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2nd Edition

Classical Guitar

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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
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Classical Guitar For Dummies® , 2nd Edition

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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/classicalguitarfd2e) 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.

Part 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.

Chapter 1

An Acoustic Guitar in a League of Its Own

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » 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
-

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.