

CLASSICAL GUITAR STUDY GUIDES

Intermediate Repertoire Series



Fernando SOR

Study in b-minor
(24 Exercises, Op. 35. No. 22)

by STANLEY YATES

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Study No. 22 in b-minor

from *24 Exercises, Op. 35*

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INTRODUCTION

Spanish guitarist FERNANDO SOR (1778-1839) is considered by many to be the finest guitarist-composer of the early nineteenth century. Trained in music as a young man at the monastery at Montserrat, he subsequently composed not only a large body of concert music for the guitar but also piano music, songs, music for the ballet, a symphony, a violin concerto and an opera. He was an established figure in the musical mainstream of both Paris and London and spent several years in Russia. Sor's various sets of etudes, studies and exercises for the guitar are no less accomplished than his concert music and have long been staples of the student repertoire.

Sor's *Vingt quatre Exercices Très faciles et Soigneusement Doigté pour la Guitare, Op. 35* ("24 Very Easy Exercises Carefully Fingered for the Guitar"), self-published in Paris in 1828, are somewhat deceptively titled. Certainly, there is a strong didactic aspect to these pieces but they are in addition beautifully crafted musical miniatures. As the title mentions, the pieces are fully fingered, though only for the left hand. Although no fingerings for the right-hand are provided, we can deduce Sor's likely fingering from the information provided in his *Methode*.

Sor did not provide expression markings in these pieces (nor, for that matter, in his most of his music). It is unclear why this should be the case though, whatever the reason, it's inconceivable that Sor intended his music to be played inexpressively. We are compelled, therefore, to reconstruct the expressive layer ourselves. Consequently, all expression markings provided in this edition are editorial.

Exercise No. 22 in b-minor is a melodic and expressive piece that offers a great opportunity to work on melodic tone, control of musical texture, and expressive melodic phrasing.

SY

Print a copy of the edited score to use as a reference, adding your own notes as you work through this Study Guide.

Study in B-mi, Op. 35 No. 22

Edited by STANLEY YATES

Fernando SOR

(1778-1839)

Allegretto [♩ = c.120]

The musical score is written for a single melodic line in 3/4 time, key of B major. It consists of 32 measures. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto' with a metronome indication of approximately 120 beats per minute. The score includes various musical notations such as fingerings (e.g., m, i, p, i, m, i), slurs, and dynamic markings (e.g., mp, mf, f, pp). The piece is divided into sections by measure numbers 6, 11, 17, 22, 28, and 32. The final measure (32) is marked 'pp' and 'rall.'.

6

11

17

22

28

32

mp

poco rit.

a tempo

p

mf

f

cresc.

rit.

a tempo

mp

cresc.

a tempo

sub. p

poco rit.

rall.

pp

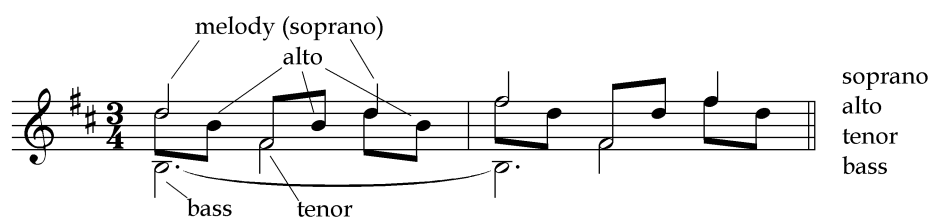
TECHNICAL ASPECTS

Right-Hand Issues

The Arpeggio

This piece uses a single right-hand pattern throughout and we'll explore and practice this before working on other aspects of the piece.

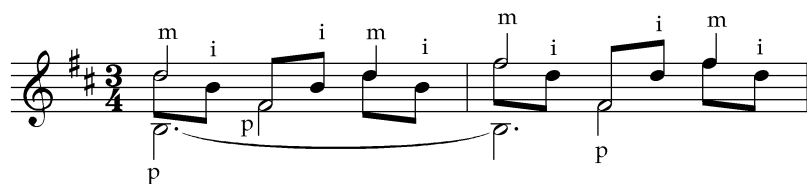
Although, on the surface, an arpeggio study, this piece actually consists of a melody on the first and second strings accompanied by an independent lower voice and two inner voices formed by the remaining notes of the arpeggio. Notice how Sor uses stem directions and open note-heads to clarify the four-part texture:



For clarity, we'll refer to these four voice-parts, from highest to lowest, in choral style as *soprano*, *alto*, *tenor* and *bass*, as shown above.

What's the best fingering?

There are two approaches one could take to assigning right-hand fingers for this pattern. One would be the usual approach of assigning **ami** to the three treble strings. Another approach, which we'll use here, is to assign one finger to each *voice-part*—we'll use **p** for the bass and tenor, **i** for the alto and **m** for the soprano. This will guarantee a consistent sound and dynamic for each voice, but will also require that the fingers change string sets as the melody moves between strings ② and ① (shadowed by the alto on strings ③ and ②):



Developing a singing tone with the m finger—Rest-Stroke or Free-Stroke?

The first aspect to explore in this piece is producing a “singing” melodic tone quality with the **m** finger—a strong, warm and full sound. Although the easiest way to do this is by using a *rest-stroke*, this would produce the undesirable side-effect of interrupting some of the notes in the next lowest string.

This piece should therefore be played mainly *free-stroke*, which provides a good opportunity to work on a full-sounding melodic **m** finger tone.

Place the **m** finger on the first string in a normal free-stroke position (i.e., with all of the finger-joints gently curved), making sure that the string is seated against the corner of the fingernail and fingertip. Push the string downward a little toward the soundboard as you pluck. Experiment with the angle of attack—playing straight across the string will produce a thinner sound, whereas an angled attack that moves more diagonally across the string will produce a warmer, fuller sound.

Also swap back and forth between rest-stroke and free-stroke, comparing the two and using the rest-stroke sound as a model for the free-stroke sound.

Combining the two strokes

You may wish to use a rest-stroke for the occasional melody note, especially if it's a particularly expressive one. To do this from a free-stroke hand position simply straighten the **m** finger a little, rather than moving the entire hand into a rest-stroke position.

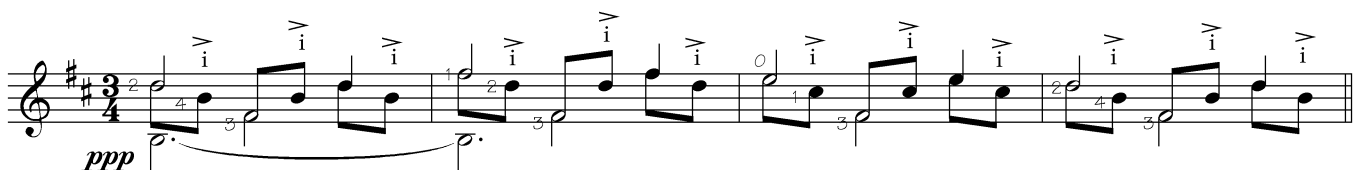
Balancing Melody and Accompaniment

Having experimented with the tone quality of the **m** finger you will now need to balance the relative dynamic and tone-quality of the melody and accompaniment:

- melody—**m** finger with melodic tone
- accompaniment—**i** (alto) and **p** (tenor) with soft clear sound
- lower voice—**p** strong sound (for the independent bass part in the second part of the piece)

Here's an exercise to help develop the finger independence needed to balance the musical texture:

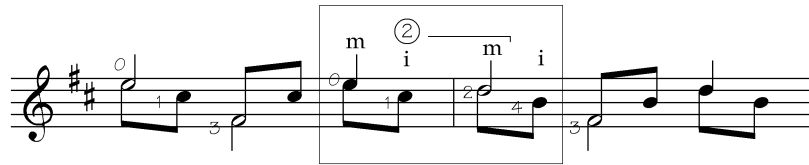
Promoting Finger Independence: take the first measure and emphasize one finger at a time, playing the other fingers at a whisper. Take care that the fingers that are playing softly are not influenced by the plucking action of the finger that is playing strongly.



Once you're able to do this, you should more easily be able to balance the layers of the musical texture, projecting each with an appropriate tone quality and dynamic level.

Distinguishing between voices that move onto a shared string

When the voices change strings a situation can arise in which successive notes on the same string can belong to different voice parts, as in measures 3-4:



In situations such as this it's important that each finger maintains its assigned dynamic and tone color, otherwise the melody could be projected incorrectly:



Left-Hand Issues

Fingering

Sor provided virtually all of the left-hand fingerings required to play this exercise, and in only one measure have I felt it necessary to modify them (in measure 7, for improved legato). (Sor's original fingerings can be found in the facsimile reproduction at the end of this guide.)



The main considerations in choosing fingerings are:

- reliability—guaranteeing an accurate performance
- smooth connection between chords—not cutting short the note before a chord change

Using Block Chord-Shapes to Determine Optimal Hand Positions

Explore the block chord-shapes and be aware of whether the hand needs to be parallel to the fingerboard (**P**) or rotated (**R**).

— a *parallel* position results from placing the fingers along a string, one per fret; a *rotated* position is required when one or more fingers play at the same fret and is also the default position in the open position. Bear in mind that we can have *degrees* of rotation and that barres are, of course, virtually always played with a parallel hand position (though there are some exception in this piece).

Work on the following block-chord version of the piece, exploring each chord change for optimal hand positions and taking note of *common fingers* (connected by horizontal dotted lines) and *guide fingers* (connected by diagonal lines):

Position Check: If you relax your fingers while playing any particular chord they should effortlessly remain over the correct frets and strings, rather than repositioning themselves to different ones.

The musical score is written in 3/4 time and D major. It consists of five staves of music. Measures 1-10 show a sequence of chords with a barre at the 5th fret. Measures 11-20 show a sequence of chords with a barre at the 5th fret. Measures 21-30 show a sequence of chords with a barre at the 5th fret. Measures 31-40 show a sequence of chords with a barre at the 6th fret. Measures 41-50 show a sequence of chords with a barre at the 6th fret. The score includes various musical notations such as chords, bar lines, and fingerings.

When playing barres, take care to cover only the number of strings indicated by the superscript numeral—it sometimes makes a difference when connecting to the next chord (as in measures 24-25 of this piece).

Sequential Preparation and Placement of Left-Hand Fingers

Work on the precise sequence and timing of left-hand finger preparation and placement for each chord change. Be aware of the following:

- *sequential placement of fingers* (rather than block placement)
- *guide fingers* (indicated with diagonal lines)
- *preparation of free fingers* (whenever possible)
- *common/pivot fingers* (avoid lifting a finger that is common to the next chord; indicated with a straight dotted line)
- *finger-leaps to new strings* (indicated by curved dotted lines)

Working on sequential preparation and placement of left-hand fingers will greatly improve your ability to play with ease and reliability. Explore the following guide to left-hand sequential placement for this etude:

1 5 R

11 R R

21 5 R

31 6 5 R P prep. 1

40 4 IV 5 R 6 R ③

Putting the piece together

Avoid the temptation to repeatedly play through the entire piece until you “get it right.” Instead, take four-measure sections as *practice units*, practicing each as follows:

- work on and memorize measures 1-2
- work on and memorize measure 3-4
- play all four measures
- move on to the next four-measure practice unit

MUSICAL ASPECTS

Performance Tempo

Sor's tempo marking for this piece, *Allegretto*, is a moderately lively tempo (and somewhat faster than many performances one hears). I suggest a metronome marking of around ♩ = 120.

Melody, Form and Phrase-Structure

Understanding the form and phrase-structure of a piece is a great aid to memorization and effective performance. The overall form of this piece is *rounded binary* (**AB**), as indicated by the repeat signs and the return to the opening material in the **B** section:

- an opening **A** section in the home key (measures 1-16)
- a modulating **B** section (measures 17-33)
- a modified return of the **A** section in the home key (measures 34-48)

The phrase structure consists of three 16-measures sections, each divided into two eight-measure phrases:

- mm 1-16—two almost identical eight-measure phrases, the first cadencing on the dominant, the second cadencing on the tonic
- mm 9-12—an eight-measure phrase based on the opening material and cadencing on the dominant followed by an eight-measure modulating phrase, also cadencing on the dominant
- mm 13-20—a return to the opening material, the first phrase cadencing on an interrupted cadence followed by a modified second phrase to end the piece

Play through the melody alone at tempo, shaping the phrase and section endings, emphasizing chromatic notes and melodic leaps (marked) and noting the overall rise and fall of the melody. Be sure to separate each main section with a *ritardando* (slow down a little) followed by a short breath (marked with a comma).

Bear the following in mind:

- *chromatic notes*—hold a little longer (tenuto) and resolve by diminuendo to the next note
- *melodic leaps*—emphasize the *second* note of the leap (using a subtle accent, a tenuto, or both)
- *general melodic shape*—crescendo gently for ascent; decrescendo gently for descent

NOTE: the overall dynamic of this piece is shaped as much by the harmony as by the melody alone, as well shall see later).
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A Allegretto [♩ = c.120]

a' *mp*

9 a'' *rit.*

B b' *a tempo* *p*

25 b'' *mf* *cresc.* *f* *sf* *rit.*

33 A' a''' *a tempo* *mp*

41 a'''' *cresc.* *sub.mp* *a tempo* *rall.* *pp*

desc. leap asc. leap

[poco rit.] desc. leap desc. leap

Harmonic Movement and Voice-Leading

Understanding the underlying harmonic progression of a piece of music is a great aid to memorizing and playing it expressively and convincingly. In fact, in this particular piece the harmonic progression rather than the melody shapes the overall dynamic.

In the following harmonic analysis, the underlying functional harmonic progression is printed in a large typeface, the quicker decorative surface progression is printed in smaller type.

Play through the progression, bearing the following in mind:

- **II-V-I** progressions outline the overall harmonic structure of the piece
- dissonant chords are expressive: **V** chords create forward movement towards their tonics, especially when they contain a seventh; diminished-sevenths (**dim7**) and augmented-sixth chords (**Aug6**) create even more tension and forward movement as they move toward resolution

A **B-mi: I** **Bmi: i** (V) i V i **II** iv V/V V **V**

I i V VI **II** ii (i) V **I** i

B **V** i V i V i V **i** V

D: II **Dma: V/ii** ii V **I** **B-mi: II** **Bmi: N6** V/V dim7 V **V**

A' **I** i (V) i V i **II** iv V/V V **V**

I **II** V/V V (int) **II** V **I**

i V/V VI ii (i) V i

mp *p* *mf* *cresc. f* *f* *sub. p* *pp*

Notice how the suggested dynamics emphasize and resolve particularly expressive chords

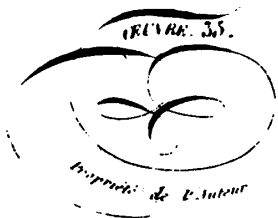
Regarding the four-part texture, the soprano and alto voices move mostly in thirds while the tenor provides a dominant pedal-point (f#)—when the tenor voice moves up a half-step in measures 7 & 39 it is worth bringing this out, as follows:

6

On the following page: facsimile reproduction of the earliest surviving edition of the piece (Paris, 1828):

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(Sor - 5)

10

Allegretto.

Nº 22

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