



Left Hand, Right Hand

The Coordination Between the right and left hands

By Dave Woods

Dave Woods is a New Age composer and teacher who also plays, composes, and improvises on the Guitar. Dave's own website Through Jazz Guitar Starting Right, Dave is trying to pass along everything He's learned to anyone who can use it, and make the instruction affordable. Dave has graciously given six string revival permission to reprint his articles.

All successful guitar playing depends on the coordination between the two hands. One hand out of coordination with the other can throw both of them off. so it's best to study each of them one at a time, and then try to get them together. When you truly achieve anything in music it becomes a feeling, and you know it by that feeling. Feelings are the hardest things in the world to convey in words.

The Left Hand

The Thumb and Fingers are not opposing jaws of a vise. The Thumb is a sensor that touches the back of the neck to sense the balance of the hand, and it only presses when it's absolutely necessary. When the necessity is over, it goes right back to it's function of being a sensor again. The weight of the arm is what holds a string down. Make a **hook** with your 1 st finger, place it on the 1 st string at any fret, keep your thumb off the back of the neck. a little tension in the finger alone, just enough to hold the shape of the "hook" is all you should need.

Next, sense the tip of your elbow, and let it gently swing back and forth like the pendulum on a clock. This should enable you to feel the weight of your arm on the tip of your 1st finger. If it doesn't, then you're holding your arm up in the air with muscular tension. Relax your shoulder and your arm until you feel the full weight of the arm fully on the end of the 1st finger.

Try curling your first finger like you're doing chin ups with the finger, and sense that you're lifting the weight of your arm with it. This will put you in touch with the right feeling. Next, do the same thing with the 2nd finger, the 3rd, and the 4th finger. Do this



slowly, and sense yourself from the inside out as you do. This is how you and your fingers inwardly sense the feeling of balance.

While you're balanced on any finger you should be able to freely wiggle the other fingers that aren't holding down a string. If their still tied up, it means you're still off balance. Lightly swing that elbow till' you feel the weight of your arm.

What happens when you're walking a balance bar, and you're fighting to keep your balance, your whole body spasms up, right? How can any graceful movement be generated when the body is in this condition. And yet, players practice for hours with the left hand off balance, trying to achieve a functional result while they block their own progress at the same time.

Once you can feel the weight of the arm as the force holding down the string, and the thumb is just lightly touching the back of the neck, you can sense your body in relation to gravity, Your left hand is no longer a vise, and you can dance. every finger you put down on a note feels balanced. The other fingers waiting to play feel relaxed and free, and can dart to any other note that you spontaneously hear.

Place your 1 st finger on the first string, then place your 2 nd finger on the next fret . Relax your 1 st finger as you place the 2 nd finger, but leave it laying on the string. keep this procedure up as you place each successive finger. When you place your 4 th finger to hold down the string, the 1 st , 2 nd , and 3 rd , fingers should be laying on the string but not holding it down.

Starting with the first finger, move to the 2nd string. Relax the 1st finger, leaving it on the string as you place the 2nd finger, and repeat this same process with the 3rd, and 4th fingers one at a time as you place them. keep the same process up as you put each finger down. Move across the fretboard to the 3rd string, the 4th string, the 5th string, and the 6th string repeating this same process. Do this **slowly** and concentrate on your balance and the way it feels, sense your breathing.

Here is the reason for this. When you're un necessarily holding down a note that has just been played, while another finger is playing a different note on that same string, the finger that's holding for nothing has to release it's tension before it can go for the next note you hear. This makes your fingers fly up in the air as you play, and it's un necessary tension and waste motion that just gets in your way.

As you go across the fretboard , imagine that your fingers are climbing string by string up the side of a wall, and as you do this you're lifting up the weight of the arm with your



fingers. Relax each finger and leave it laying on the string after you play the note. When you reach the top, 6 th string, go back down string by string. Now you feel like you're gradually lowering the weight of the arm back down the wall.

The weight of the arm is automatically re adjusting the necessary length of your fingers so that the length is just right to reach each string. This kind of practicing is like slow motion Karate moves. Sense within yourself into your body. Relax but stay focused every second.

Unnecessary tensions and physical glitches not only make getting to what you hear difficult, they also screw up what you're hearing in the moment. This is why it's so important to practice slowly, and to be aware of your body from the inside out. Sincere players afflicted with these problems can practice everyday, unaware of what's holding them back. This deals with with going across the fretboard,. Let's see about going up and down.

Play a G maj.7 (3,x,4,4,3,x) chord with the root on the 6th string at the 3rd fret. The neck of the guitar should be at an upward angle from the body of the guitar. When you're playing standing up, this will automatically be the case.

Next, let go and let your left hand and arm FALL so that it hits the body of the guitar with a resounding "thunk". If you don't hear the "thunk", it means that there's muscular tension in your arm that's defying gravity. We don't want to defy gravity, we want to use it to get where we want to go. Keep this up till' you really feel like you're abandoning the weight of your left arm and hand to the fall. Get that "thunk". In going in the direction from the nut to the body of the guitar, You "let go" and fall toward what you want to get to. This is the fastest way to get there.

OK, but what about going in the other direction from the body of the guitar toward the nut? Imagine that you've got a quarter in the palm of your hand, and you arm is making a motion to flip it up in the air so you can catch it again. The more energy you put into the "flip", the higher the quarter goes up in the air before it's momentum gives out, and gravity pulls it down. less energy in the flip makes the quarter rise and fall from a lower height.

With your left hand and arm resting on the body of the guitar, make that flip motion so that the momentum makes it rise only as far up as the 3rd fret, and no further. At the apex of the flip, at the 3rd fret, you should feel gravity take over, and the arm starting to fall back down toward body of the guitar again. The advantage of the flip motion is that



there's an initial burst of energy that creates momentum, and as momentum carries you forward, you can release all muscular tension.

the shape of the fingering for the G maj.7 chord is "made in the air" on the way to the 3rd fret. As the momentum dies out EXACTLY at the 3rd fret and gravity takes over, the fingertips are already shaped, and touch down on the G maj.7 chord. The pull of gravity toward the body of the guitar takes over, and the weight of the arm kicks in as the main factor in holding down the notes of the chord. Too much energy in the initial flip will make you overshoot the 3rd fret, and you'll have to put on the brakes. This again, creates an unnecessary muscular tension and screws up the flow. The by word in expending energy while playing is "just enough.....to get it there.

The best way to get Your fingers used to making the fingering "shape" of any chord in the air, is to strum the chord you're learning four to the bar. On the 2nd and 4th beats of the measure, release the pressure on the strings. Here, you can practice lifting your fingers and higher higher off the fretboard after the 2 and 4 just as an exercise. Your fingers will learn to remember the shape of the chord while they're in the air, and then accurately place the fingered shape of the chord back on the fretboard.

Next, let's say that you're on the Gmaj.7 at the 3rd fret and you want to play D7 (10,x,10,11,10, x) at the 10th fret. You let go, and allow your left arm to fall toward the D7. The "shape" of the D7 is made in the air during the fall. You sense the weight of the arm falling. At the 10th fret, you stop the weight of the fall like a base ball player sliding into home plate, and gravity takes over.

What I've talked about till now will free the left hand so your fingers can dance. The left hand and its fingers have to be able to dance before the music can sound and feel like it's dancing.

The Natural Players

I've had the privilege of being around some great natural players. Their response to what I've said here would be, "now that I've stopped to think about it, ...of course". To them it was self explanatory, how could it be otherwise.

I think that this is how they got there. In listening to jazz, and other kinds of music that they liked, the first thing they grasped was the image of the emotional intent of the music. They sensed the momentum of the swing, the organic feeling of physical movement in the inflections of the rhythms in the phrases. They were not primarily concerned with academics.



A great bass player who I roomed with would listen to music with me. I would ask about a phrase that just went by, " what did he do there?", thinking about chord progressions etc. The bass player would get up and do a little dance, that would visually portray the emotional message of what had been played. I could not escape the meaning of what he showed me That was his answer. He had a lot of heart, putting up with me like that.

Great natural players have such a strong inner grasp of what the music is conveying in body language, that they never lose sight of that while they're trying to learn, and developing ways of getting their fingers to make it happen. They listen and understand with their bodies, and the entire body is the ear.

Therefore, all they had to do was experiment with getting their hands to move in ways that allowed the physical meaning the swing and dance to come out. This is how they arrived naturally at what I've been talking about here. Thank you Duke Clemmons, my friend. I don't know where you are now, but I hope you're well, and that somehow you can feel how much I appreciate and care about you.

The Right Hand,

I've seen players play all kinds of ways that I would consider wrong, but they can still play fast. Go figure. Some people are naturally fast. As I mentioned in an earlier post, Jack Wilkins moving around his apartment was like watching a squirrel. That's the way his body and metabolism functioned, fast. Jack also used the pick correctly. He was amazing, and one of the nicest guys you'd ever meet.

All action in time begins with pulling away from gravity first. A leg has to lift away from gravity before you can swing it forward to begin walking. You have to sense the weight and balance of your body on both legs and feet equally in order to achieve a stride that will generate momentum and flow. If you're with it, the rest of your body also swings in coordination with the flow.

When strumming, action in time begins with the lift of the arm. You've got to pull loose from gravity first. Once again, it's the "flip" motion. You put just enough energy into the Flip to get the pick up to the 6th string. At the 6th string, Gravity takes over, and the arm falls back down.

Your dropping a good 10 pounds into the strings, you don't have to force your arm down, let it fall. if muscles are used, they're used to guide and add finesse to the fall, not



to eliminate it. The heft and weight of the arm are felt all the way down. This creates momentum.

Don't leave your forearm laying on the edge of the box like a bag of cement. Think of the forearm like the playing arm on an old LP record player. Where it touches and rests on the box is a balance point. You tip the arm down putting the pick into the strings with a lightly balanced arm, using just the tip. The pick is like the phonograph needle in the LP arm. This is another "feeling" type of thing.

Picking on a single string can be a cut down version of the strum motion. The same principal of energy expenditure applies here. throwing too much energy in to the single string picking motion forces you to "put on the breaks" in order to contain the motion. This stiffens up the arm and throws the flow out of whack.

There Are Three Basic Ways The Right Hand and Arm Can Move.

- 1) from the elbow. Imagine you're scrubbing the top of your stove with a steel wool pad. This comes from the elbow and can go very fast.
- 2) Shaking water off your hand. This can also go very fast. This involves the forearm's ability to rotate. The rotation can be scaled down in excursion and energy expenditure to just a single string.
- 3) Side to side motion of the wrist alone. This can't generate speed unless the elbow scrub and the forearm rotation shake is mixed in with it.

Side to Side is good for sweep picking up or down. and also good for crossing two strings with an up stroke or a down stroke. Very little energy is required and it's easy to get back into the scrub and shake to regain momentum.

Picking single string and throwing in chords is a mixture of all three of these motions blended together in different degrees as the playing situation requires in the moment. It's not "either or". Remember, that when you have it, it's a physical feeling and sensation in your body. You'll know you're doing it right by the feeling

What I've said here, and the images I've tried to convey in words, are things you have to discover within yourself by sensing your body from the inside out. This is the only way to know them for what they really are, and when you have it, you'll have just as hard a time trying to put it into words as I have.



Jazz Guitar, Starting Right should serve as an indispensable guide in helping you to find your own way to accomplish this. Dave Woods 11/08/2006 Copyright 2006 Callicoon Music ASCAP, All Rights Reserved