

# Chapter 1: The Musical Alphabet

Let's start at the very beginning: the musical alphabet and first-position notes on the bass. You may already be familiar with the material in this chapter, but it's a good idea to review it all and make sure you know the basic terminology we'll be using throughout this book. All of the examples will be presented with a combination of music notation, tablature, and fretboard diagrams. Although you don't need to read complex musical notation in order to apply the principles of music theory to your playing, it's helpful to be able to identify the basic pitches on a musical staff in bass clef.

## THE NOTES IN FIRST POSITION

Memorizing the names of the open strings and the notes in first position will give you a good foundation for understanding the musical alphabet and will make it easier to learn the rest of the notes on the fretboard. Below are the four open-string notes—E, A, D, and G—shown in notation and tablature, with a fretboard diagram on the right. If you can identify these four notes in music notation, you can use them as reference points on the staff to help you find the other notes in the alphabet.

Musical notation and tablature for the four open strings of the bass guitar. The notation is in 4/4 time with a bass clef. The notes are E (open), A (open), D (open), and G (open). The tablature shows 0 for all strings.

Fretboard diagram for the four open strings. The strings are labeled G, D, A, and E from top to bottom. A dot is placed on the second fret of the D string.

The fretted notes in first position should correspond to each of the four fingers of your fret hand. Fret the notes at the first fret with your index finger, the notes at the second fret with your middle finger, and so on. For now, let's focus on just the *natural notes*—the regular letter-name notes of the musical alphabet that contain no sharps or flats (A, B, C, D, E, F, and G). The natural notes in first position on the fourth string are E, F, and G.

Musical notation and tablature for the first three frets of the fourth string. The notation is in 4/4 time with a bass clef. The notes are E (open), F (1st fret), and G (3rd fret). The tablature shows 0, 1, and 3 for the strings.

Fretboard diagram for the first three frets of the fourth string. The strings are labeled E, F, and G from top to bottom. A dot is placed on the second fret of the F string.

Notice how the notes progress up the staff in order, alternating between lines and spaces. Here are the first-position natural notes on the third string—A, B, and C:

Musical notation and tablature for the first three frets of the third string. The notation is in 4/4 time with a bass clef. The notes are A (open), B (2nd fret), and C (3rd fret). The tablature shows 0, 2, and 3 for the strings.

Fretboard diagram for the first three frets of the third string. The strings are labeled A, B, and C from top to bottom. A dot is placed on the second fret of the C string.