

# ***ESSENTIAL THEORY FOR GUITAR***

***LEVELS 1 & 2***

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# FORWARD

Music is a gift. To play a musical instrument, sing, and to share this with others is a treasure.

*Newsweek*, a popular magazine in the USA, asked Baby Boomers (1946 – 1964 Generation) to list the three things they still want to do—no matter what before they die (Jan. 22, 2007 issue). Of course, some made some extraordinary requests like, to orbit the Earth in space or fly to the moon (and to live to write about it ☺), world travel, provide humanitarian aid, go on an archeological dig in North Africa or Turkey or fool around with old cars.

Surprisingly, many of their future goals were quite simple; to grow vegetables in the backyard the old Italian way, join a square-dancing club, learn a new language and be a better golfer, to name a few.

However, one goal that many had in common, and that caught my attention was, ‘to play a musical instrument’ (in most cases, it was the piano). A most interesting thing about this survey was that the people interviewed were Hollywood celebrities.

When folks learn a musical instrument, often times they use a book and learn by himself or herself and/or with the aid of a teacher. In the last decade or so, music instruction books have been aided with audio and video recordings. This has greatly increased the speed at which a student can understand and interpret the written page. If a competent teacher is available, progress is at its maximum.

Many times, even musicians that are technically advanced by book reading, never wean themselves away from the sheet music or tablature. They are consistently trapped to paper and ink and if an arrangement is not written out for them, they cannot learn a new song.

If you have ever watched a professional band (a group that is *paid to play*) live, it is very doubtful that they will have sheet music on the stage. (The Orchestra is an exception. It is normal for classical musicians to read sheet music during a live performance, even if they know the song by heart. In rare cases, however, soloists or quartets may play without sheet music but what they are playing is memorized and nothing is improvised during the performance).

If you ever get a chance to speak to the performers after the show in the band that do use sheet music on stage, ask them if they ‘read music’, 9 times out of 10, they will either say, ‘No’, or, ‘not enough to hurt my playing’. They may know the basics of music but they do not rely exclusively on sheet music.

Even more intriguing, is when a group of musicians will get together, perhaps for the first time, and play a song together that has not been rehearsed and it sounds like they have played it as a professional group for years. This is called ‘playing by ear’.

How do they do that? What is the secret to improvising, playing a song for the very first time and not get lost in the mix? How is it possible to join in with a group of musicians that you have never met, play a song that you have never heard and still sound as though you wrote the tune?

These 'Musical Magicians' are using Music Theory to 'map out' the song in their minds. They are improvising the CHORDS, MELODY and RHYTHM as they continue through the arrangement. This may sound daunting; a No-Mans-Land to those that have never tried this before. The truth of the matter is that, any musician, with basic instrumental skills and a working knowledge of Essential Music Theory can learn the art of Improvising.

That is what this Book, '**Essential Theory for Guitar**', is all about.

This program is designed to help the *Advanced Beginner*, someone that has been playing for about a year, to grasp the concepts of improvising. The material throughout this series will be progressive but you will not have to be concerned about forgetting important concepts that you have learned earlier. As this course progresses, you will be given reviews periodically to refresh your short-term memory and more examples to drive the points home.

Each section will be built on previously covered material and concepts so that in the end, you will eventually develop a 'feel' for music and begin to see it in your mind. Over time and of course, with experience, you will actually be able to play your music freely and from the heart. This will not be automatic but it will come in time as you work through all of the examples. I would recommend starting from the beginning, rather than jumping around the book just to learn some more songs'. Remember, your goal is to learn to improvise and develop your own personal style.

**Essential Theory for Guitar Level 1** is rated for first year players. If you have never played a Guitar before, I would recommend that you learn the basics in the first book of the series, **Bluegrass Guitar**. This publication will make sure you have the proper technique and understanding of this instrument. You can read more about it at: [www.jaybuckey.com/guitar.htm](http://www.jaybuckey.com/guitar.htm) However, if you can play a few chords, pick out a simple little tune and read some tablature or sheet music, then you can start with **Essential Theory for Guitar Level 1**.

I have studied music theory in school and it was rather dull. In actual performance, it really did not fit in. Many music theory books have the information but the actual application to a real performance is generally lacking. So, I felt the need to publish a book with this in mind.

There are also matching books of the Essential Theory series for the **Fiddle, Mandolin, Bass, Dobro, and Banjo**. These are listed at [www.jaybuckey.com](http://www.jaybuckey.com)

# *HOW TO USE THIS COURSE*

You will get the most out of this course by just starting at the beginning and following each lesson. The accompanying audio recording will help reinforce the concepts of the material and give you controlled and quality practice time to make sure you understand the material.

As you go through the program, there will be song examples for you to analyze and play along with. You may want to follow along with the sheet music/tablature while the song is demonstrated on the recording, but later, put the book away and try playing along with the recording.

The main thrust of this book is to give you a working knowledge of **Essential Theory** to help you get away from reading the printed page. Tablature is fine; I like it and do often. However, relying on it all the time will keep you from developing your own style. As you work through the song examples without the book, try to see the music in your 'mind's eye' always working for that feel. Learn to anticipate the chord changes and fitting in a solo between the vocal lines.

The musical examples will be illustrated on the audio recording. The track number will be indicated by a number inside of a square box, 1, 2, 3 etc.

The printed song examples are provided to give you a reference; however, you will eventually want to get away from the printed page and just play along with the audio recordings with this aid. Our ultimate goal is to *play from the heart*. ☺

On the audio recording the melody, as played by the Guitar will be on the far right channel of your stereo. The Rhythm instruments and the rest of the band will be on the left. These days, modern audio equipment does not come with a *Balance Control* to single out either side. In the past this was not the case.

To get around this, you can play back the audio recordings on your computer system. If you are using a Windows PC, the Windows Media Player has a Balance control. This can be accessed by looking for the 'speaker' icon on your Task Bar. Double click on it, and the 'Level Control' window will pop up. You will see the 'Balance Control' at the top of each Level Slider. Simply place the arrow over the control then hold down the left mouse button and drag the slider either left or right to isolate the left or right channel. If you are using a Mac, there is probably something similar but I am not personally familiar with this operating system.

Check your computer owner's manual for details on how to access the balance control on your audio system.

# *THE ELEMENTS OF MUSIC*

Music is three-dimensional. There are three basic elements, when combined, create a song.

These three elements are the:

1. Rhythm (also called 'Meter')
2. Melody
3. Harmony

The **Rhythm** is the beat or, in many cases, the strum of the chords that give the song its drive. In Jazz, Rock and Blues, the Rhythm is generally played by the drums. This is the backbone of a group and keeps everyone in sync.

In an acoustic band, like a Bluegrass Band, this rhythm will be provided by the strumming of the Guitar and Guitar chop as well as the downbeat of the Bass. The Fiddle, Dobro and Banjo also contribute to the Rhythm but they are not necessarily the core of the Rhythm like the Guitar, Guitar and Bass.

The **Harmony** will be played as the chords in a song. Chords add 'texture' to the music, adding musical color to the background.

The **Melody** is often times, the singing. This can also be referred to as the 'lead'. Now, the lead can also be played on any of the instruments but most of the time, the vocalist will do the honors.

These three elements are organized into something called the '**Key**' of a song. The '**Key**' of a song identifies the tonic triad (usually the last chord of the song), major or minor, which represents the final point of rest for a piece, or the focal point of a section. This focal point also helps identify the scale(s) used to create the melody line within the tune.

When a group of musicians are together and one of them states that he would like to play a certain song, someone in the group will generally ask, 'What KEY do you do that in?' What the other members are inquiring about is the layout of this song? By determining the Key, the rest of the musicians, even though they have never practice the song together or even heard of it, would be able to play it together successfully.

From the Key, a specific pattern for the melody notes and the chord structure are found. When each member understands this theory, they can usually play the song the first time flawlessly as a group. Let us look now, at some examples of how these three elements work in a song. Remember, as we work through these musical examples use the printed music/tablatore as a reference, try to close the book from time to time and just listen and see if you can identify these separate elements in your mind.