



# PREPARATIONS FOR THE GUITAR BEGINNER

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## Abstrak

*Tulisan ini adalah hasil pengalaman dan survey terhadap alat musik gitar. Dimana para pemula yang belajar gitar benar-benar dapat memahami persiapan-persiapan sebelum bermain gitar dan juga peralatan yang dibutuhkan sebelum belajar bermain gitar.*

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Classical Guitar is a combination of three elements: the instrument, the music, and the style of playing. Each element is described below.

## **The Instrument**

The Classic Guitar is a hollow bodied wooden instrument with six strings; the higher sounding 3 strings are nylon, the lower sounding strings have a nylon center with some type of metal winding. Do not try to play Classical Guitar on a steel string guitar or on any other type of guitar besides a true Classic Guitar. This is because the entire technique of playing Classical Guitar depends on using a Classic Guitar. The wrong type of instrument will not respond properly. Classic Guitars are available in 1/2, 3/4 and full size models.

First of all, the neck of the Classic Guitar is wider than that of a steel string electric or acoustic guitar so that the strings may be further separated on the instrument to allow easier access to each string for "finger picking" as opposed to "strumming " or picking with a "pick."

The Classic Guitar is constructed to allow the top of the instrument to vibrate but to suppress vibration in the neck, back, or sides. This is similar to how an electric speaker works, the center section moves to radiate the music, the casing must be rigid to support smooth motion of the



center. A solid body guitar does not resonate and will not project any reasonable level of sound.

The type of string is critical to both the Classic Guitar itself, and to playing Classical Guitar. Steel strings have a much higher tension than nylon strings when tuned to the correct pitch. Properly made guitars of either type (steel string or nylon string) are designed to resonate most effectively at the "operating tension" of the instrument. A guitar designed for steel strings will not respond properly with nylon strings, and a guitar designed for nylon strings will probably break in half if you try to string it to pitch with steel strings. Playing Classical Guitar requires that you use a combination of contact with your finger nails and with the fleshy part of your finger tips for picking. This requires careful shaping and use of the finger nails of the picking hand; steel strings will rip off your finger nails and make it impossible to control the sound.

The quality of the sound is also very dependent on the construction of the top of the guitar. Famous Classic Guitar makers usually have carefully selected pieces of wood which will eventually be made into the tops of Classic Guitars aging for years in their workshops. Mass produced Classic Guitars often have plywood tops with a thin layer of cedar or spruce wood laminated (glued on) to the plywood to give the appearance of a quality top. Never accept a Classic Guitar with a laminated top, you will be very disappointed with the sound.

Intonation and the ability of the instrument to be properly tuned and to stay in tune are critical elements of a Classic Guitar. Fortunately, modern construction techniques have eliminated those type of problems in all but the cheapest of instruments. The height of the strings above the neck (Action) is also very important - the strings must not be too high or too low. Once again, most guitars manufactured today are pre-set up at the factory to have a usable Action and this is rarely a problem anymore. The one area which remains a problem with the Classic Guitar today is in the strings themselves. Nylon has a tendency to stretch unevenly along the length of the string. This uneven stretching often causes the string to vibrate unevenly and to make the instrument appear to have intonation problems. When I discuss tuning in the lesson 5 I will explain how to check the strings to make sure they have not "gone bad."

Price is often a good metric for determining the quality of a Classic Guitar, however, be warned that is not always the case. Unless you have a professional Classical Guitarist available to help you select an instrument, it is wise to wait until you know how to select an instrument before



spending too much money. At the very least, you should get a good quality beginner's Classic Guitar with carrying cases, a music stand, a supplemental music book with some graded pieces, a foot stool, a tuning fork, a metronome, and a tuning crank. You should also purchase a good quality nail care kit which contains a coarse, medium, and fine memory board to be used to correctly shape your fingernails. These items should be all you will need to progress to the intermediate level, at which point you might want to consider purchasing a better quality instrument.

## **The Music**

Almost every type of music has been either transcribed or written for the Classical Guitar. You can apply the Classical Guitar style on a Classic Guitar to any music you choose once you have developed your own ability to play the instrument.

## **The Style of Playing**

The style of playing is much more objective than the definition of the music. My definition of Classical Guitar style is: playing with simultaneous conscious and separate control of each individual voice present in the music by using all four fingers of the "fretting" hand and by using the thumb and the first three fingers of the "picking" hand. Playing with a "pick" is not playing in the Classical Guitar style.

## **Other necessary equipment**

### **1. Music stand**

Music stands come in many shapes and sizes. I recommend a foldable stand to begin with so that it can be easily transported or stored.

### **2. Metronome**

I consider this a necessary piece of equipment because it is a totally objective constraint which forces a player to understand the rhythm which the composer intended for a piece of music. Some teachers feel that use of a metronome will create a "mechanical" player. It's not a metronome that creates a mechanical player, it's mindless repetitive practicing in a



mechanical way that causes a person to learn to play like a machine. You'll find a metronome to be a useful and welcome tool.

### 3. Tuning fork

A tuning fork is necessary so that you can establish the correct reference pitch for tuning the instrument. It is only used to tune one string, the other strings are always tuned relative to that one string which was tuned to the tuning fork. The standard tuning fork reference pitch for a guitar (and classical music in general) is "A-440."

### 4. Footstool

The Classic Guitar must be held in a very stable position while it is being played. A footstool allows you to position the guitar properly with respect to your body so that it will be easier to play and more comfortable to hold.

### 5. Tuning crank

This item makes it easier to change your strings and you will appreciate its importance once you change the strings on your guitar for the first time. Strings should be changed at one to four month intervals, depending on how often you play and on the chemistry of your own body. Strings go "dead" after a period of use or they develop cracks at the point where the string makes contact with the frets. Body chemistry is important because the oils from your skin cause the strings to lose their brilliance.

## **Optional Equipment**

### 1. Length Mirror

It is often helpful to view yourself while playing so that you can see exactly how your body is moving while you play. There are great players who move their bodies and fidget so noticeably while performing, that it is sometimes almost impossible for an audience to focus on listening to the music. In the case of one very famous (and here un-named) guitarist, I could only listen to him if I kept my eyes closed during his



performance. Even if your extraneous motion is not that exaggerated, you might want to watch your fingers to see that they are “behaving themselves” and not flying around the air as you play.

## 2. Tape Recorder

It never lies about my playing and listens patiently no matter how long I demand its attention. Had I not personally experienced the benefits of this tool I would never have acknowledged how distorted my perception could have been of my own playing. Rhythmic changes and expressive nuances that sounded so poetic while I heard myself playing them live, too often devolved into acoustic nausea when I listened to the playback of the recording. I highly recommend this tool and suggest that you use it faithfully, especially if you plan on performing for an audience outside of your immediate loved ones.

## 3. Guitar Stand

This piece of equipment is convenient if you play frequently during the day and you want the guitar accessible near your practice chair. It's also useful if you frequently change music on your music stand and want to put the guitar down without having to return the instrument to its case. The only drawback to using a guitar stand is that Classic Guitars are affected by changes in temperature and humidity in the air. If you keep the instrument in a room that is fairly stable with regard to temperature and humidity, there should not be a problem. If there are frequent or rapid changes in temperature or humidity, you should keep the instrument in a guitar case that shields it from these rapid changes.