

Since the left foot must rest on a stool in front of the chair, the right foot should be placed on the floor slightly *behind the performer* to create a balancing mechanism in which the backward effect of the left foot could be cancelled.\*

Taking into account the above facts, it should be clear that both sitting position and the placing of the instrument *should form a "whole" that works both for males and females*. There is no sense in dividing playing position according to sex.

## B. HOW TO HOLD THE INSTRUMENT

### 1. Placing and Balancing the Guitar

Only after the guitarist has found a position that is based on the concept of Stable Equilibrium is he prepared to consider how to place the instrument. The guitar must accommodate itself to the human body without altering this equilibrium, and without interfering with the performer's freedom of movement. At the same time, the placing of the instrument should comply with a series of prerequisites that a good performance dictates. The criteria used in determining just how the guitar is to be placed should be of a generic and conceptual nature. They should under no condition be taken rigidly but rather as *flexible and adjustable* elements that are adaptable to the physical characteristics of each individual.

A bad guitar position can harm the guitarist and, consequently, his music. The performer would have to adopt a defective physical attitude incompatible with his anatomy, and one very likely to impoverish his technique and musical expression.

Correct placement of the instrument would allow for the greatest freedom of movement in both low and high registers. *The left arm should be totally free* and able to move in order to aid the hand and the fingers in every way. At this point, it may be mentioned that the efficiency of the fingers is *always* dependent on the attitude of the arm and is *never* an isolated event. Every movement derives from some other and only through a complete understanding and control of the "motor complex" would one be able to attain the best results.

The body should be able to move without hindrance, forward and toward the left (as shall be seen), so as to put even the highest register of the fingerboard within easy reach of the hand. The right shoulder should not be forced forward (Fig. 1a) or upward (Fig. 1b) in order to set the arm over the upper part of the guitar.

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\* If one sits in a normal fashion, i.e., in the center of the chair, the front right leg of the chair could interfere with the free movement of one's right foot or leg. (Logically this statement refers only to common four-legged ones and not to one-legged stools and other variants). The guitarist should sit, therefore, on the forward right corner so as not to impede the movements of the right leg and foot.

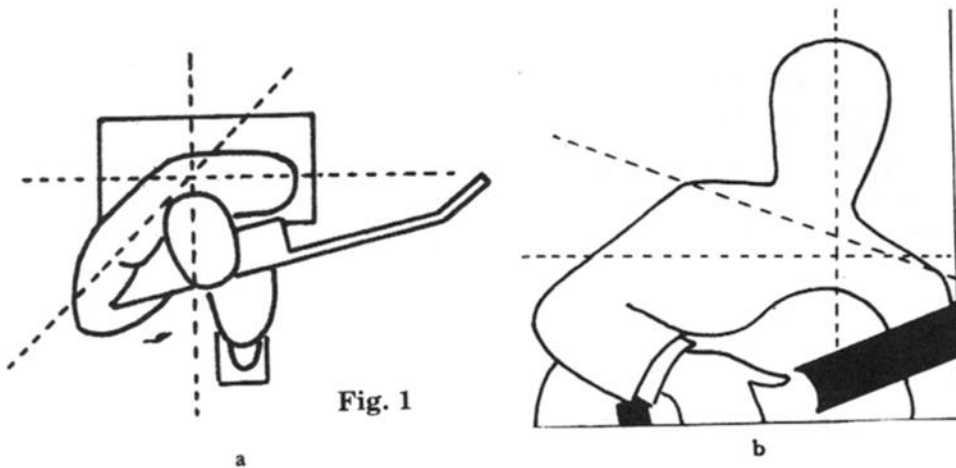


Fig. 1

Consequently, the instrument, leaning on the left leg should be bevelled in relation to the body, with the upper side close to the right breast and the guitar neck pointing outwards (Fig. 2). The two drawings in Fig. 3 illustrate incorrect ways of sitting.

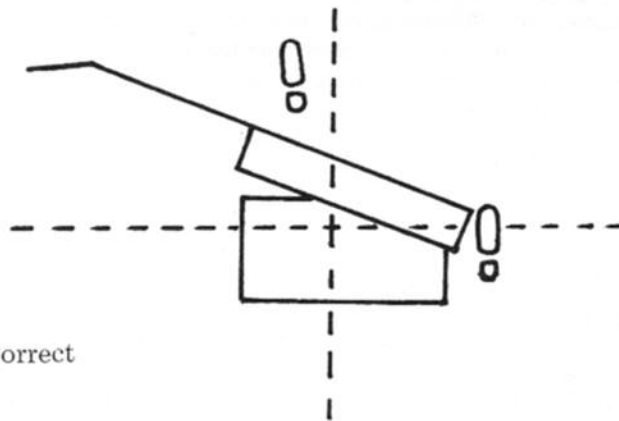


Fig. 2 Correct

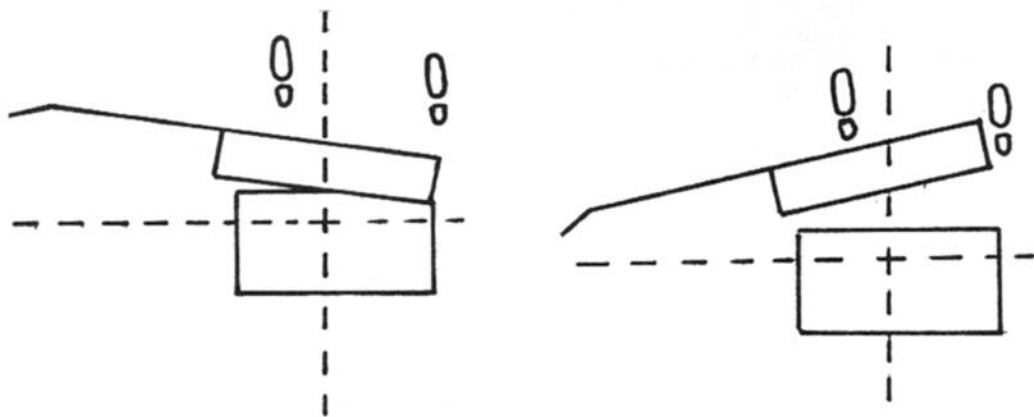


Fig. 3 Incorrect

The right-hand fingers must perform perpendicularly to the strings since gliding along them is very likely to produce noises that would detract from the music. To obtain a perpendicularity of attack, the wrist need not be curved in an exaggerated form; instead, one should search for the ideal inclination of the guitar, raising and lowering it, rotating it between both legs, adjusting it until the fingers can effect the most efficient stroke as naturally as possible.

## 2. Stability

Involuntary and unforeseen movements of the guitar will disorient the performer and detract from his attention. Thus, the instrument should remain motionless even when the body moves due to technical or musical demands. This does not mean that the guitar must never be moved: it may become necessary to adjust its position during the course of a performance, but these movements must always be voluntary—marrying, so to speak, guitarist and instrument. Unexpected and surprising movements must at all cost be avoided.

Controlled stability of the guitar is a result of body balance (correct sitting posture) on the one hand, and of establishing logical contact points with the instrument on the other.

## 3. Points of Contact

The guitar has five contact points in relation to the body. *In order of importance these are:* (a) the left leg, (b) the right leg, (c) the right arm, (d) the left hand, and (e) the right side of the body (and never the left).

The first four are *active contact points* and through them the instrument can be firmly held. The fifth contact point is *passive* or neutral, i.e., it does not participate in holding the instrument. Just *three* active points of contact, however, are necessary to maintain and control the stability of the guitar.

### a. Left Leg

This contact point has the following characteristics.

- i) Basic element in holding the guitar.
- ii) Firmest contact point (all the rest are movable).
- iii) As a consequence, a reference point for all body movements.
- iv) *Central and stable contact point* coming ahead of and related to all the other contact points.

Given the bevelled position, the curvature of the lower side of the guitar could prove somewhat awkward when trying to accommodate it to the left leg. The problem of imbalance that may arise could be overcome by using a cushion (Fig. 4) that not only helps mold the shape of the guitar to the leg, but also prevents the instrument from eventually sliding.\*

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\* The first objective is attained by making the cushion out of sponge, the second by using a slip-free material (e.g., latex) for its upper side (i.e., the part that would touch the guitar).

b. *Right Leg*

Only after the guitar has been placed on the left leg should the right one be brought into play. This is done by allowing the right thigh to come into natural contact with the flat surface of the side of the guitar rather than merely to touch the corner of it (i.e., where the back meets the side), and should result in effective balance and control while maintaining the bevelled position.



Fig. 4

c. *Right Arm*

The right arm should rest over the upper side of the guitar letting its own weight contribute to balancing the instrument (see Chapter II).

d. *Left Hand*

There are a number of situations (to be mentioned later) in which the right arm must be lifted—it is in these cases that the left hand becomes the third essential contact point with the guitar (neck).

e. *Right Side of the Body*

The body as a contact point plays a totally neutral and passive role and does not belong to the group of three contact points essential for balancing the instrument. Still, it is imperative to remember that the natural contact with the guitar is always against the right and *never* against the left side of the chest. *Placing the left side of the chest against the guitar must be considered defective* because it could harmfully force the right shoulder forward. *One should, therefore, avoid this from the very beginning.*

The fifth (neutral) contact point is established when the guitarist himself moves forward in performing attitude, and not because the guitar is made to lean against him.

*The sequence of events in placing the guitar can be summarized as follows:*

1. Place the guitar over the left leg (with the cushion) taking into account its bevelled position relative to the body.
2. At the same time, separate the right leg moving it backwards so that nothing obstructs the instrument from the very beginning.
3. Bring the right leg well into contact with the side of the guitar in the manner described above.
4. Place the necessary contact point, the right arm, by resting it over the upper side of the guitar as in Fig. 5.



**Fig. 5**

**N. B. Listed here are some of the more common, but by no means exclusive, situations which do not require a fixed contact point for the right arm.**

- (1) Certain harmonics performed with the right hand: the contact point is moved or the whole arm is freed.
- (2) Pizzicatos (some).
- (3) Muted or dampened sounds (exceptionally).
- (4) Dynamic resources that require arm movement.
- (5) Some strokes of the thumb along the six strings in arpeggiated chords (with or without contact point).
- (6) Exceptional transversal displacements of the other fingers, from first to sixth string or vice versa.
- (7) Certain thumb strokes that require "fijación" (fixation).
- (8) Non-traditional tone colors and percussive effects employed in contemporary music.

### C. BODY MOVEMENTS (Without Affecting the Instrument's Balance)

Movements of the body are necessary when certain technical demands are placed on the left hand and arm. Most of these displacements have their origin in and are controlled by both feet as *motor elements*. Each foot is then a lever which uses the ground like a platform in order to transmit a force that will directly act on the movements of the body. *The body itself need not make any effort whatsoever.*

When left-forward movements of the body are required, the right foot comes into action. (This foot, incidentally, should be quite *free to move*.) Contrary body motion is executed by applying slight pressure to the left foot which is *stationary* (on a stool); in this way the trunk can return to its original position.

The use of the vertebral column as the only motor element is counter-productive, and hence must be discouraged. In addition to being harmful, bending the spine forward obstructs mechanical freedom.

How can these movements, in which the trunk and the guitar are sometimes separated, be performed while maintaining instrument balance at all times? Were the angle formed by the right elbow to remain constant and rigid, the guitar would be dragged with the body whenever the latter moved backward. Once the concept of governing the stability of the instrument is fully grasped (i.e., that there are three necessary and sufficient contact points), and the function of the right arm is understood (i.e., that its own weight keeps the guitar steady), all that remains is to *allow the right elbow to vary its angle graciously when required* and thereby acquiesce to the movements of the body. In this way, the guitar can remain in its desired place, unaffected by the displacements discussed.

It is recommended that these operations be worked upon separately until a fair amount of dexterity in the movements of the body is achieved.