

Introduction To Visualinear Tablature

Notation refers to the expression of music in a written format. Staff notation, also called standard notation, is the most prevalent and generally useful type of musical notation. The staff system is based on a set of five parallel lines called a staff. Working effectively with staff notation requires a memorization of the names of the lines and spaces of the staff (every good boy deserves favor). It also requires familiarity with the system of note and rest values used in staff scores (a score is music in written form). It also requires some understanding of music theory, since the concepts of key and key signature are an essential part of the staff system. The complexity of the staff system is a common source of difficulty for beginners in the study of music. Staff notation, a simple example of which is shown below in Figure 1, is used more or less exclusively in scores for Classical guitar music.

Figure 1 : “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star”



Most guitar music, other than Classical guitar music, is notated in tablature. Tablature refers to a system of musical notation other than staff notation. Standard guitar tablature, also called TAB, is the commonest form of tablature notation. The TAB system is based on six parallel lines which represent the strings of the guitar. In the TAB system, a note is expressed by the placement of a number, on the appropriate string, representing the fret behind which the string should be fretted (fretted means held fast against the fingerboard of the guitar). For example, a 3 would indicate that the string should be fretted at the

The purpose of notation is to provide a self-contained set of directions regarding how music should be played. In the simplest sense, notation should inform as to what notes are to be played, when they are to be played, and for how long they should remain sounding. From the standpoint of usefulness, the simpler the notation the better, provided accuracy is not sacrificed in the pursuit of simplification. For example, the chief advantage of TAB notation is that it shows where the required notes are formed on the guitar. But this same benefit can be obtained, without recourse to the six parallel lines of TAB notation, by assigning a number to each string, and expressing notes numerically. This is called string and fret notation, and it is an important component of the visualinear tablature notational system.

The first string is the highest pitched of the guitar's strings, and corresponds to the top line in the six line TAB grid. The sixth string is the lowest pitched of the guitar's strings, and corresponds to the bottom line in the six line TAB grid. In string and fret notation, fretted notes can be expressed numerically by means of a string number followed by a parenthesized fret number. For example, 3(2), which reads string three-fret two, refers to the note formed on the third string at the second fret. Open notes can be expressed numerically by means of a string number followed by a parenthesized 0. For example, 1(0), which reads string one-open, refers to the note sounded by the open first string.

The TAB system is based on a pictorial representation of the guitar's strings. The visualinear tablature system, on the other hand, is based on a pictorial representation of the music's rhythm. In visualinear tablature, rhythm is notated visually along a single line of tablature. The derivation of the name for this notational system is shown below.

Figure 4

Rhythm is notated **visual**(ly) along a single **line**(ar) of **tablature**

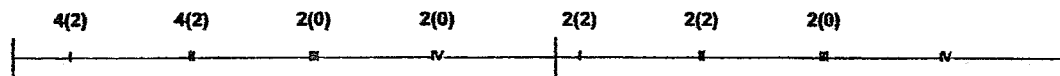
In visualinear tablature, the evenly timed and spaced pulses of the music's meter (the beats) are indicated along a single line of tablature by means of Roman numerals.

Figure 5



Notice that the beats are numbered within each measure, or group of beats. Notice too that there are an equal number of beats in each measure, which is normally the case for music of a simple nature. A measure is also called a bar, and the lines marking off each measure at either end are called bar lines. In the visualinear tablature system, the timing of notes is interpreted according to where the symbols representing those notes are placed, along the line of tablature, and in relation to the beats. The simplest and most common rhythmic timing is on the beats. Simple music in which all the notes occur on the beats is said to employ metric rhythm.

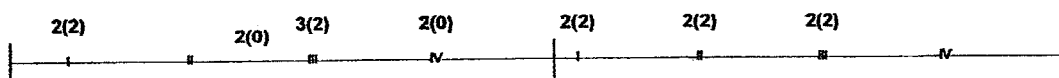
Figure 6 : "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star"



Notice that the symbols (string and fret notation) for notes which are sounded on the beats have been placed directly above those beats. The next most common timing of rhythmic occurrence is exactly halfway between beats. The string and fret notation for notes sounded halfway between beats, then, would be placed exactly halfway between the beats, as shown in Figure 7. For beginners, the proper timing of such notes can

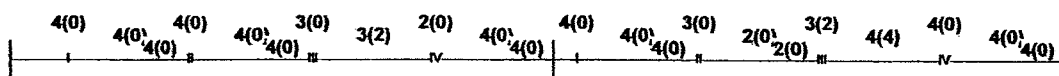
be more easily achieved by developing the habit of counting out the music's meter by including an "and" halfway between each beat and the next (ONE – and – TWO – and – THREE ...). The use of this counting technique for ensuring rhythmic correctness is by no means limited to beginners. For more experienced players, however, subdividing the beats of the meter in this way has become second nature, and is therefore no longer a conscious process.

Figure 7 : "Mary Had A Little Lamb"



An astounding amount of rhythmic variety is possible even in cases where notes are sounded either on the beats or halfway between them. Sometimes, however, and especially in more advanced music, more complicated rhythmic patterns are used. The inclusion of notes halfway between beats effectively halves the interval of time between beats. Halving these two halves produces a quartering of the beat, and two new possibilities for rhythmic timing. Music which makes use of such a quartering of the beat can most easily be played with rhythmic correctness by counting out the meter as follows : ONE – two – three – four – TWO – two – three – four – THREE ...

Figure 8 : from "The William Tell Overture" (Rossini)

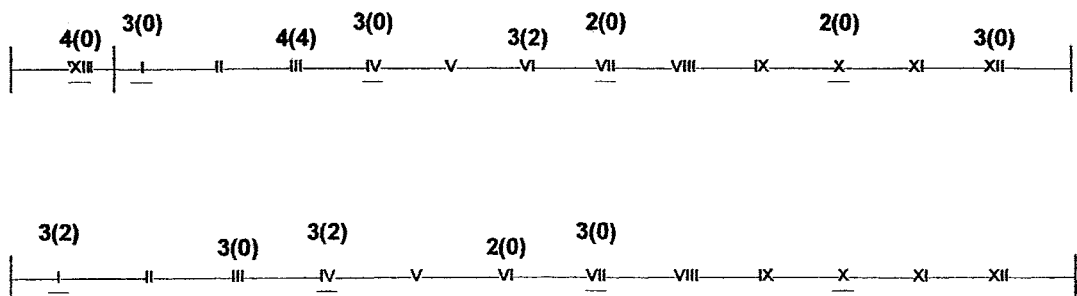


For some music, there is an entirely different feel to the flow of rhythm. This is the case, for example, when the interval of time between beats is

divided into 3 equal parts (this is called ternary division of the beat). Music which employs ternary division of the beat is said to be in compound meter. Music in compound meter tends to have a bouncy feel and rhythmic flow, and can most easily be played with rhythmic correctness by counting out the meter as follows : ONE – two – three – TWO – two – three ...

Music in 6, the simplest of the three compound meters, is therefore really in 2, and employs ternary division of the beat. Similarly, music in 9 and 12, the other two compound meters, is really in 3 and 4 respectively, and again employs ternary division of the beat. This equivalency can be expressed in visualinear tablature notation by using 3 or 4 beats per measure, and by including a 3 (indicating ternary division) at the left end of each line of tablature. In such a notational scheme, the symbols for notes would therefore be placed directly above the beats, at one third the interval from one beat to the next, or at two thirds the interval from one beat to the next. Alternately, the tablature can be based on the full 9 or 12 beats per measure. When music in compound meter is represented in visualinear tablature in this fashion, the main beats (one, four, seven, and ten) are underlined so as to better show the rhythmic flow of the music.

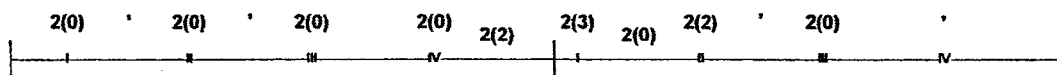
Figure 9 : “The Eensy Weensy Spider”



Rhythmic timing is only half of the formula for the correct rhythmic interpretation of music. The other half is duration. Notes played on the guitar can be made to stop sounding by damping the string on which they are sounded. Damping is accomplished by lightly touching the string, which causes it to stop vibrating, and to therefore stop producing sound. Although damping can be done with either hand, in melodic playing the left hand is probably used more often. Fretted notes can be damped by simply reducing the pressure of the fretting finger, so that the string is no longer fretted, while maintaining contact with the string.

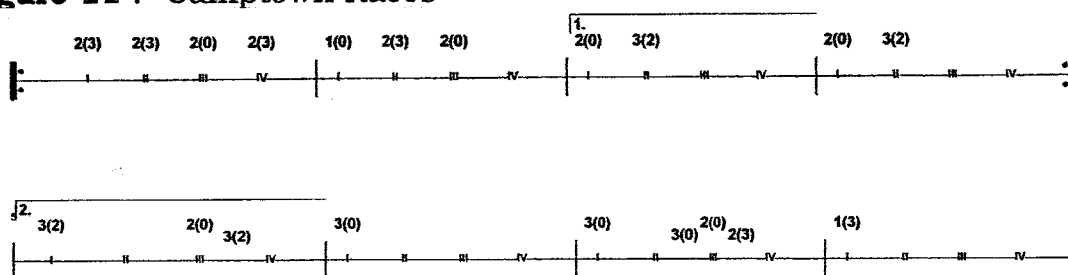
Regardless of the notational system used, in melodic playing (one note at a time), the exact duration of notes is left largely to the player's discretion. In making decisions regarding duration, the player should be guided by what sounds best and what sounds most musical. It will not normally have a very musical effect, for example, to allow open notes to continue sounding through successive notes. Similarly, fretted notes cannot be abandoned too soon, or a noticeably choppy rhythmic flow will result. Generally speaking, the most musical effect is created by damping notes so as to create a slight separation between each note and the next. Sometimes, however, notes must be damped sooner than that in order to achieve the desired rhythmic effect. This can be indicated in the tablature by means of a damp sign, which resembles an apostrophe. As with the timing for notes, the timing for damps is indicated by the exact placement of damp signs, along the line of tablature, and in relation to the beats.

Figure 10 : "Yo, Ho, Ho, And A Bottle Of Rum"



Repetition is a much used device in the construction of music. There is a greater symmetry to and a more developed sense about music, even the simplest of melodies, in which phrases (groups of measures) are repeated. When this occurs, as it does with some frequency, it makes no sense to notate the music twice. The desired result can be indicated much more easily by the use of repeat notation. When repeat signs, which resemble colons, are placed at the beginning and end of a phrase, they indicate that the phrase should be repeated (in other words, should be played twice). Sometimes first and second endings are used with repeat signs. When this notation is used, you should play the original phrase once, return to the beginning of the phrase, and then on the second time through substitute the second ending for the first ending in the original phrase.

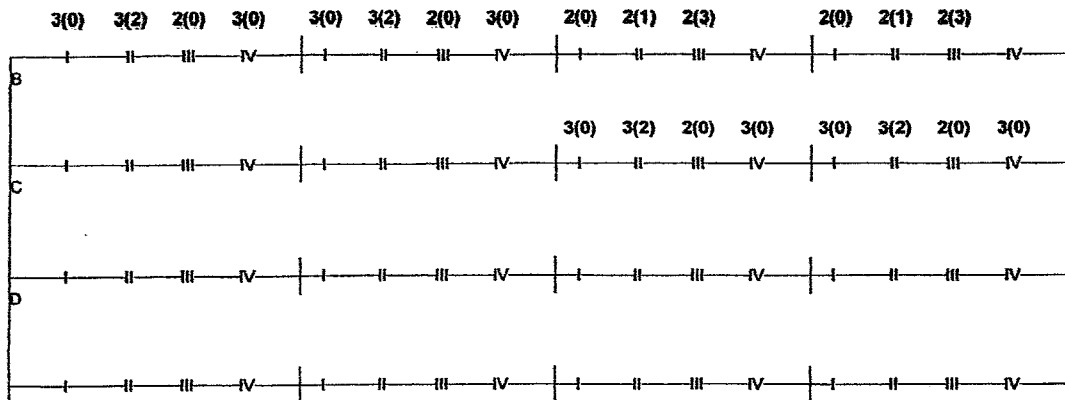
Figure 11 : “Camptown Races”



The guitar ensemble concept, like the music of an orchestra or a choir, is based on the combination of monophonic (one note at a time) parts into a single musical context. In the printed visualinear tablature notation for guitar ensemble music, the various parts are joined by a connecting line at the beginning and end of each line of tablature. The group of lines of tablature thus connected is called a staff. In visualinear tablature score, the first measure of each staff is numbered. This greatly simplifies the matter of referring to specific locations in the score in connection with score analysis or rehearsal. The parts are identified by name at the beginning of the first measure of a piece, and again at the beginning of the first measure of the top staff on each page of a score.

Figure 12 : "Are You Sleeping?"

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