

Strings? Why not!

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Contents

1	Philosophy	5
2	Getting ready to play	7
2.1	Tuning	7
3	First sounds	9
3.1	Fretboard	9
3.1.1	Note names	9
3.2	Finger names	11
3.2.1	Free and rest stroke	11
3.2.2	Exercises	12
4	Music notation	15
4.1	Music notation anatomy	15
4.1.1	Note names	15
4.1.2	Counting	16
4.1.3	Learning the main notes	18
4.1.4	Sharps and flats	22

1 Philosophy

The idea of this method is to give you the tools to be creative with music. Concretely this means that instead of saying "The D chord is played using this shape", the following will be said: "A chord is constructed like *this*. So to play a D chord do *this* and you will end up with this shape". Where the "*this*" is some knowledge you will learn.

During the method you will notice that you will see certain constructs/symbols/etc. that you may not know yet and that are not explained directly. This is with intention. The idea is that by exposing you early on to something, while not consciously needing it yet, it is easier to learn the meaning of it later on.

When putting it in steps it looks as follows:

1. Expose you to new concepts so you have seen it, but not necessarily understand it yet.
2. Guided by exercises and songs, explain the previously shown concepts and how they work together.
3. Understand the theory of the concepts and be able to use them in playing.
4. Start at 1. again with new concepts.

2 Getting ready to play

2.1 Tuning

Your Ukulele needs to be in tune. This means that each string has a certain pitch. Even though this is already implied, it is important to note that the relative pitch different per string is important as well.

In Figure 2.1 you see the names (letters) of the string.

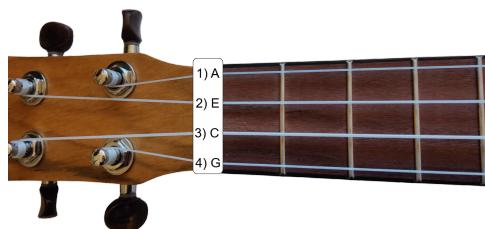


Figure 2.1: Names of the ukulele strings

A mnemonic is (from string 4 to 1):

- 4) **G** ood
- 3) **C** cooks
- 2) **E** eat
- 1) **A** all

You use a tuner to tune (see Figure 2.2). The tuner either gives a note value, and then you have to tune up or down to get the correct note on the screen. Or it shows a string number and you have to get the 'pointer' in the middle.

Be careful with tuning the string up (to a higher pitch). Especially the thinner strings can break if they are too tight.



Figure 2.2: Using a tuner on a ukulele

Another tuning options relies on the previously mentioned difference in pitch between the strings. In Figure 2.3 you see which positions on the neck have the same pitch the a thinner open string.

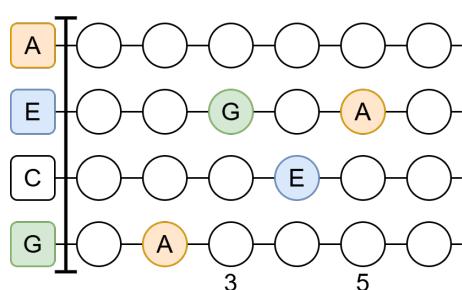


Figure 2.3: Relative tuning

3 First sounds

3.1 Fretboard

3.1.1 Note names

Each position on the neck has a different pitch. The metal bars on the neck are called the **frets**. For example, if someone asks to press the 2nd fret on the 3rd string, then you press your finger in the area of the green dot. Right next to the fret. See Figure 3.1.

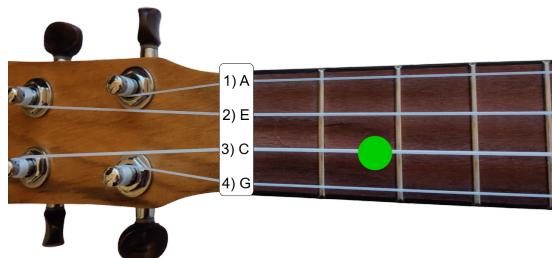


Figure 3.1: The green dot indicates the finer position for the 2nd fret on the 3rd string

In music there are 12 different pitches before coming 'back around'. When you come back at the same note letter you are an octave higher. The 12 different notes are shown below.

A A♯ B C C♯ D D♯ E F F♯ G G♯

You may see that there are only **7** different letters and **5** letters with a **#**. These **#** symbols are called **sharps**. On the fretboard a **#** means you move one fret up (to the body of the guitar).

In Figure 3.2 you see a music staff with underneath it tablature (TAB). In the next section we will learn to read the notes. For now you can try to read the tabs first to play the sequence.

Each line in the TAB section represents a ukulele string, with the 4th (G) string on the bottom. The numbers indicate which fret should be pressed (a 0 means an open string). So the TAB in Figure 3.2 says to first play an open G string, and then play each ascending fret up to the 12th fret.

Figure 3.2: An octave from C to C on the 3rd C string with sharps

Remember the relative tuning? This implies that the same note (and pitch) can be played on different string. This is demonstrated in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3: An octave from C to C on strings 1 to 3 with sharps

Besides sharps there are also flats. A flat (\flat) means to go a halve tone (one fret) down. Rewriting Figure 3.3 with flats would look like Figure 3.4.

In Figure 3.4 also a new symbol is shown. The natural (\natural). This means that the note on which a \flat or \sharp was placed, now is 'normal' again. Whenever a \flat or \sharp is added to a note, it remains valid for this note up to the end of the measure. What a 'measure' is will be explained later.

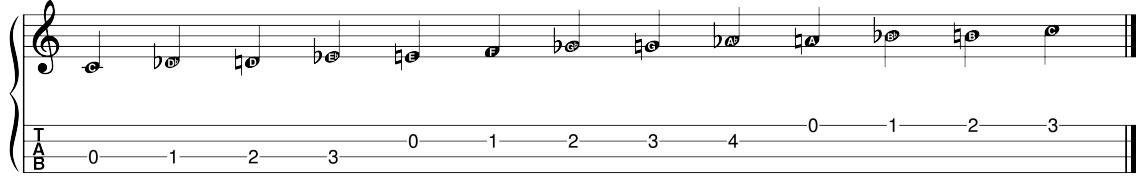


Figure 3.4: An octave from C to C on strings 1 to 3 with flats and naturals

3.2 Finger names

When playing guitar, your fingers will be given a name. This makes it easier in music notation to indicate which finger should be used. The names are shown in Figure 3.5.

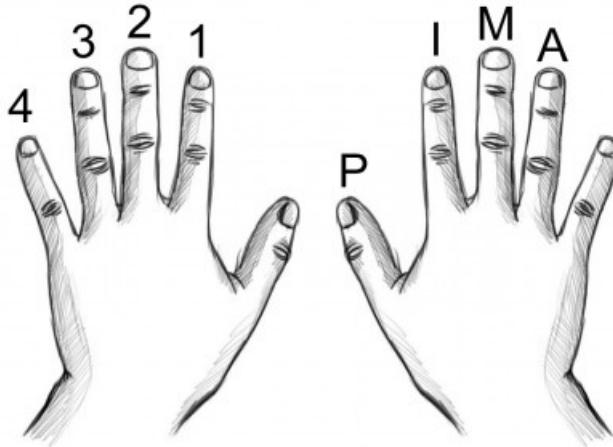


Figure 3.5: Names of the fingers [2]

3.2.1 Free and rest stroke

With a free stroke you hold your right hand in a relaxed position over the strings (see Figure 3.6). To play a string, move your finger through the string without lifting the upper part of your finger. Your finger should slightly curl into your hand. Once you made the sound, move your finger back to the relaxed position.

The trick now is, to not hit the other strings, and to not 'pluck' the string (making a buzzing sound).



(a)



(b)

Figure 3.6: Free stroke position [1]

A rest stroke may sound a bit louder (but with some practicing a free stroke can be as loud). Like the name suggests, a rest stroke means that you move your finger through a string to play it, but now you let your finger rest on the next string.

3.2.2 Exercises

In the exercises below you see some symbols above the notes. The numbers with circles around them indicate on which string the note should be played (this can also be seen from the TAB). The *i* and *m* indicate which right-hand finger should be used to play the note.

Play exercise Figure 3.7 first with a rest stroke and then with a free stroke to feel the difference.

Figure 3.7: Exercise: rest and free strokes

This second exercise (Figure 3.8) is similar to Figure 3.7, but a bit more challenging.

Figure 3.8: Exercise: changing strings with *i* and *m* fingers

In Figure 3.9 you will also use your left hand. The numbers above the notes indicates which left-hand finger should be used to press the fret. Play this exercise using alternating *i* and *m* fingers.

Figure 3.9: Exercise: fretting on 1st string

Exercise Figure 3.10 is adds another string to the exercise.

Figure 3.10: Exercise: fretting on 1st and 2nd string

4 Music notation

4.1 Music notation anatomy

4.1.1 Note names

You have already seen the music staff from Figure 4.1 in the previous exercises. However, the meaning of it was not explained yet.

The letters A-G on the staff show which line on the staff has which note value. The notes that are in between the lines nicely spell out "FACE", making it easy to remember. The notes that are on the lines can be remembered with the mnemonic "Every Good Boy Does Fine". But another important thing to see is that the notes go up alphabetically (starting again with A after G).

The most left symbol () is called the G clef. Note that the curl of the G clef is on the line of the G note.

The vertical line in the middle indicates the start/end of a new measure, and the thinner vertical line in at the end indicates the end of the piece.

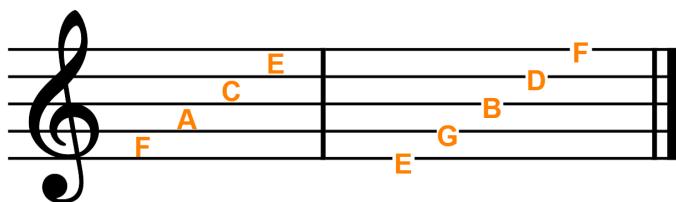


Figure 4.1: Note names on the staff in two measures

The ukulele is mostly known for its happy strumming of course. What you are playing then are chords. A chord is a collection of notes. So while it maybe is more fun in the short term to start with strumming chords from the start, it pays off in the long term to learn your notes and where they are on the fretboard.

Additionally, training your finger-style playing from the start will help to play melody lines through the chords more easily.

Once we know our notes on the fretboard, we will start to play chords and learn how to construct them from scratch.

4.1.2 Counting

So far we have also only seen one type of note. The quarter note. However, there are more. See Figure 4.2. The $\frac{4}{4}$ means that there can fit 4 (top number) quarter notes (bottom number) in a measure.



Figure 4.2: Note duration

Important: A whole note (\circ) equal 4 quarter notes (\bullet). It does **not** equal a whole measure.

There are also other time signatures. The top value indicates how many notes of the bottom number's duration fit in a measure. So a $\frac{3}{4}$ time signature can fit 3 quarter notes per measure. And a $\frac{6}{8}$ time signature can fit 6 eighth notes per measure. Note that $\frac{3}{4}$ and $\frac{6}{8}$ indicate the same duration per measure, but they provide a different feel. This is demonstrated in Figure 4.3.

In Figure 4.3 you also see a new duration notation. In the first measure with $\frac{6}{8}$ timing, there are dots next to the notes (\bullet^*). This means that the note has a duration of 1.5x its original duration.

The ">" symbol means that this note should be played with a more powerful accent. The **bold** numbers above the notes indicate the counting of the notes. A bold number means to put an accent on it, but played less accented than the ones where there is also an ">" symbol.

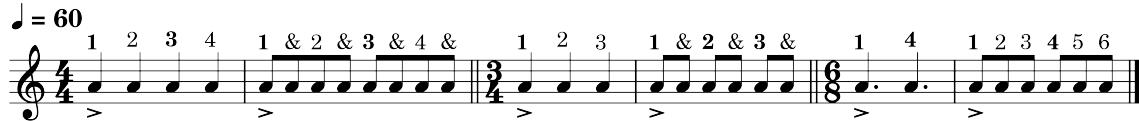


Figure 4.3: Time signatures

Where notes indicate when to play a sound, rests indicate when to be silent. In Figure 4.4 the most common rest durations are shown.

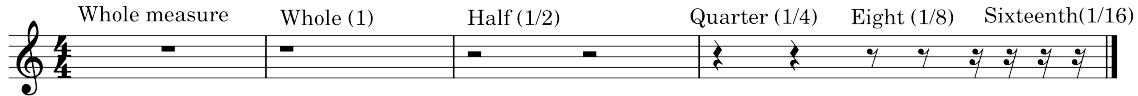


Figure 4.4: Rest notations of different duration

In Figure 4.5 an exercise is provided to count the rests. Remember to take this slow and to be conscious about the counts. As a help the tempo is set to the 60 quarter notes per minute (BPM). This way each quarter note is 1 second. But feel free to play it slower.



Figure 4.5: Rest notations of different duration

4.1.3 Learning the main notes

To learn the notes we will first start with the well known "Jingle bells". This song uses all non-sharp/flat notes on the third and second string of the ukulele up to the 3rd frets. See Figure 4.6 for the tabs of these notes.

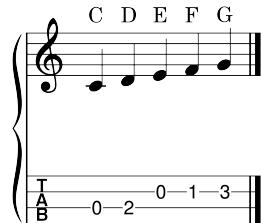


Figure 4.6: Notes used for Jingle bells

Jingle bells

Music: James Lord Pierpont
Arranged: Enzo Evers

Figure 4.7: Jingle bells

In preparation to play the well-known "Tetris" tune, the notes from Figure 4.8 should be learned. Note that only the A note is new compared to the notes in Jingle Bells (Figure 4.6).

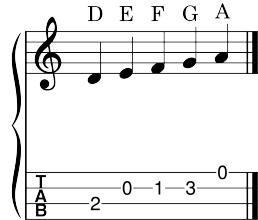


Figure 4.8: Notes used for the first part of the Tetris tune

In Figure 4.9 the first part of the Tetris tune is written. This time no TABs are shown. This exercise has 4 different note durations and 5 different notes pitches.

Tetris (first part)

Music: Hirokazu Tanaka
Arranged: Enzo Evers



Figure 4.9: First part of the Tetris tune



The "Tetris" tune is derived from a Russian folk song called "Korobeiniki", which is based on a similar named poem written by Nikolay Nekrasov. [4]

In the following song you will learn the remaining non-sharp/flat notes on the first string. The B and the C.

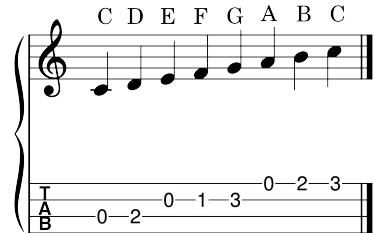


Figure 4.10: Notes used for the song "De Vogeltjesdans"



In Figure 4.10 you not only see the notes used in the song, but you also see the C major scale. Later on we will talk more about scales.

De vogeltjesdans

Music: De Electronica's
Arranged: Enzo Evers

Figure 4.11: De vogeltjesdans - De Electronica's



While most people know this as the Dutch titled "De vogeltjesdans". It is based on the original song called "Der Ententanz" composed by Werner Thomas. [3]

No new notes to learn for "Seven Nation Army" (Figure 4.12).

Seven Nation Army
The White Stripes

Music: Jack White, Meg White
Arranged: Enzo Evers

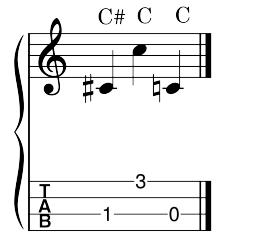
The musical notation consists of two staves of music. The top staff begins with a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 125$. It contains six measures of music, each featuring eighth-note patterns. The bottom staff continues the pattern for another six measures, ending with a single eighth note. Measure numbers 1 through 12 are indicated above the staves.

Figure 4.12: Seven Nation Army - The White Stripes

4.1.4 Sharps and flats

In the beginning on this method it was already mentioned that sharps \sharp increase the note by a half step and flats \flat decrease the note by a half step. It has also been mentioned that a sharps and flats are valid for the duration of a measure. If a note should get its 'normal' sound back, a natural \natural symbol is placed in front of it. This undoes the sharp/flat for the rest of the measure (until another sharp/flat is placed).

What has not been mentioned yet, is that a sharp/flat placed a note is valid only for that pitch of the note (position on the sheet music). See for example Figure 4.13a. Here you see that the first C (open third string) got a sharp, and is therefore now played a half tone (1 fret) higher on the 1st fret. The C that is played one octave higher on the first string is still a C. When the C note then gets a natural sign, it becomes the normal C note again which is played on the open third string. The same example can be given for flats (Figure 4.13b).



(a) Usage of sharps and naturals



(b) Usage of flats and naturals

Figure 4.13: Sharps, flats and naturals

Sometimes a song uses a note with a flat or sharp a lot of times. It can then be considered to be in a certain key (we will come back to that later). It is then not desired to add sharps/flats all over the sheet music. That could get messy. Instead, the sharps/flats used for the song are shown as the beginning of the piece and apply to all pitches of the notes (unless natural symbols are used). Note that this is different than adding sharps inside a measure, there it only applied to that specific pitch.

See for example Figure 4.14 and Figure 4.15.

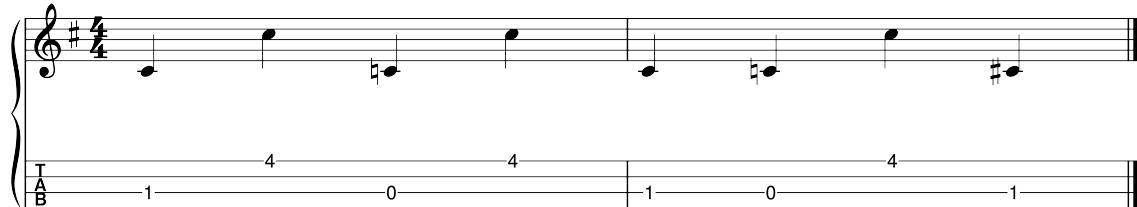


Figure 4.14: Example of adding sharps at the beginning of the music

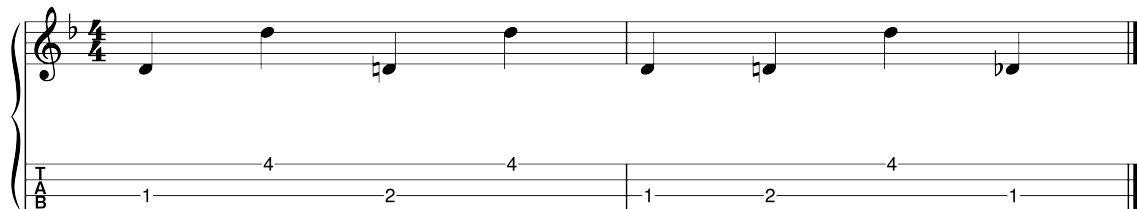


Figure 4.15: Example of adding flats at the beginning of the music

Before playing some pieces to learn the sharps and flats, lets first show the sharps and flats on the fretboard again:

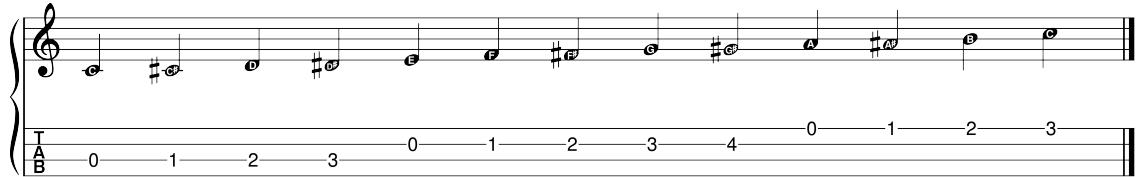


Figure 4.16: An octave from C to C on strings 1 to 3 with sharps

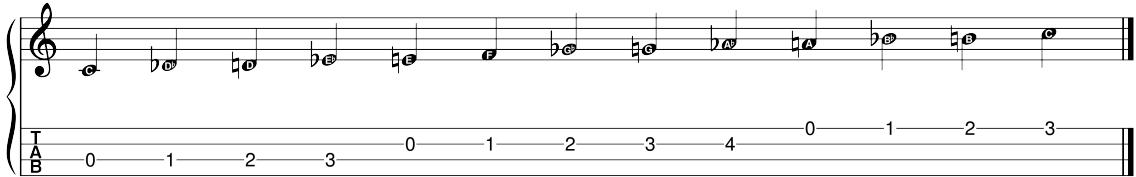


Figure 4.17: An octave from C to C on strings 1 to 3 with flats and naturals

Also remember that between each note, except for B-C and E-F, there is two half steps. Between B-C and E-F there is only one half step.

A	A \sharp	B	C	C \sharp	D	D \sharp	E	F	F \sharp	G	G \sharp
A	B \flat	B	C	D \flat	D	E \flat	E	F	G \flat	G	A \flat

Table 4.1: Sharp and flat intervals

Remember that a sharp and flat simply move the note a half step up or down respectively. So what would happen when the E note gets a \sharp ? It would become an F. And what does an $F\flat$ resolve to? An E indeed. The same holds for the B-C interval. $B\sharp$ is the same as a C and a $C\flat$ is the same as a B.

The music shown in Figure 4.18 doesn't show any symbols in the notes. But it does show two flat symbols at the beginning of the music. In this case it shows a B_{\flat} and an E_{\flat} . Note that these apply to any pitch of the B and E notes in the music.

An empty tablature staff has been added. You can fill this in yourself to help learn the position of the (flat) notes on the fretboard.

Memory
Cats (musical)

Music: Andrew Lloyd Webber
Arranged: Enzo Evers

A musical score for the song "Memory" from the musical "Cats". The score consists of a treble clef staff and an empty tablature staff below it. The treble clef staff has a key signature of two flats, indicating B-flat and E-flat. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 70. The first two notes on the treble staff are B-flat and E-flat, respectively. The empty tablature staff below it has six horizontal lines, corresponding to the six strings of a guitar or bass. The letter 'A' is written above the first line, and the letter 'B' is written above the second line, likely indicating the string positions for the flat notes.

Figure 4.18: Memory from the Cats musical

In Hedwig's Theme (see the next page) you will see the usage of sharps, flats, naturals and music-wide sharps.

It also introduces one new note. The high D note. This note has not been played in earlier songs yet. But try to see if you can figure out the position based on your knowledge of the note intervals (Table 4.1) and how that relates to the frets on the fretboard. If you want to know the answer, have a look at Figure 4.13b.

To better help learn the position of these notes there is an empty tablature staff added. You can fill this staff with the correct tabs to help you learn.

After that there is the song "He's a pirate" from the "Pirates of the Caribbean" movies. This song doesn't introduce any new notes and is here purely for review.

Hedwig's Theme

Harry Potter movies

Music: John Williams
Arranged: Enzo Evers

J = 180

11

21

31

He's a pirate

Pirates of the Caribbean

Music: Klaus Badelt, Hans Zimmer
Arranged: Enzo Evers

$\text{♩} = 210$ Start quiet and build up volume

7

14

21

The orchestra's sound goes up in pitch.
We stay stay the same pitch.

28

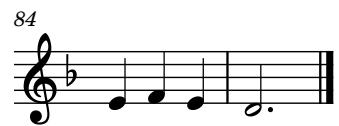
35

43

51

59

67



The following song introduces two new high notes. The E and F (see 4.19). Note that in Figure 4.20 all F notes become an F♯ due to the sharps at the start of the song.

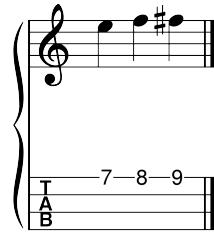


Figure 4.19: Position of the high E, F, and F♯ notes

The notes here play the singing/melodie line. Therefore the chords are placed above the notes to make it easier for two people to play together. One plays the chords, the other the melody. But don't worry about the chords yet. We come to that in the next chapter.

Just like with the other songs. Feel free to fill in the tabs to help you learn the notes.

C'est La Vie (intro + chorus melody)

Chef'Special

Music: Chef'Special
Arranged: Enzo Evers

$\text{♩} = 90$

Chords: Em, A, D, G, C♯dim, F♯

6 Chords: Bm, Em, A, D, G, Em, F♯7

10 Chords: Bm, Em, A, D, G, Em, F♯7

Figure 4.20: C'est La Vie - Chef'Special

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