

Classical Guitar

The guitar is the most popular instrument in the world. It is no surprise then that the guitar is the primary instrument in most styles of popular music, including rock, blues, folk, pop, country, and bluegrass. In these styles, the guitar is used mainly as an accompaniment instrument. But the guitar is also a serious and respected solo instrument for the classical concert hall. The music written for the classical guitar is both abundant and diverse. Additionally, there are hundreds of serious works written for the guitar in combination with other instruments. In fact, the most famous *concerto* of all time is Joaquin Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez*, a work for guitar and orchestra. (A concerto is a piece written for one instrument and orchestra.)

As we begin to learn classical guitar in the following lessons, the main focus will be to develop right-hand technique. Most beginning classical guitar music and virtually all popular songs using fingerstyle technique (i.e. *Dust in the Wind*, *Stairway to Heaven*, etc.) are essentially just simple chord progressions played with patterns in the fingers of the right hand. From a technical standpoint, the only difference between this music and the songs you've played in past lessons is the right hand technique. In other words, you will still be forming chords in the left hand, but instead of strumming the chords, the fingers of the right hand will play individual notes using patterns. Playing chords this way is called **arpeggios**, which literally means, "broken chord." Each lesson will introduce you to a different pattern. For instance, the right-hand pattern in Lesson 11 is: thumb (*p*), index finger (*i*) and middle finger (*m*). You will play this *p-i-m* pattern continually, while the left hand merely changes chord positions. [Note: **p** stands for *pulgar*, which means "thumb" in Spanish.]

Free Stroke

When playing arpeggios, we want the notes in each chord to continue ringing until we form the next chord. We accomplish this in two ways. First, in the right hand, we will use a **free stroke**, *not* a rest stroke. A free stroke is different from a rest stroke in that after striking the string, the fingers glide freely towards the palm of your hand, allowing that string to continue to vibrate. Secondly, in the left hand, we must make sure we continue to hold down the notes in the chords until we form the next chord.

Chord Transitions

One of the most challenging things when learning chords is transitioning from one chord to the next. This will also be true with the classical guitar music you will be learning. To help you form the chords quickly and accurately, keep fingers down on the notes that will also be used in the next chord. Secondly, always look ahead so that you can prepare for the next chord *before* you get to it. Lastly, never look at the fingers of your right hand! Doing so will not only inhibit your learning of the technique, but it will also hinder the flow of your performance, since your eyes will constantly be shifting from the music to your left hand and right hand. Instead, only look at your left hand, and only if necessary. In fact, place your music to your left so that your eyes can easily shift between the music and your left hand without moving your head.

Reading the Music

When we learned chords and songs, the chord diagram showed us where to put our left-hand fingers. We simply formed the chord and strummed the strings. Unfortunately, chord diagrams (and tablature) would have a very limited benefit in classical guitar music. Chord diagrams may show us where to place our left hand fingers, but it doesn't tell us *which* notes to play or *how* to play them in the right hand. Likewise, tabs may tell us which notes to play, but does not tell us how to play these notes, including the rhythm. Therefore, when learning classical guitar music, we must *read* standard music notation to know what chords to form in the left hand and how to play them in the right hand. Like the songs we've learned, most of the chords in this beginning classical guitar music lasts for a whole or half a measure. With that in mind, when learning the music, instead of reading note to note as you did when you reading duet music, you will need to look over *all* the notes in each measure so that you know how to form the chord and when the chord changes.