



# RAINBOW GUITAR

## Teacher Notes

## General notes on Rainbow Guitar Book 2

### Previous knowledge

Book 2 assumes knowledge of the material in Book 1 - i.e.

- the notes DEGABCD on strings 4, 3 and 2
- plucking with the thumb while resting fingertips on string 1
- simple note values including rests

### The colours

In Book 1, the pupil learns to play on 3 strings. Each string is given a colour, and the notes on the staff are coloured according to their string. This approach eases the mental burden of note-reading in the early stages, and ensures that pupils focus on the “dots” themselves, generally eliminating the need for writing in note names or fingerings.

In Book 2 the new strings are given colours as well, and pupils will find the colour-coding just as useful at this stage as they cope with a much larger note range and many more combinations of strings.

*Eventually, of course, pupils will need to make the transition to reading the notes without the aid of colour. This is one of several reasons why the Rainbow Guitar books feature extra parts printed in black and white. The website also offers some extra resources to help with the transition:*

- *The Rainbow Guitar Black and White Tunebook, which features different tunes from the main books, but introduces the notes in the same order.*
- *A set of Rainbow Guitar flashcards, featuring all the 1st position notes in both coloured and black versions. These are available in a free downloadable “print your own” version or can be ordered as a physical set of cards. There is a set of Teacher Notes to go with them describing some of the games and activities that they can be used for.*

## **The left hand**

By the end of Book 2, the pupil will have met all the natural notes in first position up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> fret.

## **The order of the strings**

In Book 1 the pupil learned to play on strings 4, 3 and 2. In Book 2 the remaining strings are introduced as follows:

- strings 5 and 6 (open)
- string 1 (open and then fretted notes)
- string 6 (fretted notes - same note names as string 1)
- strings 5 and then 4 (fretted notes)

## **The right hand**

In Book 1, the pupil learns to pluck “thumb only”. The progression in Book 2 is as follows:

- Section 1 (Extending the Note Range) starting with thumb only, as in Book 1
- Section 2 (Mainly Melody) plucking with index and middle fingers in alternation (sometimes with thumb accompanying on bass strings)
- Section 3 (Artful Accompaniment) broken chord patterns using thumb, index, middle and ring fingers

However, the book design allows many other possible routes through the material. For example, it is quite possible to reverse the order and do the Accompaniment section before the Melody section, or to mingle material from the two sections.

The book does not explicitly mention rest stroke (apoyando) or free stroke (tirando) - after much thought I decided it was better to prescribe as little as possible in the book itself, and leave this up to the teacher.

## **Right hand markings**

The thumb, index, middle and ring fingers are labelled “Timr” in this book, and the right hand markings are printed rather bigger and bolder than is usual. The hope is that this will cause more pupils to actually notice them and pluck accordingly!

The classical convention, of course, is “pima” after the Spanish words for the digits and of course pupils could be introduced to this at any time.

## **Plectrum players**

All the material in the book is playable with a plectrum, and the Rainbow Guitar books make as good an introduction for the plectrum player as they do for the fingerstyle player. However, some of the material may need to be covered in a slightly different way, as plectrum and fingerstyle playing present different sets of problems for the right hand.

For reasons of space and simplicity, plectrum markings are not included in the book – I hope to put together some separate notes for plectrum players.

## **Voices**

All the music in Rainbow Guitar is written “single-voiced” even when - as is often the case - bass and treble notes are intended to overlap. This is in keeping with the general philosophy of presenting everything as simply as possible at each stage, and only putting information on the page which will help at that point.

In the long run, the more serious pupil will need to get used to guitar music written in two or more voices, and of course this notation is richer and more informative. But the extra information is unlikely to improve a beginner pupil’s performance – and is in fact quite likely to cause him/her to miscount and lose the simple metre of the piece.

## **Chords**

For some pupils, chords are the be-all and end-all - the only reason they wanted to pick up a guitar in the first place. For others, chords are not enjoyable at all in the early stages because they are too hard, they don’t ring properly and they make a novice’s hands ache miserably. So chord work can be a great motivator, or a great demotivator, and it is obviously important for the teacher to be very aware of how each pupil reacts to it.

In Book 2 many of the pieces can be accompanied with strummed beginner chords, and chord symbols are included. There is a chord chart at the back of the book. The symbols are printed lightly in grey, and it is left up to teachers and pupils to decide when and how to start chord work.

Many of the pieces also feature suggested accompaniment patterns. These are not written out in full – instead an example is given for each of the chords in the piece, and the pupil learns the useful skill of putting together the accompaniment from the chord symbols. These accompaniment patterns mostly do not require the whole of the chord shape to be held down.

## **Composing and improvising**

As in Book 1, there are many invitations in the book for pupils to make up their own music. Many of the pieces in the book can act as starting points for this sort of activity.

At this stage, some pupils also can learn a lot from free improvisation over chordal backings. Several of the pieces in the “Artful Accompaniment” section of the book are suitable for improvising over. Also, the backing track “Endless Journey” (available as a free mp3 download on the website) is referred to repeatedly in the book but can also be used freely at any time. The track is deliberately formless - just an alternation of two chords, Am7 and Em7. It is equally useful for practicing strummed chords, broken chords, ostinatos or free melodic improvisation (with these harmonies it is difficult to for pupils play a really wrong-sounding note as long as they stick to natural notes).

## Mixed ability parts

As in Book 1, accompaniment parts are often marked EZ and ADV to help with mixed-ability teaching.

The EZ parts can usually be learned quickly and are useful for quick sightreading, or for keeping slower learners engaged. The ADV parts contain notes or techniques which may not be covered until later in the book. They make good extension activities for quicker learners.

# Page by page notes

## P 3 – P 7

At this stage the pupil should focus on

- reviewing and quickly recognising the notes from Book 1
- learning to find and read the new notes (open A and E strings in the bass)
- producing a clear sound on the bass strings without unwanted twangs and rattles
- controlling and using simple dynamics

## P 3

The pupil is introduced to a new style of fingerboard diagram which will be increasingly useful as more new notes are added. A blank version of this diagram is available as a free download on the website - you can use this any time to test pupils, or get them to test themselves.

## P 4

As well as reviewing the Book 1 notes, the pupil is introduced to some of the basic dynamic markings.

A useful exercise in dynamic control is to start plucking a single note to a steady beat very quietly, and with the right forearm and hand absolutely relaxed. Then very slowly build up the volume but without losing the relaxed feeling. Then slowly decrescendo again. Another useful exercise is to practise sudden contrasts (again to a steady beat). On 1 pluck quietly, on 2 damp the string off, on 3 pluck loudly, on 4 damp the string off.

## P 6

The bottom strings of the guitar are relatively slack and can easily buzz or rattle if they are plucked too hard. Another common problem is unwanted noises caused by the a previously struck string vibrating against the thumbnail. A reminder of good right hand shape will usually help with this.

## P 7

These ostinatos are more fun when played along with the backing track “Endless Journey” which is a free download on [www.ringingstringspublications.co.uk](http://www.ringingstringspublications.co.uk) - though they can also be played

unaccompanied or the teacher can busk a part using the chord symbols shown.

The ostinatos include rests - make sure pupils damp the strings off cleanly.

Pupils are invited to make their own ostinatos. As always teacher should be prepared to go first and model the sort of thing that could be done. There is also scope here for an imitation game - one person plays on ostinato starting on the A string and the other has to imitate starting on the E string.

Depending on your pupil's interests and personality, you will also find that "Endless Journey" makes a good all-purpose jam track and the pupil can practice taking a looser solo using any or all the notes learned so far.

### **P 8-9**

At this stage the pupil should focus on

- learning the new sharp notes and understanding the principle of locating sharp notes on the guitar
- building finger strength and dexterity by playing mini-chromatic scales (0123 on each string)
- getting familiar with new fingering patterns on red and green strings

"Good Company" is of course the same tune as "Solitude" (see p4) but in a major rather than a minor key. Pupils will enjoy the mood change between the two pieces, which make an effective pairing for a school concert.

For the time being, all sharps are flagged up as accidentals. A key signature is used for the first time on page 15.

### **P 10 -14**

At this stage the pupil should focus on

- plucking with "walking fingers" (i + m), initially on the first string and then on 2nd and 3rd strings
- extending the note range up to high G on the 1st string.

For now you may choose to play the accompaniments yourself and keep your pupils focussed on the melodies. However, see general note above about mixing material from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> sections of the book.

### **P 10**

See general note above about free stroke and rest stroke.

### **P 11 -12**

The pupil gets used to the alternation between i and m, and straight away uses the technique in a variety of rhythms.

"Imitating Rhythm" can lead to an informal game between teacher and pupil or between two pupils. Some pupils may enjoy developing their ideas into a longer composition or improvisation.

These pieces are very quick to learn and play, so pupils should be able to work up the dynamics and articulation without getting overloaded.

### P 13 - 14

The fretted notes on string 1 are introduced and gradually mixed with notes on other strings. F natural and F sharp are both shown here, but the F natural note is then “parked” until p17.

A lot of pupils struggle to keep a good left hand shape when fretting the 1st string - even if they are now managing quite well on 2nd and 3rd strings. There is a strong tendency to tighten the wrist, pull it back behind the neck and allow only the tips of the fingers to peep round on to the fingerboard. Encourage pupils to keep the wrist relaxed and fingers curved over the fingerboard.

### P 15 -19

At this stage the pupil should focus on

- mixing the 1<sup>st</sup> string notes with previously learned notes on other strings
- a larger range of string combinations
- starting to combine thumb and finger plucking

### P 15

The notes of “La Mexicana” are easy once the scale has been well learned, but pupils will often make mistakes with counting in this tune, tending to start each phrase too early. The teacher can help considerably by tapping an emphatic “3, 1” in the pause at the end of each phrase. Once the rhythm is confident, another pupil could do the tapping, and it could be turned into a performance feature of the tune.

### P 16

On this page the right hand comes to the fore again as bass and treble notes are combined. As pupils start to combine thumb and finger plucking, it is important that they learn to keep the wrist still and pluck from the base of the knuckles with no other movement. (Most novice players will tend to rock the wrist forward and up to pluck with the thumb, and then draw it back and down to pluck with the fingers). Hopefully the music on this page, being very simple, will allow them to concentrate on this important aspect of technique.

### P 18

The leap from fretting on string 1, to fretting on string 6, is one of the more unusual features of this book. Having tried it, I hope you will agree with me that there is a lot to be said for it! The note names on the two strings are of course the same, which eases the burden of remembering notes on the fingerboard. The sudden contrast and extreme leaps in “From Top To Bottom” are difficult to start with, but with a little practice they quickly help the pupil to establish a good left hand shape and a stable thumb. The piece can also be played as a duet of course, with two instruments echoing each others phrases. A good way to warm up for this piece is an imitation game, where the teacher plays a short phase with E, F# and G on string 1 and pupils imitate on string 6 by ear.

### P 19

“Flamenco Flavour” is a challenging piece at this level and not all pupils will master it completely. However they will have fun trying, and the one thing they tend NOT to have a problem with is the compound rhythm! If necessary you can practice this with clapping, stamping, any other body percussion, or by finding words with three and then two syllables to help say the rhythm aloud. My pupils learn to say “PINEapple PINEapple MANGo MANGo MANGo” and often leave the lesson still chanting this like a mantra.

From the technique point of view, the hardest thing is to sustain the fretted bass notes without

accidentally touching and blocking off the 1<sup>st</sup> string.

If the harmonic note at the end is too hard, just get them to play the note fretted in the ordinary way. Or finish the piece with an E minor chord instead ...

### **P 20- 23**

At this stage the pupil should focus on

- learning the new fretted notes on strings 5 and 4
- relating them to previously learned notes, to complete the note learning in first position

### **P 20**

At this stage the new notes should not present too much difficulty in themselves. Pupils will need plenty of practice in reading them though, and even with the aid of the colours, they will need to learn to look very carefully at the leger lines!

“Cat’s Cradle” is a relatively challenging piece, requiring confident reading and good left hand shape in the section where lower notes are mixed with a high E drone.

### **P 21**

“Shifting Ground” – see comments on “Cat’s Cradle”. There is one tricky moment in the middle of the piece where the pupil has to overlap a fretted bass string note and a fretted treble string note. This is a good moment to introduce the 4<sup>th</sup> finger if you have not already done so, as it is not practical to finger the D note with 3<sup>rd</sup> finger here. Pupils should not be discouraged if they cannot manage the full overlapping sound in this bar straight away – it may take quite a bit of practice.

### **P 22**

The F note on the 4<sup>th</sup> string is, in my experience, one of the hardest notes on the guitar – judging by the number of my pupils who reach for it and miss it completely!

Otherwise, this is a fairly straightforward page and more extrovert pupils will enjoy the “Oi!” moment. Get them to aim for a brisk speed in this piece.

The time-honoured riff at the bottom of the page is fun to play and also gives great left hand finger practice. Encourage pupils to use it as the basis for a longer piece – possibly but not necessarily using the 12-bar blues form.

### **P 23**

Another fairly straightforward page apart from the F note. “Storm in the Mountains” has a rootsy, Appalachian feel and should again be played at a brisk speed. The scale at the top is of course a Dorian mode which could lead to all sorts of improvisation activity if pupils are so inclined.

### **P 24- 29**

In this section of the book the pupil should focus on

- plucked accompaniment patterns with various right-hand combinations, textures and rhythms
- moving each digit independently of the others (these accompaniments do not use the top string, so unused fingers can be planted lightly on it)

- (at the very end) plucking with the ring finger to make up the classic “pima” combination

Each of the accompaniments has a melody to go with it, but these are deliberately very simple so they are quick to learn. If you are playing the melody yourself, try playing up an octave so the melody comes out above the accompaniment pitch (and of course feel free to embellish!)

### **P 25**

This piece can be learned by a pupil much earlier in the book, if the bottom G note is replaced by open G (see bottom of page).

### **P 26**

In bars 5 and 6 (D7 chord) the pupil has to fret A and C notes at the same time. Do not underestimate the difficulty of this innocent-looking chord for a novice player! (I mostly avoid it in this book). It is one thing to place the fingers, it is quite another thing to make both notes ring. Hopefully, as the C finger is already in place, these bars should come with practice.

### **P 27**

Pupils enjoy this rhythm of “Sitting by the Stream” and of course it is the basis for a lot of contemporary songs. This is a very open-ended piece – pupils can just enjoy mastering the four bars given, or with a little initiative (or help from you!) turn it into a complete piece.

### **P 28**

The syncopated rhythm of the “Tango” is not used anywhere else in the book, nor is there any space here to explain it properly. I am assuming it would be taught by ear at this point.

### **P 29**

Several milestones at the end of the book! Plucking with the full pima combination ... a 12-bar blues ... pentatonic improvising ... putting together your own piece ... wherever is it all going to lead? 😊

## **That's it!**

I do hope you and your pupils enjoy the book. Please let me know how you get on – it is so nice (and so useful) when people send me feedback.

And despite my best efforts, there are bound to be a couple of misprints and howlers in the text in the first printing – do let me know when you find them!

With thanks,

Hugh Boyde, Sep 2014