

Introduction To Visualinear Tablature (continued)

Like most musical instruments, the guitar lends itself well to the playing of monophonic (one note at a time) music. Melodic guitar playing is in fact an art in itself, and it requires skills (especially damping skills) that are not called upon to anywhere near the same extent in many other styles of play. The chief benefit in developing such skills, apart from acquiring a better feel for the instrument, is that it allows for effective participation in the making of guitar ensemble music. The fact remains, however, that the guitar is better known and more widely admired for rhythmic styles of play. Rhythm guitar music, which makes better use of the instrument's capabilities than monophonic music, is based on chords.

A guitar chord is a specific combination of fretted and/or open notes. Simple strumming styles and simple fingerstyles consist mainly of strumming or individually plucking the notes of chords. Even the simplest rhythmic styles of play produce music which is obviously considerably more complicated than monophonic music. This does not mean, however, that the visualinear tablature notation for rhythm guitar music must likewise be considerably more complex than the notation for monophonic music.

The principles of rhythmic notation used for the notation of monophonic music also apply to the notation of rhythm guitar music. This means that in rhythmic notation, symbols representing notes, combinations of notes, and damps, are situated along the line of tablature, in relation to the beats, so as to show the correct rhythmic timing. Apart from this implied notation for rhythm, the simplicity of visualinear tablature notation for monophonic guitar music is made possible by the fact that notes can be expressed numerically (string and fret notation). The simplicity of visualinear tablature notation for

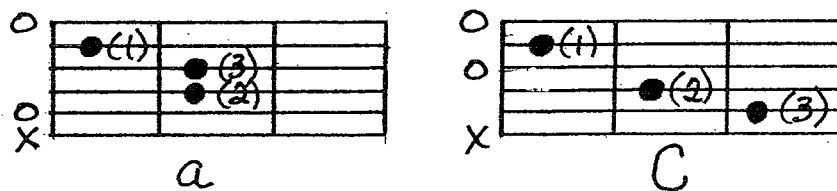
rhythmic guitar music is made possible by the fact that the tablature, like rhythmic styles of play, is based on chords. In rhythmic tablature, there is always a specific chord governing the notation. Playing symbols must be interpreted in the context of that specific chord. Specific chords are represented by means of chord symbols placed beneath the line of tablature.

All minor chords, and chords based on minor chords, are expressed in chord symbol with lower case letters (for example, a = a minor). Major chords, and chords based on Major chords, are expressed in chord symbol with upper case letters (for example, C = C Major). Barre chords can usually be expressed in chord symbol with a common chord symbol followed by a Roman numeral. The Roman numeral indicates the fret at which the barre should be made, and above which the common chord fingering should be formed. The common chords are the vocabulary of basic chords developed in Rhythm Guitar. Whenever one of these common chords is called for in a rhythmic visualinear tablature score, it is referred to simply by means of its chord symbol. All other chords, with the exception of simple barre chords, are referred to in the tablature by means of asterisked chord symbols. The asterisk indicates that the chord is diagrammed at the bottom of the page.

Until relatively recently, guitar chord diagrams appearing in music books and printed music were invariably presented in a vertical configuration (and, for the most part, still are). The most plausible reason for this preference is the fact that the invention of chord diagrams hundreds of years ago coincided roughly with early developments in Classical guitar technique. Since Classical guitarists hold the instrument with the neck in an almost vertical position, vertically configured chord diagrams correspond with how they actually view the fingerboard. Most contemporary guitarists, however, hold the instrument with the neck in a horizontal position, and therefore view the fingerboard quite differently. Since a horizontal configuration conforms more closely to how most

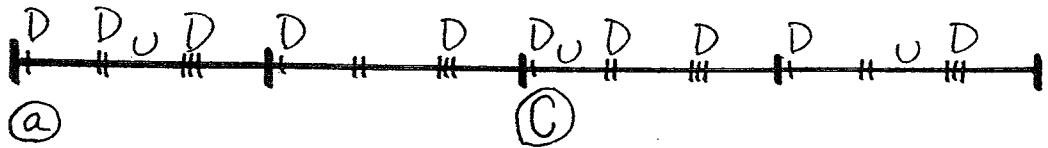
players actually view chords, this is the orientation in which chord diagrams are presented in visualinear tablature scores. In the two chord diagrams shown below, notice that O's have been used to indicate open notes that are included in the chord, and that X's have been used to indicate that a string is not included in the chord. Notice too that suggested fingerings are included, but remember that they are just that - suggested fingerings. Diffeerent players have different preferences regarding chord fingerings. Alternate fingerings for chords must sometimes be used in specific contexts. The truth of the matter is that the only incorrect fingering is one that does not result in a sounding of the correct notes.

Figure 1



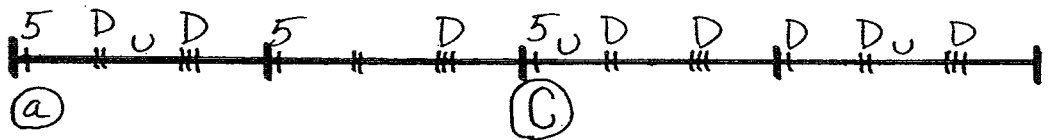
Once the context of a specific chord has been established, the notation of rhythmic playing techniques is relatively simple. For example, simple strums can be represented by means of D's and U's, which obviously indicate the direction of the strumming motion. Even very simple strummed guitar music can be very musically effective, and makes good use of the instrument's capabilities. Basic downstrums should be made over all the notes of the chord. Basic upstrums should be confined to the treble strings only (the first, second, and third strings). The key to making pleasant sounding strummed guitar music is to try to achieve a balanced sounding of the notes of the chord on downstrums, and to treat upstrums like rhythmic embellishments.

Figure 2 : "The House Of The Rising Sun"



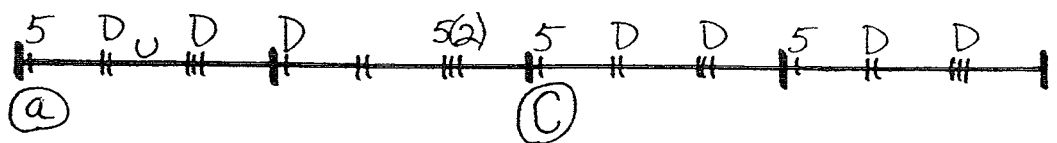
Strums are usually made with a flatpick, a small piece of plastic designed specifically for that purpose. The use of a flatpick is equally conducive to a sounding of individual notes, and is in fact recommended for monophonic music of a lively or boisterous nature. Most rhythmic flatpick styles of play employ strums and individually picked notes in combination. Notes which are part of the chord governing the tablature can be expressed in notation simply by means of the corresponding string number. The simplest and most obvious way in which flatpicked notes can be used to embellish strummed guitar music consists of sounding the bass note of the chord on the first beat of the measure.

Figure 3



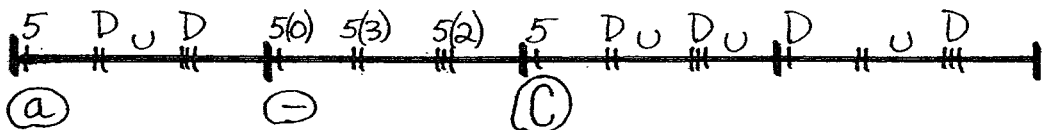
Notes that are not included in the chord governing the tablature are expressed by means of string and fret notation. This makes them readily distinguishable from notes that are part of the chord governing the tablature. When a non-chord note is followed in context by a chord note on the same string, the chord note is also expressed by means of string and fret notation.

Figure 4



In pick and strum flatpick styles, as the name implies, sequences of picked notes and strums are played in alternation. The sequences of picked notes are usually played on the bass strings and usually have a melodic character. Sometimes the chord is abandoned altogether in favor of a strictly melodic passage. In such instances, string and fret notation is used, and the open chord symbol (\ominus), which means no chord at all, governs the tablature. Notice that in the notation of monophonic guitar music, which is accomplished solely by means of string and fret notation, the open chord symbol is implied.

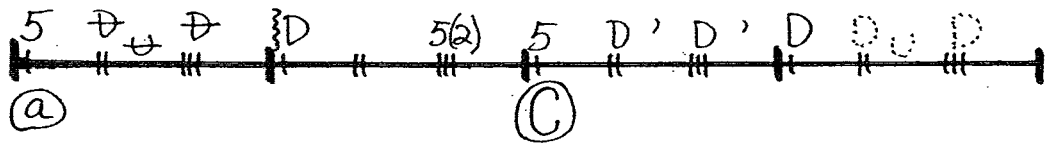
Figure 5



The key to making pleasant sounding pick and strum music is to limit downstrums following picked notes to the strings situated above those picked notes. This will ensure that picked notes are not re-sounded in strums, which tends to obscure their melodic character and function. Flatpicked rhythm guitar music can also be enhanced and made considerably more intricate by modifying the basic downstrum and the basic upstrum. This can be done in a variety of ways, both in playing technique, as well as in the notation for those techniques. For example, strums can be confined to the bass strings only (\underline{D} , \underline{U}), or to the interior strings only (\overline{D} , \overline{U}). Downstrums can be made over the treble strings only (\bar{D}). Strums can be made over a specific number of strings, reckoned from the first through the sixth ($D(4)$, $U(6)$). Arpeggiated strums ($\{D\}$, $\{U\}$) are made by sounding the notes of the chord in succession, thus creating a rolling effect. Like individual notes, strums can be damped (D' , U'), or played in a staccato fashion by damping the strings immediately after the strum is made (\dot{D} , \dot{U}). Finally, muted strums (\ddot{D} , \ddot{U}) are made by damping the strings before the strum is

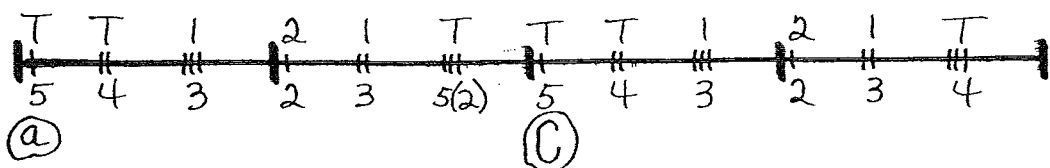
made. The clicking sound created by the flatpick striking the strings in a muted strum can greatly enhance the rhythmic interest of flatpicked guitar music.

Figure 6



For rhythmic guitar music played in fingerstyle, the strings are not struck with a flatpick, but rather are plucked with the thumb and fingers of the playing (non-fretting) hand. The principles of notation which allow for the representation of notes in flatpick tablature are equally applicable in the case of fingerstyle music. Notes which are part of the chord governing the tablature are expressed simply by means of a string number. Notes which are not part of the chord governing the tablature are expressed by means of string and fret notation. In fingerstyle tablature, string and fret numbers are placed below the line of tablature. This allows for the inclusion, above the line, of corresponding playing hand fingerings, as shown below. Again, these are only suggested fingerings, but they will probably prove quite useful to beginning and intermediate level players. In any case, it is important to note that the thumb usually plays all notes on the bass strings (the fourth, fifth, and sixth strings), and is therefore normally pretty busy in playing fingerstyle music.

Figure 7



Fingerstyle guitar music is obviously not confined to sounding one note at a time, as in the above example. Multiple notes are frequently sounded simultaneously with the thumb and one or more fingers of the playing hand. This technique, accomplished by a pinching motion, has a very striking musical effect, and is employed in virtually all but the simplest fingerstyles. The simultaneous sounding of two or more notes with the fingers of the playing hand has a markedly different but equally interesting effect. The guitar, in the hands of a capable fingerstylist, is capable of extraordinary music which is as intricate as it is beautiful. A number of advanced styles, called fingerpick styles, are built around a complicated and constantly moving bass line called an alternating bass. It is even possible, in advanced fingerstyles, to develop simultaneously sounding melodic themes, much like the manner in which guitar ensemble music is constructed. The fretting hand requirements for fingerstyle music are rather different than for flatpicked music. This is so because, since chords are not sounded in their entirety (strummed), far greater use can be made of fragmented and incomplete chords.

A thorough consideration of the visualinear tablature notation for basic rhythmic styles of play requires a discussion of three two-note techniques which are used with some frequency in beginning and intermediate level rhythm guitar music. The first and easily the most commonly used of these is the hammer-on. In a hammer-on, the second note is sounded, not by re-striking the string with the playing hand, but rather by forcefully re-fretting the string at a higher fret. Notice that the fret number for the hammered note is placed along the line of tablature in accordance with the correct rhythmic timing for that note.

Figure 8a

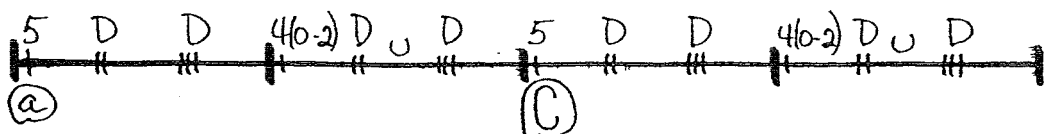
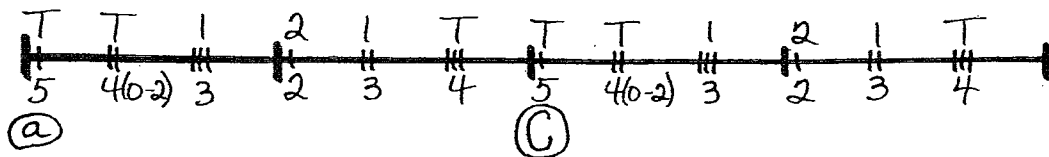


Figure 8b



In the pull-off, which is in effect the opposite of a hammer-on, the second note is sounded by removing a fretting finger and by simultaneously plucking the string with that finger. This causes a lower note on the same string to sound. The pull-off is more difficult to execute than a hammer-on, is less generally useful, is used with much less frequency, and is especially difficult to time properly.

Figure 9a

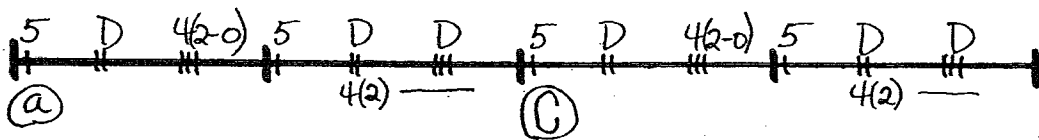
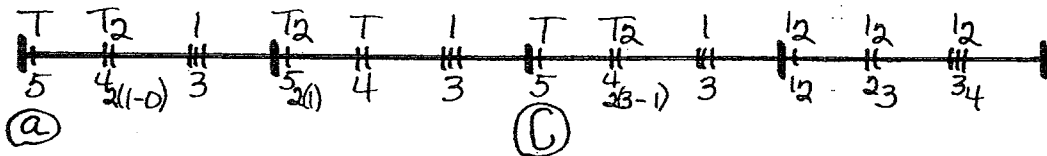


Figure 9b



The least frequently used of the three two-note techniques is the slide. As the name implies, the slide is accomplished by sliding the fretting finger from the first note to the second. In executing a slide, it is essential that the vibration of the string be sustained so that the second note sounds clearly. Since it is usually not possible to execute a slide within a specific chord fingering, slides are normally notated above the open chord symbol.

Figure 10a

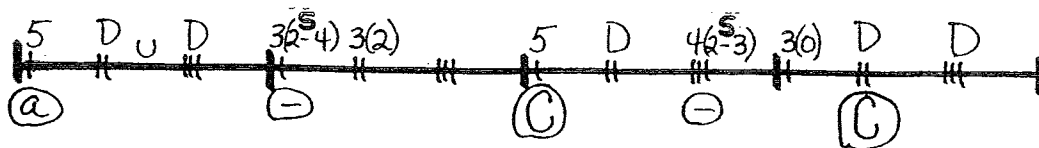
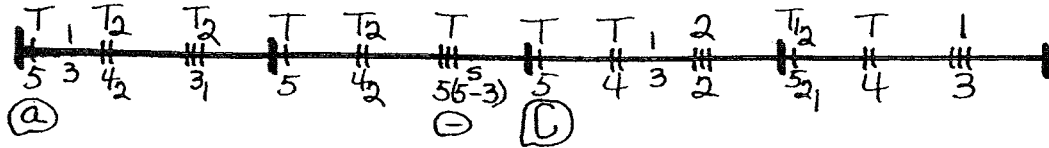


Figure 10b



Despite the dissimilarity in appearance of flatpick and fingerstyle tablature, they are in fact, together with melodic tablature, variants of a single notational system (visualinear tablature). The common thread among these seemingly unrelated tablatures is the implied notation of rhythm, which allows in large part for the simplicity of the system. Another unifying factor, and one which argues well for the consistency of the system, is the fact that information pertaining to the playing hand is normally notated above the line, and information pertaining to the fretting hand (and especially chord symbols) is normally notated below the line. This distinction may prove to be of great value in determining how best to notate more advanced playing techniques. In truth, visualinear tablature can be used to notate any music that can be played on the guitar, and it is particularly well-suited to the task of notating musical compositions and hybrid forms of play in which melodic, flatpick, and fingerstyle techniques are combined.