

Glossary

Included below are short definitions of guitar-specific terms and general “classical” and non-Western musical terminology that are found within the chapters in this book. It does not include many terms that are already defined within the chapters themselves. The definitions given here are for quick reference only, and for the most part explained in relation to the guitar. For longer and generally more detailed information, the reader is encouraged to consult the entries in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd edn., ed. S. Sadie (London, 2001). Words in the definitions that appear in boldface can be found as entries elsewhere in the glossary.

Appoggiatura: An auxiliary note that, after creating a slight dissonance with the bass, “leans” into the main note. It was commonly used in music of the Baroque period.

Arch-top: Pioneered by the Gibson L-5 (1924), the arch-top featured two f-holes (rather than a single soundhole, as on the flat-top models), and a more arched soundboard, like a violin or cello.

Arpeggio: A chord that has been broken up as a series of repeated patterns, or as successive notes, rather than simultaneously.

Blue notes: In jazz or blues playing, the largely flexible third and seventh notes of the scale, which are often flattened or otherwise altered.

Chitarra battente: A wire-strung five-course guitar played with a quill and probably used mainly for strumming chords.

Chitarrino: Italian term used to describe the small four-course Renaissance guitar that flourished during the sixteenth century.

Chromaticism: The “coloring” of scales and chords with notes from outside the scale.

Comping: From the word “accompanying,” its meaning in jazz denotes the use of well-chosen sparse chords when accompanying, usually not in regular or predictable strum patterns as in country, folk, or rock.

Counterpoint: Musical texture that combines independent, simultaneous lines; opposite of **homophony** and analogous to **polyphony**.

Course: The name given to the individual pairs of strings found on lutes and early guitars. Sometimes courses are tuned in

unison, sometimes in octaves. Even though the highest course of a lute is usually single, it is still called a “course” for practical purposes. A ten-course lute, then, would have one single course and nine pairs.

Diapasons: With regard to plucked string instruments, the term refers to added bass strings on a lute or guitar that lie off the fingerboard and are plucked only at their pre-tuned pitch (i.e., they cannot be fretted).

Diatonic: In Western harmony, the notes (and only those notes) that make up the major or minor scale. In the scale of C major, the diatonic notes are CDEFGAB(C); any **chromatic** alterations (C#, E♭, etc.) are departures from the diatonic scale.

Diferencias: Spanish term for variations or divisions (the breaking up of long-note passages into smaller units of scales).

Dominant: The fifth degree of the scale above the **tonic**, and in Western harmony the chord that prepares, or leads back to, the arrival of the tonic.

Double stops: In a guitar solo, the playing of two notes (“doubling”) simultaneously on two separate strings (e.g., a typical Chuck Berry guitar solo).

Dreadnought: Perhaps the most famous Martin guitars (designated by their numbers D-18, D-28, D-45, etc.), these large steel-string acoustics feature wide waists, sloping shoulders, and a very resonant, bassy sound, preferred by country, bluegrass, and folk players.

Flat-top: Similar to and inspired by classical guitars, steel-string flat-top guitars were introduced by Martin, featuring relatively flat soundboards and different body construction compared to the **arch-tops**.

Glissando: A slide from one specific note to another, including notes in between, or a slide for effect, as in across the keys of the piano, with no specific beginning or ending note.

Hammer-ons: Technique used (and often overused) by heavy metal guitarists, involving the picking of notes with the left-hand only though “hammering” the string against the fret with the third or fourth finger.

Heptatonic scale: Any seven-note scale.

Heterophony: A style, prevalent in Asia and in the Middle East, in which one player sings

or plays a melody while another duplicates it with added embellishments and variations, or in which two players vary it simultaneously.

Homophony: Literally, “sounding together” (analogous to homorhythmic); a musical texture consisting either of melody with a chordal accompaniment that moves “in sync” with the melody or simply of a succession of chords. Almost all rock and folk music is homophonic; the music of Bach, with its layered, independent voices, or **counterpoint**, is generally not.

Intabulation (intabulating): The practice of writing music in **tablature**; or, the transcription and arrangement of music in staff notation into tablature, as was common during the sixteenth century.

Maqam: In Arab and Turkish musics, a melodic mode, distinguished by scale, pitch hierarchy, and characteristic phrases, used as a basis for improvisation and composition.

Melisma: Vocal passage, or vocalization, in which only one or two syllables of a word, or a one-syllable word, are vocalized over many notes.

Minimalism: Style in which a single rhythmic pattern, or even pulse, underlying a static harmony (often only a single chord) is extended over the entire time (or a large part) of the composition.

Monophony: Music written or improvised as a single melody, without accompaniment, and without supporting parts, e.g., Gregorian chant.

Open tunings: Guitar tunings that allow the open strings to sound as a chord (i.e., without fretting). The most common are E tuning (open strings sound an E major chord; from highest to lowest EBG#EBE) and G tuning (open strings sound a G major chord, DGBDGD).

Ostinato: A short “obstinate” musical pattern – rhythmic, melodic, or chordal – that repeats many times in succession. The repeating guitar jabs in a reggae piece can be considered a simple type of ostinato.

Oud: Arab, fretless lute played with a plectrum or quill. The Western lute of the Renaissance, and its name, are derived from this instrument.

Pentatonic scale: Theoretically, any five-note scale. But the term is usually used to describe a particular type used in, for example, southeast Asian and African music, as well as in blues, rock, and “orientalist” classical music, that is analogous to the scale produced when playing only the black notes of the

piano, e.g. C#–D#–F#–G#–A#, or beginning on any note and adhering to the same intervals: major second – minor third – major second – major second.

Polyphony: Musical texture characterized by independent lines and **counterpoint**. Opposite of **homophony**.

Portamento: Vocal slide from one pitch to another, generally for expressive purposes.

Pull-offs: Technique similar to **hammer-ons**, in which the note is sounded by pulling the string off the fret with the left hand, rather than plucking it with the right.

Rasgueado: Strum as opposed to picking (*punteado*).

Riff: a short, recognizable, melodic or chordal idea around which a song is based, i.e., the fuzz riff in the Stones’ “Satisfaction.” In this way, riffs are frequently **ostinatos**.

Rose: The intricately carved sound holes found on lutes, **vihuelas**, and early guitars.

Scordatura: The “distuning” of the guitar from its standard tuning as required by composers for specific pieces.

Serialism: Twentieth-century compositional technique involving the use of a pre-planned ordered series that controls the choices of melody, chords, and even rhythm.

Skiffle: English guitar-oriented country/folk style popularized in the 1950s by Lonnie Donegan (and profoundly influential on the young John Lennon).

Tablature: System of notation used in lute and guitar music prior to the middle of the eighteenth century, and used currently in folk and rock. In its most basic form, tablature shows where the notes are fingered on the neck of the instrument by the use of letters or numbers (0 or a = open string; 1 or b = first fret, etc.) placed on a “staff” of six horizontal lines designating the six strings of the instrument.

Tapping: An innovative electric guitar technique in which the *right* (picking) hand taps a string against the frets on the fingerboard to produce notes.

Theorbo: Long, extended-neck bass lute used mainly for accompanying between about 1600 and 1720. It was usually strung with fourteen single strings.

Tonic: In simplest terms, the central note or chord that designates the main key of the piece; it is usually the chord with which the piece begins and ends. The tonic of the Pachelbel Canon is D; the tonic of the Beatles’ “Something” is C.

Tremolo: Literally, “trembling,” the rapid repetition of a single note, usually as a pattern

on the highest strings in twos, triplets, quintuplets, etc., sometimes in conjunction with bass notes played with the thumb.

Twelve-bar blues: What has come to be accepted as the standard blues form, it consists of three musical phrases, each four bars (or measures) in length.

Vamping: Improvised or semi-improvised repetition of a chord or melodic sequence,

usually found in introductions before the soloist hits the stage or at ends of pieces, especially fade-outs.

Vihuela: The Spanish guitar-shaped version of the lute. It flourished in sixteenth-century Spain, normally had five **courses**, and was played with the fingers. The surviving repertory, all in **tablature**, is of extremely high quality.