

How to use a Guitar

1. Introduction (Common in all times)

This here (lift Guitar) is an example of the most common instrument of worship in all the history of the faith in Jesus Christ. If among the Jews or among the Christians it has dominated worship since thousands of years.

The Bible mentions that David played his praises to God on a kind of Guitar. His version had not just 6 strings like this one but ten. The praise he played helped King Saul get rid of his evil spirit after the spirit of God had left him. David's praise was the source of the psalms. Some psalms explicitly mention the type of instrument used to sing it like Psalm 92:(1-4) "Its is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord ... with an instrument of ten strings."

And if you look at contemporary music it is clear that the Guitar is still the most popular instrument after all these years.

How can this be? Why is and was the Guitar so popular?

To answer this question I will describe how a Guitar works and why it is and was so fascinating.

I have been playing Guitar for 9 years now and found that most people know how to use it, but they do not know why it is working like it is.

2. Size and Handiness

If you look at the Guitar (lift Guitar) the first thing you notice is its size. It has the ideal size that you can take it with you wherever you go. Try to take a piano or a keyboard with you and you see a notable difference! Have you ever moved to a new apartment and taken a piano with you? I only did that once and had to hire professionals to do the job.

But I have been touring the country with a Guitar and had no problems. Even the Airlines cooperated.

3. The Instrument

Let's look at the instrument and see how it is built.

A Guitar has two major Parts the Body and the Neck with the frets (Indicate where they are)

3.1. The Body (also called the Sound Box)

As the name indicates this is to amplify the sound made by the strings. The strings connect to the body at a point where they can most easily make the body vibrate so that the sound can be heard. You can test the amplification in a very simple way:

(Knock on Body)

Simply knock on the Body and we all can hear a sound amplified by the body. This is very important for "acoustic" Guitars like this one here. They are called "acoustic" because they rely on amplification by the resonance in the body. Electrical guitars need electrical amplification to give the sounds enough volume to be heard. Thats also why electrical Guitars can have a different mostly smaller body. The Body of an acoustic Guitar is very important for the quality of the sound that can be produced.

By the way if you look all around this acoustic Guitar do you see a power cord? No way. There are also no batteries which might not be charged. Unlike most of the modern electronic gadgets, nothing will hinder you from playing, no lack of power connectors, no messing around with cables or batteries.

3.2. Neck with frets

Ok. we had the amplifier now we need something to produce the sounds, something like a synthesizer. This is done by the strings which run from the body to the end of the neck of the Guitar. At the end of the neck we have some mechanical things to bring the right tension to the strings. This is necessary for tuning, so that the strings are in harmony with each other.

The strings are placed in a way to swing freely in one direction if you pull at them. (Pull at E-String)

Have you ever played with a rubberband as a kid? Its the same principle. (Demonstrate)

If a string is vibrating it causes the body to vibrate with it in the same way,. The body then amplifies it so that the sound can be heard.

Each of the strings has a different frequency of swinging back and forth which is called the pitch.

The frequency of the strings is dependent upon their material and the pull on them. The pull can be regulated using the little knobs called tuning pegs at the end of each string.

And the frequency is dependent on the length the string has to swing. Guitar playing relies on cutting the length of the swinging part of a string. The shorter the length the higher the note.

When the length of the string is cut in half the tune jumps up one octave. By the way this means that its frequency doubles according to the Laws of Physics.

The twelfth fret is exactly in the middle of the strings. If you press down the string behind the twelfth fret you restrict the length of the string to the half. (Demonstrate it)

Pressing a string down behind a fret causes a change in the length and thereby in the note that is produced by that string when struck. The frets are arranged in a way so that all notes necessary can be produced.

There are eleven other positions of frets between the middle one and the end of the neck, because each musical octave has twelve notes. By just using two positions on one string it is already possible to play a short melody.

(Demonstrate E-E G A, E G AG E)

4. Playing Techniques

Now that we have the basics how is the Guitar played? There are basically three ways of Guitar-Music. Each has different demands on the player.

4.1. Strumming

Strumming is the simplest way of playing. By pressing down not only one but a number of the strings behind the frets at certain places one can produce a chord. In musical terms a chord is a collection of notes that sound well together and they are named after their bass note. For example a E-Chord is one which is built on the E-note.

To play a Guitar in this way you have to learn positions for your left hand to produce these "chords". Accidentally these positions are also often called "chord". Once you have learned the right positions for your fingers it is very simple to play the instrument. Just strike at all those strings while holding the position of the fingers in a chord. For example:

(Demonstration E-Minor)

This makes it very simple to produce rhythm patterns with it.

(Demonstration E F G A G F E)

Here we have a simple delegation of jobs to the right and left hand. The left hand regulates the chord you are playing and the right makes the rhythm with which the chord is played.

(Demonstrate)

Since this is so easy quite a lot of people can play the Guitar in this way. This technique is often used to accompany songs.

4.2. Picking

To make the music sound nicer one can use "picking" meaning pulling individual strings in a certain sequence. The use of the left hand is the same as when strumming, but the right has a far more complex task. The Fingers have to pull individual strings and for that purpose each finger of the right hand is assigned to one or more strings.

Generally the thumb is used to strike the lowest 3 strings. The following three fingers are used to strike the upper strings. Most assign one finger for each string.

(Demonstration)

Various picking patterns can be employed to produce nice sounding patterns of sounds. These Patterns are highly repetitive to make playing them simple.

(Demonstrate)

In contrast to strumming this is more complex and demands a better training of the right hand.

4.3. Classical Guitar Playing

The high art of playing Guitar is The Classical Style. The aim is to play polyphonic music on the instrument. Polyphonic means that the Guitar can be used to produce multiple sounds or melodies at a time. For example it is possible to play a melody and its accompaniment. This demands a coordinate effort with both hands in a way similar to the Piano. The first step on the way is to use the Guitar to play a Melodie. To produce the notes of a melody one has to press down a string and strike it for each note of the melodie. This is easier than playing multiple notes which requires handling multiple strings at a time. This is for example the famous melodie El Condo Pasa. Look at the movement of the left hand.

(Play El Condo Pasa)

Notice that the left hand always presses down a string at the correct position to produce the tune and the right hand pulls at the correct string to sound it. There is a certain technique involved in the right hand to have enough speed. Basically you are alternating between two fingers to play a continuing melodie. The first note is struck with the first finger. The second note is struck with the second finger the third again with the first and so on. Now focus your attention on the right hand.

(Play again, demonstrate)

In full classical Guitar playing you not only play one note a time but multiple. All techniques that we have heard from can be mixed. It is very difficult for an untrained eye to observe what works together in what way.

(Demonstration)

This part requires you to maintain a certain chord in the higher 3 strings while playing a melodie in the lower strings.

This is as far as I can go with my basic training. Professionals are of course able to do much more complex things. Often when you hear somebody playing a Guitar professionally on the radio, there is the danger of thinking that it is a Harp or a Piano.

5. End

As you have seen the Guitar is a very flexible instrument. It can be played by people with a wide variety of skills. There is no steep learning curve to get good sounds from it as with many other instruments. This makes the Guitar almost universally usable. That is certainly one of the biggest reasons of its popularity over thousands of years.