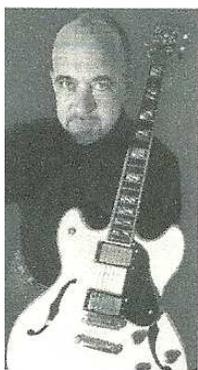


Introduction to Sight Reading

How do you get guitarists to turn down?

PUT SHEET MUSIC IN FRONT OF THEM. Unfortunately, too many guitarists forsake the skill of reading music, opting instead for the quick fix of following tablature or playing exclusively by ear. When a piece of standard notation comes along, they play *very softly*. This month's Basic Training introduces you to reading music in open position.

In the Western tradition of music, notes are given the letter names "A" through "G," sometimes altered with the words "sharp" (#) or "flat" (b). As notes move progressively higher in pitch, they move upward through this seven-letter musical alphabet.



When we reach the note G, we recycle the letter names to continue higher. Similarly, when we go down below "A," we continue with G, F, E and so on. Our musical alphabet extends as far as we can hear in both directions, but for practical purposes, we use a small portion of the total range at any

one time. In order to show which note is which, we use a *staff*—a group of five lines (and the spaces in between them). Once we slap a *clef* on the staff, we've identified a specific range of notes. The clef we guitarists need to know first is the *treble clef*, and the classic mnemonic device for identifying the lines of the treble clef is "Every Good Boy Does Fine." The spaces spell out F-A-C-E. If we need to extend notes above or below the staff, we use *ledger lines*, following the musical alphabet as we ascend or descend. All of this is shown in Fig. 1.

The notes themselves consist of a *notehead* (either solid or open), and often a *stem* and a *beam* (or *flag*). An anatomical diagram of a few of the most common note types is shown in Fig. 2. It is the head and its placement on the staff that tells us which letter name the note is, while the way the head is written (solid or open) and the presence or absence of stems, beams, or flags gives us information about the rhythm of the note. A good note to get to know first is the utilitarian quarter note, which has a solid head and a stem. The quarter note commonly receives one beat of rhythmic time. Recurring patterns of strong and weak beats create what is called meter and is

Fig. 1

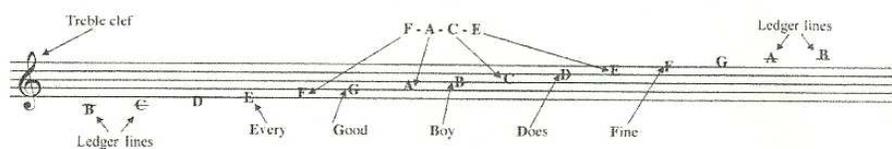


Fig. 2

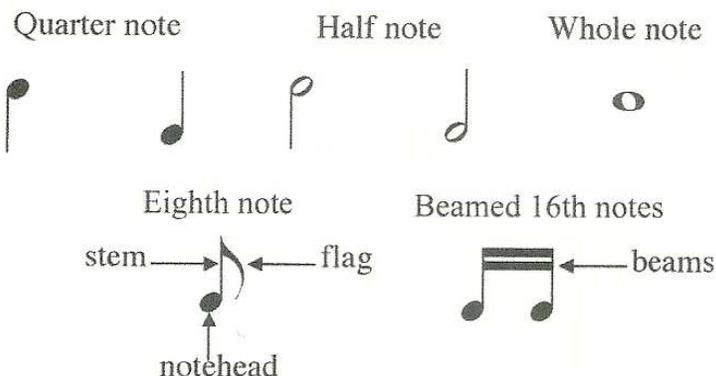


Fig. 3

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indicated with a symbol called a *time signature*. It's that thing that looks like a fraction at the beginning of a piece of music. The most common time signature is 4/4. The top number tells us that there will be four beats in each measure; the bottom number tells us that a quarter note will receive one beat.

The skill that is commonly called "reading music" actually consists of three skills: 1) Looking at a page of notes and naming them; 2) Playing the guitar and naming what we play; and 3) Looking at a page of notes

and playing them on the guitar. Fig. 3 puts all of these sub-skills together. The first six notes are the open strings of the guitar (and we hope you know *those* by now). The remaining measures run through the C major scale in open position. Cover the tablature as soon as you get to know where to play all the notes. Then you should be able to look at these notes and name them, play anything in this range on the guitar and name what you're playing, and play the entire example—without turning down your volume! ♪