



Musical Dictionary with My Guitar Lessons

A

A-String

The second string from the bottom. The 'bottom' string is the one that is lowest in pitch, and actually nearest to you. The 'top' string is the HIGHEST in pitch, and nearest the floor.

Accelerando

Getting faster as you go through it.

Action

The distance between the string at the fret you're pushing it towards. As a basic rule, the lower your action, the faster you'll be able to play 0 but not too low, as you might get frets buzzing or 'choking out' when you try to bend notes. On some instruments (classical guitars/resonators etc) the action is intentionally higher.

Adagio

Slow, at a laid-back sorta pace.

Allegro

Quickly, rapidly...any piece with 'allegro' in the title is usually moving a pretty fast pace.

Andante

Not slow, but fairly slow at a fairly leisurely pace.

Aria

A tune / melody. You'd only usually hear this word in reference to classical music, really.

Arpeggio

Playing the notes of the chord one after the other, rather than all at the same time. It's sometimes, though almost never, referred to as a 'broken chord'. If anybody tells you it's 'every second note of the scale', they're wrong!

Artificial Harmonics

Not to be confused with "natural harmonics" or "pinch harmonics". A tricky technique of playing harmonics whereby the first finger of the picking hand touches the string at the correct point (usually 5, 7 or 12 frets higher than whichever note is being played by the fretting hand) and the second or third finger plucks it.

B

B-String

The second-highest pitched string on the guitar, second from the top. *NOTE* - the 'bottom' string is the one that is lowest in pitch, and actually nearest to you. The 'top' string is the HIGHEST in pitch, and nearest the floor.

Balalaika

Vintage Russian guitar from the olden times of yore!

Ballad

In olden times, a ballad was a song that was supposed to be danced to. Nowadays, it's basically a slow-paced song, usually a love song, that you might wave your lighter in the air to.

Band

A group of people coming together to make music, i.e. you and your buddies jamming out some tunes!

Banjo

Usually five-stringed (though originally four-stringed), the banjo is a popular instrument in Jazz and Country music. For a five-string banjo, the standard tuning is actually to tune it to G - i.e. 5th string = G, 4th = D, 3rd=G, 2nd =B and 1st string = D.

Bar-line

A vertical line which divides the notation up into pieces (bars) on the staff. A bar will consist of a certain number of beats (usually 4 in a bar for rock music etc) and a bar-line points out where that number of beats ends and where the next 'strong' beat is about to come in. Example: (bar line) 1,2,3,4 (barline) 1,2,3,4....the snare would usually hit on beats 1 and 3. *NOTE* - in electric guitar circles, referring to 'the bar' can also be in reference to the whammy bar/tremolo.

Baritone

A class of male singing, much as 'middleweight' is a class of boxing. A baritone voice is not deep enough to be a bass, but not high enough to be a tenor. Frank Sinatra could be seen as a baritone.

Bass

Either the lowest note of a chord or the lowest notes in a piece of music. Within a band, whenever someone refers to a 'bass' they're almost always meaning the bass guitar so called because it plays the lowest notes in the song!

Bass Clef

Unless you're playing bass (or piano) you won't see this one so much. Almost never called the "C clef" or "F Clef", it works the same way as the treble clef except the bottom line is a G, the next one up a B, then a D, then F with the top line being an A.

Beat

The "pulse" or "rhythm" that the piece of music is played in time to. Usually the 'beat' refers to what the drummer is playing. A 'beat' can also be referring to 1 count of a bar, i.e. if there are 'four beats in a bar' and your guitar part comes in 'on the third beat' you play nothing for 1,2...and come in on 3, if that makes sense.

Blastbeat

A type of drum beat, common within Death Metal, at a very fast speed and alternating between strokes on the kick drum and the snare. Less about rhythm really and more about packing as many snares in there as you possibly can, to make the most chaotic drum sound possible. "Frantic Disembowelment" by Cannibal Corpse is pretty much a blastbeat all the way through.

Blocking A Tremolo/Whammy Bar

Usually to help stop the guitar going out of tune every five minutes. To 'block' your tremolo/whammy bar, a piece of wood would be fixed beneath the bridge to stop the tremolo bending upwards.

Body

In a classical or acoustic guitar, the 'body' is the part with the sound-hole in it, where the sound bounces around. This would be the same for any stringed instrument with a soundhole. On an electric guitar, the body doesn't have a soundhole, but is essentially the same bit of the guitar. In this case, where the pickups/knobs/whammy bar are fixed into.

Bow

What violin players use to drag across the strings to sound the note. As used by Jimmy Page in one particularly famous piece of guitar playing.

BPM

'BPM' stands for 'beats per minute and is usually referred to to describe how fast a piece is. 50bpm is going to be mega-slow, while 240bpm would be very fast.

Brass-band

Kinda like an orchestra, but with no woodwind section, i.e. entirely made up of brass instruments. Usually a military thing.

Breve

The same as a 'whole note', to call it a 'Breve' would be to call it by its traditional English name. The longest note used in notation, this is equal to two semibreves, or four beats,

i.e. (usually) a full bar. If you were to see a breve, you would play nothing for four beats (or in 99% of what you're probably playing, a whole bar).

Bridge

The part of the guitar underneath your picking hand that the strings are fastened into. If you have a whammy bar/tremolo, it screws into the bridge. Basically the part that the strings are stretched across (or with an electric guitar, fixed into place by), a piano also has a bridge.

Bugle

Weird military-style trumpet, with no valves or keys. Kinda like a curly brass vuvuzela, but less annoying.

Bum Note

If, by mistake, you were to blatantly hit a note that sounded hideous, you hit a "bum note".

C

Cadence

The ending of a phrase, piece or movement. If you were to finish a song on a chord that is NOT the root chord, this would be known as an 'imperfect cadence'. If the song was in C, and you finished on a C chord, this would be known as a 'perfect cadence'.

Capo

In classical music, this tends to mean the 'beginning'. In the world of electric guitar, a capo is a contraption that ties across your fretboard, pressing the strings down across a certain fret. This allows you to play in a higher tuning, with a higher-pitched guitar, than you would have been able to otherwise.

Cats

Vintage term to describe a bunch of band guys. Like when you hear Hendrix refer to 'the cats in the band'. Start saying it all the time - bring it back!

Cat Gut

A common, if weird, term for 'gut strings'. Certain types of classical guitar/nylon strings are often referred to as 'cat gut' strings even though original 'gut' strings were made from bull-gut, never from cats. There's a random fact for you.

Choir

A bunch of singers which you might either see in a church...or hear on dodgy Power Metal records, singing about wizards and demons.

Choirmaster

The dude that's the lead-singer of the choir.

Chord

A group of two or more notes played together.

Chorus

The main part of the song, often repeated numerous times. The part everyone's waiting for at the gig as the verse rumbles on as an excuse to jump around and go crazy. "I wanna rock and roll all nite...and party every day" is a line from the chorus of "Rock And Roll All Nite" by KISS. A "chorus" can also refer to a group of singers though not usually in Rock/Pop/Metal music etc.

Chorus Pedal

An effects pedal for electric guitar adding an echo to whatever you're playing. With a chorus pedal, you can create the sound of playing in a large hall.

Chromatic Scale

There's no particular sequence to the notes except that you play them all! If you were to play every note on the bottom E string, in order (from frets 1-12) you would have played an E chromatic scale. A 'chromatic note' could be a note that doesn't fit in with the scale or chord that you're using might sound cool, might sound vile!

Clavier

Vintage, renaissance term for a keyboard.

Clef

The swirly symbol at the very beginning of the musical score. Usually on a guitar, this is a treble clef (find it under 'T').

Composition

A piece of music that someone has created. If you were to stand on stage and say "I'd like to play you one of my new compositions" it would be fine although you'd probably sound a bit posh. Usually a 'composition' would refer to an instrumental piece of music, i.e. with no vocals.

Concert

A live performance of music by a number of people playing together. Did you really need me to explain that one?!

Concert pitch

Usually, another term for "Standard tuning". On a guitar, concert pitch / standard tuning would be (from sixth string to 1st string/low E to high E)...EADGBE.

Conductor

The dude waving his arms around at the front of the orchestra.

Count

Referring to a 'count' is usually to refer to a number of beats. For example, "Let that chord ring for the count of 8" would mean "let that chord ring for eight beats". "Come in on the count of 4" would usually be followed by four clicks on the drum sticks (at the speed the song is going to be) to lead you into the beginning of the song at the right speed.

Country music

A style of music, popular in the US, stereotypically involving banjos, line-dancing, ten-gallon hats and spurs on your boots. Dolly Parton is a Country artist as is Alan Jackson.

Cover Song

A song, performed or recorded by yourself, that you did not write. If you were to perform a Beatles song with your band, you just played a 'cover'. Unless you're Paul or Ringo, that is.

Crotchet

A "quarter-note" lasts for one beat.

Cymbals

The metal plates on stands around the drumkit that make a crashing sound when hit.

D

D-String

The third-bottom-string, which plays the pitch of D when picked by itself. *NOTE* - The 'bottom' string is the one that is lowest in pitch and actually nearest to you. The 'top' string is the HIGHEST in pitch and nearest the floor.

Dampener/String-Dampener

A fairly exotic piece of guitar gear which is used to mute the strings at the nut-end. With a string dampener, you can play elaborate guitar solos without the risk of horrible notes by accidentally hitting an open string. Kinda works like palm-muting all the strings you're not playing at once, leading to, in theory, crystal-clear guitar solos...as long as you don't need to play an open string! Michael Angelo Batio, for example, is a big fan of the string dampener.

Death Metal

An subgenre of Heavy Metal, usually extreme in its heaviness and filled with growling vocals, blastbeats, chromatic riffs and gore-filled album artwork. Bands like Venom could be seen as pioneers of death metal as could Slayer. Cannibal Corpse are a death metal band.

Decibel

A scientific unit used for measuring volume. 5 decibels is very quiet. 150 decibels is very

loud!

Delay Pedal

An effects pedal which basically plays back what you just played after a set period of time resulting in an echo effect.

Demo

Inevitably the first CD you record with your band. Not long enough to be an album, usually just a couple of tracks to show what you can do. "You seen that band before? I've heard their demo, it's pretty good."

Demiquaver

The traditional term for a 16th note.

Demisemiquaver

The traditional term for a 32nd note.

Diatonic

If something is 'diatonic', it is played using the intervals of a standard major or minor scale comprised of the intervals of a "white note scale" (named such because these are the intervals on the white keys of a piano). Example: CDEFGAB would be a diatonic scale. CDEFG#AB would not.

Diminished Chord

A minor chord with a flattened 5th- C, Eb, Gb would be a C diminished chord, for example. These are quite rarely used in guitar playing and are often substituted for a minor, fifth chord or something else that will fit. Diminished chords tend to sound a little bizarre.

Dirge

Originally, either a piece of music to be played at a funeral or some sort of death march. A dirge could also be used as a slang term for a dreadful, boring piece of music.

Distance

The number of tones between two notes. Also known as an "interval".

DiveBomb

If you were to play a note/chord, then push the whammy bar right down til the strings go all wobbly, that's a divebomb.

Dot

In musical notation, a dot may be placed after a note/rest to indicate that it is half as long again as it would usually be. A dotted crotchet (quarter note) for example, would be one and a half beats long. A dotted minim (half note) would last for three beats, etc. In the very rare occurrence of seeing TWO or more dots after a note, the second dot adds half the length of the dot before it. So a double-dotted crotchet (quarter note) would last one and three quarter beats, etc. It's very rare that that would appear though. I wouldn't worry about it.

Double Bar

A double-bar line at the end of a piece of music, to show that it has ended.

Double Chorus

A point of the song where you would play the chorus twice, rather than just once. Also a term for a piece of music to be sung by two choirs at once.

Double Flat

Two flat symbols after a note, dropping its pitch by a whole tone. Almost never used.

Double Sharp

The same idea as a double flat, except it raises the pitch by a whole tone. Again, almost never used. The symbol for this is usually an X, rather than two "#" signs. I wouldn't worry about it.

Double Time

The point of a song where it would double in speed. Very common in Metal music, easy to hear too. You can hear the drums are suddenly playing at twice the pace they were before (note - the guitars, etc don't necessarily need to double their speed! They're just playing to a beat that is twice as fast as it was before). Can also be used to describe a drum beat that is twice the speed expected, possibly right from the beginning of a song (a "double-time

feel").

Down-Beat

The first beat of the bar. Originally named because the conductor would wave his hand downwards to indicate the first beat of a bar. If you watch an orchestra, as the piece begins and he waves his hand downwards, that's what he's doing.

Drone Note

A long note that plays continuously usually while something else is going on at the same time. Bagpipes are usually playing drone notes while a melody plays over the top.

Drum Kit

Do I really need to explain this? The percussion instrument within the band...the one with the guy sitting down the drums all around him!

Duet

A performance by two musicians / singers at once.

Dynamics

The 'loudness' and 'quietness' that are used within a piece of music.

E

E-String

There are two E-strings on your guitar. The bottom string and the top string both of which play an "E" tone when picked by themselves. *NOTE* - the 'bottom' string is the one that is lowest in pitch and actually nearest to you. The 'top' string is the HIGHEST in pitch and nearest the floor.

Echo

A repeat of a sound you have just made - shout "Hello!" inside a cave and the voice you hear shouting it back at you is the echo. Numerous echo effects on the guitar can be made by using effects pedals.

Eight-Note

Another word for an 'octave' note. If you're playing a C major scale, you'd played CDEFGAB before playing the 8th note - C, which is an octave above the first C you played.

Eight-Track

A type of recording unit (like a mini-home recording studio) that would allow you to record 8 separate tracks onto one recording. A very cool piece of equipment to have, as you can record your riffs in there, stick a bass under it, try out some melodies over the top and basically jam with yourself. A pretty essential piece of kit for anyone writing their own music, really.

Emphasis

To make one particular note/chord/part stand out over the rest of what you're playing. If you were to play a melody on the guitar and keyboard at the same time, with the emphasis on the guitar, the guitar would be more prominent in the mix than the keyboard.

Encore

Pronounced "on-core". A song added to the end of your set after it appears you've finished playing. Example: the singer shouts "Thank you! Goodnight!"...the crowd cheers for more...then you come out and do one last song. That song is your 'encore'.

Ensemble

Pronounced "on-somble". A bunch of musicians playing together bigger than a band, but not as big as an orchestra. A "small orchestra" for more intimate performances, if you like.

Equivocal Chord

A chord which can be 'resolved' into many different keys, as it is difficult to determine its root note due to its (weird) note structure. A diminished 7th chord, for example, could be referred to as an 'equivocal chord'.

Espressivo

Usually a term found lurking in classical music, should you see this written somewhere you're supposed to play it with expression, expressively...passionately!

Etude

A piece of music, usually classical, that has been written as a practice piece rather than a masterpiece to be performed.

Exercise

Usually, a fairly technical piece of guitar playing meant as something to practice not necessarily to perform. Something to noodle around with to improve your technique.

F

F

Should you see the symbol "f" (usually written in lower case) upon your musical score it stands for 'forte' and means that it should be played loudly. "ff" would mean to play it very loud, and so on.

Falsetto

Singing 'from your head' rather than 'from your stomach'. If you sing in falsetto, you can sing very high, if usually weaker, notes. The Darkness, for example, became famous for their falsetto-singing style. The Bee Gees would be another example.

F Clef

Very rare and very old-skool term for the 'bass clef'.

F-Holes

The two f-shaped soundholes in the body of a violin, cello etc.

Fiddle

Another term for a violin.

Fifth

The fifth note of the scale from the root note. Example: in C Major (CDEFGAB) the "5th" is the G. A flattened 5th would be an F#, and a raised 5th would be a G#, etc. A chord is built from the notes of the scale, so if someone was to say "that chord is a C with a flat 5th", for example, you would play the G note one semitone lower than usual. That chord in particular, however, would probably sound supremely hideous.

Finale

The final part of a symphony...this usually refers to classical music again. An orchestra, upon playing an elaborate piece, would work towards the 'grand finale' at the end. Basically, it's the elaborate end passage of a composition.

Fine-Tuner

Usually found on Rock guitars/guitars with a Floyd-Rose style bridge. Each string has its own tuning dial on the bridge which, once the strings are 'locked in', can be used for any minor tuning adjustments.

Fingering

The way you fret the notes on the fretboard. If someone was to say "the fingering for that piece is a nightmare", it would indicate that playing whatever that piece is is very tricky for your fretting hand.

Fixed-Tone Instruments

An instrument with 'fixed intonation' is one that cannot be tuned willy-nilly whenever you feel like it. A guitar is NOT a fixed tone instrument. A church organ is.

Flat

A musical symbol, placed just before a note, that tells you the note is to be played one semitone (one fret) lower than usual. It basically looks like a lower-case "b". It is the opposite of a sharp sign ("♯"), which indicates the pitch is to be RAISED one semitone.

Floating Bridge

You'll be most likely to see a 'floating bridge' on a guitar set up for Heavy Metal / divebomb abuse. A floating bridge is a type of tremolo that allows the bar to be either pushed down (like it normally is) or pulled up (to sharpen the pitch of the note rather than send it plummeting through the floorboards). Rather than the bridge sit against the body of the guitar, it instead would 'float' as there is a hole in the body of the guitar under it, allowing

the tremolo to be pulled upwards.

Folk Music

A relatively modern term to describe music that was originally sung by the lower classes in the 19th century. Disappearing for a while since then, it became popular again in the 1950s. Coming from the term musical folklore, it has paved the way for a number of subgenres, such as Electric Folk, Contemporary Folk and Folk-Rock. Simon and Garfunkel, for example, are a Folk-Rock act.

Forte

A classical music term, meaning "loud".

Freestyle / Played Freely

A piece of music played in relaxed timing. An unaccompanied guitar solo, for example, a rapper without a backing track, or a long drawn-out atmospheric intro to a song. If something is played freestyle (or in free-time) it doesn't necessarily have to stick to the usual rules of timing.

Fret

Those metal things across your fretboard that you press the strings towards to sound the notes. An electric guitar usually has 22 frets. A Fender Stratocaster often has 21, some have 24 and some more unusual guitars may have more or less than that.

Fretboard

Also known as 'the neck'. The long skinny bit sticking out of guitar with the frets and strings on.

Fundamental

The "fundamental" is the root note. This term isn't used very often.

G

G-Clef

Very rare and old-skool term for the Treble Clef.

Gauge

The thickness of your guitar strings is judged in 'gauges'. A set of 'gauge 9' strings, for example, would be fairly light and bendy. A set of 'gauge 14' strings would be very thick and somewhat hard on your fingers. Lots of players like the extra tone from "heavy" gauge strings, but remember a good amount of this is going to be down to your amp. On an electric guitar, gauge 9s are absolutely fine though lots of players swear by gauge 10s. Acoustic guitars, not using an amp, often use heavy strings - a gauge 13 or 14 is quite common on an acoustic guitar.

G-String

Not to be confused with underwear, this is the third-highest string on the guitar and plays a G-note when picked by itself. *NOTE* - the 'bottom' string is the one that is lowest in pitch, and actually nearest to you. The 'top' string is the HIGHEST in pitch, and nearest the floor.

Gallop

A picking rhythm which, I suppose, sounds like a galloping horse. Often used in Heavy Metal, Iron Maiden and Slayer, for example tend to use this fairly regularly. To attempt to explain it in words, I guess it goes dun-dududun-dududun-dududun...if you see what I mean. When Slayer's "Raining Blood" kicks him (after the intro, the riff before the first verse), he's playing a gallop.

Gargling

A term used by nerds in guitar magazines for playing a note and flicking the tremolo so that it creates a 'gargling' effect. Usually this is created by having the tremolo arm locked in a backwards position (pointing away from the fretboard), hitting the note, then basically just flicking the bar with your picking hand. *NOTE* - you don't PRESS the bar, you flick it just enough to basically make it vibrate.

Gig

A live performance of music. Usually, a "gig" is smaller and more intimate than a concert

(but essentially the same thing), though every concert seems to be referred to as a "gig". If you're super-cool on the scene, that is.

Glissando

An originally classical term that may or may not crop up on your tablature score. If something is played in a "glissando" fashion, it is to be played very smoothly, usually without picking it. All slurs/hammer-ons/pull-offs and tapping runs would be referred to as 'glissando'.

Grace Note

You'll be able to spot these on your notation because it's a little note (half the size of the rest of the note, often with a line through its 'stem') that appears before a bigger note and basically shows the 'intention', if you will, of how the note is to sound. If you were to play a B (4th fret on the G string), and there was a grace note at A (2nd fret G string) just before it, I would play the A first, but hit the B super-quick like you barely heard the A at all. It's whole point was to lead onto the B. Sounds a little pointless when I put it like that, but it gives the note a certain sound.

Guitar

Originally, an instrument of the lute family. Musical notation for a guitar is written an octave higher than it sounds, and guitars come in a wide number of styles.

Gut Strings

Usually, when people say 'gut strings' they're referring to 'nylon strings'. Originally they were made from sheep or bull gut, despite becoming known as 'cat gut' even though cats were never used, ever, in any way, to make guitar strings. Weird! Anyway, gut strings are more sensitive to changes in temperature/humidity than steel strings are and as a result may go out of tune quicker should you turn the heaters on/ tune up inside then do a gig outside etc...

H

Half Note

A minim...a note which last for two beats or, usually, half a bar.

Harmonics

There are different types of harmonics to be played on the guitar. Natural harmonics (easy peasy), pinch harmonics (a little trickier) and artificial harmonics (a pain in the cheeks to get the hang of, although these are often referred to by people who mean 'pinch harmonics' and don't know the difference). See ["Advanced Tablature"](#) on this website for a full explanation of how to do them.

Harmonic Minor Scale

Basically, a natural minor scale with a raised seventh. See [Guitar Chords](#) on this website for a full explanation.

Harmony

Usually, an accompaniment to a melody, played at the same time, using different notes to what the first guitar is playing (or vocalist is singing, for that matter). Example: if you played A, then B then C, at the same time as I played C, then D then E, I would be playing a harmony in thirds above what you're playing. Thin Lizzy and Dragonforce play a lot of guitar harmonies.

Harmonica

A mouth organ. As played by Bob Dylan and guys in jail in vintage movies.

Harp-monics / Harp harmonics

A term describing well-executed artificial harmonics, Tommy Emmanuel-style. So named because played well enough and usually at speed it kinda sounds like a harp.

Harpsichord

Vintage, renaissance sort of piano, as heard in Classical music and often in Power Metal. It's like a piano but with a very trebley, jangly sorta sound. The keys on a harpsichord are coloured the opposite of those on a piano; all the sharps are white, and the rest of the

keys black.

Heavy Metal

A genre of Rock music, started in the UK in 60s and 70s with bands like Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin. Typical characteristics of Heavy Metal include heavily distorted guitars, wailing guitar solos, sinister imagery and lyrics with a dark/evil twist. Heavy Metal is responsible for the whole 'headbanging' phenomenon. Ozzy Osbourne, Iron Maiden and Dio are examples of Heavy Metal bands. In more recent times, about a bazillion sub genres of Heavy Metal have appeared.

Hymn

A religious song, sang in a church and/or by a choir.

I

Imperfect Cadence

Ending a piece or song on a chord that is not the root, giving it an 'unfinished' sound, as if you're expecting to hear another chord to follow it.

Improvisation

An 'off the cuff' musical performance playing something that you entirely made up on the spot.

Interlude

A passage of a piece of music / song that links two parts together and doesn't necessarily fit with the style of the rest of the song.

Interval

The difference in pitch between two notes usually expressed in the number of tones between them. An 'interval' is also the term used for the break halfway through a performance that gives you a chance to go to the bog and get a burger in before the second half begins.

Intonation

The need of each string to stay always in tune no matter how far up the neck you go. If you ever find that the tuner says you're ok, but the guitar seems to get more and more out of tune the higher up the fretboard you go, it's invariably because your guitar isn't set up correctly, your intonation stinks and you wanna get someone (qualified) to take a look at it.

Introduction

A piece of music/group of sounds/whatever that basically 'brings in' the main piece. An 'introduction' could be anything from keyboard drones to spoken words and plays before the track kicks in.

Inversion

A 'chord inversion' is basically when you play the notes of the chord, but in a different order to what you would normally. If you played a chord, but stuck the 3rd at the bottom rather than the root note, for example, that would be known as a 'chord inversion' or 'inverted chord'. Put super-simply, it's playing a chord with the notes deliberately in a different order to the usual way. You can do this either by playing the chord in a different position or just by swapping the notes around.

J

Jamming

Getting the guys together and trying out some new ideas. Jamming would be different from 'rehearsing'/'practicing' but usually when someone refers to 'jamming' they mean the same thing. Usually, a 'jam' is more improvised than a rehearsal.

Jazz

An American style of music, dating from around 1900, often with prominent brass instruments (trumpets and saxophones are popular Jazz instruments), plenty of improvisation and some unusual beats. On the guitar, jazz chords and scales may well be different from anything you've seen in Rock or Heavy Metal, too. Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker and Django Reinhardt are all famous Jazz musicians.

Jig

Music that people would dance to in the olden times of yore....often a very jolly tune in $\frac{3}{4}$ time at a pretty quick pace.

K

Kazoo

Annoying toy instrument that makes buzzing sound when you sing or hum into it. The intro melody to 'Crosstown Traffic' by Jimi Hendrix is doubled on a kazoo.

Key

The 'key' that a piece is said to be in is determined by the sharps and flats displayed at the beginning of the notation. For example, someone may tell you that a song is 'in the key of A minor', implying that the root chord is an A minor. Something that you'll need to take into account before playing your solo! If something is referred to as 'being in-key', it means that it fits with the piece you're playing, a drastic bum-note could be described as 'out of key'. Not to be confused with 'out of tune', which would essentially do the same thing I suppose, but if a note is 'out of tune', you may well be playing the right note it just sounds bad because you just need to tune your guitar. A note that's 'out of key', however, will sound horrible due to being the wrong note.

Keyboard

Originally, a 'keyboard' is the part with the keys on it on a piano. Nowadays, any sort of 'electric piano', much smaller than a full piano, and the sort you would usually use in a band, would be referred to as a 'keyboard'.

Keynote

The note that the scale or chord is based around. Also known as a 'root note' or a 'tonic'.

Key Signature

This refers to how many flats or sharps are shown at the beginning of the piece (on the notation) right next to the clef. If, for example, you were to see an F# and C# sitting right next to the clef, your key signature is D major. Basically, anyone referring to the 'key signature' is doing exactly the same as anyone referring to the 'key'.

Kit

The shortened term for 'drum kit'. If someone said 'I need a new kit', it implies his drums are falling apart.

L

Lead

The cable that connects your guitar to the amplifier/effects pedal.

Lead Guitar

The guitar that plays the main melodies or solos as opposed to just the riffs. Also referred to as 'playing lead'. Slash from Guns n' Roses, for example, plays lead guitar.

Ledger-Line

In musical notation, one of that small lines that a note sits upon when off the top or bottom of the stave. A high "A" (5th fret on the top string) for example, in musical notation, would sit on a ledger line.

Legato

A way of playing notes together, without picking them all. "Slurred" is another way to

describe it. An entirely-tapped guitar run, or one played entirely by hammer-ons and pulls-offs would be known as a 'legato run'. When playing it, all the notes run together as one smooth passage.

Lute

An ancient, renaissance type of early guitar.

Lyre

Another ancient stringed instrument, this one more like a harp than a guitar, really.

Lyrics

The words of the song, i.e. the words the singer is singing/the rapper is rapping...etc.

M

Maestro

Within an orchestra, the maestro would be the conductor / the guy leading the performance.

Major Key

As opposed to a minor key, a piece in a major key would be built around the major scale and in its simplest terms, would usually sound 'happy' and 'positive' rather than 'sad'.

Mandolin

Another vintage, high-pitched guitar-type instrument, descended from the mandolin, usually with four pairs of metal strings and played with a plectrum.

Marshall

Legendary guitar equipment and amplification company, with certain amplifiers simply being referred to as 'a Marshall'. If that guitarist played 'a Les Paul into a Marshall', for example, it would mean he is playing a Gibson Les Paul guitar plugged into a Marshall amplifier.

Measure

A measure is the number of beats between a set amount of bar lines, but almost always, if someone refers to 'the third measure' or whatever, they're referring to the third bar. "Come in on the third measure" would mean they want you to start playing in the third bar.

Melody

The main 'tune' of the piece.

Metronome

A crucial piece of equipment if you're rehearsing in your bedroom. A metronome can be set to play a click at a set speed, allowing you to practice at different tempos to make sure you're playing is accurate!

Middle C

The "C" note that lies in the centre of a piano's keyboard.

Minim

A note that lasts for two beats. A half-note.

Modulate / Modulation

During a piece, to pass from one key into another. Technically, an abrupt key change where everything jumps up three frets or whatever isn't really a modulation. A modulation would be more of a subtle key change, using the chords in the original key, to drift musically from one into the other, rather than just drastically jump everything up a string.

Monotone

A piece performed using only one note could be referred to as either 'monotone' or 'monotonal'. Also used to describe either the repeated playing of a single note or perhaps a note droning under a melody.

Movement

A particular section of a composition. A particularly long composition, usually in Classical music, may be divided up into movements such as, for example, Vivaldi's "Four Seasons".

Mozart

Legendary classical music composer. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was his full name.

Mute

On the guitar, to mute the strings would mean to stop them from vibrating, with either the picking or fretting hand, so that they make no sound at all.

N

Natural

A note without a "sharp" or "flat" symbol. Occasionally, the note of "C", for example, may be referred to as "C natural". Any white key on the piano may also be referred to as a "natural".

Notation

Music displayed in the form of written symbols and characters. Tablature is not notation. The notes sitting on the lines that usually come with the tablature most definitely are. Any classical music, or piano music for example, would be written as notation.

Notes

Musical symbols written to express the value of certain tones.

Nut

Where the fretboard meets the headstock, the strings pass over the "nut" on the way to the tuning pegs.

O

Octave

A series of 8 consecutive diatonic tones. For example, If you were to play a C major scale, starting on a C (3rd fret, A string), by the time you reach the next C (5th fret, G string) you have played through one octave. An open G string and the G note at 12th fret on the same string would also be referred to as being 'one octave apart'. 17th Fret on the top E string is "three octaves above" an open A string.

Open String

A string on the guitar without any frets pressed down. If you just hit the string as it is, you 'played an open string'.

Orchestral

Music written in a way that mimics the sound and grandiosity of an orchestra would be referred to as 'orchestral'.

Over The Neck

A somewhat unnecessary, but pretty cool method of guitar playing whereby the fretting hand, rather than go round the back of the guitar neck, goes 'over the top' with the hand pointing downwards and fretting notes almost as if you were playing a keyboard, Michael Angelo Batio-style.

P

P

Should you see the symbol "p" on your notation, it stands for 'piano' and means it should be played quietly. "pp" or "ppp" would be referred to as 'pianissimo' and would suggest you play it very quietly. "pf" would suggest you start playing quietly, increasing to "forte" (loud).

Passage

Usually, a short section of a piece of music.

Pause

Within a piece of music, a "rest", where nothing would be played at all.

Pedals

In electric guitar playing, your pedals would be the effects boxes (or "stomp boxes")

underneath your feet that you can stand on to get random cool sounds to come out of.

Perfect Cadence

A song that ends on the root chord could be referred to as a 'perfect cadence'. For example, if you were playing a song in A minor and the last chord of the song was an A minor, that's a perfect cadence. If you ended it on a G major, that would be an 'imperfect cadence' and would make the song sound somewhat unfinished.

Perfect Intervals

The standard fourth, fifth and octave intervals. You may hear the phrase 'perfect fifth' or whatever, in which case it would simply be the standard fifth interval of the scale.

Phrase

A short piece of music, usually a particular run or lick.

Phrasing

Basically, phrasing would be using loud and quiet to more passionately express the piece of music, rather than just playing it straight through like a machine.

Pick

The piece of plastic between your thumb and your first fingers used for plucking the notes of the guitar. Also known as a plectrum.

Picking

The technique you use to pluck the notes of the guitar. There are different 'picking techniques' that can be used for different styles of music, explained elsewhere on this website!

Picking Hand

If you're playing the guitar in a right-handed way, the picking hand is your right hand. Play left handed, it's your left. Basically, the picking hand is the hand with the plectrum/pick in it that you're 'picking' the notes with.

Pitch

The position of a tone within a musical scale. The higher the note, the higher the pitch. For example, the G note at 15th fret is higher-pitched than the E at 12th fret.

Pitch-Pipe

A somewhat redundant piece of equipment used to tuning an instrument. Blowing into one of the top of the pipes, a perfectly in-tune note is produced by the pitch pipe, by which you can then tune up your guitar. Don't bother with one of these; some buy an electric tuner.

Pivot Pointing

Repetitively playing a note in between the notes of the melody, which tends to give it a very neo-classical Yngwie-Malmsteen sorta sound. Example: if you played 17th fret on the top E, then 15th, 17th again, 13th, 17th again, 12th, 17th again (17-15-17-13-17-12), the 17th fret would be your pivot note and that particular run could be referred to as 'pivot pointing', 'using a pivot note', or any other similar phrase.

Plectrum

Another word for a 'pick'. It's the piece of plastic between your thumb and first finger that you're plucking the notes with.

Position

The 'position' would refer to where your hand is on the fretboard. If you're playing a piece whereby your first finger is at, say, fifth fret (and the other fingers are to play notes above that fret), you could refer to being in 'fifth position' and so on. If playing chords, they might also be referred to by their 'position'. An E fifth power chord could be played in its 'first position' (bottom E to D string - 0,2,2) or in its second position (A string to G string - 7,9,9), for example and so on.

Prelude

A musical introduction to a main piece of music. A prelude comes before the main composition.

Presto

A classical music term, basically meaning 'fast'. Any piece with 'presto' in the title is

inevitably played rapidly, at a fast pace.

Programming

A recording technique whereby certain instruments may actually be programmed into a computer and played by the computer also. A piano part may be programmed, for example, if you don't have a keyboard player in the band (or if you do, but he stinks!)

Pulse

The "beat" of the music might sometimes (though not very often) be referred to as the "pulse".

Q

Quarter-Note

A crotchet, a note that lasts one beat.

Quarter-Rest

To play nothing at all, for one beat (i.e. the length of a quarter-note).

Quarter-Time

Playing over a drumbeat a quarter of the speed than might be normal for that piece of music could be referred to as 'quarter-time'. If you were playing a track really fast at 240bpm, then the drummer plays a big fill and comes back in at 60bpm (and everyone else keeps playing what they were playing), you could say you 'went into quarter-time'.

Quaver

An eighth-note. In 4/4 timing, you can fit 8 quavers into a bar. A quaver lasts for half the time of a crotchet.

Quintet

An instrumental performance of five musicians. If there are five dudes in your band, you could refer to yourselves as a 'quintet' although you almost certainly wouldn't.

R

Recital

Usually a classical music term. You might hear someone talking about a 'piano recital', for example. A recital would be either where all the pieces are played by one performer or where all the pieces played are written by the same composer.

Recorder

Annoying flute-type instrument, usually played by school children.

Reed

A small strip of material inside the mouthpiece of, say, a clarinet, that vibrates when blown upon to create the sound the instrument produces. Any instrument that uses one of these is referred to as a 'reed instrument'.

Riff

The main, usually repeated, musical phrase that may well be the basic foundation of your song. Usually a riff is played using more than one note at a time though you might hear the beginning of "Sweet Child O'Mine" also referred to as a 'riff'. It doesn't particularly matter; a riff is basically the catchy part played on the guitar.

Repeat

A repeat would simply mean you play that particular piece of the composition over again. Seeing two dots next to a bar-line in notation would signify a repeat. Two dots to the left of the bar line show where you need to start playing the repeat (i.e. when you get to there) and two dots to the right of a bar line would show the beginning of the part to be played over again, if that makes sense.

Reprise

The reappearance of a particular part of a composition, after not being heard for a while. Basically a repeat. Imagine you played a cool bit of music, then went into some other bits,

before ending on that piece of music again. The second time you played through it could be considered a 'reprise'.

Rest

An interval in the music, where nothing is played at all. A "three bar rest", in a 4/4 piece of music, would mean that you are to play nothing at all for a total of twelve beats.

Rhythm

The basic flow of the music, comprised by all of the parts that make up the piece. Not quite the same as a 'beat', really, as a rhythm would be the 'groove', 'feel' or 'vibe' you feel when hearing all of it at once. Perhaps. You know what I mean!

Roll / Drum Roll

Kinda like doing a trill on a drum, (usually on the snare). Often found in military drumming, basically the drummer would have both sticks basically bouncing off the snare skin to give a very fast, 'rolling' drum sound.

Root Note

The note that the chord or scale is built upon. In A major, the root note is A. In C minor, the root note is C, and so on.

Run

Kinda like a lick, sort of. A quick passage, usually on the lead guitar. The bit where the guitar solo builds up (the heavy bit) in the middle of the Sweet Child O'Mine solo could be referred to as a 'run'.

S

Score

The presentation of music across a number of staves. Rather than just sheet music / tab for the guitar part, a score tends to be the entire piece of music for all the instruments written on one sheet. A full score, for example, will have the guitar part, then the bass part on the stave below it, then the keyboard part below that, etc. It's like the notation for the entire band.

Scoring

The writing or putting-together of the score.

Section

An individual part of a piece.

Semibreve

A whole note, i.e. one that last for four beats or as 99% of what you'll probably be playing will be in 4/4 timing, a whole bar.

Semitone

Half a tone. On the guitar, this is a distance of one fret. For example, if you played 7th fret on the B string then played 8th fret after it, you have 'moved up a semitone'.

Seventh

The seventh note in the scale from the root note. To play, for example, an A minor 7 chord, you would play an A minor, but add in the 7th note of the A minor scale (which in this case would be a G).

Sextet

Almost never used in popular music, this term means a piece of music that is to be performed by either six musicians or indeed six singers.

Sextuplet

Six notes played in the time that four would usually be played. Sort of like a double-triplet.

Sharp

If someone said "that note was sharp", it might mean that you played it too high. A sharp note is, on the musical score, a note raised by a semitone. 1st fret on the E string is F, 2nd fret is F sharp, etc.

Signature

The signs at the beginning of the score (sharp signs, flat signs etc) are known as the signature, or 'key signature'.

Sinfonia

A symphony.

Sixth

Similar to the definition for seventh, really, except this refers to the sixth note of the scale.

Sixteenth Note

A note that lasts for a sixteenth of a bar. Usually, anything written in sixteenth notes will be played pretty fast!

Slide

To play one note, and keeping your finger pressed down, slide up (or down) the string to the next note indicated, without taking pressure off the string.

Slurred

"Slurred" and "legato" are basically the same thing. On your musical notation, slurred notes will be indicated by a curved line joining them all together (the line will appear slightly above or below the notes). This means you are to play them "legato", i.e. you don't pick them all. An entirely tapped guitar run, for example, would be considered 'slurred'.

Snare

The drum on the drumkit which tends to indicate the main beat of the song. A blastbeat would largely involve the snare. It's the particularly loud one next to the hi-hats!

Solo

A piece (or part of the song) that puts the emphasis on one single instrument (or voice, if you're into that).

Sound

Any type of noise can be considered a 'sound'.

Soundhole

In an acoustic guitar (or a classical for that matter), the soundhole is the hole in the body of the guitar where the sounds bounce around and is amplified.

Staccato

Any sort of staccato note is to be played abruptly, and stops suddenly. In a 'spiky' sort of way, if that makes any sense. Staccato notes tend to be short, sharp and abrupt.

Staff

The parallel lines that your musical notation is written upon.

Step

To go up (or down) one note of the scale. If you played an A note, then played a B note, you have 'gone up a step'.

Strumming

Rather than picking every note individually, strumming would be the technique whereby you hit all of the notes in the chord at once. Strumming is done to a particular rhythmic pattern, in time with the beat of the song.

T

Tablature

A form of writing music whereby rather than using notes sitting on lines, notes are represented by number sitting on lines. Tablature has six lines instead of notation's standard, each line representing a string on the guitar (bottom line is your bottom E string, top line is your top E string, etc). Very common for the electric guitar; in fact, to be honest, you probably don't even know how to read notation as long as you have tablature handy!

Tempo

Basically, another word used to describe the 'speed' of the piece.

Tenor

More of an Opera term really, a 'tenor' is a male singer with a high voice. The word 'tenor' can also be applied to certain musical instruments, a tenor saxophone, for example.

Third

The third note of the scale. A 'thirds harmony' for example, would see you play the third note of the scale, from the one you're playing, at the same time as you're playing it, if that makes sense. If you played an A and a C together, then a G and a B together, then an F with an A together, you'd be creeping down the A minor scales in a harmony using thirds.

Thirty-Second Note

Rare. A thirty-second note is a note that lasts a thirty-second of the bar. Usually, these would be played at warp speed.

Tied Notes

In musical notation, two notes joined together by a line, showing that you should hold the first one until you reach the second one. Numerous tied notes together could be played in a 'slurred' fashion.

Timing

Being able to play the piece strictly to the beat. If your timing was dodgy, you may find that you're either playing notes before or after they're meant to come in or if playing unaccompanied, the speed of the piece may be affected by poor timing. For example, you might start the piece slower than you finished. To improve your timing, you may want to invest in a metronome!

Timpani

A big drum, basically, usually found in an orchestra.

Tone

On an electric guitar, if someone refers to your tone they usually mean the actual sound your guitar is producing. "Hey, that guy has a great tone!". A tone is also an interval of two frets on the guitar. Play an A at second fret on the G string, then play a B at fourth fret, and you have 'moved up a tone'.

Tonic

The 'root' note of the scale. The note that the scale or chord you're playing is based around.

Tremolo

Another correct term for 'whammy bar'. It's the gadget hanging from the bridge on many guitar where when pressed, will lower the pitch of the note being played.

Transcribed

If a piece is 'transcribed', it has been written down either as notation or tablature for performance on an instrument, usually an instrument that it wasn't originally written for. Beethoven piano sonatas written for guitar, for example, could be referred to as having been 'transcribed for the guitar'.

Transposed

When a piece of music is written or arranged in a key different to what it originally was in you might find this with, perhaps, violin music written for the guitar. A violin plays at a higher pitch to the guitar, so any arrangements for the guitar may be written an octave lower than the original and can be referred to as having been 'transposed'. Likewise, if you were to write a song in A, then play it in C instead, you have 'transposed it into a different key'.

Treble Clef

The symbol at the beginning of your guitar notation, indicating that the second line from the bottom is G. For this reason, it is sometimes, though almost never, referred to as 'the G clef'.

Trill

Playing one note, then rapidly hammering on/pulling off another so that you don't particularly hear either note individually, rather you just hear the effect of two notes being rapidly alternated between.

Triplet

A group of three equal notes together, to be played in the same time as two of the same value.

Tune

Either the basically 'melody' of the piece or altering a string so that it is 'in tune'. "Hey, you need to tune your D string" would mean that your D string is out of tune and sounding horrible!

Tuning

Setting your guitar so that the strings accurately play the notes they're supposed to. If your 'tuning is out', you are 'out of tune' and will inevitably sound horrible! Every guitarist should have a tuner. Don't be one of those 'I can tune by ear' idiots!

U

Upstroke

Plucking the string with the pick in a manner that brings the pick through the string, in a direction towards you rather than away from you, which would be referred to as a 'downstroke'.

Unison

When two or more parts are playing the same note (or melody), they are seen as 'playing in unison'.

V

Variation

A slight change in an original melody or theme. If you were to play the main tune of a piece, but then kind of add a load of your own stuff into there, while keeping to the original 'feel' of the piece, you could be considered as having played a 'variation on a theme'.

Verse

In your song, the bit after the intro, before the chorus and the prechorus. Your song will probably have more than one verse, as well as more than one chorus. "Oh baby baby, how was I supposed to know" is the first line of the first verse of Britney Spears' "Baby One More Time", for example, for want of a better example!

Vibrato

The 'wobble' of a note. Playing a note, then kinda quivering your finger upon it to make it bend ever so slightly in and out of tune, I suppose but not so far as to be considered a bend in either direction. Very rarely will your favourite guitarist play a cool note without any sort of vibrato and this is something very important to your playing. Extreme vibrato could be added Steve Vai-style via the use of your tremolo.

Viola

A 'tenor' violin.

Violin

Do I really need to explain this? A four-stringed instrument, traditionally a classical instrument and usually one that leads the orchestra. Nigel Kennedy plays a violin.

Virtuoso

A musician who is particularly good! Paul Gilbert or Tommy Emmanuel, for example, could be referred to as 'virtuoso guitarists'. Any musician who kicks maximum levels of ass could be considered a 'virtuoso'. Usually this is a term to describe particularly advanced technical ability. For example, even if you think the dude from Korn kicks ass, he could hardly be considered a virtuoso.

Vocals

The 'singing' in your song, or indeed just the part performed by voice. Celine Dion's singing, Cannibal Corpse's death growls or Snoop Dogg's rapping are all 'vocals'.

Vox

A company that makes amplifiers and other guitar products. Brian May is a big fan of them.

W

Waltz

A (usually fairly slow) piece performed in $\frac{3}{4}$ timing - i.e. there are three beats to every bar, as opposed to the more common 4.

Whole Note

A note that rings for the entire duration of the bar.

Whole Step

Moving up two frets (a full tone).

Wind Instruments

Instruments that are blown into to create the sound. Clarinets, harmonicas and saxophones are all wind instruments.

X

Xylophone

A very old type of instrument, where keys lie across a board and are struck with a 'mallet' sort of thing.

Y

Yodelling

A type of singing that rapidly alternates between normal singing and falsetto. Usually, fairly amusing!

Z

Zither

A European stringed instrument, sorta like a bizarre guitar, in that there is a sound hole, strings stretched across it, but that's about where the instrument ends. It is played with it lying down, across your lap, in a similar sorta position to a lap-steel guitar.