

## Preface

During the Spring of 1998, it became apparent to me that I was using antiquated introductory guitar methods that didn't reflect current pedagogical research. It was frustrating to correct sequential content errors, embarrassing to explain why the photographs were wrong, and time consuming to adjust the fingerings for both hands. Little, if anything, was taught concerning musicianship skills, and nothing at all concerning style.

This text attempts to fill this void. It includes the latest research concerning the teaching of guitar. The intended user is the beginning student enrolled in a school of music who wants to acquire solid mechanical fundamentals, with a strong background in classical technique. With this perspective, I have adopted the following pedagogical positions:

- *The fourth finger approach.* This is the practice of using the fourth finger on the third fret on the treble strings.
- *The left-thumb is behind the first finger.* This thumb position has been adopted as a companion to the fourth finger approach. Its placement is supported by recent physiological research.
- *The fundamental mechanics of playing the guitar are the same regardless of the style of music being performed.* As a result, the lessons are chosen to reflect the broadest possible applications.
- *Right-hand cross-fingerings are avoided.* Cross-fingerings are left for later study.
- *Both rest-stroke and free-stroke are taught from the very first lessons.*
- *The first lessons are open strings with the thumb.* This is done to establish the default right-hand position and establish the fore-arm as the point of reference.
- *Style can be taught and appreciated from the onset.* At the very least, the study of style will encourage later, more intensive investigation.
- *The establishment of the rest-stroke scale position is delayed.* The "Flat-hand" rest-stroke position taught with the right-hand default position often confuses the beginning student.
- *Segment practice is used for the development of mechanics.* Practicing for the concert stage is delayed but detailed in the text so that the student understands the difference.
- *TAB is avoided.* At some point, the advancing student must make stylistic choices concerning where the notes are played on the neck. Over reliance on TAB discourages this aspect of self-expression.

Of course, each teacher must decide which pedagogical perspectives are in the best interest of each student. There is no “one book that fits all”. For example, placing the left-thumb behind or to the left of the first finger is exceptionally new technique, one many instructors are hesitant to recommend, even more so if the instructor has not adopted the “fourth finger approach”.

Many instructors prefer to begin scales in the early lessons. This allows the student to practice mechanics in a concentrated fashion. Since there is so little agreement on which scales to use, when to begin their study, whether to teach them by rote, traditional notation, or TAB, the introduction of scales is left entirely to the instructor. If you would like a free download the authors’ scales, along with left-hand and right-hand arpeggios, please visit:

[www.LarryMcDonaldGuitar.com](http://www.LarryMcDonaldGuitar.com)

There are no chord diagrams in the book. Nevertheless, there is extensive chord study. Chords are taught through notation for several reasons including; 1) voice-leading is a vital study in jazz and related styles, 2) chords can be quickly taught by successive combination and serialized placement of the fingers, which is more easily understood through standard notation, and 3) several guitar styles don’t use diagrams. Using standard notation for chords reinforces the premise that fundamental mechanics are the same regardless of the style of music being played. If you would like a free download of chord diagram study, including simple strumming patterns, please visit the authors web site shown above.

This method book contains sixteen lessons. The first nine have several sub-lessons or levels. The first sub-lesson is introductory and easily learned in the weekly meeting. The second sub-lesson is more difficult, allowing for deeper discussion. The third and later sub-lessons are more difficult yet, needing a week or more of segment practice. Some of the most rewarding parts of the text are the duets. They teach style as well as ensemble playing.

Many instructors (including this one) believe that it is better to learn fewer pieces very well rather than many pieces superficially. But this is not true for every student, and there is often a need for reinforcement. To this end, there are supplemental pieces that target specific mechanics and reading skills.

Turning pages in a book is not a gauge for success. Only the acquisition of a collection of solid mechanics is the true measure of success in the beginning lessons. Nevertheless, during testing of this method, students (adults and teens) that scheduled a one hour weekly lesson, and practiced ten or more times a week satisfactorily finished the material in as little as 12 weeks. Students who scheduled a half-hour lesson, and practiced less than an hour a week took as long as 7 months, longer if chord diagrams and scales were introduced.

The pedagogical positions assumed in *The Conservatory Tutor* are thoroughly developed in the forthcoming companion book *The Conservatory Tutor: Instructors Edition*.

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