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Introductory Remarks

Compared with the bowed stringed instruments, the guitar has a relatively limited power to sustain its tone which decays rapidly, especially on the treble strings. To make it possible to play a continuously sustained melody line, which might be required by the nature of the composition, the tremolo technique has been developed. Yet, while it may have originated as an attempt to simulate a sustained melody, the tremolo has characteristics and charm peculiar to the guitar and should be regarded in this light.

The tremolo technique consists of the rapid repetition of the same note produced by alternating fingers of the right hand. It is difficult to execute and requires well controlled coordination of both hands, for which a prolonged and diligent study is necessary.

Although it is possible that, with determination and careful attention to details, the guitarist who must work completely without guidance may succeed (but with some danger of acquiring bad habits), the writer strongly feels that study of the guitar and its diverse techniques should be pursued under the guidance of a qualified teacher. Therefore, while an explanatory text is provided to illuminate the following studies, it is assumed that the student will have careful supervision.* It is also assumed that he will have mastered certain fundamental requirements: how to hold the guitar while maintaining good body posture and correct playing position of the right and left hands; the *apoyando* and *tirando* strokes; and the most favorable length and shaping of the fingernails of each hand, so important for the production of a strong clear tone and for the correct playing of all guitar techniques, but especially the tremolo.

Well executed, the tremolo is extremely effective. It has great popular appeal. Nearly all of the major composers for the guitar have written tremolo studies or introduced tremolo passages in their compositions. *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* by Francisco Tárrega is perhaps the best known example, and *Campañas del Alba* by Regino Sainz de la Maza is a favorite contemporary composition.

In order to play these pieces and others of lesser technical difficulty, the student is advised to proceed with these studies without undue haste, mastering every lesson well before attempting the next one. Rigid adherence to a set tempo, no matter how slow in the beginning, at which clarity and evenness can be maintained comfortably is much preferable to a reckless attempt at fast playing, without adequate preparation, inevitably resulting in an unclear, ragged, irregular, and faltering tremolo. Patience, in fact, is the secret of a refined tremolo, and the reward of achieving it is well worth the effort.

In conclusion, I would like to stress the importance of playing different forms of *arpeggios*, as a preparation for playing the tremolo proper. This advice was given the writer years ago by Andrés Segovia. His comment that the tremolo should be regarded as an *arpeggio* on a single string has proved invaluable in providing a clear concept of this technique.

**Contact the Society of the Classic Guitar (non-profit organization founded in 1936), 409 East 50th Street, New York, New York 10022, for names and addresses of qualified teachers in the New York area and for the addresses of other Classic Guitar Societies which might help you with advice in your own locality.*

GUITAR NOTATIONS

STRINGS

- ① — 1st string e
② — 2nd string b
③ — 3rd string g
④ — 4th string d
⑤ — 5th string A
⑥ — 6th string E
-

- ② ————— to be played on the second string until termination of the line
⑤ ————— to be played on the fifth string until termination of the line
-

o — open string

har. 8ve — octave harmonic

har. 12 (7, 5, 4) — harmonic played on the fret indicated

RIGHT HAND

- p — thumb
i — index finger
m — middle finger
a — annular (ring) finger
s — small finger
-

↑
p arpeggiated chord (from bass to treble) played with the finger indicated by a small letter under the arrow

i
↓
arpeggiated chord (from treble to bass) played with the finger indicated by a small letter above the arrow

↑
Rasgueado (Spanish), arpeggiated chord played by s, a, m, i fingers in rapid succession from bass to treble

LEFT HAND

- 1 — index finger
2 — middle finger
3 — annular (ring) finger
4 — little finger
-

1 — 1, 2 — 2, etc. use same finger by sliding without pressure

1----1, 2----2, etc. retain the position of the finger indicated

I — first position

II — second position

III — third position

IV, V, etc.— fourth, fifth position, etc.

The word *position* refers to the location of the left hand on the fingerboard, depending upon where the first finger is.

C — bar all six strings with the index finger

CI, CII, CIII, etc.: bar all six strings at the position indicated

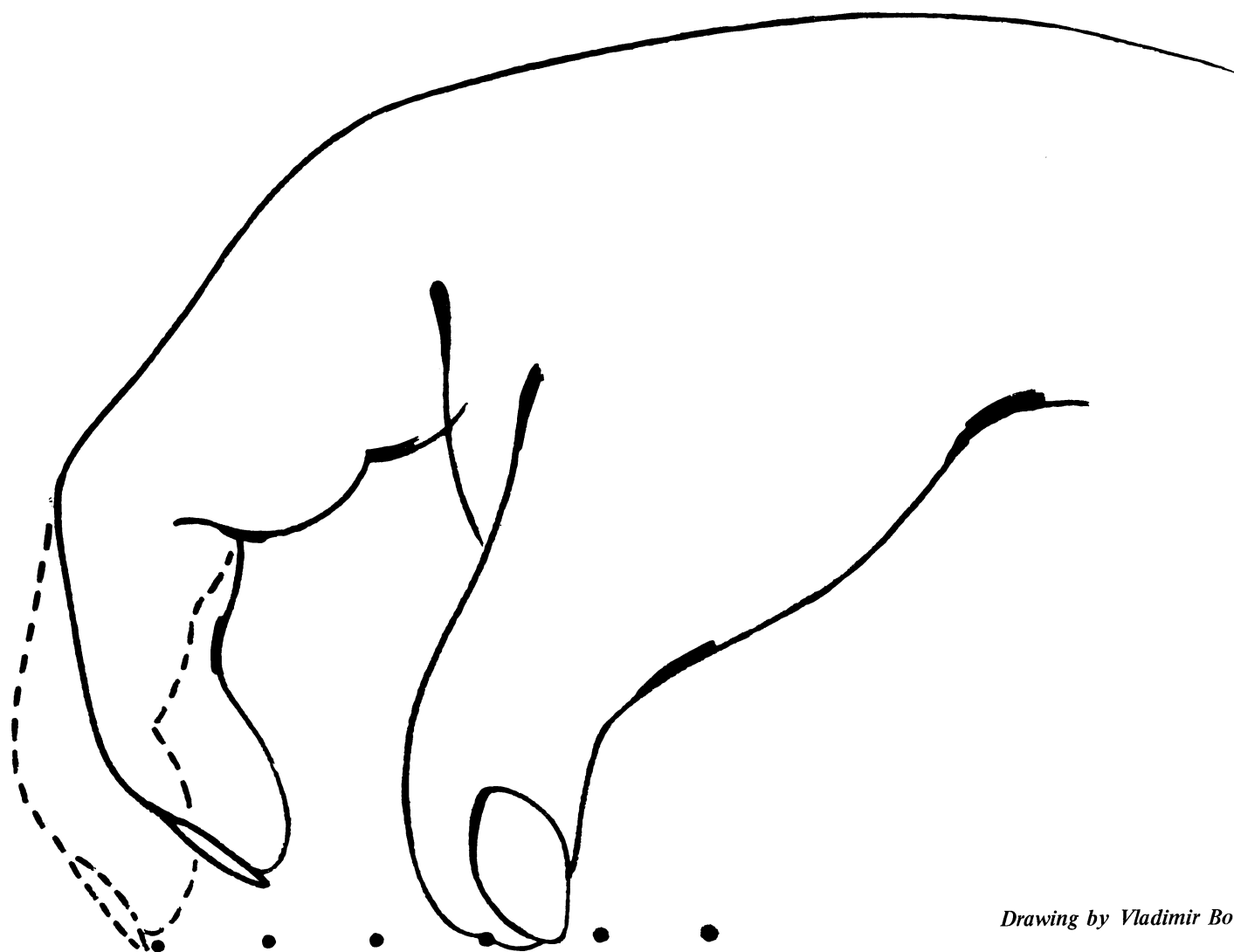
CIII ————— hold the barré until termination of the line

∅ — bar the required strings, leaving free those needed open

∅I, ∅II, ∅III, etc.: bar the required strings at the position indicated

[1] — bar the notes indicated by the bracket with the tip joint of the index or any other finger indicated

The Position of the Right Hand



Drawing by Vladimir Bobri

In order to strike the strings correctly, the right hand should be held with the wrist arched, allowing a distance of from three to four inches between the inner side of the wrist and the soundboard. The fingers should be held slightly curved. The fingertips describe a shallow arc toward the palm of the hand and clear the next string. The nails should be trimmed and shaped following the natural curve of the fingertips, and when the right hand is held with the palm toward the face and fingertips at eye level, the nails should be just long enough to be barely visible over the fingertips.

The action of the thumb is variable, depending on musical and technical requirements.

Lessons

To begin, hold the fingers *i*, *m*, and *a* very close to the first string. Support the hand by resting the thumb lightly on the third string.

As each finger plucks the first string, be sure that it moves clear of the second string. Play the exercise very slowly and in strict rhythm, paying full attention to the clarity of each note. When the exercise has become clearly articulated and rhythmically fluent at the slow tempo, try it at the next higher speed at which you can maintain clear articulation and rhythmical fluency. In this way, increase your speed gradually, taking care that the next faster tempo can be played without forcing. By following this procedure your technique will become more secure. When finally you achieve a high speed, the tremolo will be even and steady, giving the illusion of a sustained tone. Thus, while holding back, you actually progress more.

It would be valuable also to learn to control the dynamics of your tremolo. After you are able to play an exercise at an even tempo, try to play it alternately loud and soft, without disrupting the original tempo in any way.

It is very important that the right hand be completely relaxed. Any tension in the wrist should be avoided. The entire body, especially arms and shoulders, should be relaxed.

In order to train the right hand fingers to function rhythmically and to pluck the strings with equal force, it is advisable right from the beginning of these studies to learn to use various right hand finger patterns, making the change from one pattern to another with no interruption in tempo and no alteration in the quality of sound. Four different ways are given in this lesson, Formulae 1 and 2 using two fingers and Formulae 3 and 4 using three fingers:

Two fingers:

Formula 1 *m i m i*

Formula 2 *m a m a*

Three fingers:

Formula 3 *i m a m*

Formula 4 *a m i m*

Start with *m i m i*, the simplest. After you attain a fair degree of speed and evenness of tone, master the other three. Additional formulae will be introduced in later lessons. Meanwhile, no preference should be given in studying the formulae; practice them all equally.

- 1 In this as in all tremolo studies, use only the free unsupported *tirando* stroke in plucking the string.

Take care that the left hand fingers 1, 2, 3 remain on the fingerboard when you reach the G \sharp . Rest the thumb on the B string, lightly supporting the hand.

Formula 1. m i m i } 2 fingers
 2. m a m a } 1

3. i m a m } 3 fingers
 4. a m i m }

- 2 This lesson is more difficult than the previous one, since it is played on the second string, with a danger of accidentally touching the first or third string. Great care should be taken to avoid this by restricting movement of fingers to a minimum. Rest the thumb on the G string lightly in order to support the hand. Start slowly, gradually increasing the tempo.

a m i m a m i m

Repeat, using formula i m a m

- 3 The only difference between this and the preceding lesson is that sixteenth notes are used, giving twice as many finger strokes to the beat. Rest the thumb lightly on the G string. It would be helpful to use a metronome; set it first at $\text{♩} = 100$, gradually increasing the speed.

i m a m

Repeat, using formula a m i m

- 4 One should be able to perform the tremolo on any given string of the guitar. The following lesson is a scale of C played in tremolo form. Do not support the right hand by resting the thumb on any string.

a m i m

Repeat, using formula i m a m