Hubert Käppel

THE BIBLE OF CLASSICAL GUITAR TECHNIQUE

A detailed compendium of the fundamentals and playing techniques of 21st century classical guitar including comprehensive, progressively structured exercises throughout

VERLAG

The Four Points of Contact on the Body

To avoid a tilting of the spine towards the left or the right, hold the guitar in a central position in regards to your body. In this position, it should be carried along with all the movements of your torso as if the guitar forms a unified whole with your body. What also goes along well with this position is the classical posture with footstool which has been proven successful in concert and audition situations. It allows your hands and upper body more freedom to move which of course readily facilitates more expressiveness when performing.
You should sit comfortably and relaxed on the front half of a stool which has a flat sitting surface and no back. Put your left foot on the footstool and pick up the guitar with both your hands. Four points of contact on your body emerge:



① the chest area

② the right forearm

③ the left thigh

④ the inner side of your right thigh

With alternate postures including a pillow, leg or a guitar support, there is no direct contact between the guitar and the left thigh (point of contact No. 3). See "Alternate Ways to Hold the Guitar," p 22.
In the chest area, the guitar should not be held too low. Your chin should be about 15 to 20 cm away from the side of the guitar, whereby the pendulum-like motions of your torso while playing will continuously alter this distance (to sometimes even under 10 cm). You can observe body-centric holding of the instrument (in the area around the solar plexus) by watching flamenco guitarists.

Caution! The second point of contact, the spot on the right, upper forearm, shifts constantly due to changes in tonal colors and dynamics. Therefore, you need to pay attention that

1. your arm rests on the side of the guitar only under its own weight (i.e. without applying any extra muscular pressure)
2. you avoid raising your shoulder or arm.

Many guitarists compensate for the sharp edge where the sides of the guitar meet the top with some kind of padding on the forearm or with a curved, wooden insert that sits on the side. They believe that the sharp edge impedes their tendons and muscles, maybe even pinches them off. Applying too much muscular pressure is what is responsible for them feeling that they are being hampered. If you apply the correct amount of pressure, any type of cushioning becomes superfluous.

The Correct Angle Towards the Body

The angle of the guitar towards the body determines the direction in which the sound radiates from your body. As the guitar only touches the upper part of your chest at the point where the side meets the back, the instrument naturally assumes a tilted position where the sound is projected up and out into the space around you.
This angle and the slightly tilted position of the instrument are not only responsible for the optimal development of the guitar sound, but they support rather, also in a psychological sense, a positive appearance and thereby an inner attitude that doesn't allow the player to hide fearfully behind the instrument.



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If the guitar is held vertically or too close to your body, it won't project the sound well due to too much body contact. Furthermore, vertical positioning can lead to "clinging" which limits the freedom of movement for your arms and hands, thereby suggesting a fearful and introverted attitude towards listeners and audience members.

Alternate Ways to Hold the Guitar

With alternative postures, the footstool is replaced by another aid that raises the guitar to the appropriate height: a specially manufactured foam cushion or a leg or guitar support which is attached to the side of the instrument, either with clamps, plastic suction cups or something similar. The advantage of this posture is that the left leg is less burdened during long practice sessions as both legs are at the same height. This also enhances the sense of stability in your body.



The rare standing posture employing a guitar strap has a lot of advantages and is very helpful if you suffer from any type of spinal or back problems.

In order to be able to change your posture during long practice sessions, for example when changing from "normal" guitar posture to a more horizontal position of the guitar between your thighs, foam cushions and flexible guitar supports can be suitable aids while non-flexible and rigid supports will not allow the most minimal of posture adjustments.

Minimal alterations to your basic posture are however, in a rhythm of every 15–20 minutes, of great importance during longer practice sessions so that, first and foremost, the muscles in your back can get some relief, i.e. one side is not strained more than the other. Remaining in a single posture over a long period of time will inevitably lead to cramping and restriction of your ability to move freely in general.

The Fusion of Body and Guitar into a Single Sound Source

You should hold the guitar as described above, i.e. at the center of your body. Make sure that your chin is only 15 to 20 cm away from the side of the guitar. This reminds us of the posture used by a flamenco guitarist, who – without a footstool and with one bent leg crossed over the other – holds the guitar very close to his body. This type of posture communicates a deep, intimate connection to the instrument. It is this connectedness that we need to imitate. Raise both your hands and arms without bending your wrists and move them to the center of the guitar where the soundhole is. Your left hand will now be in the upper positions (XV to XIX) and your right hand almost on the fingerboard. Both are directed toward the middle of your guitar and body. One could say you are "embracing" the instrument.

Now, imagine that your arms and hands emit a certain type of energy which flows into the center of the guitar and your body, and then back into your arms and hands etc., in a closed energy circuit. If you now close your eyes, you can sense, as you do in autogenic training or meditation, that this feeling is directed at yourself, at your innermost sanctum. We can now proceed and imagine to be one with the instrument. The guitar is actually no longer perceived as a foreign object, i.e. something separate from yourself. When you bring your hands into playing position, perform a work by heart with your eyes closed and concentrate on the idea and the feeling of your body and the guitar fusing into a single sound source, you generate a special charisma that is characteristic to each and every performance or musical presentation and which capture's your audience's imagination.

Resulting from the fact that your body and the guitar are no longer two separate objects but rather a unified whole from whose center musical energy emerges, a new dimension has been created. It represents an additional force or energy which serves to transport your sound to an audience in a special, individual way.

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III. Left Hand Posture (LH)

As all humans have different size hands, it is difficult to establish generally valid rules of posture for the left hand (abbr. LH). In the following attempt to create a set of rules, I will address an average to large size left hand. Today, guitarists with smaller hands can choose from an excellent selection of instruments of smaller scale length (62, 63 and 64 cm). As with basic guitar posture holding the guitar, the different postures of the left hand, your fingering hand, are just snapshots. As the left hand moves from positions I up to XVI and from the 1st to the 6th string, i.e. along the full length and width of the fingerboard, the potential postures vary greatly.

Four Universal Rules

1. **Your elbow and left arm should never be allowed to be rigid or stiff!**
   In order to comfortably accomplish the necessary movements of the left hand without bending your wrist, your arm and elbow supplement the horizontal and vertical movements of the fingers. They "elongate" the fingers, as it were, so that they can take up their positions next to the frets without having to stretch too much. If you are moving your fingers to the 6th string, move your elbow towards your body. Moving to the 1st string, your elbow should proceed to the left and away from your body (see "The Motion of the Arm," p. 28).

2. To guarantee the full transfer of the strength in your fingers to the fingerboard, **the back of your LH and forearm should almost form a straight line.** This means that under no circumstances should your wrist be strongly bent!



3. **The thumb of your LH has to be free to move.** It can't ever be allowed to fully clasp the neck of the guitar and should only assert minimal counter pressure towards the fingers of your LH. Its basic position is across from your index and middle fingers, yet **tending towards the index finger**.
   Frequently, the light counter pressure of the thumb turns into an excessive pressing which can cause limitations to movement and cramping in the LH! The optimal amount of counter pressure is created when the position of the thumb, relative to the other fingers, adjusts continuously, albeit if only minimally. When fingering the treble strings, your thumb will be vertically **situated higher**, with full barre and bass strings, vertically **situated lower** on the neck. Starting with position XII it will move so low that it will touch the body of the guitar.



4. **The fingers must – as seen from the player's perspective – always be placed close to the frets**, on the high e' string almost perpendicular and as we move on down towards the low E string, less perpendicular. Definitely avoid laying your fingers flat on the strings, however (exceptions: barre chords and extreme stretching).







As the distance between the frets is considerably larger in the lower positions than in the higher positions, your fingers have to stretch more in the 1st position. Starting approximately with position V and up to X/XI, the required finger positions are easier to take on because they correspond to the natural physiognomy of the hand.

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The Principles of the Four Hand Shapes

To identify the fingers and fingerings of the LH, numbers have proven themselves useful, like with all string instruments:

Index Finger = 1st Finger = 1
Middle Finger = 2nd Finger = 2
Ring Finger = 3rd Finger = 3
Pinky = 4th Finger = 4

For the extended distance from the 1st to the 6th string and back, which demands considerable stretching and spreading of the fingers, there are endless potential finger combinations and hand positions which, when broken down and **oversimplified, can be reduced to four shapes**. They are most often simply combined with each other and appear isolated only when certain playing techniques are employed (playing in octaves, scales). These four hand shapes will help us describe four different snapshots of the LH in depth:

1. **The natural hand shapes spanning four strings and two frets (diminished 7th chord)**



Finger 1 on the 1st fret of the d string
Finger 2 on the 1st fret of the b string
Finger 3 on the 2nd fret of the g string
Finger 4 on the 2nd fret of the high e' string

The natural hand shape is the most comfortable position for all the fingers. No stretching or spreading of the fingers is necessary. If you allow your fingers to simply "fall" onto the fingerboard, this is the natural position they assume.

2. **The LH shape in the direction of the bass strings (diagonal)**



Finger 1 on the 1st fret of the high e' string
Finger 2 on the 2nd fret of the b string
Finger 3 on the 3rd fret of the g string
Finger 4 on the 4th fret of the d string

3. **The LH shape in the direction of the treble strings (diagonal)**



Finger 1 on the 1st fret of the low E string
Finger 2 on the 2nd fret of the A string
Finger 3 on the 3rd fret of the d string
Finger 4 on the 4th fret of the g string

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4. **The LH shape on one string, also called the four finger position (horizontal)**
   All four fingers are placed on one string. For more details, see "Different Positions of the Left Arm-Hand-Finger System…" below.



So that the fingers of the LH can take on their individual positions within the shape in a direct, economical fashion, even after a large change of position, they need to have the proper stability. They shouldn't be allowed to swing or sway back and forth to the sides. This especially applies to the 4th finger which, together with the index finger, is responsible for the overall stability of the shape and which can be strengthened by practicing playing in octaves.
All LH shapes are at their widest in position I and loose breadth as you move into the upper positions. The higher the position, the smaller and more compact the shape. You can best observe this perhaps when, employing the 3rd shape in the direction of the treble strings, you play chromatic octaves from position I to position XII. In the highest positions, your fingers are forced so close together that they distinctly touch.
Fingering in general is more difficult here due to the missing counter pressure of the thumb.

Different Positions of the Left Arm-Hand-Finger System, Clarified by the Fourth Hand Shape

After you have assumed basic guitar posture (see II. Holding the Instrument, p. 20) , bend your left forearm (that is extended down next to your body with the inner surface of its hand pointing in) at the elbow more than 90 degrees in the direction of the fingerboard and move your upper arm slightly away from your body. The fingers (held straight up until now) are now bent approximately 90 degrees. If you look down at your LH now, you should be looking at your fingertips as they point towards your upper body and at the inner surface of your hand which, slightly tilted, faces the fingerboard.
Next, the fingers of the LH are placed successively on the high e' and low E strings in shapes I and VII. This way we generate 4 shapes – snapshots – in the fourth hand shape (four finger horizontal position) to illustrate the differences when assuming extreme positions.

The posture of the LH in position I on the 1st string, the high e' string:



1. **Upper arm** and **elbow** move away from the body.
2. The **wrist** forms a straight line with the forearm.
3. The **thumb should be across from the index and middle fingers** yet tend towards the index finger at the top of the back of the neck, forming almost a straight line with your forearm.
4. The **index finger** bends slightly to the back and left from its base joint. **The outer left side of the first phalange near the base joint lies very close to the guitar neck and almost touches it.** The end and middle finger joints are extremely bent.
5. The base joint of the **middle finger** should form almost a straight line with the back of the hand yet this joint has the tendency to lean a little bit forwards towards the guitar. The distance to the guitar neck should amount to 1 to 1.5 cm. The end and middle finger joints are extremely bent.
6. The **ring finger** bends slightly forward from its base joint. The distance to the guitar neck should be approximately 2 to 2.5 cm. The end and middle finger joints are less extremely bent than those in the index and middle fingers.
7. The base, end and middle joints of the **pinky** are all bent equally yet distinctly less bent than the index, middle and ring fingers. It should form a bridge-like, stable arch. The distance between the pinky and the fingerboard is larger than the other fingers and should be 3 to 4 cm.

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The posture of the LH in position VII on the 1st string, the high e' string:



1. The **elbow** should be near to your upper body, but not touch it.
2. The **wrist** forms a straight line with the forearm.
3. The **thumb** sits distinctly across from the index finger at the top of the back of the neck and forms a straight line with your forearm. (If you have big hands, the thumb can also extend out beyond the neck).
4. The base joint of the **index finger** is not bent. The back of your hand and your index finger from a straight line up to the middle joint of the finger. The end and middle finger joints are extremely bent. The distance to the neck of the guitar should amount to plus or minus 1 cm.
5. The base joint of the **middle finger** is slightly bent, the end and middle joints extremely bent. The distance to the guitar neck is plus or minus 1.5 cm.
6. The base joint of the **ring finger** is bent slightly forward, the end and middle joints are extremely bent. The distance to the guitar neck is larger than that of the middle finger and amounts to plus or minus 2 cm.
7. The **pinky** is bent at its base joint only slightly, its end and middle joints are extremely bent. The distance from the pinky to the guitar neck is, in the upper positioas larger than that of the other fingers yet amounts here to only plus or minus 2.5 cm.

The posture of the LH in position I on the 6th string, the low E string:

1. The **elbow** is led away from the body by your upper arm, however it's closer to your body than in the LH posture on the high e' string in position I.
2. The **wrist** is slightly bent (depending on the size of your hand).
3. The **thumb** sits across from your index and middle fingers at the base of the back of the guitar neck and extends the line formed by your forearm. (If you have smaller hands, your thumb will be quite low on the back of the guitar neck.)



4. You can hardly see the base joint of the **index finger** and its end and middle joints are slightly bent as it takes on the shape of a stable, bridge-like arch. The end joint is bent the most in order to achieve an angle of at least 45 degrees so to able to apply the ideal amount of pressure. The index finger should be allowed to touch the neck of the guitar along the seam where the base joint meets the inner surface of your hand.
5. base joints of the **middle** and **ring fingers** are slightly bent, the end and middle joints extremely bent. With both fingers, it's the end joint that's bent most. The distance between both fingers and the guitar neck amounts to just a few millimeters while both base joints extend distinctly (2 to 2.5 cm) above the plane of the fingerboard.
6. The base joint of the **pinky** is not bent at all, the end and middle joints are bent only slightly; it should form a stable arch. It is also the end joint here that is bent the most. Although the 4th finger has to stretch distinctly more than the other fingers, its angle should be at least 45 degrees as it touches the string.

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The posture of the LH in position VII on the 6th string, the low E string:



1. Your **elbow** should be right next to your body. The upper arm also touches the body.
2. Your **wrist** should form a straight line with your forearm.
3. The **thumb** sits across from your index finger on the upper part of the back of the guitar neck and should extend the line formed by your forearm.
4. The base joint of the **index finger** is slightly bent, the end and middle joints are strongly bent, but not excessive. The index finger should be allowed to touch the neck of the guitar along the seam where the base joint meets the inner surface of your hand.
5. The **middle finger**, **ring finger** and **pinky** are all slightly bent at the base joint and quite strongly in their end and middle joints. The end joints are, again, bent the most. The face of your hand is allowed to touch the guitar neck from your index to your ring finger.

The Positioning of the Fingertips

The exact positioning of the fingers is determined, on the one hand, by the placement of the fingertips either diagonally or lengthwise (parallel) to the strings and fingernails, or, on the other hand, the diagonal and perpendicular placement of the fingertips (outer left, middle, outer right). Examining the different indentations on the fingertips, you can recognize whether you've been playing in a perpendicular or diagonal position.

On the 1st and 2nd strings, the fingertips sit more **obliquely (diagonally)** on the strings, which means: **diagonally from the left to the middle** of the tip, sometimes beyond the middle as well.

When changing to the bass strings, the positioning changes **from oblique (diagonal)** on the 1st and 2nd strings **to lengthwise (parallel) to the direction of the string** on the 5th and 6th strings.

Fingertips sit obliquely (diagonally) on the b string:



On the low E string, the fingertips sit parallel to the direction of the string.





You can determine the exact position of your fingertips by, as an exception, pressing your fingers down hard on the strings. The indentations created on your fingertips exactly correspond to their positioning on the strings.

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IV. Short Outline of the Movements of the Left Hand (LH)

The Shoulder-Arm-Hand System

As a comprehensive description of the complex movements of the LH would go beyond the scope of this book, here is a short outline of the most important movements of the LH.
The required movements of the LH and its fingers wouldn't be feasible without the support provided by the shoulder and arm. It is only the fine-tuned collaboration of the muscles, tendons and joints of your shoulder, arm, hand and fingers that make the economical movements of the fingers of your LH possible. In order to be able to adopt the different required positions of the fingers diagonal to and lengthways along the fingerboard, your upper and lower arms and wrist have to move so that your fingers have an easy job of it, i.e. they strain or stretch as little as possible.

The Motion of the Arm

To avoid bending your wrist too much (see III. Left Hand Posture, p. 23) and to maintain the tack hammer-like shape of the fingers when playing, the arm has to be moved distinctly away from the body (see photo at the bottom left) when in the 1st hand shape (diminished seventh chord, see p. 24) In the 2nd hand shape (see p. 24), it's almost touching your body so to avoid having to stretch your fingers too much, especially the 4th finger (see photo at the bottom right). In between these two shapes are an infinite number of variations of LH positions which are always accompanied by appropriate movement of the arm. This motion of the upper arm and the elbow joint is known as "arm control" amongst violinists, a term that couldn't be more applicable to guitarists as well.
Even during the vertical motion of the LH from the 1st to the 6th string and back, the upper arm moves slightly to the front and, conversely, to the back as well. The motion of the arm is minimal in this case. The wrist, which is normally held straight, should be allowed to lightly bend towards the 6th string here. The overall motion is more fluid and natural as a result.
The proper motion of the arm makes economical fingering easier and also helps you to retain strength in your fingers. The movements of your hand are not only less strenuous but look lighter and easier as well.



1st Hand shape (see p. 24):
your arm is away from your body



2nd Hand shape (see p. 24):
your arm almost touches your body

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Left Hand Shifts

Shifting from one position to another is one of the most difficult sequence of motions in the LH. There are three kinds of shifts: the one **over an open string** as well as the **direct** and **indirect shift**. With all three types your arm, hand, thumb and fingers all move more or less simultaneously to the new, target position.

An exception is the **half shift** in which the thumb does not move, yet the fingers stretch to reach the next higher or lower position. They either then remain in the new position and the thumb follows suit or they return to their original position with the thumb not having moved at all.



A shift involves a quick movement of the entire arm – with clearly noticeable motion in the forearm (the bending/extending of the elbow) – the hand,
the thumb and the fingers.

When shifting **from the low to the upper positions**, the thumb moves simultaneously with the fingers. You have to slightly detach it from the neck of the guitar. When shifting **from the high to the low positions**, the thumb should be in motion towards the lower target position as soon as the final note in the original position is played (fingered) so that **a pulling motion emanating from the wrist is created**. When shifting, the thumb has to be able to act in a flexible way. It has to constantly change its position on the neck of the guitar, both vertically and horizontally. The counter pressure applied during a shift is always minimal.

In the upper positions, the thumb sits at the intersection of the neck and the side of the guitar, tending more towards the neck. Shifting should be executed by stretching the whole hand whereby the thumb does not leave its position but functions rather as a pivot point. If you have smaller hands, the thumb is placed next to the lower edge of the fingerboard and exerts little pressure which is quite easy to achieve on modern guitars because, if you look across their tops at eye level, you can often see that they have an elevated fingerboard.

The easiest **shift is the one over an open string**: its ringing allows the LH time for the change and always guarantees it will be "legato."

In the **direct shift**, the finger assumes the same position it had in the starting position in the new, target position. A special issue here is the 4th finger when changing to a higher position. It has to be moved so that the posture of its arch-like, bent knuckle (middle) joint can always be maintained, even in the highest of positions. It cannot be allowed to follow its natural tendency to slip off to the side and twist away.

With the **indirect shift**, the finger that performs the shift will be replaced by another finger when it reaches the new, target position. When changing to a upper position, the following finger combinations 1-2, 1-3, 1-4, 2-3, 2-4, 3-4 won't prove to be difficult at all. The reverse combinations are all the more difficult the farther the fingers are apart from each other, admittedly 3-1, 4-2 and especially 4-1.

Shifting to a lower position, it's exactly the same process but inverted: 1-3, 2-4 and 1-4 are the difficult ones here. In these shifts, the fingers have to be drawn together as closely as possible in order to perform the motions as legato as possible. The thumb is, again, sent in advance so that a "pulling" motion in the hand can occur.

Stretching and Contracting the Fingers

In order to guarantee an economical and unstrained performance of the LH, you should use every possible opportunity to relax your LH because even the four finger horizontal shape (4th Hand Shape, p. 25) in the 1st position requires every finger to stretch. If all four fingers are constantly kept down on the fingerboard, this can be strenuous for the LH over time. That's why your fingers, when they're not needed for a brief moment, should be lifted off the fingerboard. With scales and runs it's even possible that only the finger that is occupied with creating a sound at any given moment is active so that the others can be allowed to rest.

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If, for example, when playing in the lower positions only one finger is active and you're sustaining a longer note. You can contract the other fingers together around the active finger at a short distance from the strings. If only the 1st finger is playing, the others hover close together above the fingerboard so that they're almost touching each other (depending on what position you're in). If it's the 2nd finger that's playing, 1 and 3 hover close to 2 above the fingerboard. This relaxation technique is very advantageous for vibrato sections in slow movements and pieces.

Another example for the contracting and relaxing of the fingers is the use of the 1st and 4th fingers when playing two different strings over two neighboring frets: for example "e" on the d string at the 2nd fret with your 1st finger and "g" on the high e' string with your 4th.
Likewise, it's better when alternating notes in half tone steps on a single string not to use neighboring fingers but to employ the 2nd and 4th fingers. This will save energy because the fingers don't have to stretch.



Fingers 1 and 4



Fingers 2 and 4

If stretching is unavoidable, you should definitely take advantage of the next available opportunity to contract your fingers together and have them rest.

Ascending and Descending Slurs

A special aspect of guitar technique is the creation of a sound with the fingers of the LH by percussively placing the finger on or pulling it off a string. The slurred tones that are produced correspond to a legato effect which, considering just the two slurred notes, could even replace the traditional articulation and slur markings, especially those found in early music. If more notes are grouped together under a slur marking however, this guitar "legato" cannot appropriately reproduce the phrasing intentions of the composer. As a result, using the term "legato" for ascending and descending slurs is dubious as a musical legato can only be partially approximated by the technical legato presented here.
The starting point for an **ascending slur is stable LH posture**. Following the stroke in the RH, a single finger of the LH is percussively catapulted onto the string from a steep angle and with plenty of momentum and speed so that a note is created upon impact.
The ascending slur can begin on an open string, however it most commonly starts from a fingered note **whereby the finger pressure of the initially active finger is shifted to the newly placed finger immediately after the attack**. Developing a feeling for the shifting of weight and pressure from finger to finger can only be achieved through slow and deliberate practicing.
The movement starts at the finger's base joint, similar to the impulsive motion of the fingers already discussed (see "Basic Motions of the Fingers," p. 29). To achieve a clear and distinct tone, the LH fingers have to gather momentum from several centimeters away from the fingerboard. They should be allowed to bend back a little bit beyond the stretched base joint of the fingers. In exceptional cases, the wrist can support the fingers by also bending back a little bit and thereby allowing the increased momentum of the fingers when they initiate their playing motion. This wrist movement has to be so integrated into your playing movements that the actual motion of the wrist is hardly visible. The whole combined movement appears harmonious, fluent and natural.

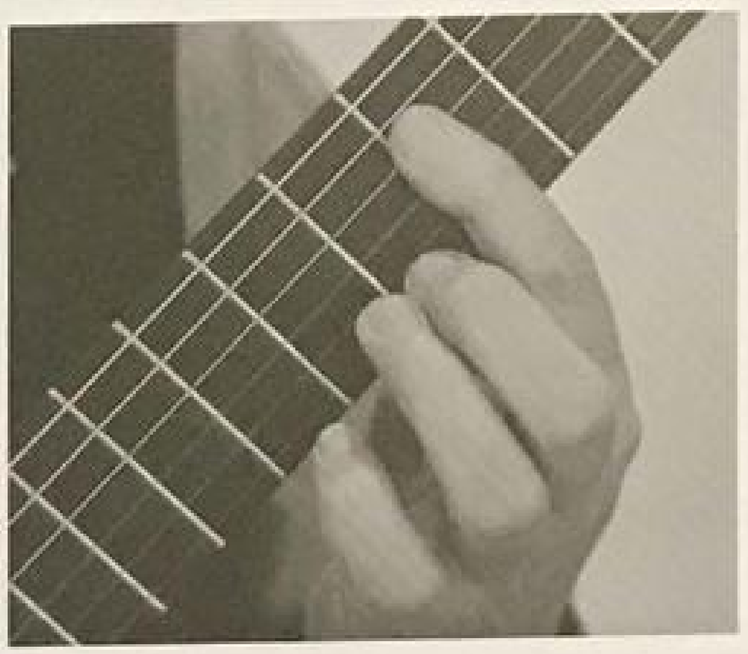
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comprehend when you have a look at the following examples. Here you have to pay special attention and make sure that both folds of skin that enclose the middle phalange of the finger are not placed **directly on** a string. The rule dictates that both these folds of skin are to be placed **between** strings.

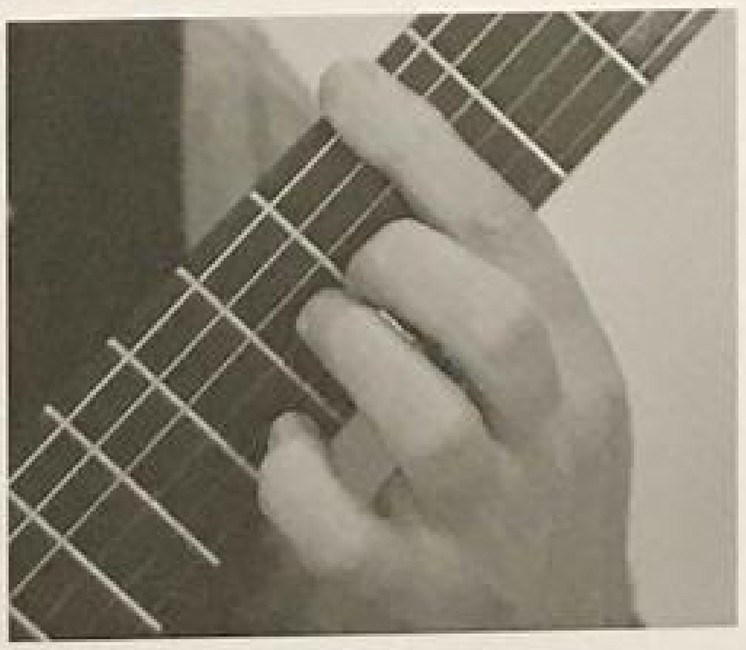
1. Small Barre



2. Medium Barre



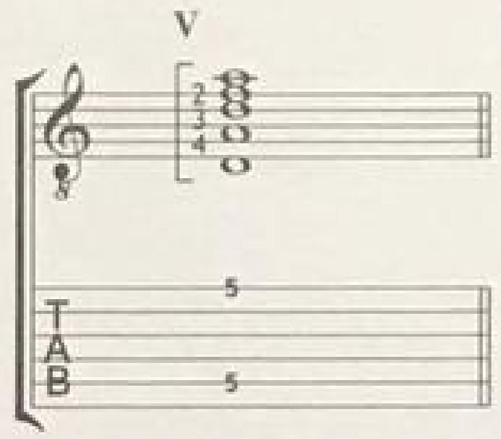
3. Large Barre



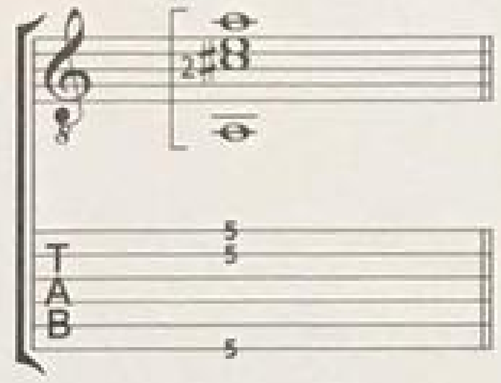
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Examples:

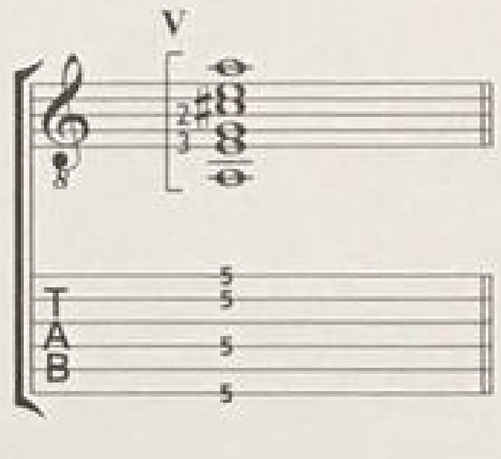
1. Two notes sound in this barre: "d" on the 5th and "a" on the 1st string. The 1st and 5th strings are depressed. Your barre finger is slightly curved and pressure is applied to a treble and a bass string while the strings in between are touched.



2. Three notes sound in this barre: "A" on the 6th, "e" on the 2nd and "a" on the 1st string. You press down the 1st, 2nd and 6th strings. The barre finger is slightly curved and pressure is applied to two treble strings and a bass string while the strings in between are simply touched.



3. Four notes sound in this barre: "A" on the 6th, "g" on the 4th, "e" on the 2nd and "a" on the 1st string. The barre finger is fully stretched and extended. The finger should be deployed so that no folds of skin come to rest on the 4th string so that the pressing strength is transferred to the 6th, 4th, 2nd and 1st strings. In an ideal case, the folds of skin should lay on the 3rd and 5th strings.



Barre technique is a technique of endurance. Alternating maintaining the barre followed by subsequent short breaks is the most effective practice method: i.e. 45 seconds of barre playing followed by a 15 seconds break including LH thumb and thenar (the ball of muscle at the base of the thumb) massage. The Llobet barre exercise found on page 187 is excellently suited here.
Besides endurance, the switching of the index finger from its normal position to its barre position and back again, often combined with a shift, has to be specifically practiced. The frequently encountered change from the small and medium barre to the normal index finger position in combination with a string and position shift should be executed in a gliding, almost floating motion. Please examine the following four photos:



Barre over three strings at the 5th fret



1st finger in motion to a new position





1st finger on the 3rd string in position III

Vibrato

The required movements here are described in detail in the vibrato exercise section on page 209.

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V. Right Hand Posture (RH)

Posture

As the right hand (RH) is directly involved in producing a sound without an intermediary medium, accuracy and tonal control have to brought into harmony with each other by good RH posture. It not only plays a key role in sound generation and is responsible for a beautiful, full tone and balanced sound, but rather, on top of this, also provides your fingers with the necessary sense of security when plucking the proper notes and strings.
The basic posture of the RH is influenced by which side of the nail you decide to pluck with, the left or the right, and the type of attack you choose, the nail or the fingertip. As questions regarding which side of the nail and type of attack are no longer discussed today and plucking with the left side of the nail has proven itself in practice, our discussion of posture will only address nail attacks. (Read more on fingernails in the following chapter which begins on page 37.)
In contrast to the numbering system used for the LH, the fingers of the RH are denoted by letters which come from the Latin names of the fingers:

Thumb	=	**p (pollex)**
Index Finger	=	**i (index)**
Middle Finger	=	**m (medius)**
Ring Finger	=	**a (anularius)**

The pinky, which is seldomly used in classical guitar technique, is often labelled with a "c."

To establish our initial starting point a little bit to the right of the soundhole (as seen from the player's perspective) and without applying any pressure, place your

thumb on the 5th string (A) or the 4th string (d),
index finger on the 3rd string (g),
middle finger on the 2nd string (b) and
the ring finger on the 1st string (e').

This results in a snapshot of the basic posture the right hand should assume so it can facilitate all the necessary movements of the fingers and the hand for the different types of attacks featuring the following characteristics:



1. Your wrist should be 6 to 8 centimeters (one hand width) away from the top of the guitar and slightly bent to the outside. It should represent, without being extremely bent, the highest point of the line formed by your forearm and the back of your hand.



2. The forearm and back of the hand should form a straight line which you should check in front of a mirror.

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3. The thumb should be located, as seen from the player's perspective, about 1 centimeter away from the fingers.



4. All your finger joints, base, middle and end, are bent so that a semi-circle is formed. In doing so, your base and end joints are bent only slightly, your middle joint more severely. In no case should extreme bending be allowed to cause tension in the hand.

5. Index, middle and ring finger are so close together that they lightly touch. Their fingertips should form a straight line.



6. Taken together, the thumb and fingers form the shape of an open "O."



Base Finger Joint Position Relative to the Strings

As described above, you touch the **4th**, **3rd**, **2nd** and **1st strings** with **p - i - m - a**, but don't apply any pressure. The correct posture of the RH can only be obtained if your playing fingers, in free stroke attack (tirando), are able to set the strings vibrating so that strong and sonorous notes are created without hitting the adjacent strings by mistake. This proper playing angle relative to the strings is achieved by moving the forearm and hand slightly down without removing the fingers from the strings.



As an orientation aid for the optimal playing angle, the positions of the base joints of the fingers above their respective strings should serve as a guide and be checked in front of a mirror:

the base joint of the index finger
should be perpendicularly above the g string,

the base joint of the middle finger
should be perpendicularly above the b string,

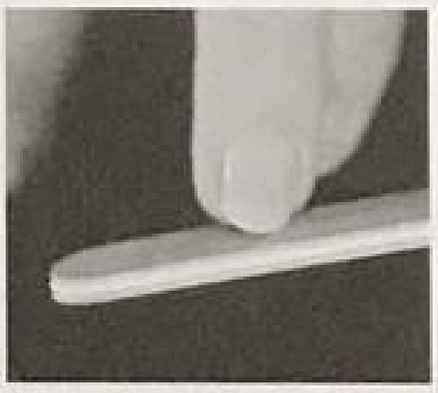
the base joint of the ring finger
should be perpendicularly above the e' string.



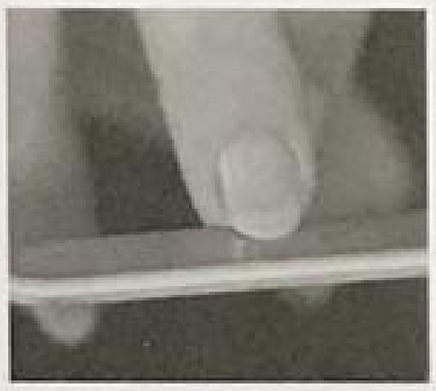
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- Although principally the left side of the nail is used to strike the string and the longer ramp exists on that side, the right side of the nail must be provided with a small ramp of its own. If it isn't perfectly filed it can become an obstacle if you slightly rotate your finger while playing.
- If none of this works then you should get some medium-fine filing paper and place it over the strings at the soundhole. You then move your fingers on the filing paper as if you were actually playing; this allows you to approach your ideal nail shape to a small degree.

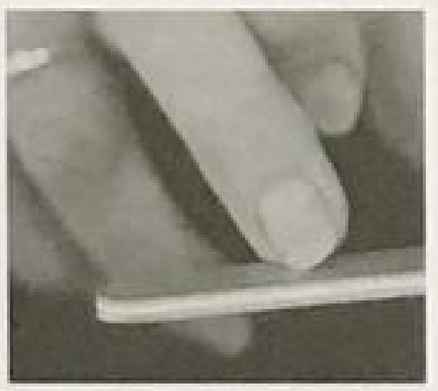
Pictures illustrating the filing process:



File and fingernail, left ramp



File and fingernail, middle



File and fingernail, small right ramp



File paper placed over the strings

Once you've gotten the perfect shape, the string is guided along the nail as follows:

- Your fingertip is on the string.
- The string slides over the fingertip on the quickest path and without the least bit of resistance to where the nail begins.
- The resistance of the nail, which is perfectly polished (see below), forces the string to move along its ramp until it finally arrives at the end of the nail.
- Now that no longer any resistance can be felt, the finger (fingernail) is set free.
- The note can sound!

Polishing the Nails

After the nails have been shaped, they need to be properly polished.
First the nail edges have to be rounded off with middle-fine file paper.



Then you wrap a wide nail file or ruler in fine file paper and polish the nails on a smooth filing surface using the shaping process described above. In the meantime, you should frequently round off the nail edges and test the tone quality of the nails on the guitar. At the same time, the granulation of your filing paper should steadily become finer over time. Repeat the procedure: polishing, rounding off, checking the quality several times and then at the end, **again and with lots of patience**, round off and polish the nail edges with the finest nail paper or even a leather shammy.

Note: When playing on the bass strings, the nails get worn-out. Not only is their polished surface roughened but the actual fiber of the nail is literally affected. You can avoid this problem by taping the nails with Scotch tape. After about 30 minutes you're going to have to change the tape, though.

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Playing Angle of the RH

The minimal distance between the strings contributes to the fact that the sphere of action for the RH is very small and limited. The distance between the strings cannot be increased, but by adopting a different playing angle achieved by turning the RH slightly to the left, the distance your fingers have to travel to strike the strings can be increased. Via this diagonal path, the fingers can execute their required motions with more strength and thus increase the volume of your playing.



Playing Angle 1

This volume effect can be intensified if you angle your forearm and wrist slightly towards the ground. Looking at it from the perspective of the strings, you are now using a different playing angle whose position is as follows: the base joints of your index, middle and ring fingers are now positioned directly above the 3rd, 2nd and 1st strings respectively. To increase the playing angle, just tilt your wrist a few millimeters more towards the floor (see "Base Finger Joint Position Relative to the Strings," p. 36). The striking motion now comes from below, similar to the striking motion associated with playing a lute. The position now assumed by your hand could be physically compared to a pair of tongs.



Playing Angle 2

Caution! **This diagonal stroke creates a scratchy sound on the bass strings.** In order to avoid this, the wrist has to be slightly tilted to the right when playing the bass strings so that the distance your fingers have to travel to strike the strings is decreased and the string is struck directly without it sliding across your fingernail.

A System of Springs

Before the sequence of motions is described, you have to be conscious of the fact that the **shoulder-arm-hand-finger system works like a system of mechanical springs** (see Ivan Galamian's "Principles of Violin Playing & Teaching").

Mechanical springs can be either elastic or inflexible, with many various degrees of firmness in between. The joints, tendons and muscles have to function in exactly the same fashion when a string is struck, i.e. set to vibrate. At any given moment you should be able to switch immediately from a state of the highest tension to one of absolute relaxation.
Every stroke, whether free (tirando), rest stroke (apoyando) or the striking of a chord is performed with the resilience of your "human" springs. Very rarely is only a single joint involved in a movement. More often than not it is the complicated interaction of several joints, tendons and muscles.
The often quoted **"relaxed" state of playing is actually unrealizable as it is only possible to absent the participation of each and every muscle**. Therefore it is actually impossible to play and be "relaxed" at the same time. If the term "relaxed state" before and after the stroke, i.e. before and after muscle activity, is meant, then we can can use this phrase colloquially, yet always carefully and with a corresponding explanation.

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Tirando: Sequence of Motions

The free stroke, also called tirando (from the Spanish "tirar" = to pull), is the most important and most commonly used stroke in the RH. In order to be able to explain the required sequence of movements, you first have to be aware of the fact that there are two opposing playing motions within the hand:

1. the thumb strikes in a downward direction,
2. the fingers in an upward direction.

Despite the opposite directions, the thumb and fingers should not be allowed to collide. In order to have enough freedom of motion while playing, **all three joints of your fingers have to bend** as well as the base joint of the thumb so that they all don't – even those on adjacent strings – get in each other's way during a strong tirando stroke. For this reason you form, as already discussed in-depth in the chapter "V. Right Hand Posture" on page 36, an open "O."



The index finger, whose sphere of action inwards is larger than that of the thumb, is able to comfortably attack past the thumb. This is of Major importance in two-part playing.



before the simultaneous stroke of p and i



after the stroke of p and i

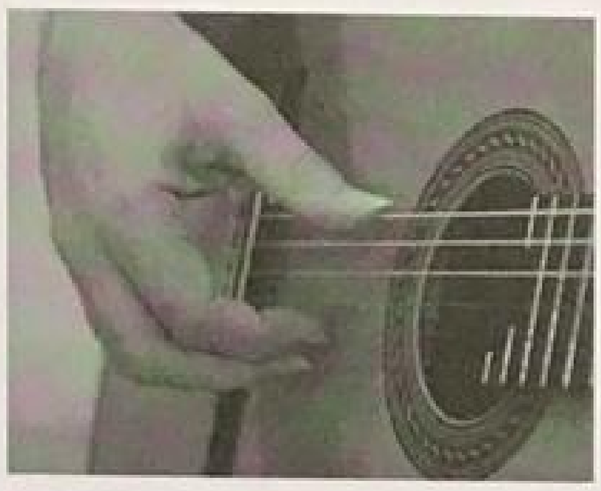
The sequence of motions in detail using the index finger stroke as an example (see the photos on page 42)

- Starting from basic RH posture, your index, middle and ring fingers are placed on the 3rd, 2nd and 1st, your thumb on the 6th or 5th strings.
- Fully concentrate on the index finger whose three finger joints are bent and slightly tensed, comparable to mechanical springs.
- Simultaneously apply pressure to the string until it sinks slightly below its natural level.
- The resistance of the string increases.
- Shortly before you execute the stroke, imagine a full and round tone in your mind.
- After briefly holding your breath, the resistance of the string is overcome by a distinctive impulse.
- The index finger attacks and moves slightly upward towards the palm of your hand, without hitting the adjacent string.
- In total, the overall movement should not be allowed to physically go beyond the second adjacent string (see the schematic depiction on page 46).

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As in every fluid movement, several joints, all three finger joints in this case, participate in the striking motion:

- the **base joint to a Major degree** including **small visible movement**,
- the **the middle joint to the greatest degree** including **the largest visible movement**,
- the **end joint to the least degree** including **almost no visible movement**.



Index finger
before the stroke



Index finger
finger after the stroke

Apoyando: Sequence of Motions

Although the rest stroke, also called apoyando (from the Spanish "apoyar" = to support), is one of the most well-known RH strokes, it is in less use at the present day than the tirando stroke. On the one hand, this has to do with the historical progression of guitar pedagogy in which the focus of beginners has now been shifted to the tirando stroke. On the other hand, today's repertoire concentrates more on polyphonic works for which the apoyando stroke is not suited. However, the guitar repertoire is stylistically so diverse that, especially in the Spanish repertoire, the apoyando stroke can be used frequently. Good, virtuosic players of today have excellent command of both techniques.
The sequence of motions is similar to the tirando stroke but with the difference that the finger does not move in the direction of the palm of the hand but stops its movement at the next lower neighboring string. By touching the adjacent string, the motion of the finger is halted immediately.

The sequence of motions in detail using the index finger stroke as an example

- The index finger is placed on the 3rd string using just a little bit of your fingertip.
- The finger cannot be allowed to dip down deep between the strings.
- Fully concentrate on your index finger.
- All three joints of your finger are bent, less than in the tirando stroke however, and comparing them to mechanical springs, they are tensed slightly.
- Simultaneously apply pressure to the string until it sinks slightly below its natural level.
- The resistance of the string increases.
- Shortly before you execute the stroke, imagine a full and round tone in your mind.
- After briefly holding your breath, the resistance of the string is overcome by a distinctive impulse.
- The index finger attacks and comes to rest with the upper part of the fingertip touching the neighboring string.

Here all three finger joints participate in the striking motion as well:

- the **base joint to a Major degree** including **small visible movement**,
- the **middle joint to a lesser degree** including **small visible movement**,
- the **end joint to the least degree** including **small visible movement as well a slight stretching!**

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Important! **The Motion of the End Joint**
You will detect a small difference in the end joint with the tirando stroke. In the apoyando it simply relents and is thereby temporarily stretched. This inconspicuous movement should not be allowed to be just any ordinary yielding, but correspond rather to the elastic motion of a spring.



Index finger
before the apoyando stroke



Index finger
after the apoyando stroke

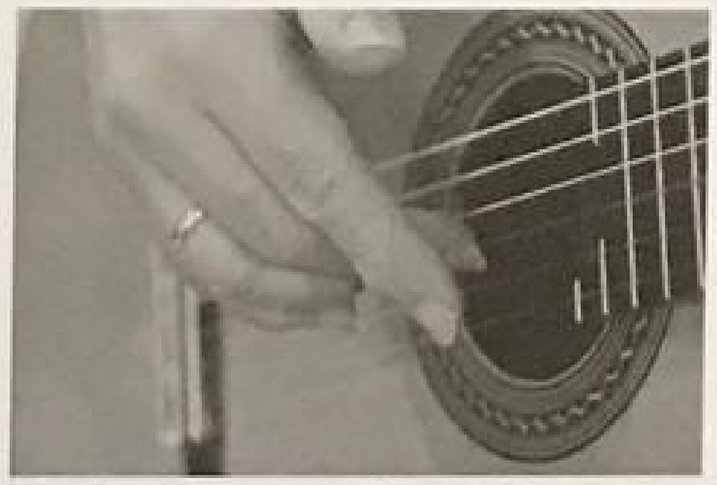
Sequence of Motions when Alternating Strokes (m-i and a-m-i)

m-i
The detailed sequence of motions when alternating strokes is identical those of the tirando and apoyando. However, alternating fingers always results in the respective returning motion of the finger that is not playing as it moves back to its original position. In other words: the striking and returning movements cross each other. While the index finger is striking, the middle finger is moving back and vice versa. These movements have to be coordinated with each other at a slow tempo first.

As the alternating strokes become faster, the returning motion becomes an automatic movement. At a fast tempo, the returning and plucking movements correspond to a kind of "ping-pong" effect: one simply leads to the other. In order to coordinate both movements perfectly, it is absolutely essential to initially practice the stroking and returning movements at a slow tempo.



i after the apoyando stroke



m after the apoyando stroke



i after the tirando stroke



m after the tirando stroke

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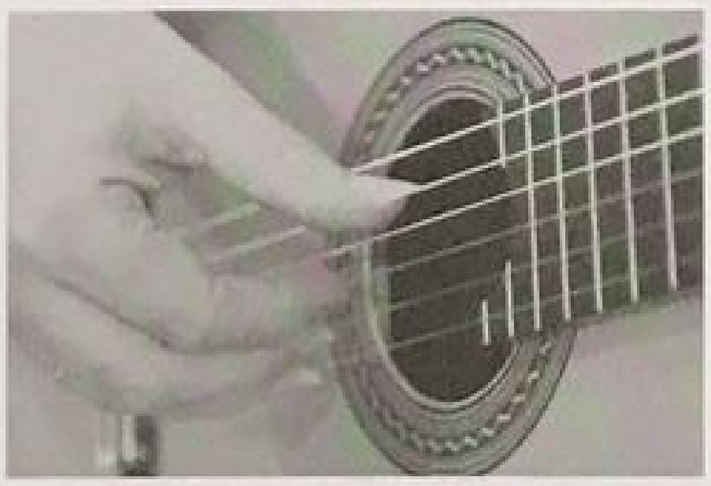
a-m-i
The stroking frequency of three alternating fingers can be higher and therefore faster than with two fingers. The movement **a-m-i** is fundamentally the fastest three finger combination in tirando as well as apoyando (see "V. Tremolo," p. 161). The returning movements match those when alternating strokes between two fingers. Based on the differential independence of the individual fingers (the ring finger is connected via its tendons to the middle finger and pinky), it's advisable to perform the returning motion of the ring and middle fingers at the same time the index finger attacks. While **i** is attacking, **m** and **a** move **simultaneously back** to their original positions!

Thumb Attack: Sequence of Motions

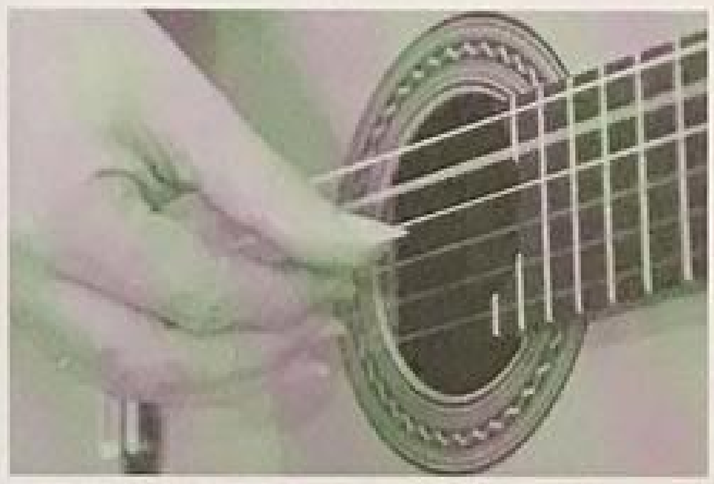
The thumb is in use during both the tirando and apoyando strokes. Beginning with basic RH posture is the best way to explain the sequence of motions.

Thumb attack in tirando
- Index, middle and ring fingers are placed on the 3rd, 2nd and 1st strings.
- In an almost stretched state, the thumb is tensed slightly in accordance with the system of springs.
- The end joint brings the thumbnail, which is often too far away from a potential playing position, into a striking position by bending slightly. It has to, as needed to achieve a certain sound or to stop the strings, potentially bend even more and should not be allowed to stretch.

The further stroking procedure follows that of the tirando stroke with the fingers.
After the thumb has plucked without hitting the adjacent string, it springs back to its original position. It is important that the thumb, which attacks less frequently than the other fingers, bounces back so to be ready for a subsequent stroke.
The overall motion corresponds to a flat ellipse and should not be allowed to extend beyond the second adjacent string. The motion is initiated at the **base joint (near the wrist)** with a **distinct visible movement**.



Thumb before the tirando stroke



Thumb after the tirando stroke

Thumb attack in apoyando
The stroking process broadly matches that of the thumb stroke in tirando.
The end joint of your thumb is stretched however and the wrist, according to the tonal color you're after, is raised.
After attacking, the thumb comes to rest at the next higher adjacent string. It should remain there only briefly so that, on the one hand, the string is not muted by the the thumb, on the other hand so that the thumb is ready to strike again from its normal position.

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Thumb before the apoyando stroke



Thumb after the apoyando stroke

Tonal Colors and Point of Contact

To achieve expressive and tonally colorful playing, you have to take advantage of the entire RH sphere, from the bridge to the fingerboard. The necessary movements of the RH are governed by your upper arm, bending your elbow to greater or lesser degrees. The forearm then changes its point of contact at the intersection of side and top.

The additional vertical motion of the RH from the 1st to the 6th string is a combination of movements of the wrist (bent), forearm (upwards) and upper arm (slightly to the back). In reverse from the 6th to the 1st string: wrist (less bent), forearm (downwards) and upper arm (to the front). This all has to happen in fluid and harmonious movements.

It should be added that, similar to bowed instruments, the strings have different string tensions: near the bridge – very high, at the fingerboard – low. This forces the hand to move even more during an expressive interpretation so that it can find the right **point of contact**. If it's played strongly, a loud note close to the fingerboard will buzz. The ideal point of contact will thus be found near the bridge. In contrast, the point of contact for a soft and dolce note can be situated either near the fingerboard or also at the bridge.

Sometimes you'll want to change the tonal color in the middle of a certain phrase to make it sound more vivid. The point of contact can thus change along with the musical and tonal requirements, at times even from note to note. Only a refined, musical ear can decide where the best point of contact actually is.

Playing Chords (Several Notes Simultaneously): Sequence of Motions

Although the simultaneous three and four note chord stroke is a tirando stroke, the sequence of motions is completely different. When you compare it to other strokes, the main difference is that your fingers and thumb play simultaneously. In order to achieve absolute synchronization of the fingers when playing, the fingers **a-m-i** need to be perceived as a single unit and not three individual fingers. Therefore they should be held as tightly together as possible so that their fingertips touch.

The stroke in detail:

- Taking the opposite directions of motion of both the thumb and fingers into consideration, the RH assumes its basic, natural posture.
- The thumb is placed on the 5th string, as seen from the player's perspective about one to two centimeters away from the index finger. If it would shift too far to the right into the hand, the index finger wouldn't have any mobility anymore: the thumb would impede its attacking motion.
- Fully concentrate now on the **a-m-i** unit and the thumb.
- Press down lightly on the strings until they sink slightly below their natural level.
- The thumb and fingers tense in their fingertips as if they were mechanical springs until, ultimately, you have the feeling that **your thumb and a-m-i are one unit**.
- The resistance of the strings increases.
- The mental image of a compact sounding chord helps you to overcome the final resistance.
- Shortly before you execute the stroke, imagine a full and round tone in your mind.
- In a short, impulsive instant, the stroke of the fingers and thumb occurs and they immediately spring back to their starting positions (either on the strings or hovering just above them).

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It is not only all your finger joints but also your wrist that participates in the stroke.
In the process, the **movement of the wrist** changes according to the speed at which you play, i.e. the frequency of strokes:

- at **slow speeds to a lesser degree** including **small visible movement**,
- at **fast speeds to a Major degree** including **large visible movement**.

Sequence of motions of the fingers:
- the **base joint to a Major degree** including **small visible movement**,
- the **middle joint to a lesser degree** including **barely visible movement**,
- the **end joint to almost no degree** including **almost no visible movement**.

Sequence of motions of the thumb:
- the **base joint of the thumb to a Major degree** including **small visible movement**,
- the **end joint of the thumb to a lesser degree** including **small visible movement**.



Before the chord stroke

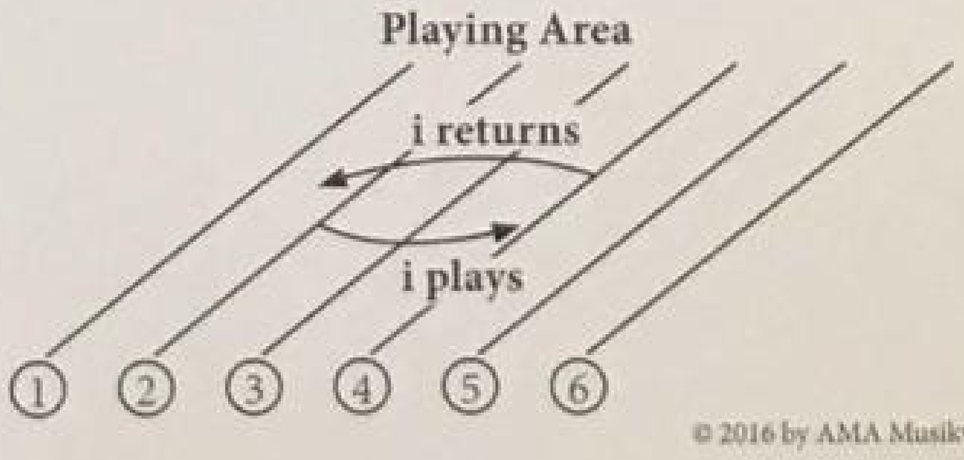


After the chord stroke

Arpeggios: Sequence of Motions

The sequence of motions of three and four note broken chords correspond to those of the tirando. As the frequency of strokes of the individual fingers in successive arpeggio patterns is relatively low – for the 6 basic arpeggios for example (see page 54) – each of your fingers and thumb has the same amount of time to attack and return to its original position.
With alternating arpeggio patterns, for example **a-m-a-i**, the returning motion matches that of the alternating stroke with two fingers. The attacking and returning movements cross each other.
To practice the returning motion and not adopt any superfluous, extra movements in the process, it is recommended to employ **"pure reflex development"** as an arpeggio practice method. In this method, the attack originates at the string. In so doing, the return motion is impulsively triggered by the stroke of the previous finger, see "I. Arpeggios" on page 50. The stroking movement should never be too grand. The stroking finger should never be allowed to extend beyond the second neighboring string and upon returning, never to overstep the area defined by the string that is to be played (see "I. Arpeggios," p. and "Tirando: Sequence of Motions," p. 41).

Schematic depiction of the playing area when striking the b string



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VI. Flamenco Techniques

Flamenco techniques have been a part of classical guitar technique for years and are employed in many original pieces, not only just in those of Spanish origin. The important flamenco technique for classical guitarists, besides the "pulgar" (Spanish for thumb), is the rasgueado technique. The "golpe" technique can only be performed on a flamenco guitar with a pick guard and is rarely used in the classical repertoire.

The biggest difference between flamenco and classical technique, besides the inclusion of the pinky (here indicated by c), is the reverse motion of the fingers during a rasgueado attack. Practicing this reverse movement strongly influences the reflex development of your fingers and thereby influences the speed of all your RH patterns in general.

Rasgueado Technique

In rasgueado technique, the fingers hit the strings with the outer side of your fingernails during downstrokes, the thumb with the outside of its fingernail during an upstroke. The movement is fast and percussive, originating from a bent, fist-like position of the fingers whereby the fingernails of **i**, **m**, **a** and **c** lightly touch the palm of the hand. After the attack, the fingers are stretched at each joint. The primary motion occurs in the middle and base joints.
The fingers hit several strings. The primary mistake made by many non-flamenco guitarists is that their attacks are too slow or even performed in a strumming fashion which produces a diffuse sound. A good flamenco rasgueado requires, however, a rhythmically percussive attack.
The upstroke of the fingers corresponds to a tirando (free stroke) across several strings. This also has to be performed quickly and percussively. The following photos refer to Exercise 4.



The starting position of the RH before the downstroke with bent fingers



after attacking with c



after attacking with a



after attacking with m



after attacking with i

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Rasgueado with Thumb and Fingers

The following patterns in triplets are frequently used in typical flamenco rhythms. The motion of the thumb and fingers originates in your forearm in a rotating fashion. When the individual attacks are performed very quickly, the rotating movement appears as if your hand is shaking.



The starting position of the thumb before the upstroke



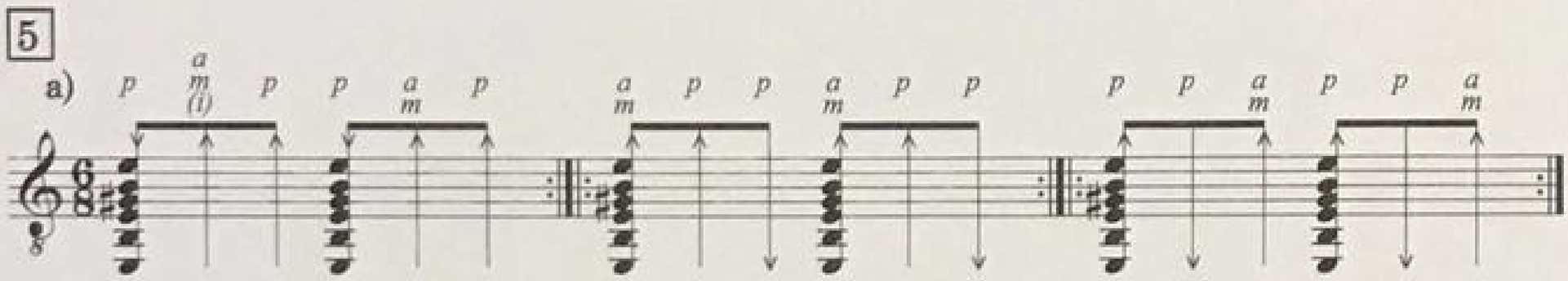
thumb after the upstroke

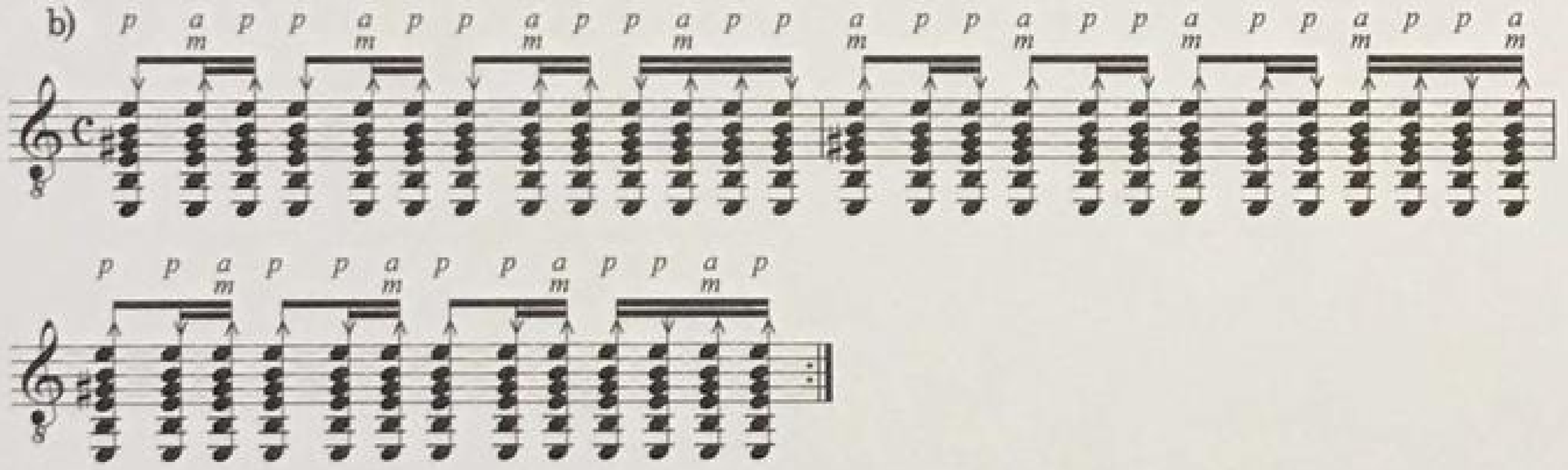


ami after the downstroke



thumb after the downstroke





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VII. Supplementary Technical Exercises for the Left Hand

Shift Exercises

The sequence of motions regarding the various shifts are explained in detail in Part One, page 30. By playing scales (p. 119), you can intensively practice and study all three types of shifts. But the complexity of playing scales can also distract your attention away from the actual difficulties involved with shifts and their perfect execution. The following, specialized shift exercises are ideal supplementary material and are excellently suited for the concentrated, analytical practice of this technique.

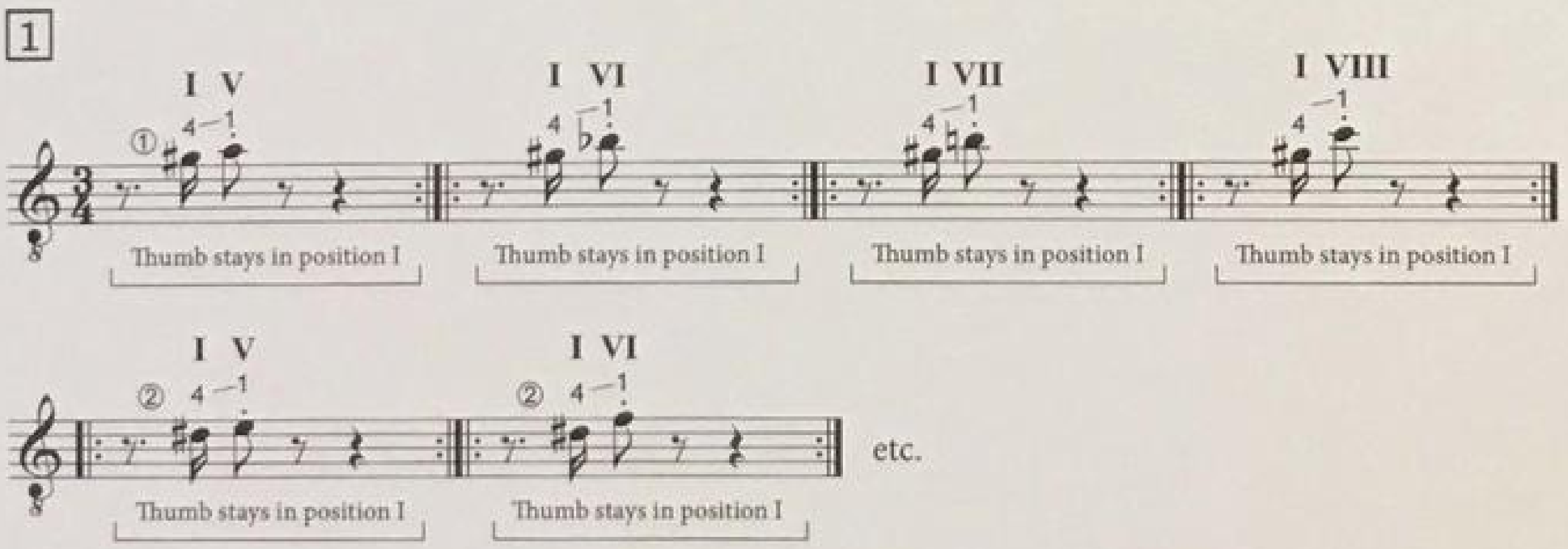
Preparatory Shift Exercises

In order to execute the shifting movement in a smooth and harmonious fashion, the thumb cannot be allowed to just rigidly move along with the fingers. It has to act as a flexible pivot point for the other fingers. In the following exercise, **only the fingers perform the shift** while the thumb remains at its spot in position I and only executes a small rotation to the left.





Thumb stays in position I



Practice on the 3rd string as well!

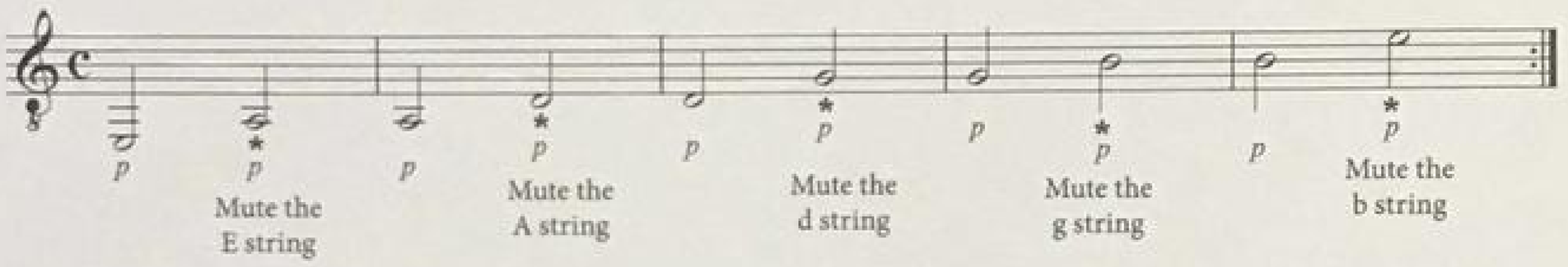
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Simultaneous Attacking and Muting with the Thumb

This technique is absolutely essential for every guitarist as it is just as commonly found in early music as it is in modern guitar literature. It allows you to stop non-harmonic bass notes immediately because, if you mute the bass note by touching the lower string after the attack, the non-harmonic bass note still sounds and is stopped too late. It is only a lower string that can be muted in this fashion. With your wrist slightly lowered, your thumb plays a (higher) bass string and mutes the lower one simultaneously. The lower joint of the thumb bends a little bit as seen in the photo:

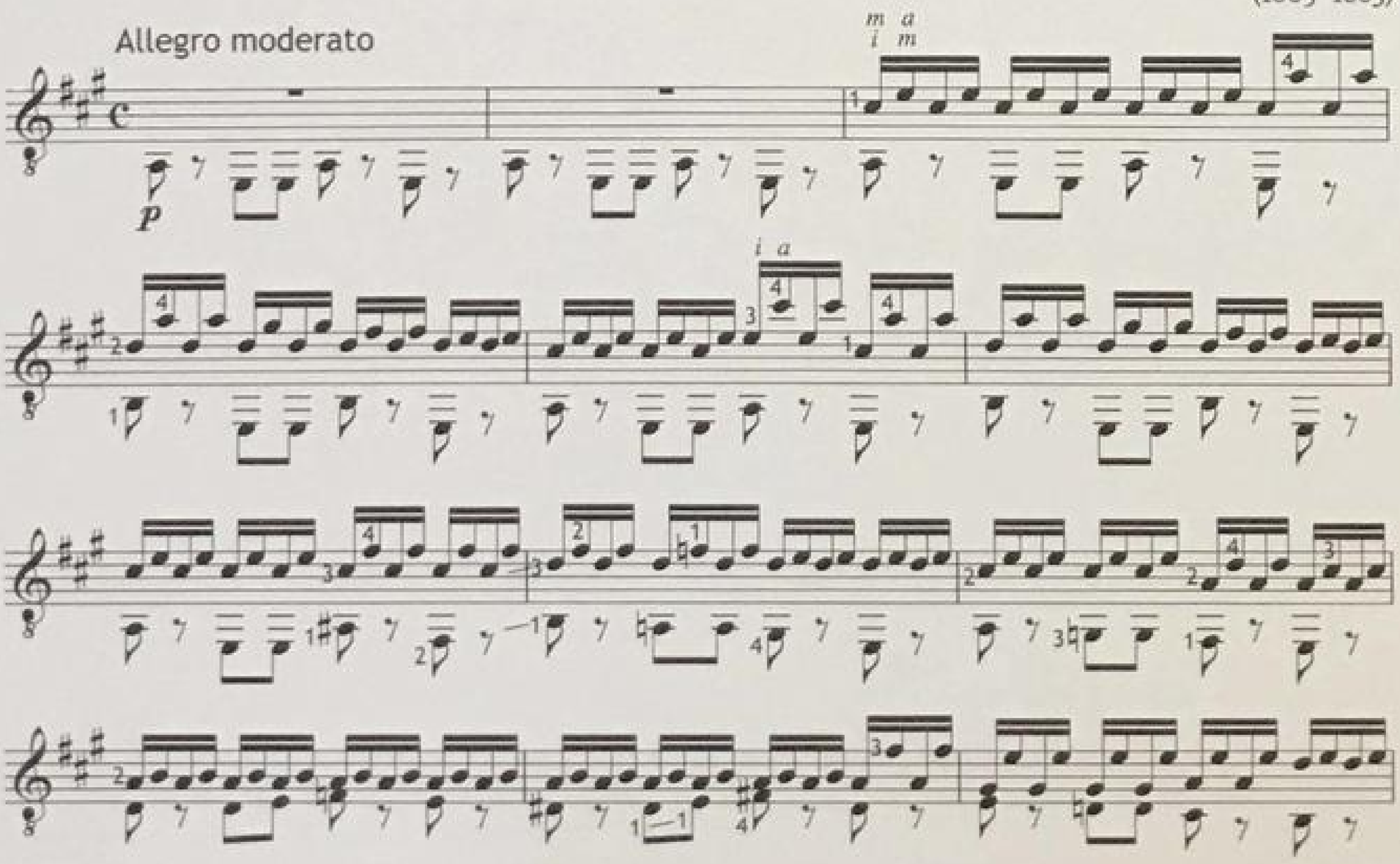


12



TIP 13 The following **Coste study op. 38, No. 23** demands several different techniques in both the left and right hands. It appears at this point in the book as it also incorporates the muting technique explained above. Overall it's one of the best and most effective etudes you can practice. The fluency and endurance of your right hand as well as quick changes in your left are trained here.

Napoléon Coste
(1805–1883)



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THE BIBLE OF CLASSICAL GUITAR TECHNIQUE



Hubert Käppel

Hubert Käppel is one of very few internationally acclaimed German guitarists. His extraordinary interpretations have set new standards in classical guitar performance and today he is the model for an entire generation of young guitarists.

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Moreover, he teaches at renowned universities and conservatories such as Yale University, Rubin Academy Jerusalem, Royal Academy Copenhagen, Boston Conservatory, The Haag Conservatory etc. and also at music and guitar festivals throughout the world. As a juror he attends the most prominent guitar competitions.

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