

THE TABLATURE SYSTEM

'... Learning from listening is unquestionably the best way, the only way that suits this kind of music. You're setting the notes down for a record of what happened, a record that can be studied, preserved and so on - a necessary and useful companion to the recordings of the actual sounds. I keep thinking of this as I transcribe; if you could do it, it would be good to have a legend across each page reading:

Listen to the record if you want to learn the song.'

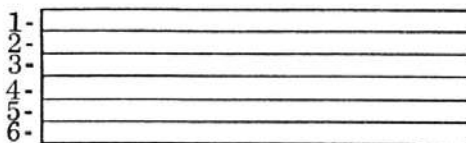
Hally Wood taken from the Publisher's Foreword to the *New Lost City Ramblers Song Book*

These words are most suitable for introducing the tablature system. The basic idea to remember in using the tab is that it must be used in conjunction with the recordings. The tablature is just a guide. It is not like music notation which is a complete language in itself. Our tab system does not attempt to show rhythms or accenting. There are no indications for speed or feel. All these points are left to the student to hear and discover in the original recordings. Music notation can tackle this to a certain degree but the overall sensation of music, the feel or *soul*, can never really be captured on a written page. If you keep those words in mind, then the teaching method that is used in this album will be successful. The large portion of work lies in your hands. You must get involved in the music. I am reminded of the words of the great Sufi Hazrat Inayat Khan:

'... The traditional ancient songs of India composed by great Masters have been handed down from father to son. The way music is taught is different from the Western Way. It is not always written, but it is taught by imitation. The teacher sings and the pupil imitates, and all intricacies and subtleties are learned by imitation.'

It is this theme that I have tried to transpose into tablature system. Now to the tablature:

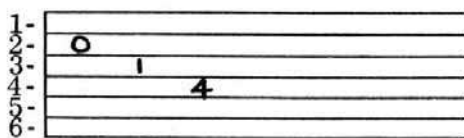
Each space indicates a string.



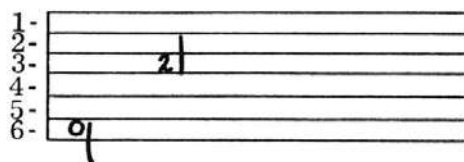
Each space indicates a string,

- i.e.
- 1 means the high E
 - 2 means the B or second string
 - 3 means the G string
 - 4 means the D string
 - 5 means the A string
 - and 6 means the low E string

A number on this space indicates the fretted position. A zero would mean open string. A one indicates the first fret of that string. Take for instance the diagram below. The zero is on the second string and thus means the open second string is played. The one is placed on the third string's space and thus means first fret on the third string. Likewise the four is on the fourth fret of the fourth string.



In this album we are concerning ourselves with fingerpicking guitar styles. This is generally done by playing with our thumb and index and middle fingers of the right hand (this presumes that you are right-handed). To show this we use stems going up and down from the numbers showing fretted positions. A stem down means that the thumb strikes the note. If the stem is up your index or middle finger strikes the note. In this case I leave it to your comfort. Use either finger. This clarifies itself when playing a song up to tempo. The diagram below shows an open sixth string played with the thumb and then the second fret of the third string played with the index finger.

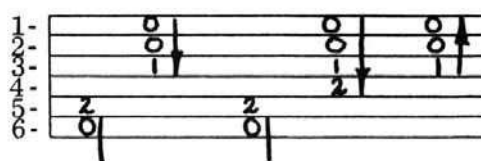


In most cases the thumb will play an alternating bass usually on the top three bass strings. The index and middle finger will play notes on the first, second and third string. But again there aren't rules and there are many exceptions. In fingerpicking we have two choices. Either we can pinch two notes together or we don't. A pinch is also called a pluck in some books. A pinch is shown by connecting the two notes with a line. A variation of this comes when two treble notes are pinched with a bass note.

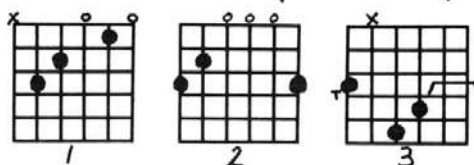


In the above example we have from left to right the following: first the open six string is played by the thumb. Next the first fret of the sixth string is pinched together with the third fret of the third string. The sixth string is plucked by the thumb and the third by the index finger. Next the thumb strikes the third fret of the fourth string. This is similar to an alternating bass pattern. The next notes are the first fret sixth string played by the thumb. This is pinched with two notes in the treble. The index and middle finger strike the first fret first string and the third fret second string. The next note is the index fingering hitting the first fret second string. Lastly we have the bass note played with the thumb on the third fret fourth string.

In blues and Ragtime Guitar styles many times the notes are not decisively played. The tablature points this out.



In the first case the thumb hits the open sixth string but the second fret on the fifth string also sounds. This is done simply by playing harder on the sixth string. The force will make the fifth string vibrate. This technique is done in the bass as well as treble section of a song. Next we see an arrow. This indicates a brush. The direction is found in the arrowhead. If pointed down the hand brushes up towards the sixth string. If up the hand brushes down to the first string. The amount of strings to be affected are shown by the length of the arrow. For instance the next group of notes shows a brush down towards the sixth string of the open first, open second and first fret third string. Next is the bass open sixth string with the vibrating fifth. Next is an arrow down. Again we brush up towards the sixth string but this time the second fret of the fourth string vibrates and sounds. It is not hit but is affected by the other three notes. This effect is gotten by dampening the strings with your right hand palm or by an upward stroke of the right hand. This sound is difficult to explain. But in many pieces you can hear notes sounding yet you know distinctly that they are not being hit. This is in the nature of the guitar. By hitting one note it will set other notes to sound. The last notes in this example are a brush up to the first string of the open first, open second, and first fret third string.



In the tablature for this booklet we have also indicated chord positions. The above example illustrates this:

First the third fret of the sixth string is played by your thumb. This is followed by a Chord (the third fret, fifth string and first fret, second string are pinched together). Above this is indicated the name of the chord. To the side of this is a number which relates to the chord position diagrams at the bottom of each tab sheet. These diagrams should be able to read. The black dots indicate where the strings are fretted. Above the diagrams there is either an "o" or an "x". These show whether those strings are left open to be played (in the case of an "o"), or are not played (this is shown by the "x").

I have illustrated two other chord diagram examples above. The notation $\overline{\quad}$ used in the third diagrams means that you bar across the number of frets indicated. This can vary depending on the chord position.

The "T" on the side of diagram 3 means that your left hand thumb will fret the third fret, sixth string. In ragtime and blues finger-picking styles, your thumb will hook over the guitar neck to fret positions in many cases. At first you might find these positions difficult but practice will develop your thumb muscles so that you should eventually find these chord positions very convenient.

There are certain effects used in playing guitar that are also symbolized in the tablature. Here are some examples; explanations follow.

a The hammer-on. Here the fret hammered is placed after the flag. In this case the second fret is played by the thumb and then the third fret is hammered. This is all done in one continuous motion and produces a single sound.

b The wham or slurred note. This is designated by a 'w'. In this case the eighth fret second string. Both notes are played with index and middle fingers respectively.

c The harmonic. This is symbolized by a dot (.). The two notes are both harmonics. The first is the twelfth fret third string played by index finger. The next is the twelfth fret fourth string hit by the thumb.

d The slide. This is shown by a dash (-). This reads: second fret sixth string slides to fourth fret sixth string. These notes are struck by the thumb.

e The pull off. This shows the note pulled off and what remains. The letter 'P' designates this effect. The last note reads: ninth fret second string is pulled off against the seventh fret second string. Also we are pinching the open fourth string with our thumb.

Many students ask me how to hold the right hand while finger-picking. The Classical and Flamenco styles have rigid rules in this context. Our only guide is comfort. What is comfortable is usually the best position. I would like to point out one similarity that many great guitarists have in this respect. From such artists as Reverend Gary Davis, John Hurt, Son House and Skip James to Dave Laibman, Martin Carthy, Bert Jansch and Ton Van Berseky, all rest their third and fourth fingers on the guitar face. This technique will reinforce your sound and give you a freedom to accent heavily when necessary. I suggest you experiment with it.

The tablature system might sound wordy and complicated but I have found that students can usually end up sight reading it within a few hours. Please always remember that the tab notation has nothing at all to do with ordinary music notation. Tab and music are two totally different languages that can be used to describe the same thing.

The vertical lines in the tab system are those places where I want the student to stop. These are indications of musical phrases. It is at these points that the student should go over the previous phrases and try to slowly build up the tune.

Tablature shows no accenting, bar indications or rhythm. All of these points hopefully will be discovered by your ears. The tab is a guide to help your ears and fingers figure out how to play the various tunes.

In general, I play with the balls of my right hand finger-tips. I found this the most enjoyable style. Some people play with their finger-nails. Finger-nails are useful for certain sounds. Especially when playing bottleneck styles or Rev Gary Davis type tunes, I use finger picks. The finger-picks help to accent the sound. There are many different types and brands of finger-picks to choose from and this is an adventure in itself.