

FINGER STYLE

• BASICS FOR •

GUITAR

Fingerstyle Basics for Guitar
©2011 New York City Guitar School
©2011 Lenny Molotov

NYC Guitar School
251 West 30th Street
New York, NY 10001

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish I could name some teachers or mentors who personally initiated me into the secrets of fingerstyle guitar, but actually there are none.

The knowledge put forth in this book was obtained through hours of hard listening—to the recordings of fingerpicking singer-songwriters and early blues and ragtime guitarists. With the listening went transcribing. Initially this was to learn this type of material myself, later it also became about teaching it to others. While teaching over the last 10 years I have been learning the essential principles of the fingerstyle art and figuring the best way to convey them. This process is under constant refinement. The book represents a crystallization of this process.

More teaching methods today focus on chords or linear lines, riffs and soloing so I think it's safe to say that there is a void in fingerstyle (non-classical) guitar education. Perhaps this book will help to fill that void.

I would like to thank everyone at NYC Guitar School, where I have taught for several years now. There is an amazing amount of life there and my job there is one I actually look forward to going to every morning. Teaching there has improved me as a musician and probably as a person.

Initially an artist might fear that teaching might sap his or her strength—that by sharing knowledge it gets depleted. This isn't true. A candle's flame is not diminished by lighting other candles. But it goes farther than that, teaching increases the skills and powers of the artist. Learning to convey your knowledge to others forces you to become much more aware, much more conscious of the various dimensions of your art, and makes you a greater artist. So teaching at the school has made me into a better practitioner of music.

Individually, most credit is due to Dan Emery, the founder of the school. He enthusiastically supported this project from first inception to final publication. Dan is a true man of action who has rare ability to swiftly carry out his stated intentions. His aggressive wisdom was just what I needed to push the work through. His input was invaluable and dynamically intertwined with my own efforts—while I looked at questions of guitar technique he calculated popular tastes and hard business facts.

Credit is also due to Vince DeMasi, by my reckoning the world's best teacher of rock guitar, for his editorial input. A contributing writer to *Guitar Player*, he helped get my idiosyncratic writing a bit clearer and focused.

Thanks also to Jamie Garamella who did great work on formatting the songs and had knowledge regarding music notation that I did not know existed.

LM



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LENNY MOLOTOV
NEW YORK CITY
GUITAR SCHOOL

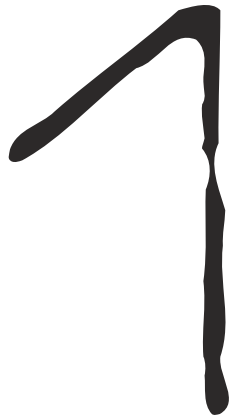


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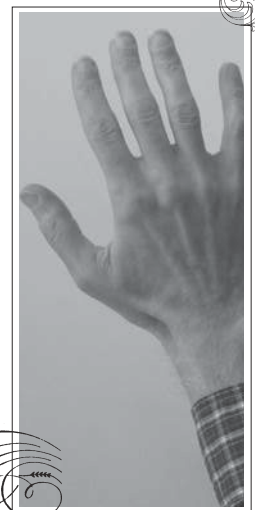


C L A S S



INTRODUCTION TO FINGERSTYLE

By Lenny Molotov of NYC Guitar School ©2011





Welcome to the world of fingerstyle guitar. You've seen other guitarists play with their fingers. You've wondered if you could do it too. You've even been planning to learn how to do it yourself one day. Well congratulations, that day has finally arrived!

If you are coming from a rock and roll background, you might be under the impression that fingerstyle guitar is a kind of novelty—something arena rockers do to provide a quiet acoustic interlude in the midst of a noisy electric set. True, fingerstyle guitar can be a nice change of pace from fast and furious high-energy fretwork, but it is also much more. Did you know that many, if not most, genres of guitar playing around the globe—classical, flamenco, delta blues, ragtime, bossa nova, and various African styles—employ fingerstyle exclusively and never call for flatpicking at all?*

I believe the ability to fingerpick is the skill that separates the men from the boys (or the women from the girls), and will give you a distinct advantage over a mere “scrubber” (strummer). While singer-songwriters of the North American variety tend to grab a flatpick when strumming, many are adept at fingerpicking as well. Quite a few renowned singer-songwriters are competent, if not outright excellent, fingerstylists—Paul Simon, Joni Mitchell, Leonard Cohen, Bob Dylan, Shawn Colvin, Ani DiFranco, Joan Baez, etc. Even some great single-note flatpicking lead players will play with their fingers when the artistic need arises. For example, Doc Watson is a lightning-fast bluegrass flatpicker who also excels at ragtimey fingerstyle. And I'll bet you've heard about Led Zeppelin guitarist Jimmy Page. He was legendary for his flatpicked riffs and solos, but on many of the most famous Led Zep tracks, Ol' Dragonpants** showed that he could cut it acoustic with his fingertips—take “Stairway to Heaven” (please), “Babe I'm Gonna Leave You,” and “Black Mountain Side”.

*Flatpicking is a term used to refer to striking the strings with that small triangular piece of plastic you've been using up until now.

**I'm not name-calling here.

In the mid '70s, Page regularly appeared on stage in a white satin outfit embroidered with multi-colored dragons!

Other virtuoso lead players take an even more radical approach and play solely with their fingers. Rock greats Mark Knopfler and (since the '80s) Jeff Beck, as well as blues giants Albert King and Hubert Sumlin all manipulate their digits to achieve distinctive, gritty sounds otherwise unobtainable with a flatpick.

My point should be indisputably clear by now—knowledge of fingerstyle technique is useful for every guitarist! So get out your pick. Now, toss it aside. Lose



it. Melt it down. Give it to your cousin who's in a Kiss tribute band. You won't be needing it. From here on in, your picks are your thumb and fingers!

In this course, our emphasis will be folk and singer-songwriter styles. These, I believe, are the easiest way to enter our new world. Even if folk songs aren't exactly your cup of tea, this introduction will be a great preparation and gateway for other exciting styles.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED TO KNOW COMING INTO THIS COURSE

This book assumes you know nothing about fingerpicking, so if you know nothing about fingerpicking, you're the perfect student for this course! Even if you have a little background—perhaps you've played a few impromptu bars of “Blackbird” at parties—there are probably a lot of fundamentals you are unaware of, so you'll benefit from this course as much, if not more than, the absolute beginner. What you will need to know are your open chords, especially *C, G, D, A, E, Am, Em, Dm, A7, E7, D7*, and *B7* as well as the small-barre *F*. You should also be fairly adept at making the changes between these chords.

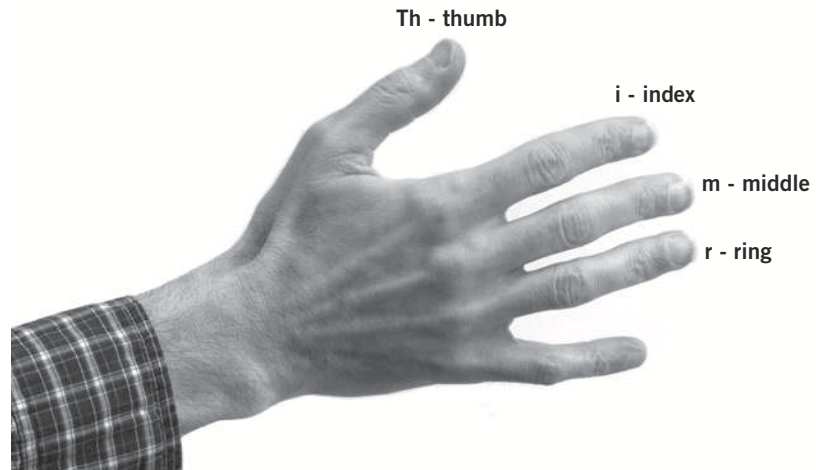
Don't worry about full barre chords. This course is guaranteed 99.6% barre-chord free! And this is not necessarily to make it easy on you. It's actually a reflection of reality. You might be relieved to know that since full barre chords are less resonant and more taxing on the fretting hand than open chords, acoustic fingerstylists at all levels will usually avoid them whenever the same chord is available in an open form.

QUE ES SU NOMBRE?— NAMING THE FINGERS OF THE PICKING HAND

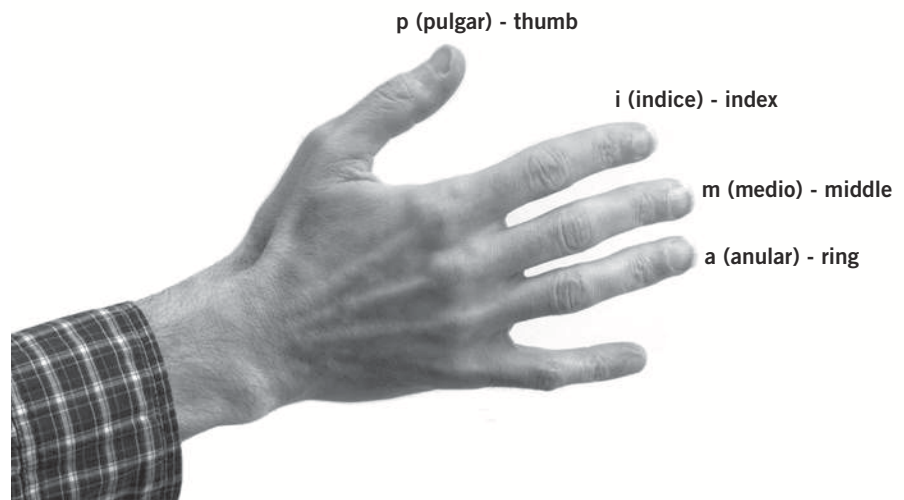
You already have several sets of numbers to get your mind around. There are strings 1 through 6, fretting-hand fingers 1 through 4, frets 1 through 12, your ATM PIN



number, your mom's birthday, etc. Luckily, we designate our picking-hand fingers with names instead of numbers. They are as follows:



When playing guitar, we always refer to the picking-hand fingers by their names and the fretting-hand fingers by their numbers to avoid confusion. Please note that in most guitar notation, the picking hand is designated with the following letters:



Yes, they're Spanish. They're also the most common designations for the picking-hand fingers, even in English-speaking countries. The reason for this is fairly simple: The Spanish invented the guitar, so they got to name the fingers.

SHAKE HANDS AND COME OUT PICKIN'

Ready for our first exercise? To start, place a D chord down with your fretting hand. Now forget about it and concentrate on your picking hand. The picking hand fingers you employ will be indicated by the letters underneath the tab. In this case the thumb picks down on the 4th string and the index finger picks up on the 3rd: Play "down" with your thumb followed by up with your index finger. Repeat.

place D chord

Th i

THUMB OUT!

Before we go any further, I must mention a matter of great importance. Your thumb must stay outside the hand.

From the beginning to the end of its stroke, the thumb tip should remain visible to any audience member sitting directly in front of you—never hidden behind your fingers. Some people are able to achieve the correct placement with ease, but many beginners



WRONG!



RIGHT!



WRONG!



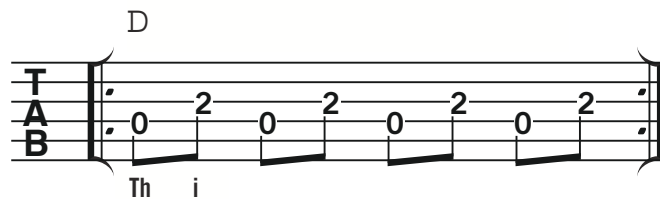
RIGHT!



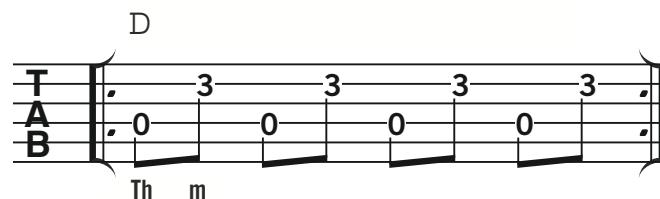
naturally position their thumb “inside” of their fingers. This is considered improper form by classical guitarists and with good reason. This hand position constrains the flow and follow-through of both the thumb and fingers. Because of this, I will keep reminding you throughout the book to **KEEP THE THUMB OUT.**

COME OUT PICKING AGAIN AND KEEP YOUR THUMB OUT

With your newfound knowledge regarding the thumb position repeat the first exercise:



Now try thumb and middle finger:



Now thumb and ring finger. Your ring will probably be a bit more unwieldy than your index or middle:

D

Th r

HERE'S TO YOU JOE ARPEGGIO

Now let's try some three-note patterns—arpeggios. An arpeggio (which almost rhymes with DiMaggio) is a chord played one note at a time:

C

Th i m

F

Th i m

G

Th i m



Now four-note patterns. in case your ring finger is feeling left out:

D

Th i m r

Am

Th i m r

Em

Th i m r

DOWNSTROKE, UPSTROKE

Remember the days when you were exclusively a flatpicker? You learned some single-note riff patterns like those in The Beatles' "Day Tripper" or Led Zeppelin's "Black Dog," and you labored hard to get the fret, finger, and hand positions right. And just when you were satisfied you had it perfected, you discovered to your chagrin that there were such things as pick upstrokes and that—arrgh—to advance as a guitarist you would have to mix them into the riff at seemingly random intervals! No worries about a repeat of this scenario for the fingerpicker. In our world, the thumb always makes downstrokes and the fingers always make upstrokes. It's that simple.

NO REST FOR THE WICKED, NO REST FOR THE THUMB

As you play through the exercises, do you notice your thumb picking the 5th string, then coming to rest against the 4th string? If you catch yourself doing this, then please cease and desist! This type of string pluck is called a rest stroke and it is inappropriate for our style. The thumb must play the 5th string, then pass over the 4th string free and clear. This is the opposite of a rest stroke and is known as a free stroke. Free stroke and rest stroke are terms from classical guitar methodology. Rest strokes can also be played with fingers and are sometimes employed by classical guitarists to highlight a single-note melody. They actually produce a stronger tone, but they also mute out the string that's being rested on. For this reason rest strokes are generally undesirable for our multi-string song-accompaniment style. (We actually don't use the terms rest stroke and free stroke because we only play one kind of stroke, the free stroke. So we can just use the term "stroke".)

Here's a five-note pattern. We've run out of strings so we're comin' back down the way we came:

Dm

2 3 1 3 1

T 6
A 8
B

Th i m r m

A

2 2 2 2 2

T 6
A 8
B

Th i m r m

E

2 1 0 1 2

T 6
A 8
B

Th i m r m



And here's the complete arpeggio:

D7

Th i m r m i

B7

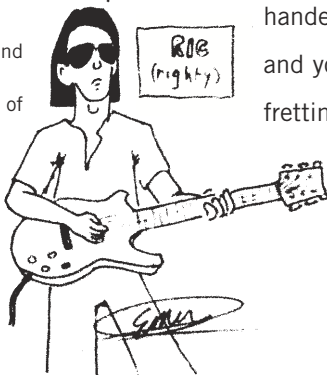
Th i m r m i

E7

Th i m r m i



Ric Ocasek and Elliot Easton are members of The Cars.



FOR LEFTY GOMEZ AND RIGHTY FORD

Guitarists (hopefully) have a fretting hand and a picking hand. If you play right-handed like Ric in the picture to the left, your fretting hand is your left hand and your picking hand is your right hand. If you play left-handed like Elliot, your fretting hand is your right hand and your picking hand is your left hand. Remember this, because I'll make extensive use of the terms fretting hand and picking hand.