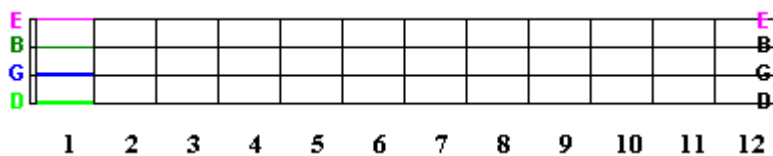


A Short Guide To Tabs

Tabs are not a new idea, they have been around since the 15th century. Basically they are diagrams showing the user where to put their fingers on the fretboard of a plucked or picked instrument in order to play a piece of music. In centuries past they were also used for other instruments such as the organ. Tab is short for tablature.

Tabs have nothing to do with the staves seen in sheet music, the lines have no relation to each other. Each line on a tab represents the strings on the particular instrument. Nowadays tabs are commonly written for Guitars, Ukuleles, Banjos, Mandolins etc. Tabs for Baritone Ukulele contain only four lines, the bottom line represent the open 4th string D. Open means that the string is plucked or struck without pressing it down onto a fret, the next line up represents the open 3rd string G. The second line from the top represents the 2nd string down on a Buke which, when open sounds the note B. The top string on the Buke is E and the top string on a Tab for the buke is also the note E when struck while open.

Here is a graphic of the first twelve frets on a Buke (Baritone Ukulele) fretboard.



Frets are the vertical lines in the above diagram. Normally frets are raised metal inserts, and to create a note the finger should press down the string directly behind the fret with the top of the finger. Most Baritone Ukes have 19 frets on their fretboard, but the majority of tabs use only the first twelve frets. The horizontal lines on the diagram are the strings.

Here is the fret to note relationships

Open	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E
B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B
G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G
D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D

As this is only a guide to tablature, I will not go into note pitch, sharps, flats and scales. The beauty of tablature is that you do not have to know anything about music except for the need to be able to recognize note and rest lengths. The only reason I have put the above table of note/fret relationships is to explain what the numbers in tabs mean.

If we translate the above table to tablature it would look like this:

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10-----11-----12
 0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10-----11-----12
 0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10-----11-----12
 0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10-----11-----12

In my arrangements I present both the tabulature and the music stave above it. This should not confuse people with little musical knowledge. The only things that need to be noted from the music stave are the note and rest lengths. I include a stave for those that read music, and have alternatively tuned instruments such as tenor guitars, mandolins and banjos.

So my tablature looks like this:

In the first measure, the first note is on the second string (line) at the 3rd fret. The second note we press is on the top string (line) at the 1st fret. We then take our finger off of the string and pluck an open E string (0) followed by pressing the top string at the 3rd fret again. When we look at the note lengths the first note is half a beat in length (an eighth note – see my Guide To Note Values), the next note is one beat plus another half a beat because it is a dotted note. When we add up the time value of the first two notes we have half a beat, plus one and a half beats, equalling two beats. The last two notes in the measure (bar) are two half notes and add up to one whole beat. So in total we have 3 beats in the bar. And the time signature at the beginning of the bar tells us that each bar should contain 3 beats to the bar (3/4). Basically the four means that the beats are a quarter note (1 standard beat) in length, and the 3 means that there are three beats to each bar.