Essential Video Collection

This booklet will help prepare you to get the most out of your video. It will introduce the bass guitar fingerboard, the basics of reading standard music notation, bass tablature, chord diagrams and bass guitar neck diagrams. All of us at the National Guitar Workshop and Alfred wish you lots of fun and fulfillment as you learn to play the bass guitar.

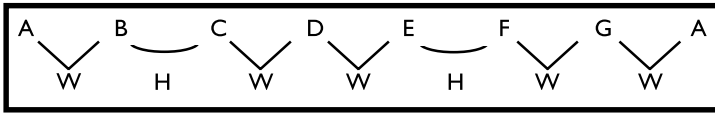
The Bass Guitar Fingerboard

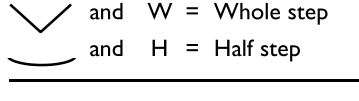
Half Steps and Whole Steps

Our first order of business is to understand how the bass fingerboard works and to learn how to find or name all of these notes on the neck. This is easy if we know about *half steps* and *whole steps*.

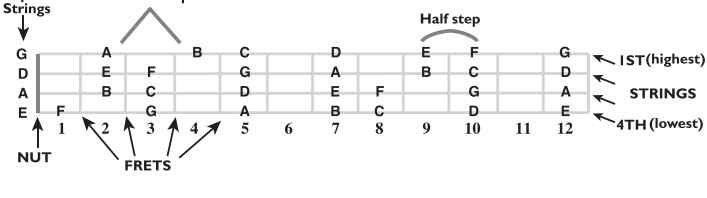
A half step is the distance from one fret to the next on the bass. For instance, the distance from the 1st fret to the 2nd is one half step. This is the smallest *interval* (distance between two notes). Two half steps equal one whole step, which is a distance of two frets on the bass. For instance, the distance from the 1st fret to the 3rd fret is a whole step.

The arrangement of whole steps and half steps in the musical alphabet is as follows:

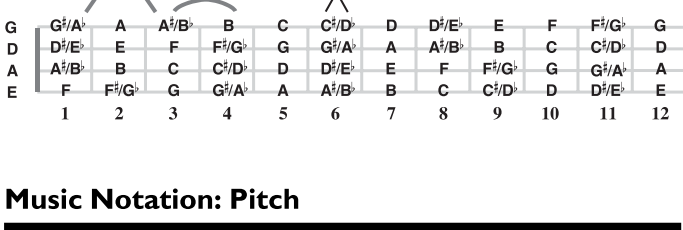




Here is where all of the notes in the musical alphabet —the *natural notes*—are found on the bass guitar.



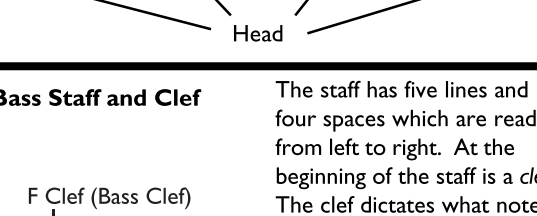
You have probably noticed the blank, unnamed frets on the fingerboard in the diagram on page 1. These are filled with *sharp* and *flat* notes. These are also called *accidentals* or *chromatic tones.* When a sharp ♯ is placed in front of a note, the note is raised one half step (one fret). For example, F♯ is one fret higher than F. When a flat ♭ is placed in front of a note, the note is lowered one half step (one fret). For example, G♭ is one fret lower than G. You will notice that F♯ and G♭ fall on the same fret. Two notes which sound the same (played on the same fret), but are given different letter names, are termed *enharmonic equivalents*. Every sharped or flatted note has an enharmonic equivalent.



Music Notation: Pitch

Notes

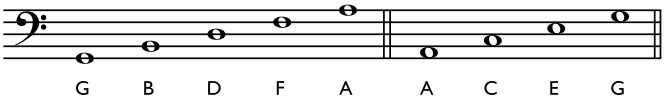
Music is written by placing *notes* on a *staff*.
Notes appear various ways.



The Bass Staff and Clef

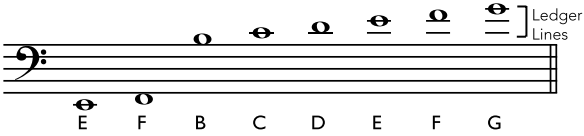
The staff has five lines and four spaces which are read from left to right. At the beginning of the staff is a *clef*. The clef dictates what notes correspond to a particular line or space on the staff. Bass music is written in *bass clef* 𝄢 which is sometimes called the *F clef*. The two dots of the clef circles the F line on the staff.

Here are the notes on the staff using the F clef:



Ledger Lines

The higher a note appears on the staff, the higher it sounds. When a note is too high or too low to be written on the staff, *ledger lines* are used.

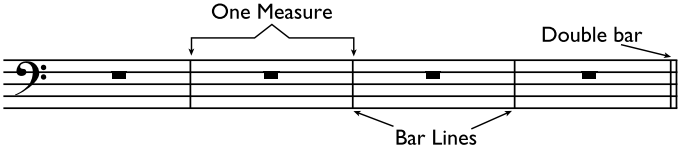


Bass guitar music actually sounds one octave lower than it is written. We write the music an octave higher than it sounds strictly for reasons of convenience and easy reading.

Music Notation: Time

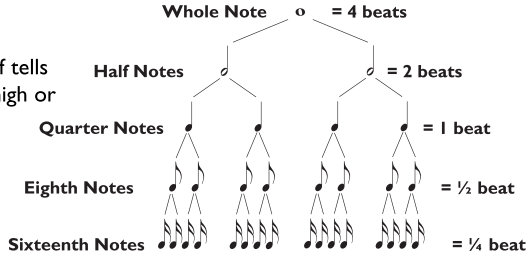
Measures and Bar Lines

The staff is divided by vertical lines called *bar lines*. The space between two bar lines is called a *measure*. Measures divide music into groups of *beats*. A beat is an equal division of time. Beats are the basic pulse behind music. A *double bar* marks the end of a section or example.



Note Values

As you know, the location of a note relative to the staff tells us its pitch (how high or how low it is). The duration, or value, is indicated by its shape.



Time Signatures

Every piece of music has numbers at the beginning that tell us how to count time. The top number represents the number of beats per measure. The bottom number represents the type of note receiving one count.

4/4 ← 4 beats per measure
4/4 ← Quarter note ♩ = one beat

Sometimes a 𝐂 is written in place of 4/4. This is called *common time.*

3/4 ← 3 beats per measure
3/4 ← Quarter note ♩ = one beat

6/8 ← 6 beats per measure
6/8 ← Eighth note ♪ = one beat

Rest Values

Every note value has a corresponding rest. A rest indicates silence. A whole rest indicates four beats of silence, a half rest is two beats of silence, etc.

= Whole rest, 4 beats

= Half rest, 2 beats

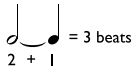
= Quarter rest, one beat

= Eighth rest, ½ beat

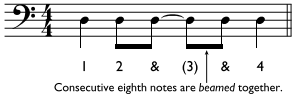
= Sixteenth rest, ¼ beat

Ties

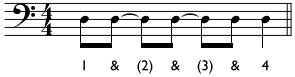
When notes are tied, the second note is not struck. Rather, its value is added to that of the first note. So, a half note tied to a quarter note would equal three beats.



Notice the numbers under the staff in these examples. They indicate how to count. Both of these examples are in $\frac{4}{4}$ time, so we count four beats in each measure. When there are eighth notes, which are only ½ beat, we count "&" ("and") to show the division of the beats into two parts. When a counting number is in parentheses, a note is being held rather than struck.



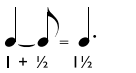
Consecutive eighth notes are *beamed* together.

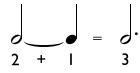


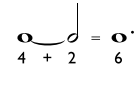
Ties are a convenient way to notate notes that begin off the beat (on an "&").

Dots

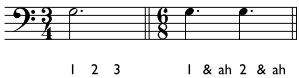
A dot increases the length of a note by one half of its original value. For instance, a half note equals two beats. Half of its value is one beat (a quarter note). So a dotted half note equals three beats (2 + 1 = 3). A dotted half note is equal to a half note tied to a quarter note.





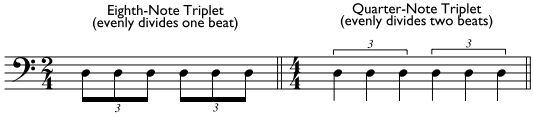


Dotted notes are especially important when the time signature is $\frac{3}{4}$ time, because the longest note value that will fit in a measure is a dotted half note. Also, dotted notes are very important in $\frac{6}{8}$ time, because not only is a dotted half note the longest possible note value, but a dotted quarter note is exactly half of a measure (counted 1 & ah 2 & ah).



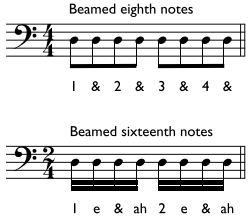
Triplets

A triplet is a group of three notes that divides a beat (or beats) into three equal parts.



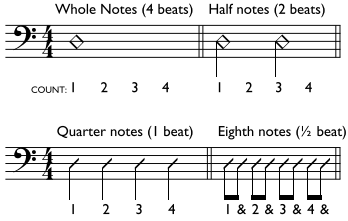
Beaming

Notes that are less than one beat in duration are often beamed together. Notice the counting numbers: since there are four sixteenth notes in a beat, they are counted "1 e & ah 2 e & ah," etc.



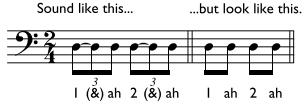
Rhythmic Notation

Rhythmic notation is common in guitar music. It is a system of slash marks with stems and beams that notate specific rhythms without specific pitches. Rhythmic notation is usually used to show a rhythm guitar part, but it can also be used to show bass rhythms.



Swing Eighths

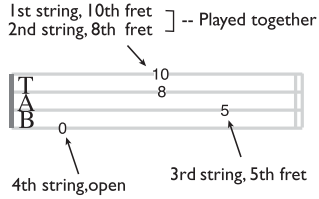
Blues frequently sounds a bit different than notated. The *swing* or *shuffle* rhythm is very commonly played even when regular *straight eighths* are written. *Swing eighths* sound very much like eighth note triplets with a tie between the first two notes in the triplet.



Reading TAB, Scale and Chord Diagrams

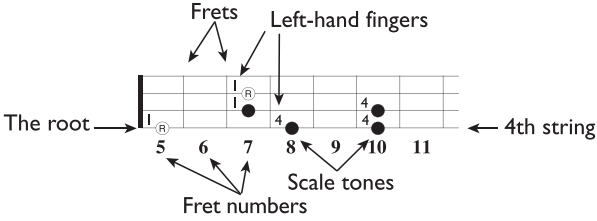
BASS TAB

Tablature is a system of notation that graphically represents the strings and frets of the bass fingerboard. Each note is indicated by placing a number, which indicates the fret to play, on the appropriate string.



Scale Diagrams

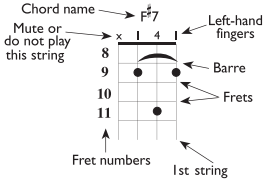
The top line of a scale diagram represents the 1st (highest) string of the guitar, and the bottom line the 6th. The vertical lines represent frets, which are numbered with Roman numerals.



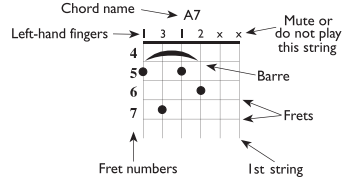
Chord Diagrams

Chord diagrams are similar to scale diagrams, except they are oriented vertically instead of horizontally. Vertical lines represent strings, and horizontal lines represent frets. Numbers on the right are used to number the frets. While guitar chord diagrams are more common than bass chord diagrams, we do use them occasionally. Here are both bass and guitar chord diagrams.

Bass Chords



Guitar Chords



Some Terms and Signs

Repeat. Return to the beginning or the nearest  and play again.

H — Half Step. A distance of one fret on the guitar.

W — Whole step. Equals two half steps. A distance of two frets on the guitar.

Flat. Lower the note one half step (one fret).

Sharp. Raise the note one half step (one fret).

Natural. Cancels a sharp or flat.