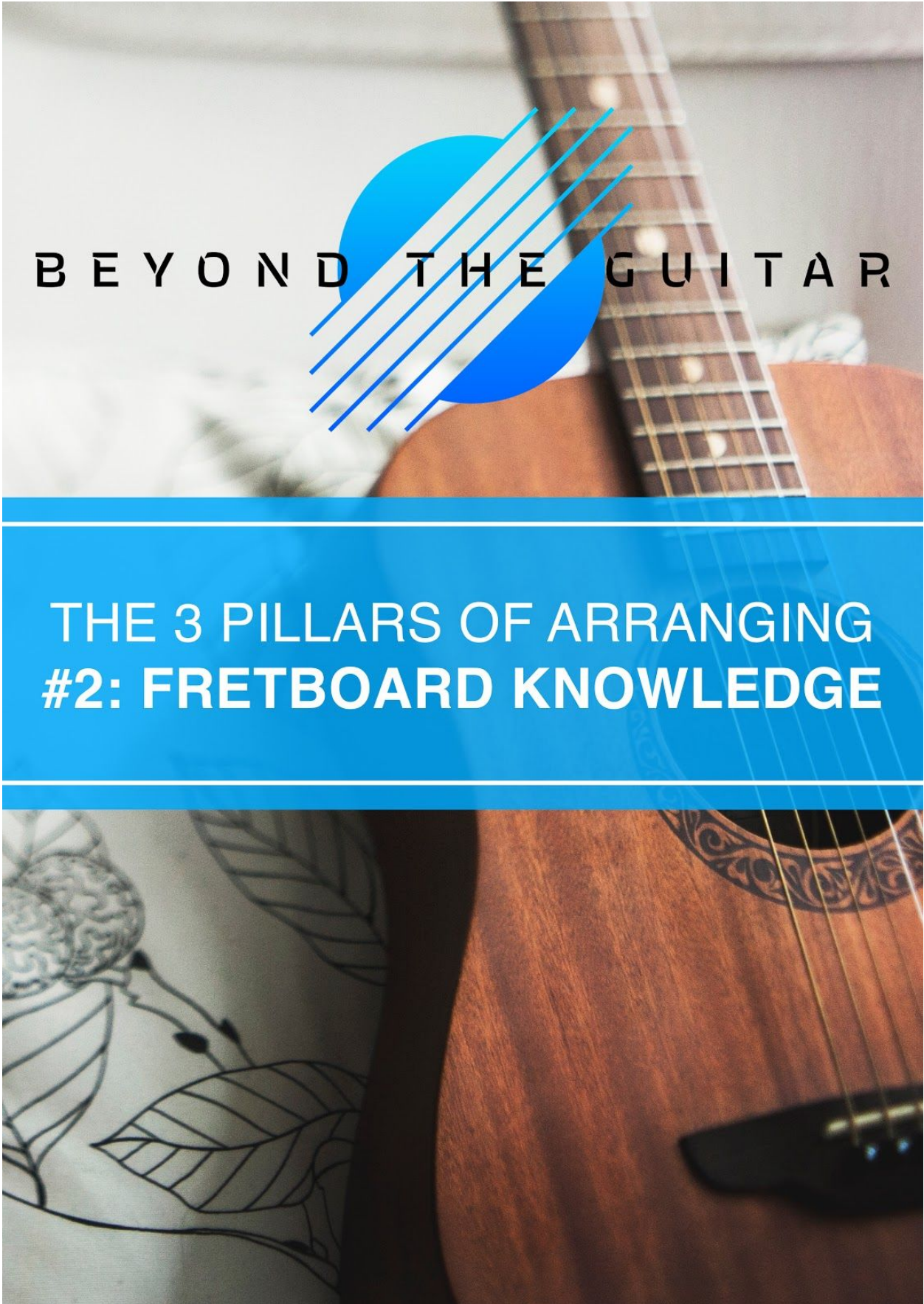


The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of an acoustic guitar. The top half shows the neck and fretboard, while the bottom half shows the body and soundhole. A blue graphic, consisting of a semi-circle and several parallel diagonal lines, is positioned in the upper center, partially obscuring the guitar's neck. The title 'BEYOND THE GUITAR' is written in a black, spaced-out, sans-serif font across the middle of the image, with the blue graphic partially covering the word 'THE'.

BEYOND THE GUITAR

THE 3 PILLARS OF ARRANGING **#2: FRETBOARD KNOWLEDGE**

Pillar #2: Fretboard Knowledge

Nathan Mills, Beyond The Guitar

Welcome to Part 2 of my lesson series *The 3 Pillars Of Arranging*. This lesson is meant to supplement what you learned in my free training *Fretboard Freedom* where I taught you how to find and play chords anywhere on the fretboard ([if you haven't taken that training yet, you can access it here](#)).

The 3 Pillars of Arranging are the 3 areas of musical knowledge that you need to familiarize yourself with in order to successfully create your own classical and fingerstyle guitar arrangements. Pillar #1 was *Ear Training* ([if you missed that lesson, here it is](#)), and today we're talking about Pillar #2: *Fretboard Knowledge*.

Guitarists are notorious for not knowing their way around the fretboard.

Even as a first year classical guitar major in college, I still hadn't completely memorized the fretboard. I ended up developing this deep fear of a highly unlikely hypothetical scenario in which a violin or piano major, for example, would come over and quiz me on my knowledge of my own instrument. I knew they would be shocked to discover that I didn't fully know my own instrument, as a college-level student, and that embarrassed me to no end.

While fear of embarrassment can be a great motivator, there are much more important reasons for memorizing the fretboard. You're probably here because you want to make your own guitar arrangements. Classical and fingerstyle guitar arrangements take you all up and down the fretboard, requiring you to find notes and chords in every position. Not knowing where you can find those notes on the fretboard not only slows down the arranging process, but also inhibits your ability to be truly creative and exploratory in your arrangements by limiting you to the few positions on the neck that you may be comfortable with.

Finally, your level of fretboard knowledge can greatly impact how difficult your arrangement is to play and how natural or awkward it sounds on the guitar. If you're at all familiar with the layout of the fretboard, then you know that most notes can be played in multiple locations. If I know every single location that a specific note or chord appears, I can experiment with playing that note or chord in

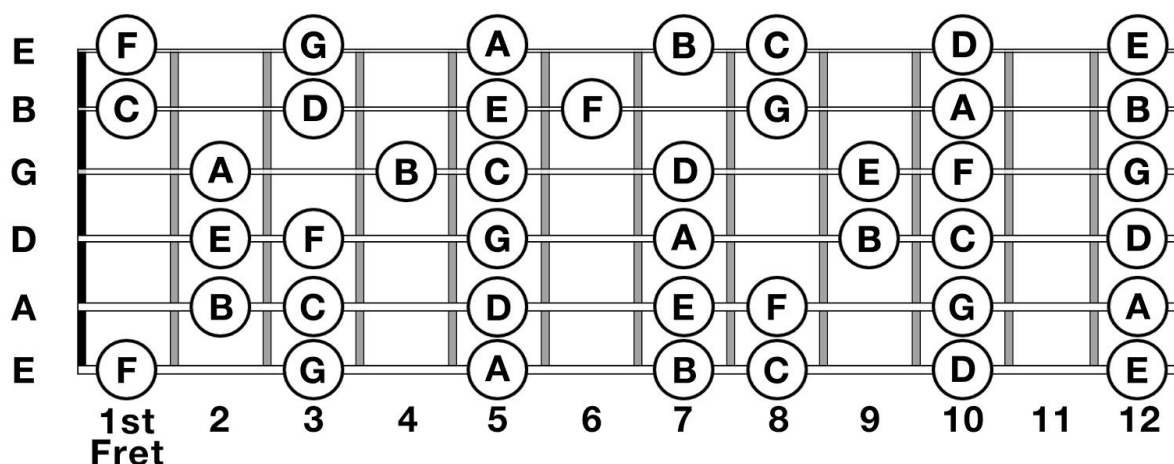


B E Y O N D T H E G U I T A R

different positions, potentially making that particular section of my arrangement easier to play.

In this lesson, I'm going to show you how to **easily memorize the notes found in a few key locations on the fretboard**. By memorizing these few locations, you can quickly find all the surrounding notes by association. This eases you into memorizing the fretboard without requiring you to sit there studying charts or flash cards trying to memorize every single fret.

Here is a fretboard chart I created for *Fretboard Freedom* ([you can download a printable version here](#))



2 quick things to note about this chart and the fretboard in general:

1. On this chart, blank frets contain the sharp or flat versions of the notes found in their adjacent frets (ex: the 2nd fret on the B string is C# or Db). Personally, I just think that charts that include all the sharps and flats look cluttered
2. The fretboard repeats itself after the 12th fret, but at a higher octave. As you can see, the notes at the 12th fret are the same as the open strings.

This brings me to my first point: **If you have memorized the open strings (E A D G B e), then you have already memorized the notes of the 12th fret.**

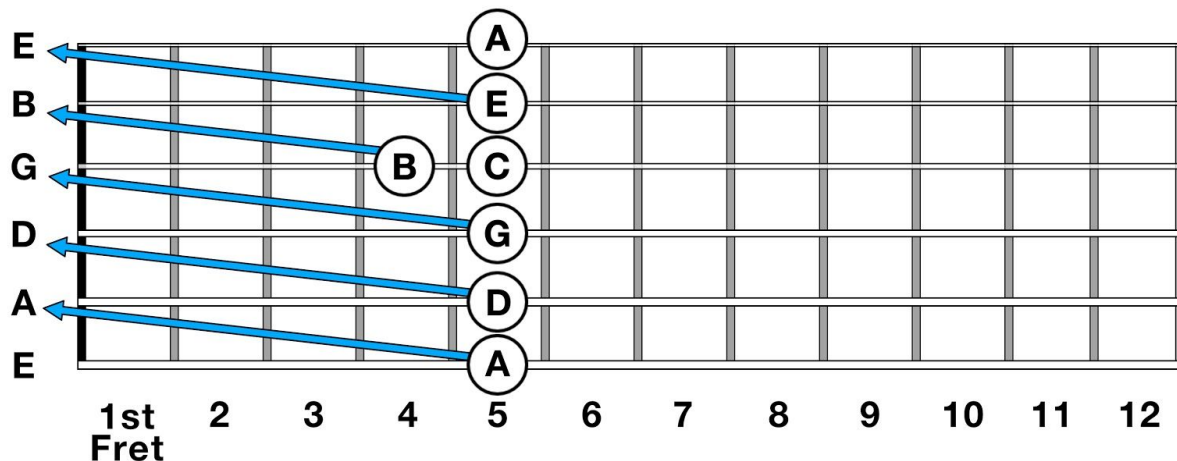
They're the same notes, only an octave up. By memorizing these 2 locations, you can quickly find the notes in the surrounding frets by association, counting up or down by half-step. For example:



BEYOND THE GUITAR

- Since I know the 12th fret of the A string is an A, then the 11th fret is a G#/Ab and the 10th fret is a G
- Since I know the open D string plays a D, then the 1st fret is a D#/Eb and the 2nd fret is an E

Now there are 2 key locations in between open and 12th position that are easy to memorize, which will help fill in the gaps. **Let's start with the 5th fret:**



The notes of the 5th fret are easy to memorize because there's a pattern they follow. **With one exception, the notes of the 5th fret are the same as the open string beneath them.**

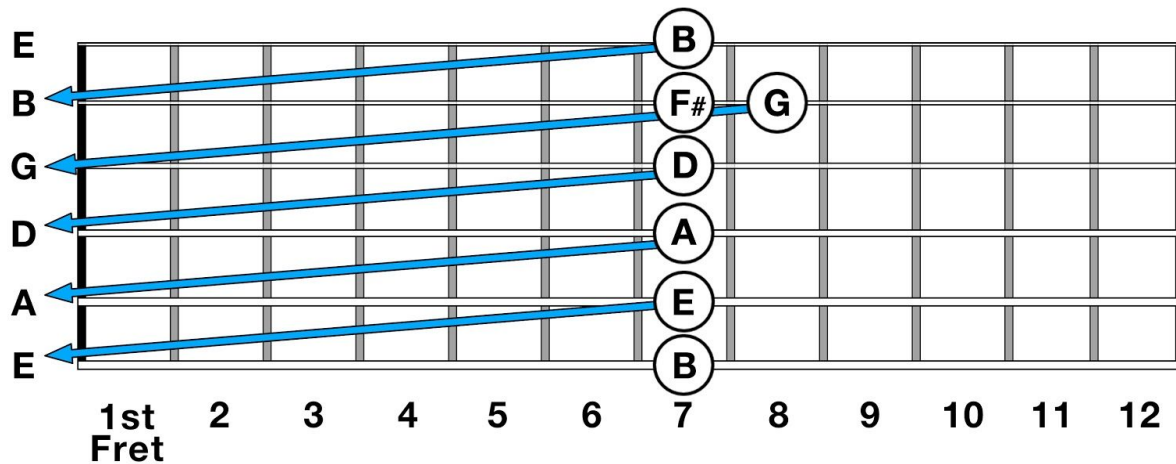
So, like with the 12 fret, if you know your open string notes it's easy to memorize the notes of the 5th fret

- The 5th fret of the low E string is A
- The 5th fret of the A string is D
- The 5th fret of the D string is G
- *Here's the exception:* The 4th fret of the G string is B, matching the open string beneath it. So, by association, we know that the 5th fret of the G string is C
- The 5th fret of the B string is E
- The 5th fret of the high e string is A. Even though there's obviously no string beneath the high e, we confirmed that the 5th fret of the low E string is A, so the same will be true of the high e string.



BEYOND THE GUITAR

The final key location to memorize is the 7th fret:



The 7th fret is also easy to memorize because it essentially follows the same pattern as the 5th fret, but in reverse. **With one exception, the notes of the 7th fret are the same as the open string above them, but an octave higher.**

So starting at the high e string instead:

- The 7th fret of the high e string is B
- *Here's the exception:* The 8th fret of the B string is G, matching the open string above it. So, by association, we know that the 7th fret of the G string is F#
- The 7th fret of the G string is D
- The 7th fret of the D string is A
- The 7th fret of the A string is E
- The 7th fret of the low E string is B. Even though there's obviously no string above the low E, we confirmed that the 7th fret of the high e string is B, so the same will be true of the low E string.



BEYOND THE GUITAR

By memorizing these 4 locations (open, 5th fret, 7th fret, and 12th fret) you'll be able to instantly find notes in those high traffic areas, and can quickly find any nearby notes by counting up or down from those locations by half-step.

This is the first big step toward memorizing the entire fretboard. After memorizing these frets, I encourage you to incorporate the concepts I taught in my *Fretboard Freedom* training. Using the knowledge I share with you there, practice finding chords all over the fretboard as part of your regular practice routine. This will help solidify your memory of these 4 key locations, and will help fill in the gaps between them.

I'll follow up shortly with the final lesson in this series, Pillar #3: Music Theory. Thanks again for being a student and subscriber.

Nathan Mills

BeyondTheGuitar.com



B E Y O N D T H E G U I T A R