Basic right-hand technique	32
Tuning Up	36
Adjusting the string tension to raise or lower pitch	36
Tuning visually with an electronic tuner	37
Tuning by ear	38
CHAPTER 3: Deciphering Music Notation and Tablature	43
Knowing the Ropes of Standard Music Notation	43
The composer's canvas: The staff, clef, measures, and bar lines	44
Pitch: The highs and lows of music	45
Duration: How long to hold a note, what determines rhythm, and so on	47
Expression, articulation, and other symbols	50

Relating the Notes on the Staff to the Fretboard	51
Relishing the Usefulness of Guitar-Specific Notation.	54
Fingering indications for the right and left hands	54
Stepping up to the barre	55
Taking on tablature, a nice complement to standard notation . . .	56
PART 2: STARTING TO PLAY: THE BASICS	59
CHAPTER 4: One Note at a Time: Playing Simple Melodies	61
Practicing Notes on One String	62
Exercising your fingers: Strings 1, 2, and 3	63
Workin' (mostly) the thumb: Strings 6, 5, and 4	68
Playing across Three Strings	72
Finger fun on the first three strings	72
All thumbs again on the three lower strings	74
Cruising through All Six Strings	76
No thumbs allowed!	76
Fingers and thumb, unite!	77
Flowing through Melodic Pieces Using All Six Strings	79
CHAPTER 5: Rolling the Notes of a Chord: Arpeggio Technique	83
Playing the Notes of an Arpeggio: The Basics	84
Working Your Way across the Strings: The Thumb and Fingers in Order	85
Keeping it simple: One digit per string	85
Moving the thumb around	87
Varying Your Right-Hand Strokes	89
Changing the finger order	90
Alternating the thumb and fingers	90
Adding Harmony to Select Notes	93
Feeling the pinch with your thumb and fingers	93
Doubling up two fingers at once	95
Playing Pieces with Arpeggios	96
CHAPTER 6: Practicing Scales in First and Second Position	101
Introducing Scales, the Necessary Evils	101
Why scales are important.	102
How you name them: Applying key signatures.	103
Where they start and end: A primer on positions	106
Playing Major Scales in 1st Position	108
The one-octave C major scale	109
The two-octave G major scale	110
The two-octave F major scale	111

	The two-octave E major scale	111
	The two-octave A major scale	112
	Playing Minor Scales in 1st Position	112
	The one-octave A minor scale	113
	The two-octave E minor scale	113
	The two-octave F minor scale	114
	Playing Scales in 2nd Position	115
	The D major scale in 2nd position using open strings	115
	The D major scale in 2nd position using all fretted notes	116
	The G major scale in 2nd position using all fretted notes	117
	The B minor scale in 2nd position using all fretted notes	117
	Applying Scales in Simple Pieces	118
CHAPTER 7:	Exploring Musical Textures	123
	Coordinating Contrapuntal Music: Layered Melodies	124
	Playing two melodies in sync rhythmically	125
	Opposing forces: Separating the thumb and fingers rhythmically	125
	Thickening the upper part by adding double-stops	127
	Melody and Accompaniment: Using All Your Fingers	128
	Matching rhythm between accompaniment and melody	129
	Getting creative with the flow: Two parts, two rhythms	130
	Playing Easy Pieces in Different Textural Styles	131
	PART 3: IMPROVING YOUR TECHNIQUE	137
CHAPTER 8:	Flat-Fingered Fretting with Barres	139
	Discovering How to Play Barres	139
	Half barre	140
	Full barre	141
	Practicing Barres in Musical Context	142
	Half barre	142
	Full barre	143
	Playing Pieces with Barres	144
CHAPTER 9:	Getting a Smooth Sound with Slurs and Trills	149
	Connecting Your Notes with Slurs	149
	Hammering and pulling: Exploring slurs	150
	Slurring in the context of a larger musical phrase	153
	Fluttering a Note with a Trill	155
	Playing trills on their own	155
	Practicing trills in context	157
	Playing Pieces Using Slurs and Trills	158

CHAPTER 10: Coloring Your Sound with Tone-Production Techniques	161
Creating Tones That Ring like Bells: Harmonics	162
Playing harmonics	162
Practicing harmonics in context	163
Varying the Tone with Vibrato	165
Playing vibrato	165
Practicing vibrato in context	166
Brightening or Darkening Your Sound by Changing Timbre.....	167
Implementing tonal changes.....	167
Practicing changing tone in context	169
Tremolo: The Classical Guitar Machine Gun of Sorts.....	170
Playing tremolo	170
Practicing tremolo in context.....	171
Playing Pieces Using Tone-Production Techniques	173
CHAPTER 11: Scaling the Musical Ladder beyond Second Position	177
Introducing Scales and Skills in This Chapter	178
Getting to know the higher positions	178
Strengthening your technical skill with practice variations.....	179
Playing Scales That Stay in 5th Position	180
The F major scale.....	181
The B \flat major scale	183
The D minor scale	183
Playing Scales That Stay in 9th Position	184
The A major scale	184
The D major scale	185
The F \sharp minor scale	186
Playing Scales That Require Shifting Positions	186
The E major scale — one position shift	187
The A \flat major scale — two position shifts.....	187
The C \sharp minor scale — one position shift.....	189
The G \sharp minor scale — two position shifts.....	189
Playing Some Pieces Using Scales Up the Neck	190
CHAPTER 12: Combining Arpeggios and Melody	195
Grasping the Combination in Context	196
Downtown: Melody in the Bass.....	197
Playing a melody within arpeggios in the bass.....	198
Practicing making a bass melody stand out	199
Moving Uptown: Melody in the Treble.....	200
Playing a treble melody within arpeggios	201
Practicing making a treble melody stand out	202

	Mixing Up Your Melodic Moves: The Thumb and Fingers Take Turns	203
	Playing a shifting treble-and-bass melody within arpeggios.	203
	Practicing making a shifting melody stand out.	205
	Playing Pieces That Combine Arpeggios and Melodies	206
CHAPTER 13:	Combining Left-Hand Techniques While Playing up the Neck	217
	Layering Melodies and Using Barres up the Neck: Counterpoint	218
	Combining Melody and Accompaniment with Barres and Slurs up the Neck.	219
	Playing Pieces up the Neck with Left-Hand Techniques	222
	PART 4: MASTERING CLASSICAL GUITAR REPERTOIRE	229
CHAPTER 14:	Playing Pieces by the Guitar Greats	231
	Getting Acquainted with the Master Guitar Composers	232
	Concentrating on Music by the Spanish Composers	233
	Saying hello to Sor	233
	Tackling Tárrega	233
	Focusing on Music by the Italian Composers	236
	Gelling with Giuliani	236
	Cozying Up to Carcassi	237
	Playing Pieces by All the Master Guitar Composers	240
CHAPTER 15:	Early Guitar Music from the Renaissance and Baroque Eras	251
	Getting an Overview of the Styles	252
	The Renaissance	252
	The Baroque era	253
	Identifying Some Renaissance Composers	254
	Traditional 16th-century melodies by anonymous composers	254
	John Dowland and other great lutenists	255
	Recognizing Some Baroque Composers	258
	Back to Bach	258
	Getting a handle on Handel	259
	Playing Pieces from the Renaissance and Baroque Eras	261
CHAPTER 16:	The Guitar Comes of Age: The Classical, Romantic, and Modern Eras	269
	The Classical Era: Mozart's Muse	270
	Getting in Touch with Beethoven, the Classical Hopeless Romantic.	272

Letting the Inside Out with the Romantics: Brahms.	274
Dreaming with Debussy: Music Becomes Modern.	276
Playing Pieces from the Classical, Romantic, and Modern Eras	279
PART 5: THE PART OF TENS	289
CHAPTER 17: Ten (Or So) Classical Guitarists You Should Know	291
Andrés Segovia (1893–1987)	291
Julian Bream (b. 1933–2020)	292
Oscar Ghiglia (b. 1938)	293
John Williams (b. 1941)	293
Pepe Romero and Angel Romero (b. 1944, 1946).	293
Christopher Parkening (b. 1947)	294
David Starobin (b. 1951)	294
Manuel Barrueco (b. 1952)	294
Eliot Fisk (b. 1954)	295
Benjamin Verdery (b. 1955)	295
Sharon Isbin (b. 1956)	296
CHAPTER 18: Ten Things to Do When Shopping for a Classical Guitar	297
Go Retail if You Aren't 100 Percent Sure What You Want	298
Bring a Friend Along	298
Decide on a Price Range Before You Go	298
Know Your Materials.	299
Evaluate the Construction and Workmanship	299
Get a Feel for the Guitar	300
Check the Intonation.	301
Listen to the Sound	301
Judge the Aesthetics	302
Determine a Guitar's Growth Potential	302
PART 6: APPENDIXES	303
APPENDIX A: Basic Guitar Care and Maintenance	305
Keeping Your Guitar Comfortable.	306
Temperature	306
Humidity	306
Protection, both at home and on the road	307

Cleaning Your Guitar	308
Changing the Strings on Your Classical Guitar	308
Step one: Remove the old string	309
Step two: Tie off the string at the bridge	310
Step three: Secure the string to the roller	311
Making Minor Repairs	313
APPENDIX B: About the Online Tracks and Videos	315
Relating the Text to the Online Files	316
Listening to the Tracks	317
Watching the Videos	321
INDEX	323

Introduction

If you're captivated by the sound of the classical guitar, you're in good company. No less than Ludwig van Beethoven approvingly called the guitar a “miniature orchestra in itself”! We don't think we can improve on that (not that we'd try to compete with Beethoven!), but we do understand his enthusiasm. The classical guitar has the amazing ability to produce expressive melodies, complex chords, flowing arpeggios, and multiple, independent parts simultaneously — all with just six strings. It offers an incredible range of tonal possibilities as well, and it's able to create a broad range of colors and textures, from driving percussive rhythms to sweetly lyrical melodies — and everything in between.

As modern players, we can appreciate that we're playing classical music on the most popular and the coolest musical instrument in the world — the guitar. What could be a better way to have the best of both worlds than to take up the classical guitar? We have access to the music of history's greatest composers — the minuets of Mozart, the bourrées of Bach, and the sonatas of Beethoven. With a classical guitar, we can delight listeners with the subtle intricacies of the Baroque era or inspire their passion with stirring pieces from the Romantic period. And we also get to do this while playing the guitar. How cool is that?

Make no mistake, though, there's a lot more to classical guitar than just being cool. Like any other serious art form, classical guitar requires work. But that doesn't mean you can't have fun while developing the discipline and mastering the skills necessary to play classical guitar. Unlike the world of popular music, the best players in classical music — technically and musically — rise to the top. Our aim is to get you started on the right path so that every minute you devote to practicing and playing takes you closer to your goal of being the best classical guitarist you can be.

About This Book

In *Classical Guitar For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, we give you everything you need to play melodies, arpeggios, scales, and full-length pieces in the classical style. We present the material in a way that respects the classical tradition yet makes it fun

and easy to learn. Here are just some of the methods we use to get our points across:

- » **Step-by-step instructions:** We guide you through the techniques, exercises, and pieces using plain and helpful language, so that you know exactly what to do to successfully play every exercise and piece that appears in the book.
- » **Music notation:** We present all the written musical figures in the traditional five-line staff with a treble clef, with notes indicating the pitches and rhythms. In addition, we also supply a tab staff (appearing directly below the music staff) that shows the strings and fret numbers. You can use either system, or even use them in combination, because they convey essentially the same information — just presented in a different way. In some figures we show a neck diagram, which is yet another way to see the guitar represented graphically and which serves to illustrate fingering positions. And have no fear — we show you how to interpret notation in Chapter 3.
- » **Online tracks and videos:** The website (www.dummies.com/go/classical-guitar-fd2e) that corresponds with this book contains more than 99 tracks of the exercises and pieces from the book as well as 19 videos. You can listen to or view the files on your computer or mobile device, or download the files to your device of choice, so that you always have the recorded music to inspire you wherever you go.

Even if you already play the guitar, you'll find this book valuable. You find here a focused approach on learning classical guitar the *right way* — the way it's played in music schools, universities, and on recordings and concert stages the world over. This book covers how to hold the guitar in the proper position, how to strike and fret the strings according to the rules of classical guitar technique, and how to perform the rich body of repertoire that awaits classical guitarists of all levels and experience.

We take care to introduce concepts and define terms so that you don't have to wonder what we're talking about if we, for example, use the word *staccato* (which tells you to play notes short and detached, by the way). But we observe certain conventions that we may not explain every time, so following is a list of concepts and terms that we use often throughout the book.

- » **Up and down, high and low:** When we speak of *up* and *down* on the guitar — whether we're referring to the strings, neck positions, or pitch in general — up means higher in pitch and down means lower in pitch. So the higher strings are the skinny, high-pitched ones — even though they're closer to the floor as

you hold the guitar in the playing position. *Going up the neck* means heading for the higher-numbered frets (toward the bridge), even though they're slightly closer to the floor than the lower-numbered frets that are closer to the headstock. Don't be confused by this seeming contradiction of musical direction and physical positioning; knowing which way is up becomes second nature when you begin playing.

- » **Right hand and left hand:** We say *right hand* to mean the hand that plucks the strings and *left hand* to mean the hand that frets the notes on the neck. Left-handed players sometimes flip the guitar so that the right hand becomes the fretting hand, and some method books avoid any ambiguity by using the terms *picking hand* and *fretting hand*. But we find that a little clunky, so we observe the more traditional use of right hand and left hand. If you're a southpaw who flips, take note!
- » **Letters and numbers:** In addition to the standard music symbols that appear on the five-line staff, we often use letters and numbers to show you specific ways to use your fingers to play the notes. The letters *p*, *i*, *m*, and *a* indicate the right-hand thumb and index, middle, and ring fingers. (The letters stand for the Spanish words for these fingers.) For left-hand fingers, we use small numbers placed just to the left of the note heads: 1 = index, 2 = middle, 3 = ring, and 4 = little. In many cases we provide fingerings because it's the *only* way to play the passage, so try our way first before searching for an alternative.

Foolish Assumptions

We don't assume that you already know how to read music, nor do we assume that you even play the guitar at all. To make the notation a little easier to grasp, we include a tablature staff under every standard music notation staff in the exercises and pieces that appear in this book. Traditional classical music doesn't include tablature, so you're actually getting something extra here in *Classical Guitar For Dummies*, 2nd Edition. You can use the tab to check the fret and string location of any note or as another way to help figure out the music in case your music reading isn't very strong. We also don't assume that you're a virtuoso, and so we've taken steps to make sure that all the exercises and pieces are easily playable by guitarists that range from beginning to intermediate level.

Icons Used in This Book

We use the following icons in this book:



REMEMBER

This one indicates important information that you want to keep in the front of your mind, as that info has a way of coming up again and again.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

This icon tags information that's not absolutely necessary to perform the task at hand but that digs down below the surface to offer greater understanding on a particular subject or point.



TIP

A helpful hint, factoid, or other useful nugget that makes some concept easier to grasp or a task easier to perform.



WARNING

We use this icon to caution you about issues that could damage your guitar or cause you discomfort. So watch for this one if you — or your guitar — like to avoid pain!



PLAY THIS

We use this icon to signal an opportunity to play a complete piece in the style of the exercise or excerpt. You can listen to the tracks and watch the videos at www.dummies.com/go/classicalguitarfd2e.

Beyond This Book

You can find some great information online as you work to learn how and improve playing the classical guitar. Look online for the following:

- » **Cheat Sheet:** Go to www.dummies.com, type in “Classical Guitar For Dummies Cheat Sheet,” and read the helpful Cheat Sheet you can refer to again and again.
- » **Audio and video tracks:** To listen to and watch the audio and video tracks we refer to throughout the book, just go to www.dummies.com/go/classicalguitarfd2e.

Where to Go from Here

If this is your first brush with music and the guitar — or if it has been longer than you'd care to remember since you practiced — then start right at the beginning, with Chapter 1. However, if you already play the guitar, it's okay to go right to Chapter 2, which illustrates the special right-hand strokes and left-hand fretting position you use in classical guitar. If you already play the guitar and know proper right- and left-hand techniques, you can skip to Chapter 3, which walks you through some of the notation explanations we use in the book. Finally, if you just want to dive right in and start playing, turn to Chapter 4.

It's a good idea, though, to come back and read what you initially skip over, just to make sure that you're not missing something or perpetuating a bad habit. We think that you'll read every word here eventually, whether or not you read the text in order from front to back. Even if you think you know the material, a gentle reminder can sometimes be helpful.

1 Getting to Know the Classical Guitar

IN THIS PART . . .

Identify the different parts of the guitar.

Get into the proper playing position.

Place your hands correctly on the guitar.

Tune the guitar.

Understand music notation and tablature.

- » Examining the term “classical guitar”
- » Breaking down the classical guitar’s parts
- » Noting the physical and stylistic differences between classical guitar and other guitar types

Chapter **1**

An Acoustic Guitar in a League of Its Own

In the right hands, the classical guitar can produce some of the most beautiful sounds in all of music. With it, a skilled performer can create miniature moments of intimate tenderness or stirring sagas of grandeur and passion. One reason the classical guitar is capable of such wide-ranging textures and emotions is that it’s one of the few stringed instruments that can play chords and single notes with equal ease. And many people credit its special emotive powers to the fact that the performer uses both hands to touch the strings directly to make a sound, allowing them to coax out the softest melody or to vigorously ring out triumphant, full-voiced chords. The tonal variations you can achieve on a guitar played in the classical way rival the colors of the entire symphony orchestra. Even the great Beethoven agreed, calling the guitar “a miniature orchestra in itself.”

In this chapter, we start off with the very basics, explaining the two different connotations associated with “classical guitar” to give you a solid understanding of what you’re reading about in the first place. (Many people may not realize that simply playing a classical piece on a guitar doesn’t necessarily qualify as “classical guitar”!) We then conduct a side-by-side comparison of the classical guitar and its traditional acoustic counterpart, exploring their differences in physique as well as technique and musical requirements. Finally, we expound on the allure of this lesser-known stringed instrument to whet your appetite for what’s in store.

Defining What a Classical Guitar Is (and Isn't)

The first thing you have to sort out is just what's meant by the term "classical guitar." It can describe both a type of instrument and a style of music played on that instrument. When referring to the instrument itself, you're talking about a guitar that has a particular design and construction, is made of certain materials, and requires playing techniques that are unique to this type of guitar, as compared to other guitars. To mine the depths of all the tonal and textural richness that await you in the world of the classical guitar music, you must employ those specific right- and left-hand techniques, which together comprise the classical guitar style.

In this book we focus exclusively on the techniques that get you playing the classical guitar style — using a nylon-string classical guitar and stroking the strings with your right-hand fingers. Doing this empowers you to play the music written by the great classical composers throughout history, and following in the footsteps of concert-level virtuosos have for centuries brought their performance techniques to a high art in the same way Vladimir Horowitz did with the piano and Itzhak Perlman did with the violin. The guitar has its own Perlmans and Horowitzes, and you can read about them in Chapter 17.

The guitar as we know it is a relatively young instrument, having evolved to its present form in the 19th century. As such, it doesn't have the rich body of music available for it that, say, the violin does, which has been around for more than 500 years. But the classical guitar has been, how shall we say, *industrious* in the way it has "borrowed" music from other instruments to claim as its own. As a result, studying classical guitar means that in addition to playing music written for the guitar, you play a lot of music that wasn't written for the guitar in the first place, nor written by a composer who would recognize the instrument you hold in your hands. But that's just part of the adventure of being a guitarist; you have to be somewhat of a pioneer with your instrument.

Nevertheless, nowadays composers write for the instrument all the time, ensuring its continued place in the field of serious musical instrument study. Many guitarists, associations, and organizations commission well-known composers to write compositions for the guitar in the same way that Beethoven and Mozart were commissioned by wealthy benefactors to write symphonies and sonatas.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Some well-known composers from the 20th century who've written for the guitar include Heitor Villa-Lobos, Luciano Berio, Benjamin Britten, Elliott Carter, Peter Maxwell Davies, William Walton, Alberto Ginestera, Ástor Piazzolla, and Leo Brouwer. If you think of the classical guitar as playing just the work of the great masters or having an undeniably "Spanish sound," check out what modern musical thinkers are cooking up for the classical guitar all the time.

After taking a while to come into its own historically, the classical guitar is now a permanent member of the classical music community. Classical guitar is taught in universities and conservatories, it's a frequent program entry for concert and recital halls, and it's found readily in new recordings by major classical music record companies. As far as music for the guitar goes, however, it's definitely in the minority, at least in terms of music that gets heard by the public at large — with rock and pop being the major players in this arena.

Knowing What a Classical Guitar Looks Like

Viewed from the front, or facing the instrument in its standing-up position, the classical guitar body has an upper section, or bulge, where the wood curves outward; a lower section; and an inward curve in the middle separating the upper and lower parts.

The purpose of the guitar's body is to amplify the sound that the vibrating strings make. So the guitar's back and sides are made of stiff, hard wood that reflects, or bounces, the sound off its surface and through the top of the guitar and the sound hole. The traditional wood for the back and sides is rosewood, though lower-priced guitars sometimes use mahogany or maple. For the top, a different wood from the back and sides is used because the top's function is to vibrate freely with the notes that the plucked strings produce. So the wood for the top is softer and more resonant — spruce and cedar are the two most common top woods.

They say a picture's worth a thousand words, so we present a picture of a classical guitar, which allows us to use a lot fewer words than a thousand to describe its various parts and functions. Figure 1-1 shows an illustration of a classical guitar with its main parts labeled. The bulleted list after Figure 1-1 is a corresponding list of those labeled parts with their definitions and brief descriptions of their functions.

Here's a list of the classical guitar's parts:

- » **Back:** The flat part of the guitar *body*, parallel to and opposite the *soundboard*, closest to the performer.
- » **Body:** The box or sound chamber of the guitar, which acts as a resonator or amplifier for the vibrating *strings*. The body is also what gives the guitar its particular — and beautiful — tone.

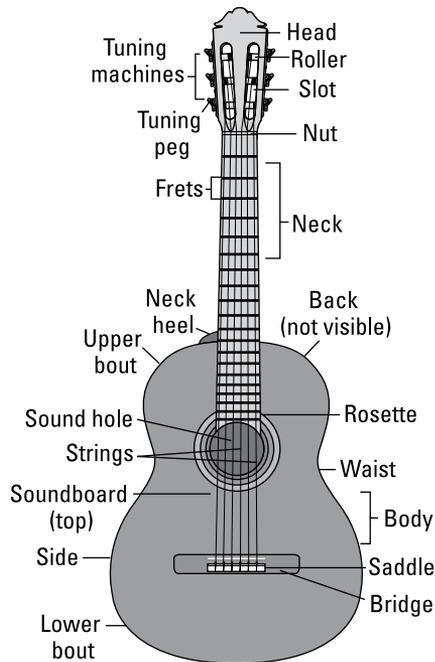


FIGURE 1-1:
A typical classical guitar with its parts labeled.

© John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

- » **Bridge:** A thin, rectangular piece of flat wood that's glued to the top of the guitar and secures the strings at the body. The bridge transfers the sound from the vibrating strings to the guitar's body. Sitting in a slot of the bridge is the *saddle*.
- » **Fingerboard:** Also called the *fretboard*, this is a thin, flat plank of wood glued to the neck and divided into frets. The fingerboard is usually made of ebony, a dense, dark, and hard wood that provides a smooth feel underneath the left-hand fingers as they move up and down and across the neck. Some fingerboards are made of rosewood.
- » **Frets:** Thin metal wires on the fingerboard that run perpendicular to the strings. Pressing down a finger behind one of these shortens the vibrating length of the string, changing its pitch. **Note:** When used in left-hand fingering discussions, *fret* refers to the space below the actual fret wire.
- » **Head or headstock:** The slotted section at the top of the neck beyond the *nut* that holds the *tuning machines*, where the strings fasten.
- » **Lower bout:** The large, outwardly curved section of the body that surrounds the bridge.
- » **Neck:** The long, semicircular piece of wood jutting out from the body, with a *head* on one end and strings stretching the full length and beyond. Usually

made of mahogany, maple, or other hard woods, the neck's light weight and grain strength enable it to hold its shape while under the considerable tension produced by the taut strings drawn up to pitch.

- » **Neck heel, heel:** The outward-sticking part of the neck that joins the neck to the sides and back of the body.
- » **Nut:** A synthetic (formerly ivory or bone) strip of material that sits between the fingerboard and the headstock. Grooves cut into the nut hold the strings in place as they pass through the nut on their way to the tuning machines.
- » **Rollers:** The white plastic cylinders inside the slots in the head that go perpendicular to the strings and that create a spool for the strings to wrap around as they're wound up or down to pitch. The rollers rotate by means of the *tuning pegs*.
- » **Rosette:** The decorative ring around the *sound hole*, usually made of *marquetry* — inlaid bits of colored wood and other materials (such as mother-of-pearl) arranged in a mosaic-like pattern.
- » **Saddle:** A synthetic (formerly ivory or bone) strip of material that sits in a slot in the bridge. The strings rest on top of the saddle, pressing down on it before passing through the bridge holes, where they're tied off (or otherwise anchored).
- » **Sides:** The narrow, curved wooden pieces between the top and back of the guitar. The sides are made of the same wood as the back and serve to hold together the top and back and to help reflect sound out of the body and through the top.
- » **Slots:** On a classical guitar, the long, oval-shaped holes on the head that expose the rollers and allow the strings to pass through the surface of the head to reach the rollers.
- » **Sound hole:** The circular opening in the soundboard, directly underneath the strings in the upper bout. The sound hole helps to project the sound, but it isn't the exclusive source of sound emanating from the guitar.
- » **Soundboard or top:** Also referred to as the *table*, the soundboard is the flat, lighter-colored wood on the body that faces the listener. Its function isn't to remain rigid and reflect sound but to resonate (vibrate) with the strings, amplifying them and projecting the sound in the process.
- » **Strings:** The strings are what the guitarist touches (fretting with the left hand, plucking with the right) to make sound. The six strings travel the length of the neck from the head, where they're wrapped around the tuning machines' rollers to beyond the fingerboard, where they're tied off at the bridge. The top three, or treble, strings are solid nylon. The bottom three, or bass, strings have a nylon core and are surrounded by a metal wrap. (All six strings are referred

to as nylon strings, even though the bottom three have an outward metal material.) Strings are available at different prices (usually determined by quality) and are categorized by the degree of tension (such as high and medium).

- » **Tuning machines:** The metal hardware system of gears, shafts, and *tuning pegs* used to wind the strings to different tensions to get them in tune.
- » **Tuning pegs:** The *handles* or *buttons* of the tuning machines that guitarists grip with their fingers to allow them to tune the strings by tightening or loosening them.
- » **Upper bout:** The large, outwardly curved section of the body that surrounds the sound hole and the upper frets of the fingerboard.
- » **Waist:** The narrow, inwardly curved part of the body between the upper bout and the lower bout.

Recognizing How a Classical Guitar Physically Differs from Its Peers

A classical guitar is like every other guitar in overall physique. And like other types of acoustic guitars, the classical guitar produces its sound, well, *acoustically* — that is, without the aid of amplification — unlike the Stratocaster of Jimi Hendrix, which must be played through a guitar amplifier (though it is possible to amplify the acoustic sound of a classical guitar with a microphone).



REMEMBER

But watch out when you hear the term *acoustic guitar*. A classical guitar produces its sound without amplification, so all classical guitars are in a sense acoustic guitars. But not all acoustics are classical.

Sometimes the best way to know what something is and what makes it special is to know what it isn't. Check out Figure 1-2, which shows a classical guitar alongside a popular traditional acoustic model. Then read through the following list, which sums up some of the major differences between them:

- » **A classical guitar uses nylon strings.** All other acoustics used for unplugged purposes are built for steel strings. And you can't just swap out a set of nylons in your steel string and start playing Bach. The parts that connect the strings to the guitar are built differently, and you'd have a tough time securing a nylon string onto a steel-string guitar. Nylon strings have a gentler sound that suits classical guitar music better than the steel variety.



FIGURE 1-2:
A classical guitar (left) with an acoustic steel-string model alongside it.

Classical guitar

Acoustic guitar

© John Wiley & Sons, Inc.



**TECHNICAL
STUFF**

Some people use the adjective *folk* to mean any unamplified guitar, so it's always a good idea to clarify whether they mean the nylon-string (classical) or steel-string variety — assuming they're aware of the difference. The guitars played by James Taylor, Paul Simon, Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Dave Matthews, and Sheryl Crow are all *steel-string acoustics*, though some folk, pop, and jazz musicians do play their brand of music on a classical guitar, including jazz guitarist Earl Klugh and, somewhat improbably, country music legend Willie Nelson.



**TECHNICAL
STUFF**

Though the instrument is officially known as a *classical guitar*, other nicknames have sprung up that have come to refer to the instrument played by classical guitarists. Some of these names include *nylon-string guitar*, *Spanish guitar*, *gut-string guitar*, and *flamenco guitar* (though that appellation is sometimes used to distinguish a flamenco guitar from a classical guitar).

» **A classical guitar has only one body size.** Acoustic guitar bodies vary widely with regard to size and shape, with names like *jumbo*, *dreadnought*, *orchestra model*, and *grand auditorium* to help you keep track of them all. It's much easier with classical guitars — they're all the same size and they all feel exactly alike when you hold them. So anything you learn on one classical guitar will transfer over to any other without a major adjustment.

- » **A classical guitar has no cutaway.** Many acoustic guitars have a scoop on the treble side of the upper bout that allows upper-fret access for the left hand. On a classical guitar, the body is symmetrical.
- » **A classical guitar neck is wider than most steel strings and joins the body at the 12th fret.** Steel-string necks are skinnier to facilitate strumming with a pick, and most modern-style steel-string necks join the body at the 14th fret. The wider frets of the classical guitar accommodate playing with the right-hand fingers, and tradition dictates the 12-fret union of neck and body (although some classical guitarists lament the more limited range of a 12-fret neck).
- » **A classical guitar has no pickguard.** A *pickguard* helps protect the soundboard from the ravages of a pick. But because you don't play classical guitar with a pick, the pickguard is unnecessary and is left off to expose more of the wooden surface. In flamenco guitars, though, a clear protective plate (called a *golpeador*) is added to protect the top from the percussive taps a performer is sometimes required to play as part of the style.

ANTONIO TORRES: INVENTOR OF THE MODERN CLASSICAL GUITAR

Plucked string instruments have been around since ancient times, but the shape that all modern classical guitar makers follow was established by a *luthier* (the term for guitar maker) named Antonio Torres (1817–1892), who lived in Spain and built guitars in the middle of the 19th century. Up until that time, a classical guitar could be found in a range of sizes, which affected the tuning and your entire approach to playing the instrument. For the guitar to be accepted, it had to be standardized, and Torres did that. In fact, an 1863 Torres-made guitar is almost indistinguishable from ones built today. One of the most important things Torres did was establish the string length at 650 millimeters, which hasn't changed. The string length has helped to determine other things, like the body proportions, the neck length, and the guitar's overall dimensions. Many bold makers have tried alternate shapes and materials and added strings, but no one has successfully improved on the basic design of Torres's creation.

Modern improvements have been made, of course, especially in the manufacturing process and in some of the materials (such as synthetic substitutes for the bone or ivory nut and saddle, and better alloy chemistries for the metal tuning parts). But the woods and design have remained largely unchanged since Torres codified them back in the mid-1800s.