

Preliminaries

Are You Left-handed? If you aren't, skip down to *Choice of Guitar*. If you are, may I (respectfully) suggest that you consider playing the guitar "right-handed" (holding the neck in your left hand). There is a practical reason for this: Since it is a right-handed world, the vast majority of guitars that you'll ever run into are set up and strung to be played right-handed. If you decide to learn to play left-handed, you'll find that you won't be able to just walk in and pick up any old guitar lying around at a friend's house, and visiting a guitar store can become a nightmare.

Besides, when humans play guitars, the two hands are assigned such different functions (picking with one hand versus fretting with the other) that it's not at all clear which function should be given to the dominant hand. Each hand learns to become proficient at its own job. In any case, for the rest of this book, I'll be calling the left hand the **fretting** hand and the right hand the **picking** hand, and the chord diagrams will depict left-hand fingers.

Choice of Guitar. To me, it really doesn't matter what kind of guitar you use (acoustic steel-string, electric, classic) as long as the *action* isn't too high. The action is the distance between the string and the fretboard; it's an indication of how far you have to push down on the string to get it to ring. Not only does high action make it harder to depress the string itself, but it also makes it too easy to accidentally touch and deaden any *other* strings that *should* be ringing at the same time.

If you're stuck with a guitar with high action, it might be possible to get it lowered at a guitar shop. If you don't have a guitar yet, drag a guitar-playing friend along with you for advice when you go to get one. And some stores will rent.

In the *killer* diagram to the right, you will find all the salient features of Your Basic Guitar. For an electric guitar, add some knobs and some pickups; for a classic guitar, subtract the pick guard.

Oh, and *up is down and down is up*. "Up the neck" means in the direction of the soundhole, where *the notes are higher in pitch*.

