fatal, first of all for the technical function of the fingers but also in the long term for the health of the tendons, ligaments and other biological components in this area.

The ideal position is a minimum curve, which still allows an easy plucking action of the thumb fingernail.

The shape of the left hand

Generally speaking, one major problem found in the left hand derives from too much pressure being exerted on the strings. Generally, in many cases a neglected or anti-natural position is noticeable.

Once more, the big question of the chicken and the egg makes it difficult to give an answer. Going back to the basic rule of keeping every muscle and joint in its optimum natural shape can guide us to a better positioning of the left hand.

The little finger appears again as a troublemaker, becoming rigid, out of periphery or 'focus' of the string. Its lack of roundness also has a negative influence on the other fingers, pulling them outside and causing a jumpy and unstable hand. This little 'fugitive' finger must always be kept round, exactly like the others.

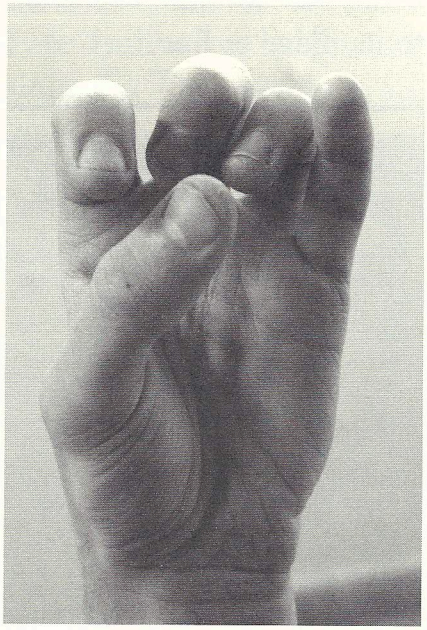


Figure 31

Usually the most important reason for an uncontrolled little finger is the inadequate positioning of the thumb behind the fingerboard, inside the palm. (Figure 31).

As an experiment, hold your left hand out, very relaxed with the palm upwards and all the fingertips bent in the same line and the thumb in its normal place to the left (Figure 32). Now move the thumb towards the second finger. Of course without fixating the other fingers, you will see the little finger jumping out of line and taking the 3rd finger with it (Figure 31). Moving the thumb back to

its normal place makes the little finger return to its place in line.

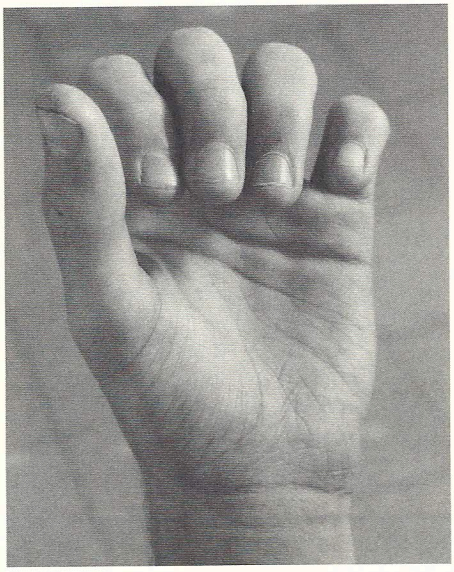


Figure 32

In spite of the correct positioning of the thumb, the little finger can still jump out of line if not constantly kept under control.

As mentioned previously, positioning the thumb in front of the middle finger, as traditionally recommended, causes points of tension in the hand. The presence of many wrinkles in the palmar side of the thumb muscles shows a high degree of contraction in this area. Another obstacle appears when the wrist is kept permanently bent.

Figure 31 shows exactly what a guitarist must avoid. Imagine having to press the strings and repeating the process for hours every day with such a hand position!

In positioning the left hand remember the need to keep the fingertips in line. This line always has to stay as parallel as possible to the strings, particularly at the beginning of technical formation. The hand actually moves as if on a three-line rail, which gives it security and stability.

These three parallel lines are:

1. The line of the fingertips
2. An imaginary line of the proximal joints in the palm
3. The lower side of the fingerboard

This approach requires permanent harmony between the hand, arm and forearm, which as a unit, down to the 3rd, or 4th position, is always perpendicular to the neck.

Don't forget that the relaxed fist remains our natural guide, considering the necessary gaps between the fingers.

For shaping the left arm, open the fist slightly without bending the wrist and keep the fingertips in line, separating the fingers a little. This is simply the shape

of the hand (Figure 32).

Avoid any concavity on the dorsal surface of the knuckles; it introduces tension to the palm, hardening the tendons and enlarging the mandatory short distance between fingertips and strings, resulting automatically in reduced ability of the hand. (Figure 33).

This is why many people bend their wrists: otherwise, because of this concavity, the fingers would not reach the strings easily. The knuckles must be seen clearly in the mirror.

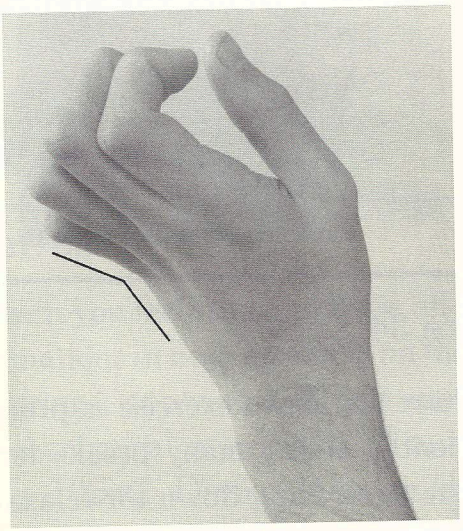


Figure 33

At this stage an auxiliary exercise for feeling the shoulder and the discovery of its tonus is most needed.

Put the right palm on the left shoulder and try to decrease its height and tension to a minimum. This exercise is an inseparable part of the left hand formation and should be practised without the guitar and of course in front of the mirror.

Movements of the left hand

After repeating the above exercise enough times, keep the four fingertips in a line in the air without the instrument, and parallel to the low joint line of the fingers. The thumb should feel very natural in its normal position with its muscles in their best relaxed shape, without any wrinkles. Now move the little finger, approximately 10 mm out of the line 10 -12 times and bring it back. The round or almost square shape of this finger has to be strictly maintained. The motion is made by the knuckle only. Now do the same movements with the third finger, with fingers 1,2 & 4 kept in a straight line. Continue with the second finger and with fingers 1-3 & 4 in the same line. There is no need to practise with the first finger. During this exercise, the elbow remains bent. Paint a coloured dot on the nail of the little finger and draw an incomplete square along its right side. When practising, this sign and the

dot have always to be kept perfectly visible. The sign guarantees the permanent curve of the little finger. Of course the roundness of this finger varies, according to which string is being used.
(Figure 32).

Contact between the left hand and the fingerboard

After this detailed shaping or reshaping of the left hand, the time has come to put the "prepared" hand on the fingerboard, without changing its shape. Choosing the 8th or 9th position on one of the treble strings, for example the 3rd, bring the hand into position with the fingertips on the string, in four adjacent positions, and unhurridly. The "unit" arm and the forearm remains behind the hand, with the forearm making a perpendicular line to the fingerboard.

The four fingers touch the strings almost without pressure – the thumb remains to the left side of the first finger on the upper part of the neck. Avoid bending the wrist, with minimal contact at the back of the fingerboard. Minimal contact between the left side of the thumb fingertip and the fingerboard helps avoid unnecessary pressure on the muscles in the thumb. As a result, the hand gains dexterity resulting in increased speed, cleaner notes, more stamina and the most important of all, a healthier existence. (Figure 34).

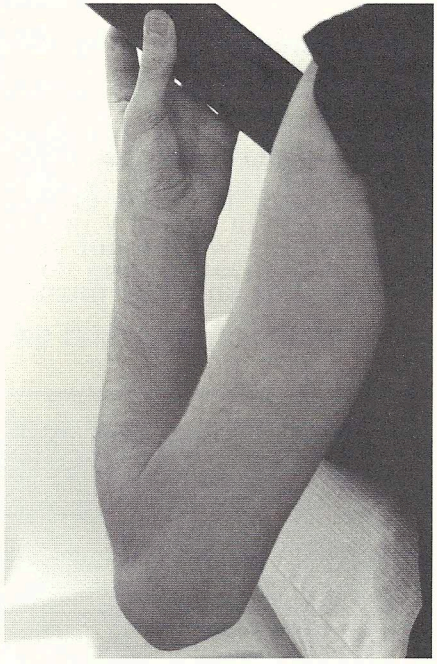


Figure 34

When the above exercise is practised sufficiently, taking many breaks for letting the hand hang down for relaxation, we should put the hand on the strings in such a way as if the whole shaped hand, forearm and arm were hanging loosely. Remaining in this position with closed eyes for a few minutes, while calmly

breathing and recalling all that has been explained about relaxing of the right hand, can be very beneficial.
(Figure 35).

This exercise is better practised in a high position in order to prevent the shoulder arm and forearm becoming tired due to their static position.

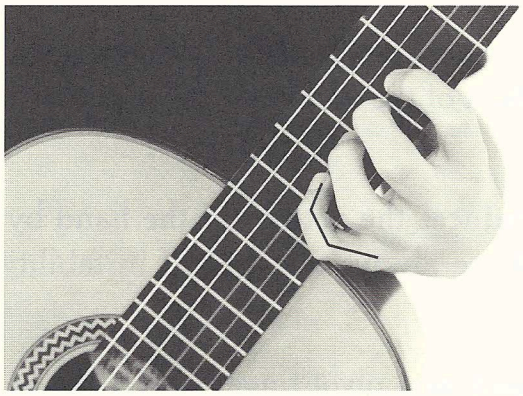


Figure 35

When you feel ready, practise all these combinations in high positions on the first four strings, applying half pressure with very economical movements of approximately 10mm. During these excercises don't employ the right hand at all.

Contact between the fingers and the strings must be as light as possible, something between "damped" or "buzzing" notes. Using always the left hand, repeat in a fixed position the following combinations at 60-70 movements per minute.

132431, 324143, 241341. Etc. Continue with small movements and don't let the little finger jump out of line. In addition avoid the other common characteristics such as a bent wrist and an extended little finger to the right. (Figure 36).

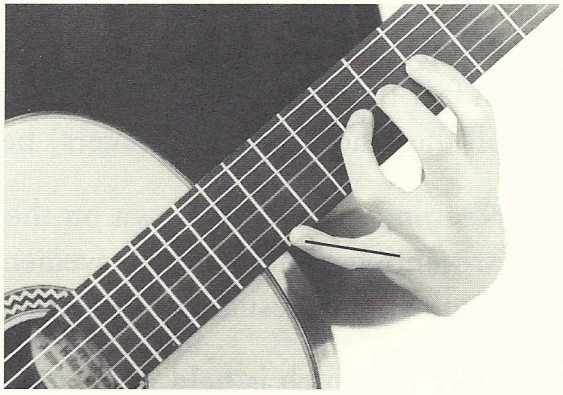


Figure 36

Concentrate on the three parallel lines. Avoid the four lower positions for the moment. Place the fingers on the right side, closer to the upper frets. Do not raise the fingers from the strings when playing from the left side of the hand to its right.

Why the left fingers have to remain on the strings?

When playing single notes on the same string and in the same position, (for instance 1 2 3 4), remember a very important rule. When playing ascending notes eg, (1-3) (2-3) (1-4) (2-4) (3-4) (1-3-4) (1-2-4) (2-3-4), etc. the finger(s) on the lower note(s) is/are held down on the string and the one playing the higher note is added. There are musical and technical reasons for this principle.

I. When we lift a finger before playing the higher note (on the same string and in the same position), the sound is cut consequently "legato playing" becomes almost impossible.

II. Keeping a finger held down results in less effort for the other fingers. In fact this finger contributes to the total effort of the hand and takes pressure off the other finger (or fingers) being used.

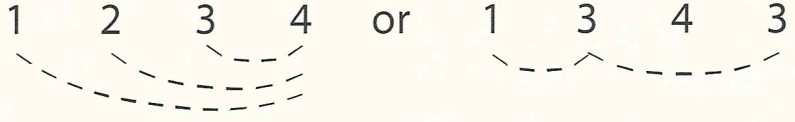
III. Keeping the fingers down on the string, reduces the activity of the hand by preventing unnecessary movements, which are always a source of instability for the hand, resulting in unclean notes.

IV. A finger which is held down can also operate as a pivot finger which can be a part of the next chord.

V. A finger held down can also act as a direct or indirect guide which makes a position change easier.

VI. When a finger stays on the string, extending the other fingers becomes more secure.

In this book the above principle is shown by broken lines as follows:



The role and influence of the left hand fingernails in clean playing

An element which can interfere with smooth movements of the left hand sometimes causing unclean playing is the length of the fingernails of the left hand. Even when they are only slightly too long, the movement of a finger from one note to another on the same string is not entirely free, even if the technique is correct. This lack of freedom in movement which also leads to an unpleasant touch to the strings and frets is a consequence of shallow contact between the fingernails and the frets. The longer the fingernails, the worse the problem. Filing them at an angle to give them a slant can help, particularly if they are thick.