

Matt's Marvelous Method

for guitar

by Matthew Osborne

editing and layout by
Kimberly Fair

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Matthew John Osborne

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About Matthew Osborne 1972-2004

Matthew John Osborne was an extraordinary singer, songwriter and musician who was born in Toronto, Ontario and lived the last 13 years of his life in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. Matt passed away in his sleep the afternoon of Friday April 23, 2004.

Matt Osborne played acoustic 6 or 10 string guitar (There were a couple strings that just weren't up to his standards), and sang. He sometimes did both at the same time. Matt wrote and performed for more than 10 years, primarily in the Southern Ontario region, but his music took him across the country and across the border when the opportunity presented itself. He loved to play Nashville. Matt's sound was a melting pot—blues, rock, folk and even the odd Celtic ingredients all shone through whenever they felt like it. And he quoted obscure movie lines on those rare occasions when he couldn't remember the words. That's what we call professionalism. Honest.

Matt was an understated and tasteful musician and a warmly genuine human being. He was one of the nicest men you would care to meet. He wanted to help everyone to bring out the artist he knew was stashed somewhere inside, including his ladyfriend, Kimberly Fair. He made this guitar method as a birthday gift for her, and she wants to share it with you. This guitar method is about freedom. It's about choice. But most of all, it's about learning to do this guitar thing *your* way.

Matt performed his original material under many incarnations: solo as **Matthew Osborne**, in **The Matt Osborne Duo** (with Christine Bird), **The Matt Osborne Band** (with Serge Solski and Arun Pal), **The Heavy Metal Think Tank** (with Chris Patheiger and Attila Baraczka), and **The Winnebago Blues Band** (with Brent Hagerman, Steve Toms, and Ian Mollison).

He also added his talents (usually free of charge or for some appropriate barter) to the album or live show of almost anyone who asked him to. He ran the longest running open-jam night with the same host in Kitchener-Waterloo history at the Circus Room on King Street in Kitchener, and everyone agrees he made it safe to get up there and put your heart on your sleeve.

Matt lived his life on his own terms. He loved all music, he loved performing, and he often said,

“I can't believe they pay me to do this!”

Editor's Notes on the Method:

I've made every attempt to keep the "Matt-made" feel of this publication. The pages are numbered creatively to match the audio portion. Matt refers to tapes, but all the audio has been transferred to the 5 CDs now in your possession. Please refer to the CD track references that appear in square brackets (**e.g. [CD 1(2)] means the first CD, second track**) to keep *you* on track. To the right of each chapter title, I have included the range of CD tracks for the whole chapter. A few tracks are not referenced individually, but listen to everything, because Matt's musical wisdom ran deep.

A very special thank you to the amazing and multi-talented **Paul MacLeod** for giving the method a first run through. If you find something that should be corrected in future print runs, or if you just want to give me your input about the method, my email is **kfair@uoguelph.ca**

Enjoy the ride, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Tuning Tracks (*open A string*) can be found in the following locations:

CD 1(48)
CD 2(10)
CD 2(31)
CD 2(46)
CD 3(10)
CD 3(35)
CD 4(30)
CD 5(30)

There is also an open A buried in CD 2(34)
Consider that one a bonus.

INTRODUCTION

[CD 1(1-2)]

Welcome to the wonderful world of guitar music. Note how the two words go together: guitar and music. The number one stumbling block to a student's progress is not understanding that the guitar is a *musical* instrument and uses exactly the same principles and "vocabulary" as any other instrument such as the violin, piano, trumpet or whatever you can think of. The trouble with learning about how to make *music* with the guitar is that there is so much information out there which consists of mainly putting your fingers where the picture says to put them and just strumming.

Not to say that there isn't some of that in here, but a good student also learns *why* they just put their finger on a certain string on a certain fret. And that's where the *music* comes in.

Why does a D chord look the way it does? Why do some of those "teach yourself guitar" books have little X marks over strings you're not supposed to play? How can a student ever hope to learn the latest hit on the radio? How can the student become self-sufficient? Simply by understanding the theory behind the music that he or she wants to learn.

It's all very simple, really. But the price is tedium. The language of music is made up of patterns, sequences and formulae that, taken by themselves, are simple to the point of kindergarten arithmetic. But if the student allows him or herself to be swamped by several little patterns all at once, it's easy to get frustrated. The trick is to focus on one item at a time, in the order that they're supposed to be focused on. A systematic approach always works.

Our "western" (or "European") system of music that encompasses about 95% of all the music you'll probably ever listen to, begins and ends with 12 notes. What the study of music theory does is show a student when certain notes can sound good together and when those same notes can sound bad together, depending on the context.

What this method will attempt to do is combine a growing knowledge of guitar mechanics and techniques with the theory that drives the music the guitar will eventually play. In this way, instead of having to fight to understand every little detail that comes along, the student can be *ahead* of the ball.

You will see certain recurring visual icons throughout this method book. I'll explain them now:



LISTEN

An exercise involving listening to a musical example



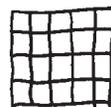
WRITE

An exercise where you have to "fill in the blanks"



PLAY

An exercise involving the playing of your guitar



GUITAR DIAGRAM

An aerial view of the guitar neck, used for chord and scale fingerings



CHORD PROGRESSION

Each group of four hash marks represents one measure of music

This workbook is obviously meant to be used in conjunction with the taped portion of **Matt's Marvelous Method for Guitar**. There are 13 chapters in all and it's important to both listen to the tapes in sequence and read along in the workbook as you progress. Each chapter will have its own set of activities, usually involving at least two of the three of "Listen," "Write," and "Play." Feel free to stop or rewind the tape at any time if a point is not clear to you.

This method will allow you to become self-sufficient musically. You will be able to figure music out from the radio, play along to your favourite songs and, most importantly, learn that the great mystery of music isn't so mysterious after all. It does however, rawk.

4 – BARRE EXAM

[CD 2(5-18)]

BARRE CHORDS AND PARTIAL BARRE CHORDS

For these (and all subsequent) guitar diagrams, the fingers of your left hand will be labeled as follows:

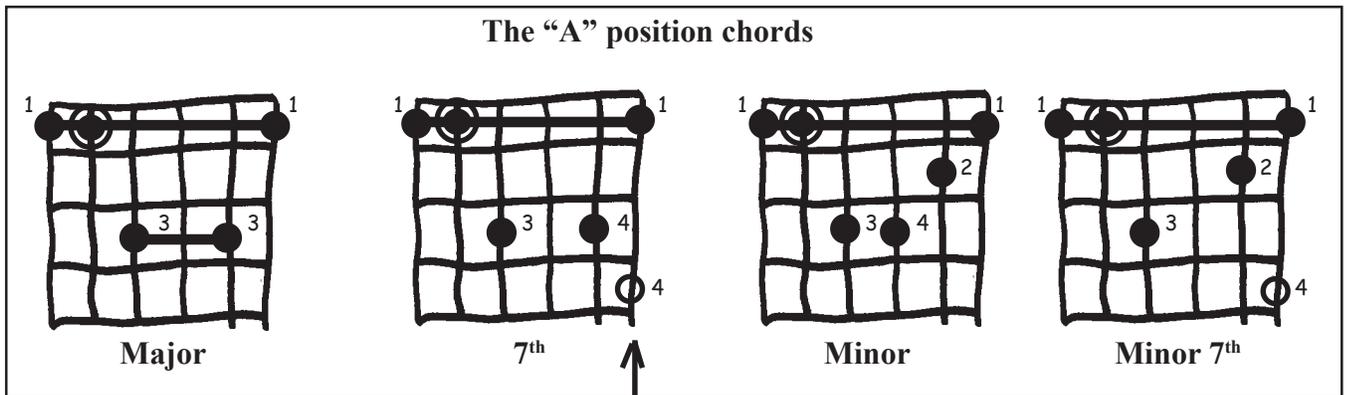
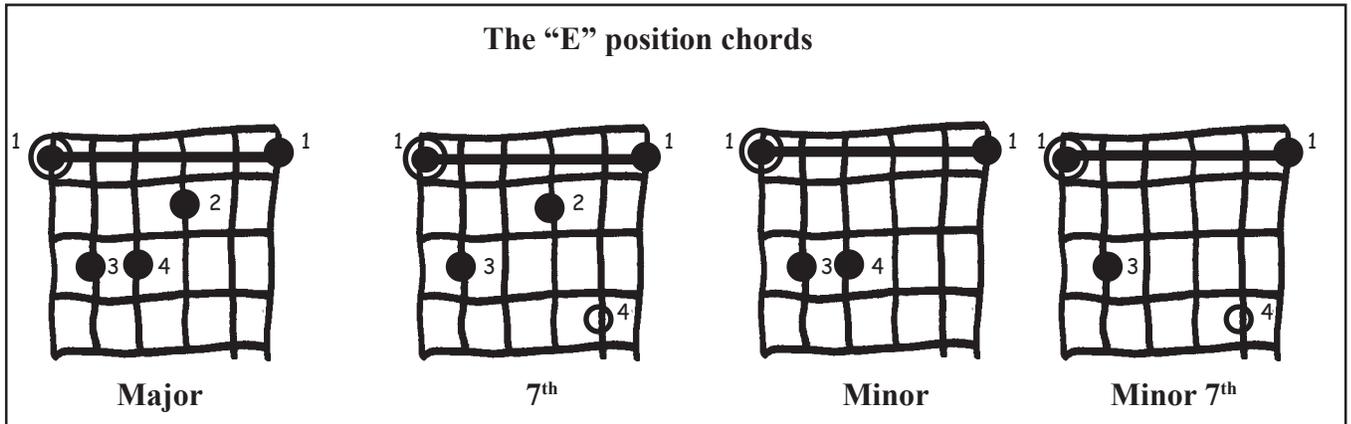
- T — Thumb
- 1 — Index
- 2 — Middle
- 3 — Ring
- 4 — Pinky

● — Root note of chord

○ — Optional note

1 — 1 — Barre your finger across all strings covered by line

A number beside the aerial diagram signifies the fret number (for specific fingering locations).



When using this optional note, barre the D to B strings with your 3rd finger.

5 – LEFT HAND POWER, YEAH YEAH!

[CD 2(20-25)]

POWER CHORDS

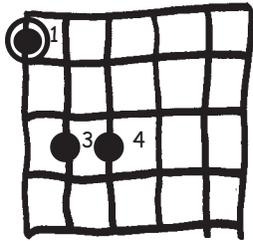
“Coles Notes” version of barre chords (power chords omit the 3rd)

Usually assumed to be major although there is no proof either way...
major chords are simply more commonly played in most songs of all styles
and therefore are most people’s “default mental chord setting”
(Assumptions can also, of course, depend on where in a song
a power chord is to be found)

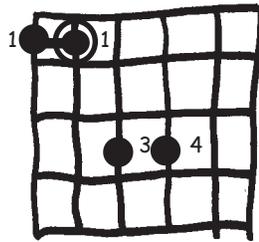
Used in heavy music a great deal, also in rock & blues... mostly on electric guitar
because with most distortion settings the power chord sounds less cluttered
and can cut through the mix better.

In standard guitar notation and transcriptions they appear with a “5” designation
(this signifies that only the root and 5th notes of the chord are being played)

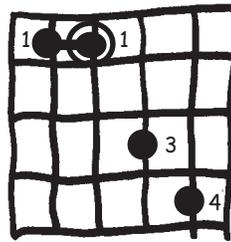
e.g. E5 A5 B5



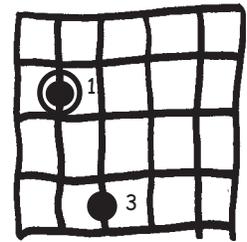
E string root
[CD 2(21)]



A string root
[CD 2(22)]



D string root
[CD 2(23)]



2 string version
[CD 2(24)]

**NOTE: 1. Power chords can be fingered using only two strings (see above)
and this particular version and spacing works on all three root strings**

**2. It’s very important to only strike the strings being fingered or you may have
clashing open strings, depending on the chord you’re playing**



Of course... there are some nice exceptions:

I Wanna be the Mayor (G) [CD 2(25)]

RIGHT HAND MUTING

Right hand muting is the practise of allowing your right (or picking) hand to make contact with the strings in a few different ways to give the strings a muted or more percussive sound, because the string is not allowed to fully vibrate the way it naturally would. This can do a great deal for the energy of a song (the intro chord progression to the Smashing Pumpkins song “Disarm” is a good example) and can increase tension dramatically (and make the listener anxious to hear more) if employed in the right places. It’s a bit of a metaphor as well: it’s like the player isn’t giving everything away just yet... the listener has to wait to get the punchline. Right hand muting usually works best with faster tempo progressions in the rock, pop, blues and hard rock/metal vein. Slower songs and tempos usually require a bit more **sustain** (duration that the note sounds) from the guitar strings to keep the song moving so you generally won’t see much muting in say, a country or rock ballad.

Right hand technique is really something that has to be acquired by the player through his or her own sensory inputs. In other words... it’s all about feeling your own hand on your own guitar, so naturally every player will approach right hand muting in a slightly different way.



As you hear and play the following exercises [CD 2(45)]
just remember that you’ll feel a bit unnatural at first. Take your time to rewind the tape and go over something again whenever you feel like it.

Exercise 1

(a) Pick any of your favourite 1st position chords and begin a regular, all downstroke strumming pattern (it’s probably better to choose a chord formation that uses all six strings). We’ll use an E minor chord for the taped example but you should eventually do this exercise with all of your favourite 1st position chords. [CD 2(47)]

(b) While keeping the same tempo and rhythm, slowly allow the palm heel of your pick holding hand to touch the strings. Notice the immediate change in tone, clarity and sustain. You’ll also feel the strings vibrating on your skin. Kinda sexy.

(c) While still maintaining that rhythm, allow the heel of your hand to further press down upon the strings. Eventually you’ll be left with only a percussive sound with no discernable pitch to any of the strings you’re hitting. You may also notice that you’ve mainly been hitting the bottom three strings as you began to put more pressure upon the strings with your hand—that’s a natural tendency and most of the muted chords you’ll hear played in your lifetime will follow that same tendency—it’s simply easier to hit the bottom as opposed to top strings when your palm is resting right on them.

It’s a feel thing and it’s up to you what sounds you like best. Generally speaking, the bottom four strings sound the most interesting with this method because they’re **wound** strings, while the top two (B and high E are simply a bare wire with no winding around them and don’t have as many complexities (and therefore as many possibilities) in their tone.

Again... this is merely the prevailing opinion and you might feel differently. It's totally up to you, but it's important to explore as many options as possible before you make your mind up.

(d) While maintaining the rhythm, allow your palm to ease up (or "open up" as it's usually called) on the strings, letting them vibrate more naturally. As you open up on the strumming you'll notice less of a percussive, muted sound and more of a sustain and clearer pitch to the strings.

Exercise 2

Follow the above procedure with as many other 1st position chords as you can.

[CD 2(48)]

Exercise 3

Now go through all those chords again following the same instructions as before with one difference: try as many different strumming patterns (not just all downstroke) as you can think of. You'll find it's a bit more difficult to maintain consistency in both tempo and pressure on the strings at the same time, but it's certainly something worth working on. You'll probably find that you need to adjust your right hand position a bit more to make it happen.

[CD 2(49)]

Exercise 4

Go through the chord progressions on page 7 and experiment with muting. You should be able to play the chords just as fast and strum just as consistently. See how much pressure you can apply to the strings and still recognize the sounds of the different chords. Then begin varying the pressure you apply to the strings and experiment with opening up the chords at certain points for dramatic effect.

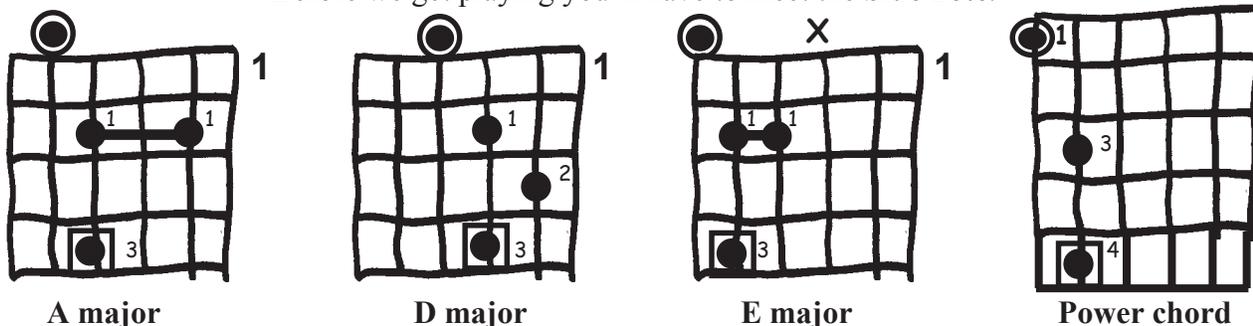
[CD 2(50)]

Exercise 5

It's time we learned you a good 12 bar blues shuffle. More often than not, most blues rhythm playing is muted and most of *that* is downstrokes. We'll use all downstrokes for the next bit.

[CD 2(51-55)]

Before we get playing you'll have to meet the **blue note**.



The first three chords are your basic, familiar 1st position chords for a blues of A major (I, IV, V). The blue note is the extra dot (at the 4th fret in these three cases). In all honesty, however, blues rhythm players, when playing the blue note shuffle, hardly play the major 3rd of any of the chords. So... in the case of these three chords, you'd be playing the root note (open string), the 5th (next adjacent string), and the added on blue note, and maybe the octave the next string over (with the flattened first finger for A and E, and the third finger for D). It just sounds simpler, cleaner, and more direct. Just like the blues.

Note the power chord formation on the right with the added blue note dot. This exact shape works for every power chord we've studied. And it's usually just the root and adjacent string 5th being played, not the octave (it's kinda tough).

The general idea for the blues shuffle is to do two downstrokes of the normal chord—usually just in a power chord formation (root and 5th without the 3rd)—then two downstrokes of the chord with the added blue note.

Chug-gah Chug-gah

And two groups of this usually make up what is considered a “bar” of blues music.

Chug-gah *Chug-gah* Chug-gah *Chug-gah*

The easiest way to remember this is to think of the sound of a train engine starting up. This is the pulse of the blues. And always, ALWAYS mute at least partially for that percussive feel.

Actually... the blues and trains will always be linked—most older bluesmen and women talk about “riding the blinds” (illegally hopping a freight train) in their songs. The trains were many blues musicians’ primary form of transport as they rarely could afford a car or even a bus ticket. All this time in the trains gave them an idea of the powerful rhythmic beating of a train’s pistons. Consequently, every bluesman and woman worth their salt could “make the train talk.”

(a) Try and play along with the example on the tape. Slowly at first, then faster. We’ll just stay on the “A” chord for now. [CD 2(56-57)]

(b) What you’ve heard so far has been a straight blues shuffle. Now we gotta swing it. An easy way to first visualize this is to add a syllable to the “chug” of our little example. [CD 2(58-59)]

Chuhug-gah *Chuhug-gah* Chuhug-gah *Chuhug-gah*

Each beat of the measure is now subdivided into three instead of two. Swing time. In blues it’s more commonly called shuffle time or just a shuffle. Play along on just the A chord.

(c) Listen to me play the following progression first (in A) and follow along with the chords. Then join in. Rewind as many times as you have to to get it smooth and... sultry. [CD 2(60-61)]

12 bar blues progression

I IV I I IV IV I I V IV I I
||| ||| ||| ||| ||| ||| ||| ||| ||| ||| |||

(d) Then try it straight. Same deal as the last one... listen first, then attempt. And succeed. [CD 2(62-63)]

One point that’s always under contention in the blues is how to end a pattern or 12 bar unit. These endings are called **turnarounds** and there’s a wide variety to choose from (one of the most common involves going to the V for the last bar). The best way to learn about these is to listen to lots of blues. [CD 2(64-65)]

(f) Now try a 12 bar shuffle (and straight) in other keys. You pick ‘em. It’s only really easy to play blues in 1st position in A because you’re basically using power chord formations with the root as the open string. For any other key, pretty well, you’ll have to play some or all chords using power chords. But if you just think logically about it, almost every first position chord has a blue note within easy reach. All you do is look for the 5th of the chord and go a full tone (two frets) up to get your blue note. It’s just that the resulting chord may not sound as tough, simple and elegant as we’d like. It may be better sonically to stick to power chords (mainly because of the tried and true formula of the 5th right next to the root... it’s not too far away and it’s not displaced below the root of the chord. If either of those aren’t happening the chord (and therefore the entire progression) won’t sound as together or cohesive). Again... a matter of personal taste. But don’t let some old blues hound catch you trying to do a blue note on the high E string. [CD 2(66)]

And it isn’t exactly rocket science to find where the I, IV and V chords are in any key if you’re doing power chords. Maybe you’ve noticed this already when practising other chord progression exercises, but the I, IV and V root notes for any given key are always within two frets of each other on adjacent strings. e.g. D major—D (I) at 10th fret (E string), G (IV) at 10th fret (A string), A (V) at 12th fret (A string). Or... D at 5th fret (A string), G at 3rd fret (E string), A at 5th fret (E string).

Those exact patterns and finger spacings repeat all over the neck (over the bottom four strings), with every single key you can think of. So play some blues.



WHERE YOU PICK

[CD 3(1)]

Where your pick strikes the string (over the soundhole, closer to the neck, or closer to the saddle) will affect how the entire guitar sounds. Basically:

The strings sound bassier and less defined when plucked nearer the neck

The strings sound tinnier and less full (but certainly sharper tonewise)
when plucked nearer the saddle.

It’s generally agreed that plucking right over the soundhole
produces the fullest, most balanced sound.

1. Begin strumming a single chord, wide open, over the soundhole. Continue the strumming pattern while moving your picking arm closer to the neck. Notice the change in tone and clarity. Now move your picking arm closer to the saddle. Notice an even more dramatic change in tone and clarity. [CD 3(2-3)]

2. Repeat with as many different chords as you are interested in.

3. Repeat with as many chord progressions as you can stand. Try and use the different tone envelopes to create different moods in your progressions (e.g. do one run of the progression picking near the saddle as an intro, then strum directly over the soundhole for contrast and that “band just kicked in” feeling). [CD 3(5)]

13 – ALWAYS LISTEN

We'll always be able to argue about what music really means to us. Is it emotion? Logic versus passion? A question? An idea? A challenge? That's really up to the listener and the artist to decide. I believe that the solution is never static and has a lot to do with the times. But certain universal themes keep popping up again and again, don't they? They're bulletproof, I guess.

One thing we can never argue about, however, is that music reaches us through our ears. Sound and how it is conveyed, chopped up, manipulated, elongated and shortened is the way music gets to us and inspires a reaction, either positive or negative.

I truly believe that no piece of music will ever exist that you can learn nothing from.

To begin listening critically (and like an artist) you have to be able to explain your reactions and not just state them. WHY does that singer's voice grate on you? WHY do the last few chords of the progression really let you down? WHY do you feel like a better person after hearing that drum intro? WHY does this song make you want to have a shower as quickly as possible?

A good exercise is to find some album, either in the bargain bin at the record store or in the library, that you would, until now, never be caught dead listening to. It may be new country. It may be polka. It may be rap. It may be opera.

Listen to this album from beginning to end. And on every song (or movement or whatever) write down one thing that you hate about it (and WHY) and one thing that you like—or at least detest the least—about it (and WHY). You *will* learn something. About yourself and what you like, and about a type of music that you may have never listened to critically before. I do this exercise (usually by listening to a campus/community radio station during the weekend) about once every six months. It really does help.

Go out and see as much music as you can. Nothing, to me, can replace the exchange of energies between a performer and an attentive audience right in front of him/her/them.

Find other people to play with. At most jam nights/open stages there are at least a few beginners present. Talk to them. Tell them you're in the same boat. Chances are you'll be playing together at the next jam night. A musician needs to exchange musical ideas with other musicians in order to grow. That doesn't necessarily mean starting a band with everyone you meet... it means trying to understand why they chose the notes they did, and trying to explain to them why you chose the notes you did.

At this point you'd probably like to continue your musical studies and I wish you good luck. As you can probably surmise... we've just scratched the surface. I now empower you to get on with some *serious digging*. [CD 5(33)]