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THE ART OF TREMOLO

A Comprehensive Analysis of the Tremolo Technique

for Classical, Flamenco, & Fingerstyle Guitar

BY IOANNIS ANASTASSAKIS

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THE ART OF TREMOLO

A Comprehensive Analysis of the Tremolo Technique

BY IOANNIS ANASTASSAKIS

author of *The Art of Rasgueado* (MB98405)
and *Guitar Journals - Flamenco* (MB20925DP)

Includes chapters on 4-note tremolo, 5-note flamenco tremolo, 5-note extended melody tremolo, 6-note tremolo, 8-note tremolo and the continuous extended tremolo

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Throughout the whole book the following symbols and conventions will be used:

e – little finger

a - ring finger

m - middle finger

i - index finger

p - thumb

↓ - Upstroke

↑ - Downstroke

LH - Left Hand

RH - Right Hand

BPM - beats per minute

Introduction

The tremolo is one of the most interesting and expressive fingerstyle guitar techniques, whether classical, flamenco or acoustic. Tremolo technique seems to rise above the physical limitations of the instrument, creating a seamless illusion of continuous, seemingly endlessly sustained sound on nylon or steel strings. Some of the most beautiful music written for the guitar uses this technique as its primary vehicle of expression and it has fascinated composers since it first appeared.

But what exactly is the tremolo technique? Well, the traditional classical guitar tremolo involves a combination of movement of all the available right-hand fingers (minus the little finger). It is a 4-note sequence performed as follows:

1. Pluck a bass note with **p**.
2. Perform a free stroke with **a** on a treble string.
3. Perform a free stroke with **m** on the same treble string.
4. Perform a free stroke with **i** on the same treble string.
5. Repeat Steps 1-4 many, many, many times!

However, there are very significant technical variations developed by various pioneers, which we will examine in the course of the following chapters.

So, **why a whole book dedicated to tremolo?**

The answer is simple: The tremolo technique gives rise to one of the most frequently asked questions at masterclasses and guitar seminars: it happens virtually all the time! This clearly illustrates that the guitar-playing world has a very keen interest in the specific technique and its numerous variations.

On the other hand, tremolo is a technique that exists in various permutations in all styles of guitar playing (classical, flamenco, acoustic, and even jazz and rock)!

The tremolo technique is not a "static" technique that has remained unchanged. In the following chapters we will examine the beautiful, lyrical 5-note flamenco tremolo and its 6-note and 8-note variations, as well as the continuous tremolo and a multitude of other related tremolo techniques pioneered by many diverse players and teachers.

While researching the materials for this book I consulted over 100 classical and flamenco guitar players, both teachers and professional performers, as well as a few quite gifted amateurs!

Before starting with the instructional part of this book, I'd like to thank my teacher and mentor, the great flamenco *maestro* **Juan Serrano** for his help and support. Also, the countless people on the Internet and the Classical Guitar mailing list that freely share their ideas, experiences and techniques with the rest of the world. There are too many to mention, but they helped immensely in broadening my perspective of the tremolo technique, its application and execution.

WARNING: In the following pages of this book you will find exercises ranging from almost simplistic to wickedly difficult: Be careful! Use your common sense and intelligence to guide you. If you feel any kind of pain while practicing, stop and take a break! DO NOT try to tackle the very advanced materials, especially the 6-note, 8-note and the continuous extended flamenco tremolos, if you have not taken the time to slowly and surely build a solid technical foundation. This is extremely sound and solid advice and you should follow it in all areas of your instrumental practicing, not just for this specific book! You have been officially warned!

A note about numbering of the exercises: I have opted to number the various exercises by chapter. I've also grouped some of them together, depending on the technique/concept behind them. Therefore, for example, if there are three different exercises that utilize the exact same technique, they will be notated as Exercise 1a, Exercise 1b and Exercise 1c, instead of using the usual Exercise 1, Exercise 2 and Exercise 3, which would give no clue to the connection between the origins and the performance of the exercises.

Tremolo Practice Techniques

In this section of the book I will illustrate an ample assortment of different practice techniques I have found to be very beneficial in both the primary creation and the subsequent continuous development of superior tremolo technique. Before we get started, let me clarify that I am not taking credit for most of these concepts! Although some of them are my own creations or variations, the vast majority of them have been offered to me during literally hundreds of lessons and masterclasses by some of the most important classical and flamenco guitarists of our time!

I have always had a personal fascination with the sound of tremolo, so I would always ask "the tremolo question" during lessons and masterclasses. In this section, you will find excellent tremolo building advice by some of the most celebrated classical guitarists and excellent teachers (*Andrés Segovia, John Williams, Sharon Isbin, Christopher Parkening, Pepe Romero, Scott Tennant, David Russell, Narciso Yepes, Stanley Yates,* and *Stepan Rak*). You will also find guidance by some of the great flamenco guitarists of our time (*Juan Serrano, Paco de Lucia, Serranito, Gerardo Nuñez, Paco Peña Manolo Sanlucar, Jose Antonio Rodriguez, Paco Serrano, Manolo Franco* and *Juan Martin*) who were kind enough to share their experience with me and offer invaluable advice.

Important Note: Most of the examples used to clarify the various technical and fingering concepts will be based on VERY simple chords, usually in the first position! **This is done on purpose!** *The aim is to keep the left-hand fingerings, as simple as possible*, therefore keeping most "resources" available *to concentrate on the right hand* which will be performing the tremolo! Of course, when the time comes to learn a complete piece or an etude, the student has to deal with the added problem of left-hand fingering. Until then, the basic examples will be kept as simple as possible, usually no more difficult than simple 1st position major and minor chords! So, keep in mind that this is NOT a tremolo repertoire collection! At the end of the book you can find a list of available tremolo pieces for both the classical and the flamenco guitar.

So, without further delay, let's jump right in!

Chapter 1

Tremolo Practice Techniques

Building a Technical Foundation

Whenever you attempt to learn a new technique on the guitar, keep in mind that you should strive to establish a strong, solid foundation upon which you will be able to continuously build for years to come. If you cannot play a tremolo (or any other guitar technique, for that matter) perfectly and in total control at a slow tempo (e.g. 60 bpm), you cannot possibly expect it to be even and controlled at 140 bpm, which is a very common performance speed for many tremolo pieces. Keeping an even tempo at all performance speeds is possibly the most important, as well as the hardest part of developing a professional-sounding tremolo technique.

The **most important tool in our tremolo-building arsenal is our trusty metronome**! I tend to favor the contemporary digital metronomes over the traditional, spring driven ones, for two distinct reasons.

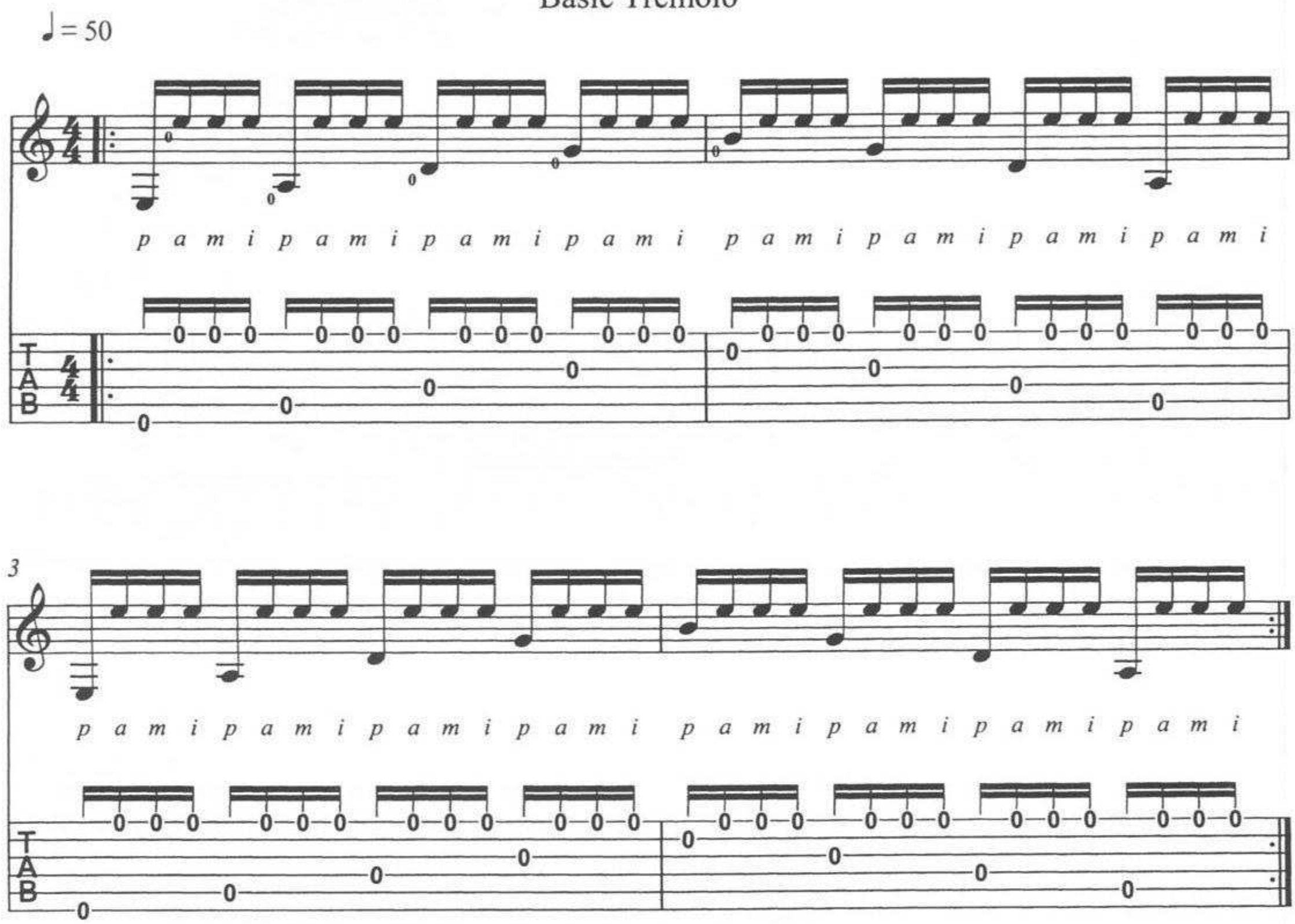
1. With a digital metronome, you have MUCH better control of your practice tempo. It is possible to play anywhere from 30-300 beats per minute, in increments of one beat per minute (bpm)
2. It is possible to make the metronome accent different parts of the beat, or play eighth notes, triplets, or 16th notes.

The first thing we will try to achieve is to make the p-a-m-i finger alternation become a thoroughly natural motion for the right hand. Start by setting the metronome to a slow speed, around 50 bpm. Persevere with this tempo or an even slower one for as long as it takes to be totally comfortable. Take **extreme care** to make sure the tremolo is not only rhythmically even, but also that the volume of each finger stroke is the same.

Here is an exercise that demands minimal effort from the LH, allowing the student to concentrate on tremolo technique.

Exercise # 1

Basic Tremolo



Try your best to be as accurate as possible from the very beginning. I would suggest recording yourself to hear the results! Each pluck of the string must be made with the same part of the nail. Failure to do this will result in an irregular rhythm.

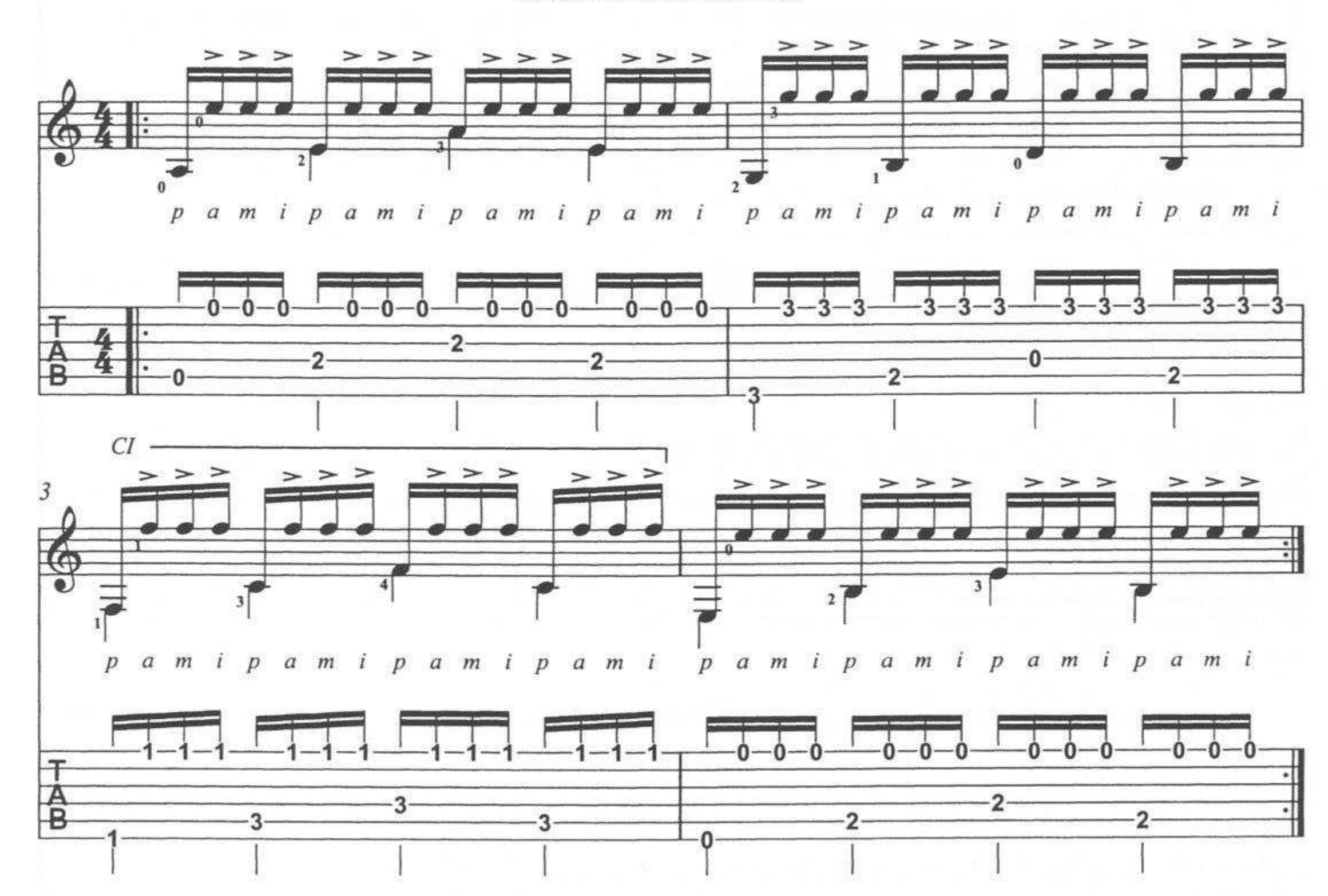
After a while, you will have no trouble performing the motion exactly as described. The difficulty comes in playing it at 140 bpm while keeping all the aforementioned elements intact! In 4/4 time, there are 16 notes to a bar of music, and with 140 beats a minute; this is 560 individual string plucks a minute. Further, they must **all** be played with even timing, otherwise a jagged, galloping sound will be produced. Patience is the name of the game here. DO NOT speed up until you are ready!

Rest Strokes

A very helpful technique in developing accurate control on the intrinsic fingering motion of the classical tremolo is to *practice tremolo using rest strokes (apoyando)*. The famous flamenco guitar teacher **Juan Martín** illustrated this tremolo practice technique to me during one his masterclasses. This creates a more intense sound on the a-m-i part, making the transition to free-stroke later on much easier to undertake. It also makes the rhythm of the tremolo feel more natural and is a great warm-up exercise! Here's the example Juan Martín used to illustrate this technique:

Exercise # 2

Tremolo Rest Strokes



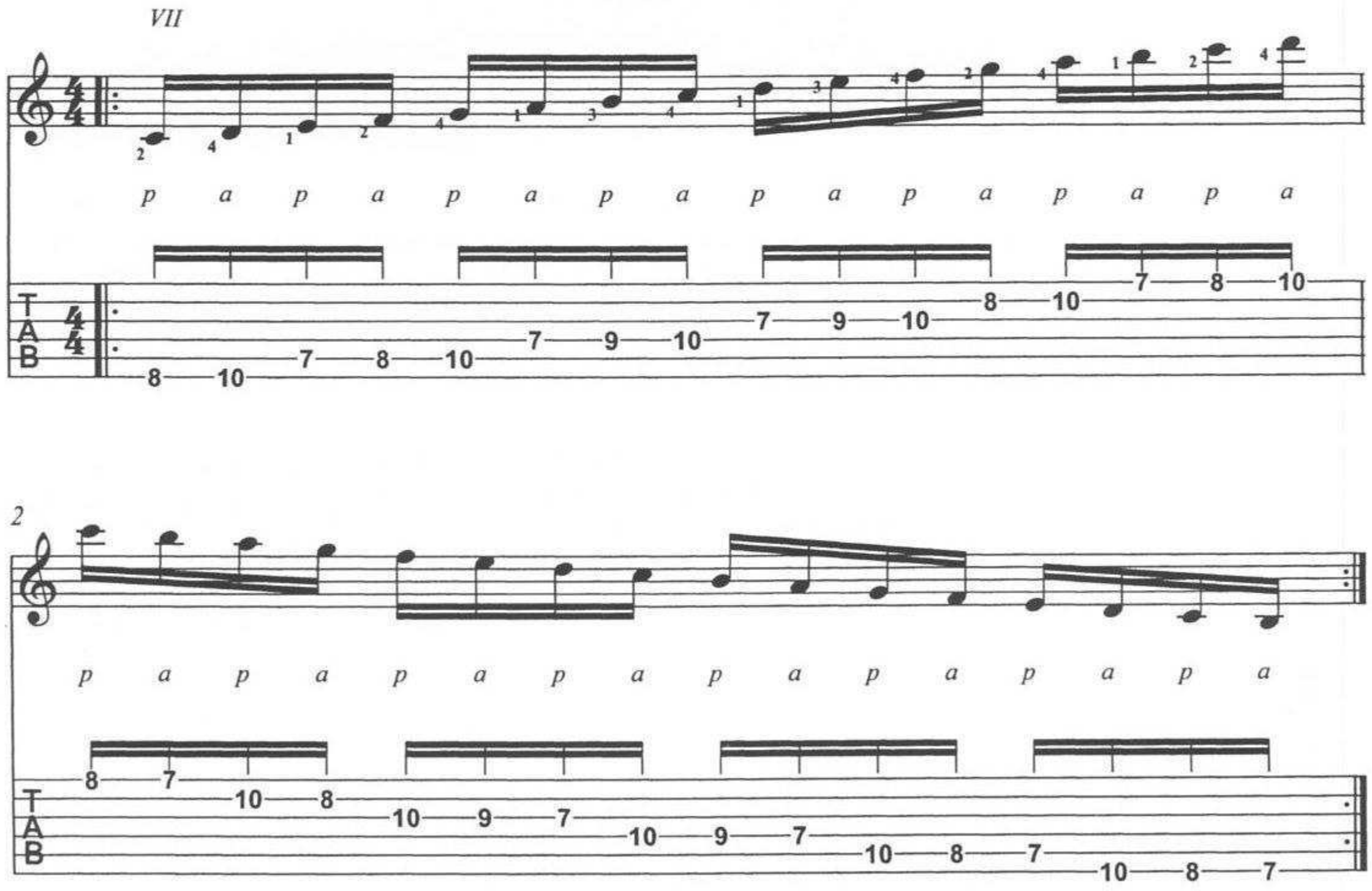
Thumb – Ring Finger Scales

During my research, I found that the most common problem classical guitarists seem to have with tremolo is that it is uneven and seems to develop a "galloping" rhythm. The usual place in the tremolo pattern, be it classical, flamenco or any other extended form, that the unwelcome galloping takes place is the transition from thumb to ring finger (*p-a*). One of the hardest parts of perfecting tremolo technique is keeping **the transition from thumb to ring finger even**. The best way that I have found to help remedy this is to practice scales and single-note sequences using alternation of the thumb and ring fingers.

Here is a basic C major scale played in the seventh position using *p-a* alternation. Watch those string-crossings!

Exercise # 3

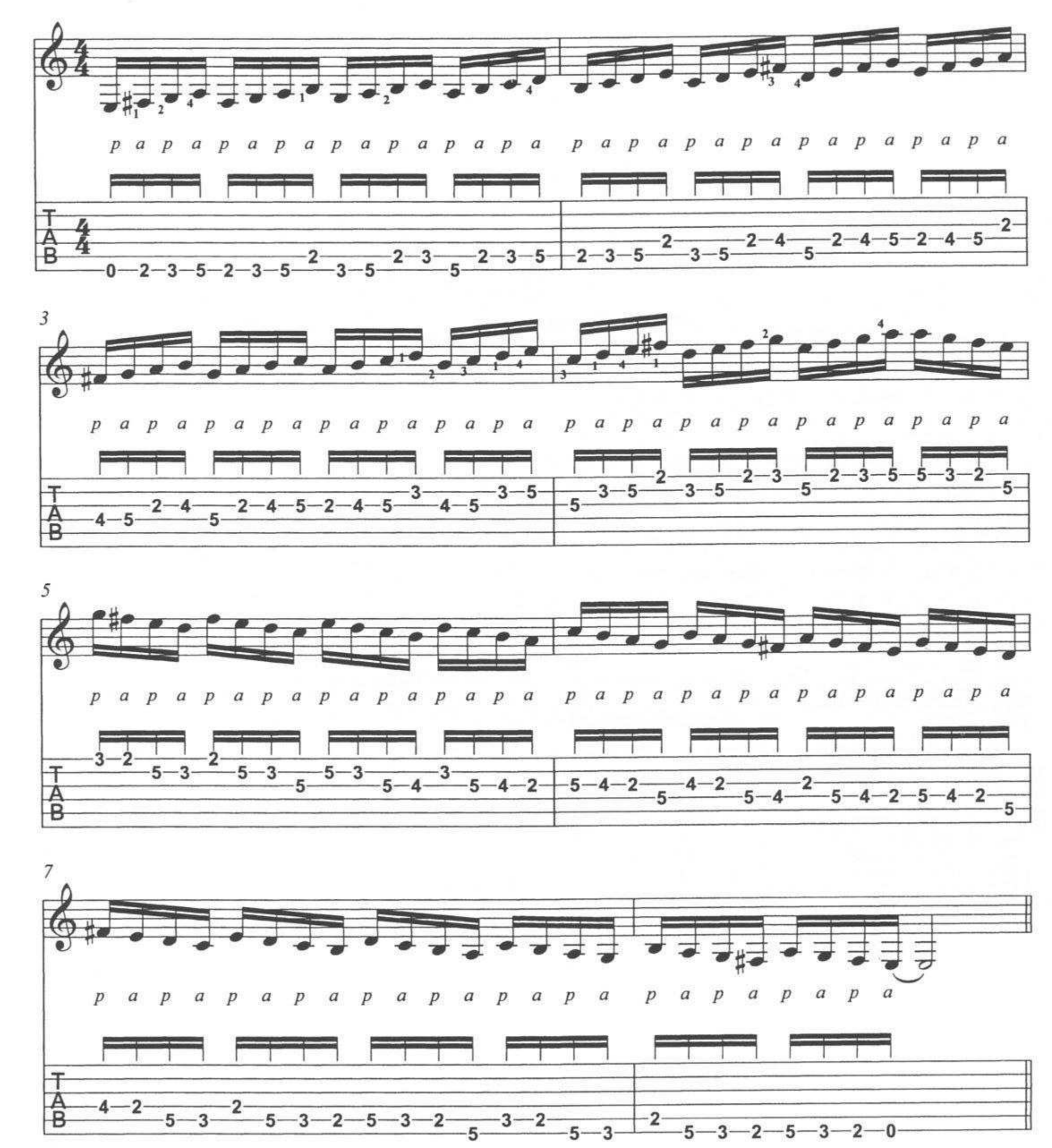
Thumb-Ring Finger Scales



Here are a few repetitive rhythmic patterns to help you feel more comfortable using this kind of RH alternation. First, a sequence of groups of fourths based on the E natural minor scale.

Exercise #4

Thumb-Ring Finger Scales - Part II

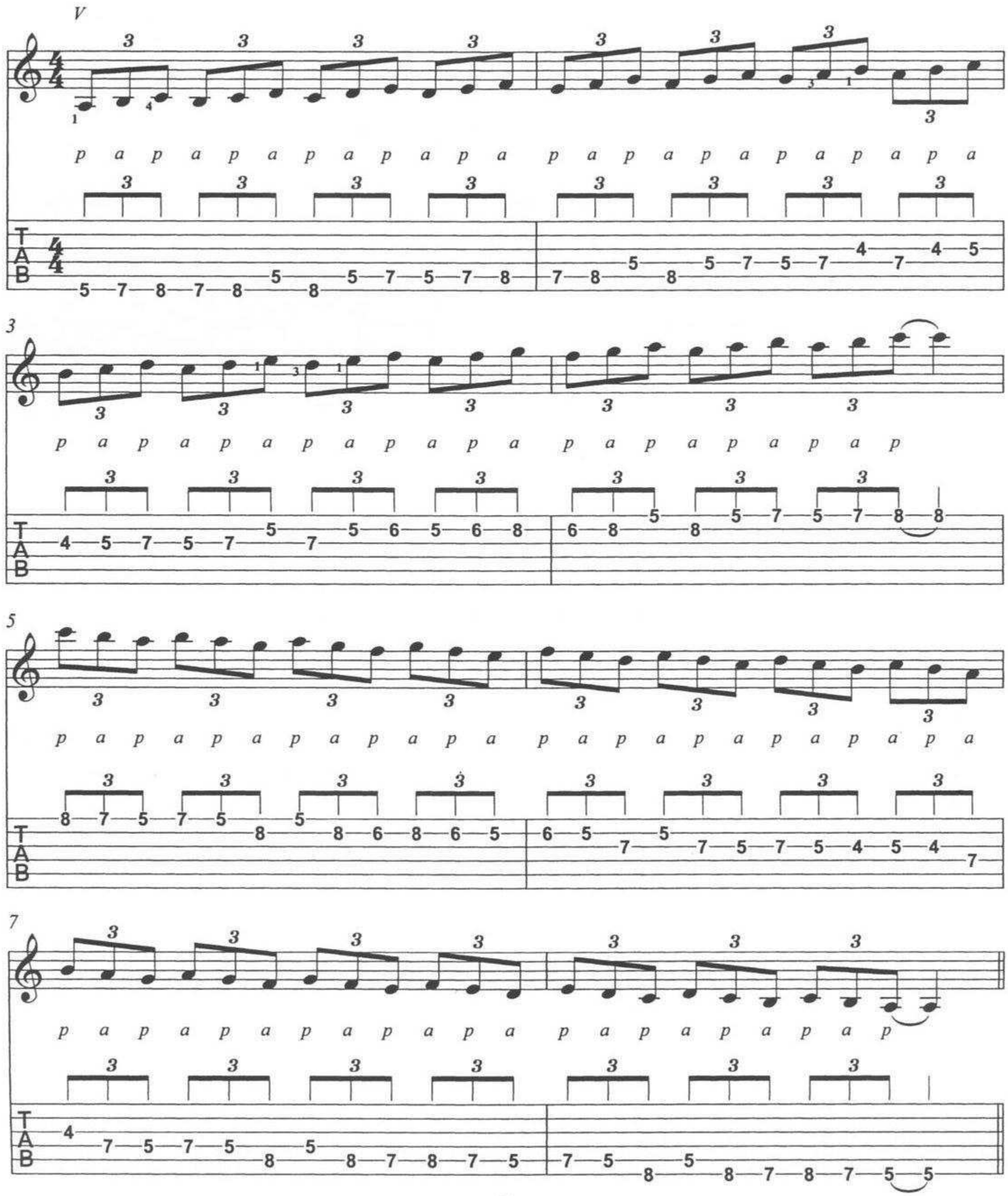

p a p a p a

Here is another sequence using three-note groupings, on the fifth position of the A natural minor scale this time.

Exercise #5

♩ = 100

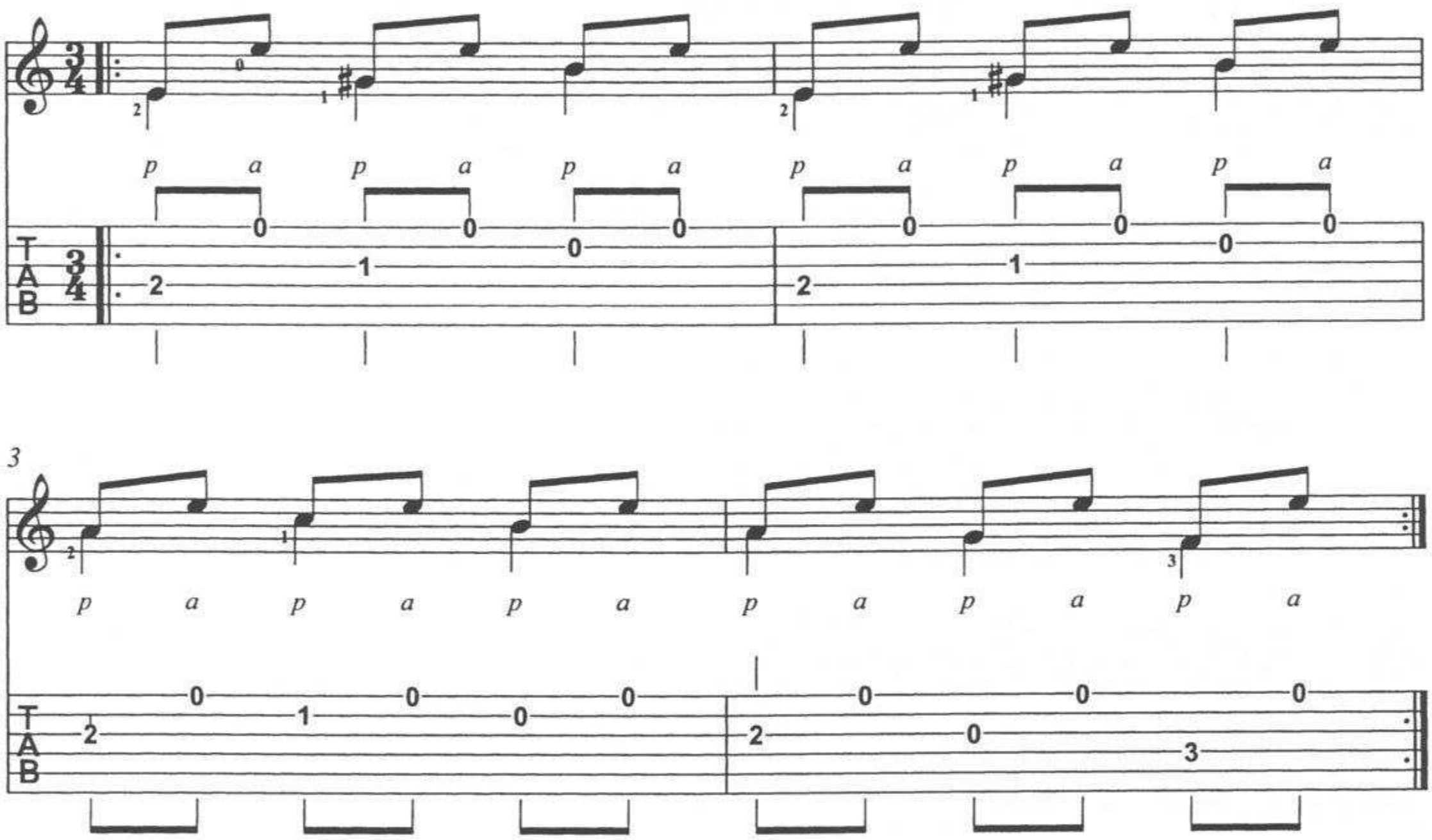
Thumb-Ring Finger Scales - Part III



Let's expand on the previous concept! Another excellent way to further develop thumb-ring finger independence is to play *p-a* alternations on different strings. This will seem tiresome at first, especially at high speeds! However, if you keep at it, you can get very fast using this technique! We will use a variation of the well-known Malagueña de Lecuona as our first example. Here the ring finger will be playing on the first string. Keep repeating the outlined pattern for at least a few minutes!

Exercise # 5b

Thumb-Ring finger Alternation



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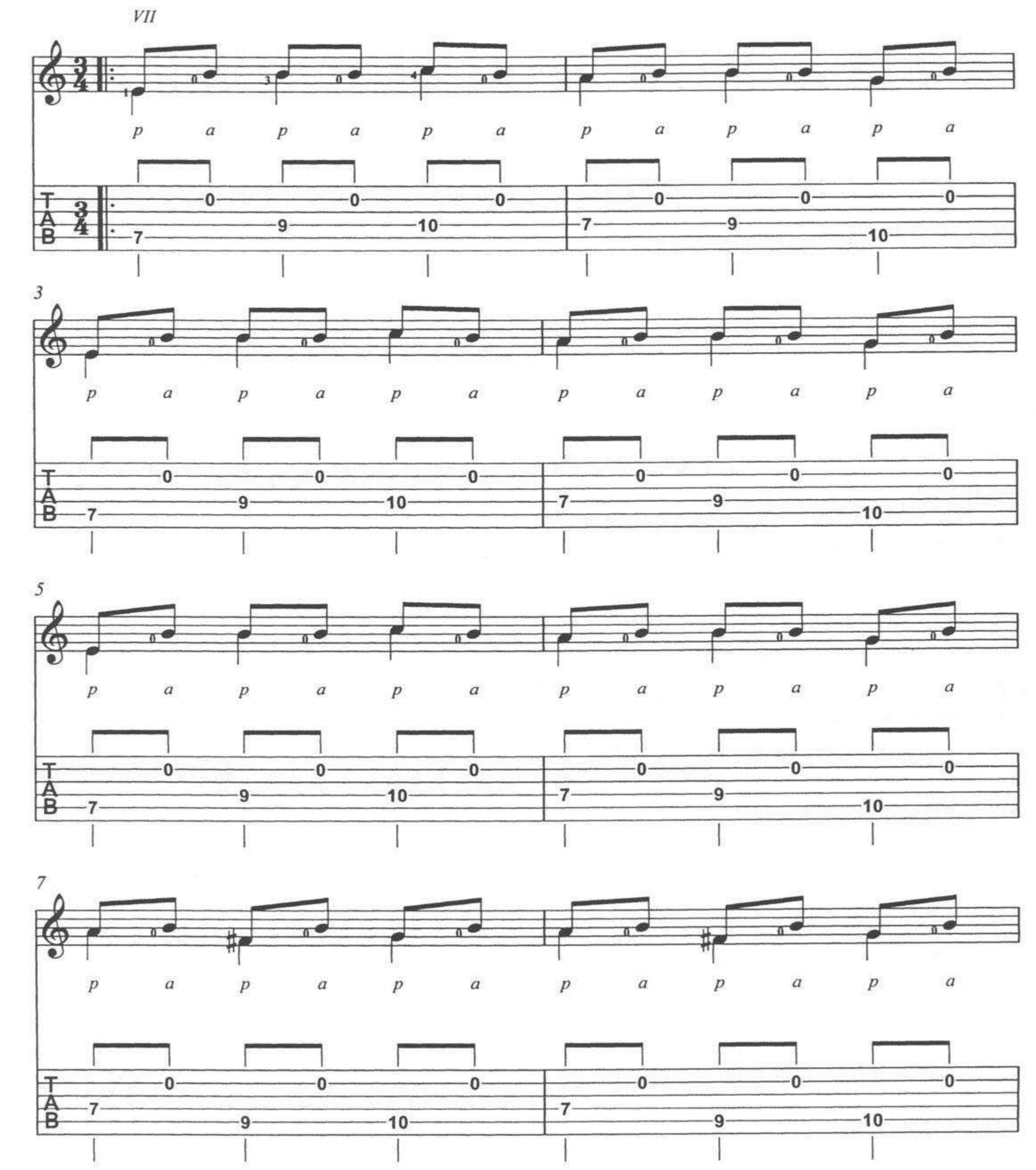
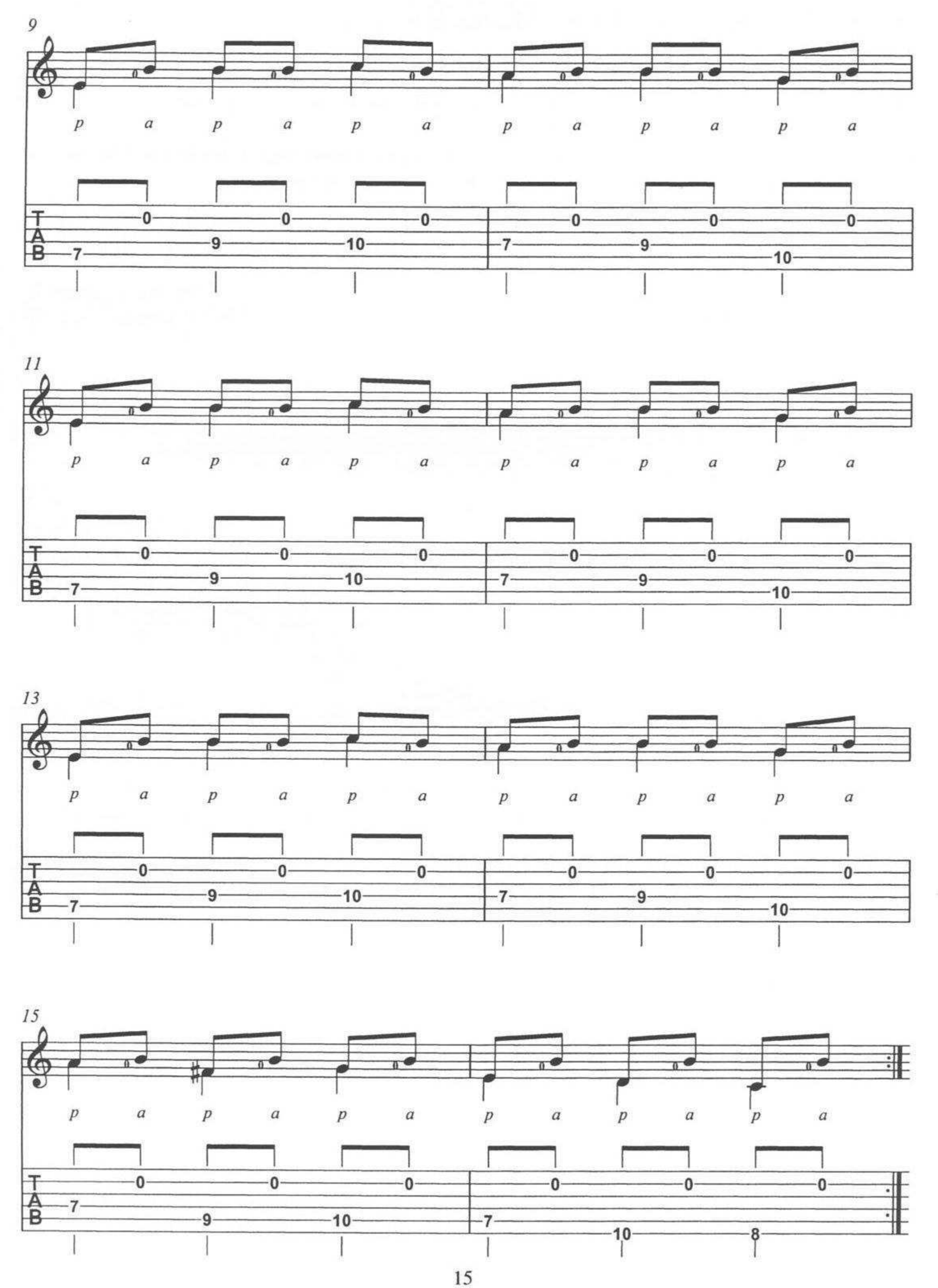
In the following example, the ring finger will be playing on the second string. Again, make sure to keep repeating the outlined pattern for at least a few minutes, in order to train the p-a alternation! This next example borrows the main melody from the very well-known composition "Leyenda" by Isaac Albeniz.

Exercise # 5c

Thumb-Ring finger Alternation - Part II




9
p a p a p a p a p a p a
T A B
0 0 0 0 0 0
7 9 10 7 9 10
11
p a p a p a p a p a p a
T A B
0 0 0 0 0 0
7 9 10 7 9 10
13
p a p a p a p a p a p a
T A B
0 0 0 0 0 0
7 9 10 7 9 10
15
p a p a p a p a p a p a
T A B
0 0 0 0 0 0
7 9 10 7 10 8

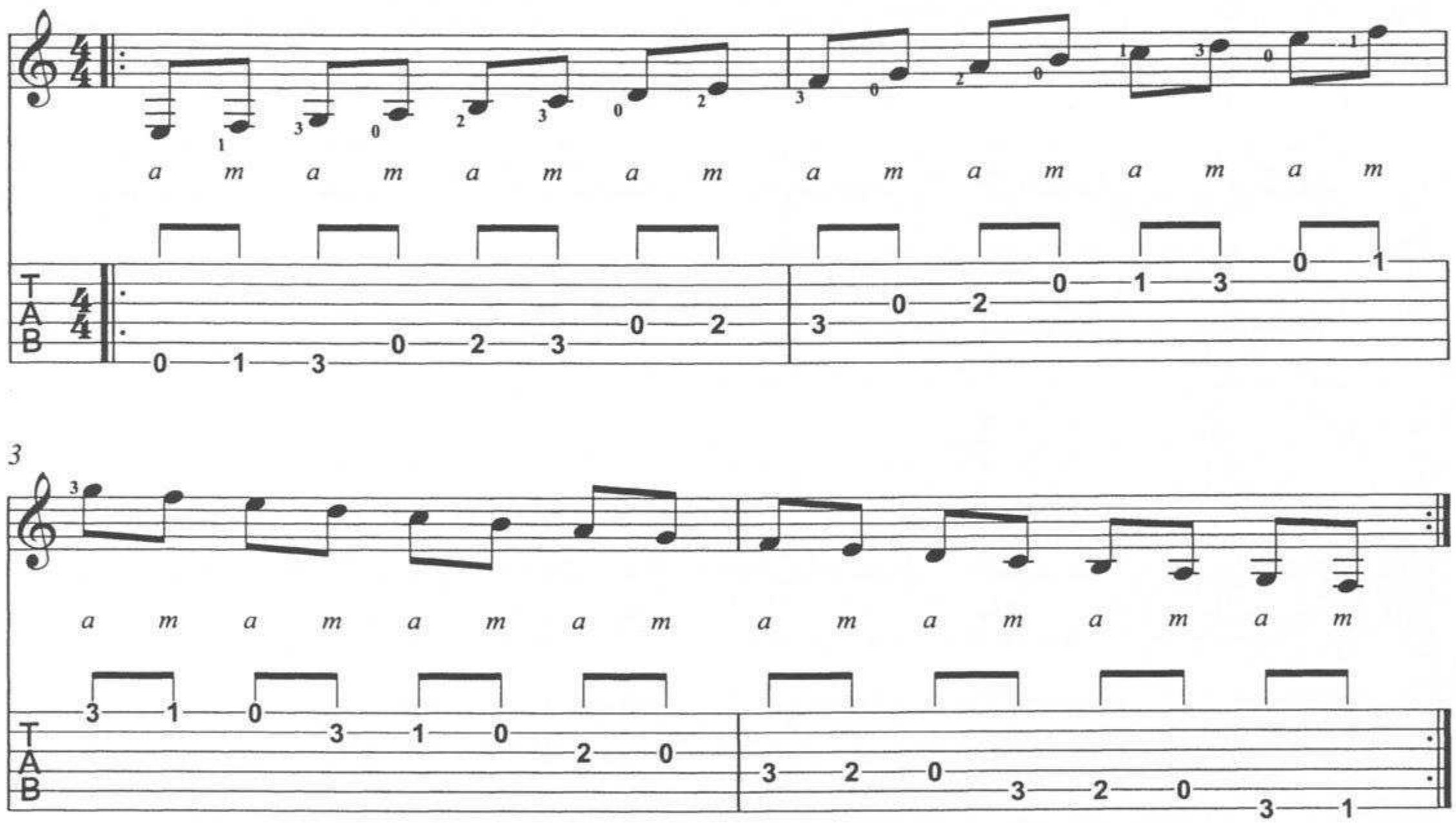
Scales with Middle-Ring Finger Alternation

The *a-m* (ring finger to middle finger) movement is the second trouble spot when executing the classical guitar tremolo. A very effective way to increase the autonomy of these fingers is to **practice scales using strict alternation of** *a-m*, both free-stroke and rest-stroke.

Here is the E Phrygian scale in the first position played using **strict alternation of** *a-m*. Take your time with these exercises! Try to project a clear, well-rounded sound from your instrument.

Exercise #6

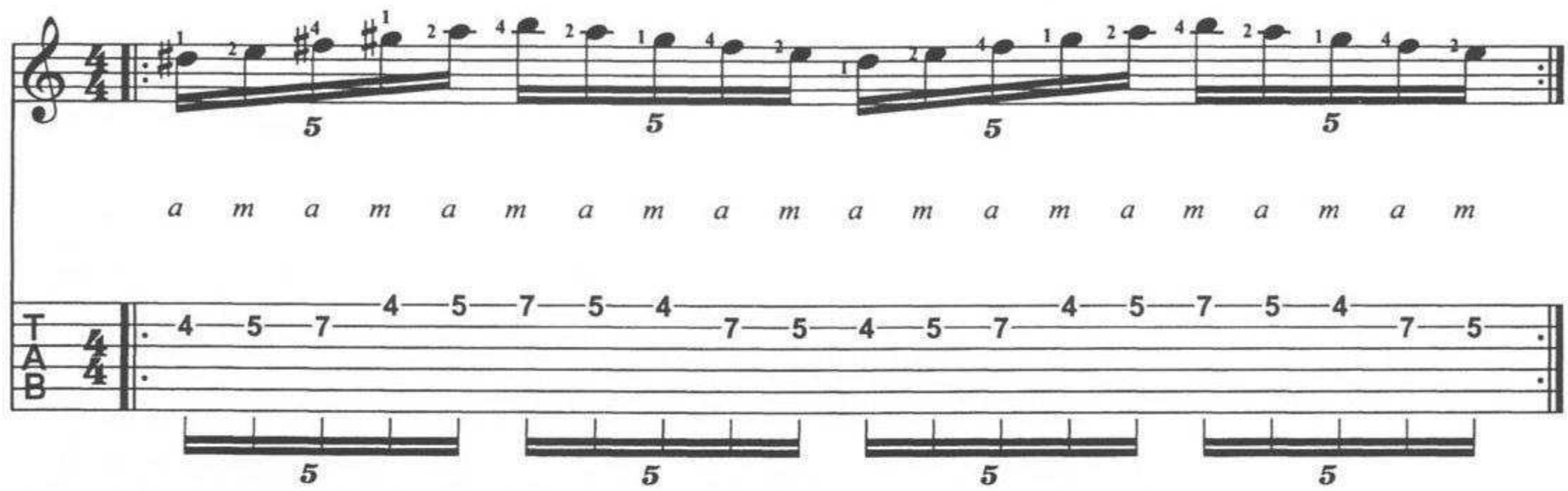
Middle-Ring finger Scales - Part I



Here is a repetitive rhythmic pattern to help you feel more comfortable using this kind of RH alternation. First a six-note sequence, based on the C♯ natural minor scale.

Exercise #7

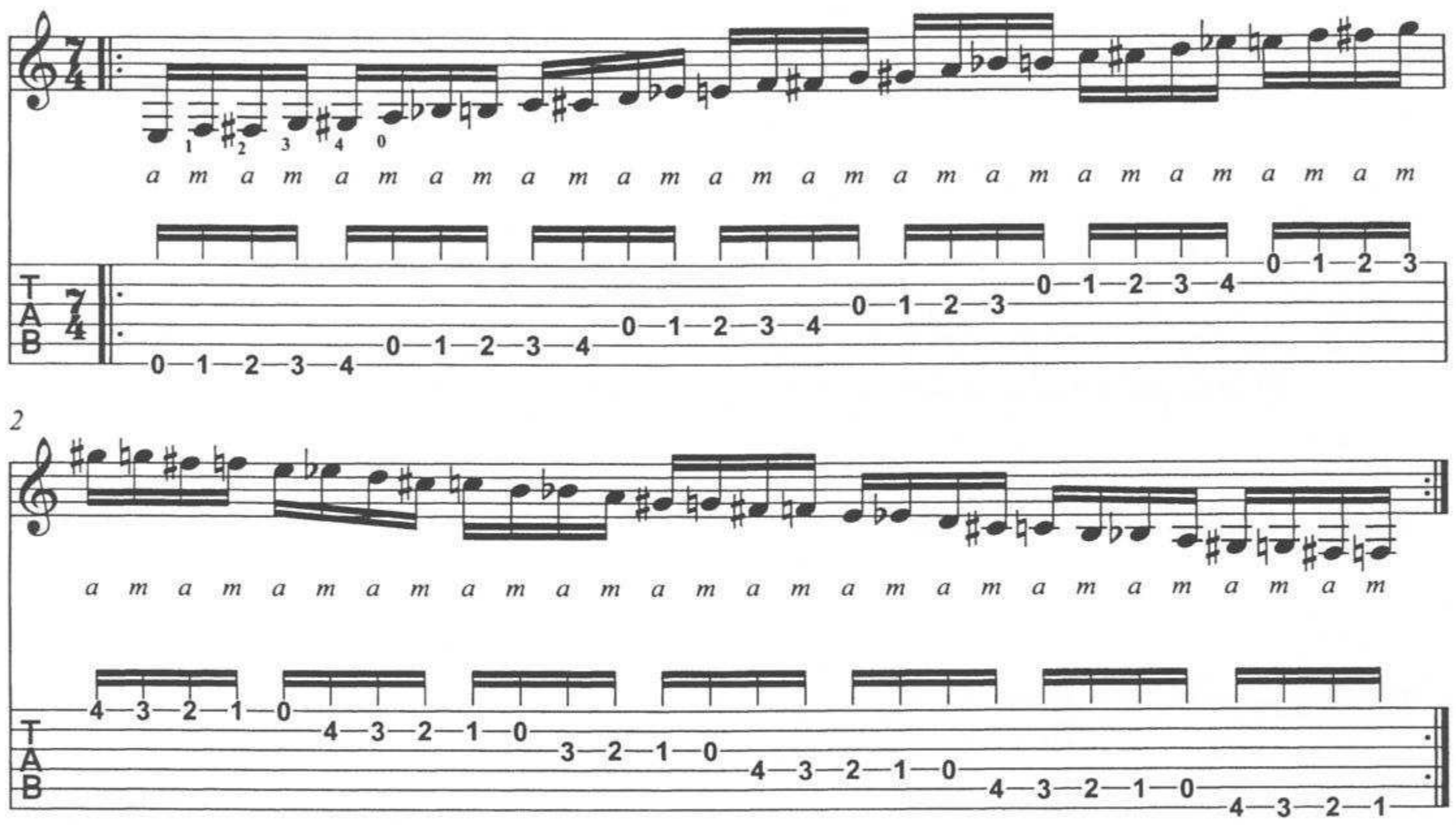
Middle-Ring Finger Scales - Part II



Here is a chromatic sequence to further practice this technique. Be careful not to mess up the pattern when string-crossing!

Exercise #8

Middle-Ring Finger Scales - Part III

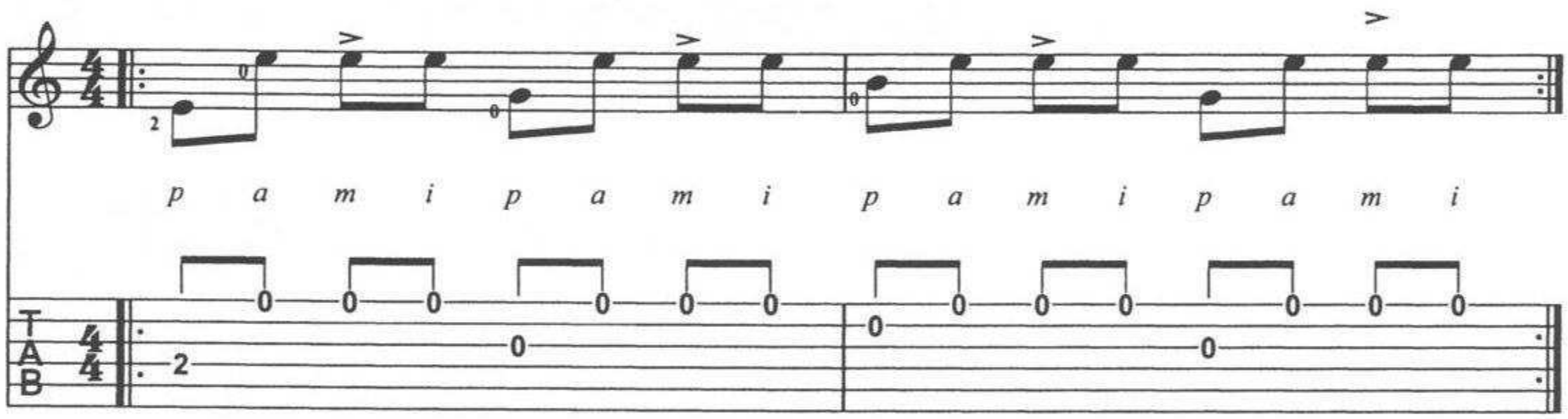


Variable Accents

Another way to greatly improve the rhythmical evenness of your tremolo technique is by using **variable accents**. The most practical way of doing that is *to practice it slowly with a slight but obvious accent on "m"*. This will subdivide the usual 16th note pattern of the tremolo into two distinct groups of two eighth notes each. After considerable practice, when the tremolo is sped up, the accent on the middle finger tends to dissolve, leaving an even tremolo technique. There is significant physiological association between the middle and ring fingers, and this practice technique helps considerably in creating more independence between them. Use the metronome to mark time points on *p* and *m*. We will see a very similar concept to this recommended by classical guitarist **Sharon Isbin**.

Exercise #9

Variable Tremolo Accents



Scales Using a-m-i Alternation

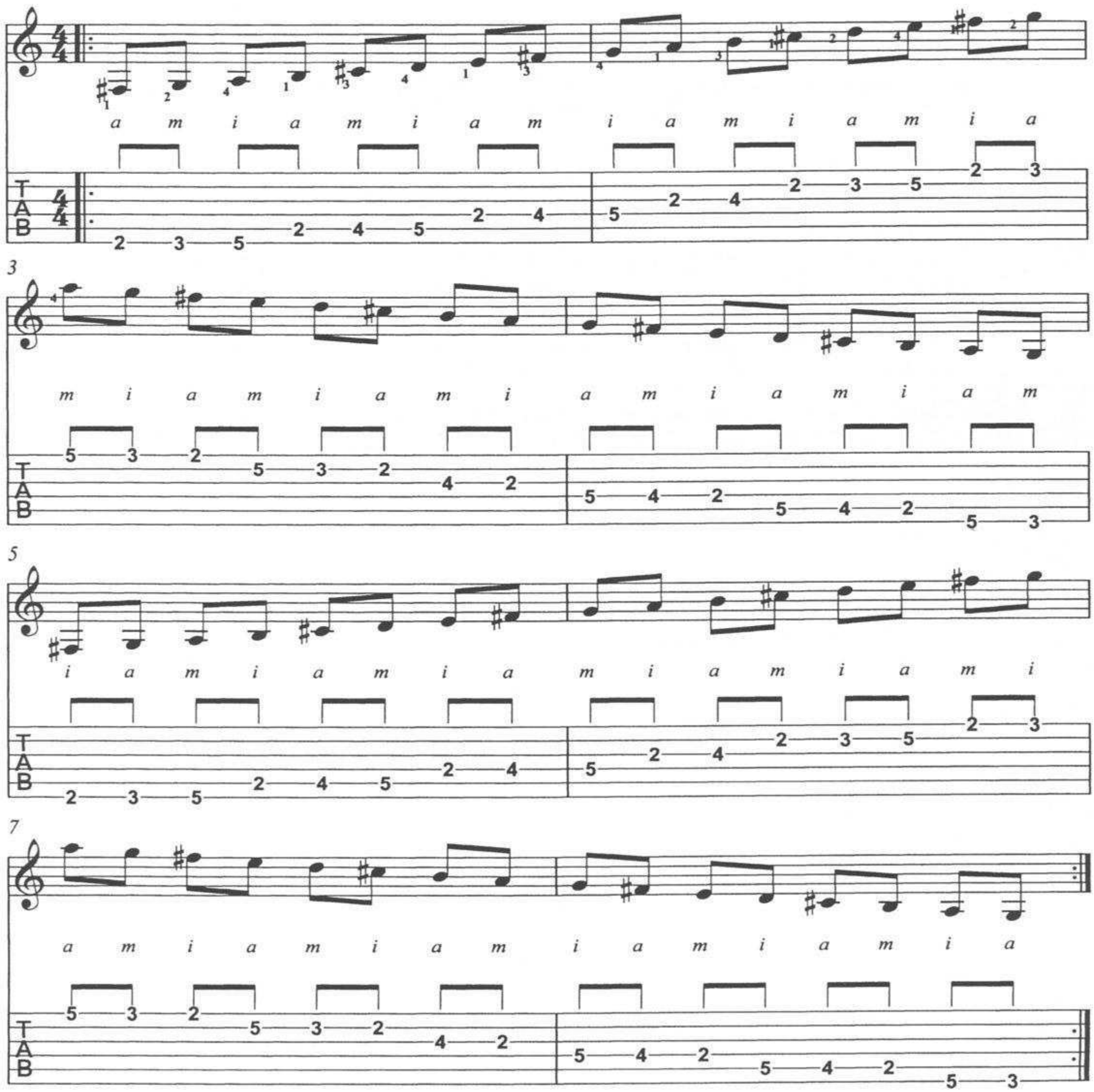
Here's another excellent tremolo practice technique! **Practice scales using a-m-i**! Since that is the exact motion of the tremolo, practicing scales in this manner will certainly benefit your tremolo a great deal! The late legendary classical guitarist **Narcisso Yepes** used to play scales this way, as does the great flamenco concert guitarist, **Serranito**.

Here's an F♯ Phrygian scale at the second position played in this manner. I will repeat the scale three times, since each time the string crossing is taking place with a different RH finger! This way you get to practice crossing strings with all three RH fingers.

Exercise #10

♩ = 100

3-Finger Scales - Part I

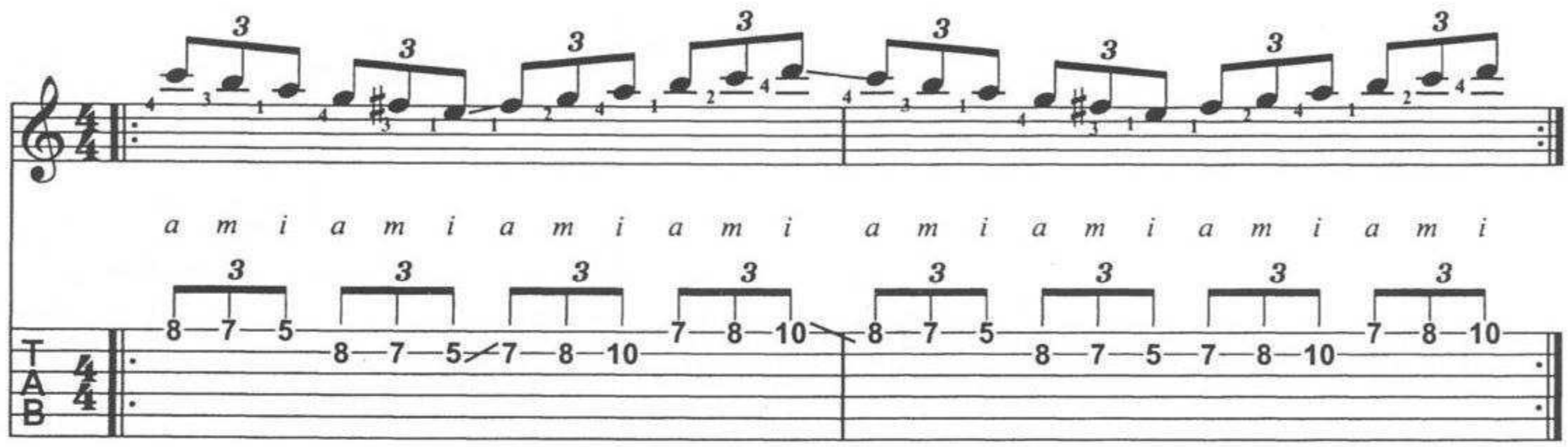


Here is a repeating sequence, using a static three notes-per-string practice pattern on the fifth position, based on the A Dorian scale.

Exercise #10b

♩ = 100

3-Finger Scales - Part II

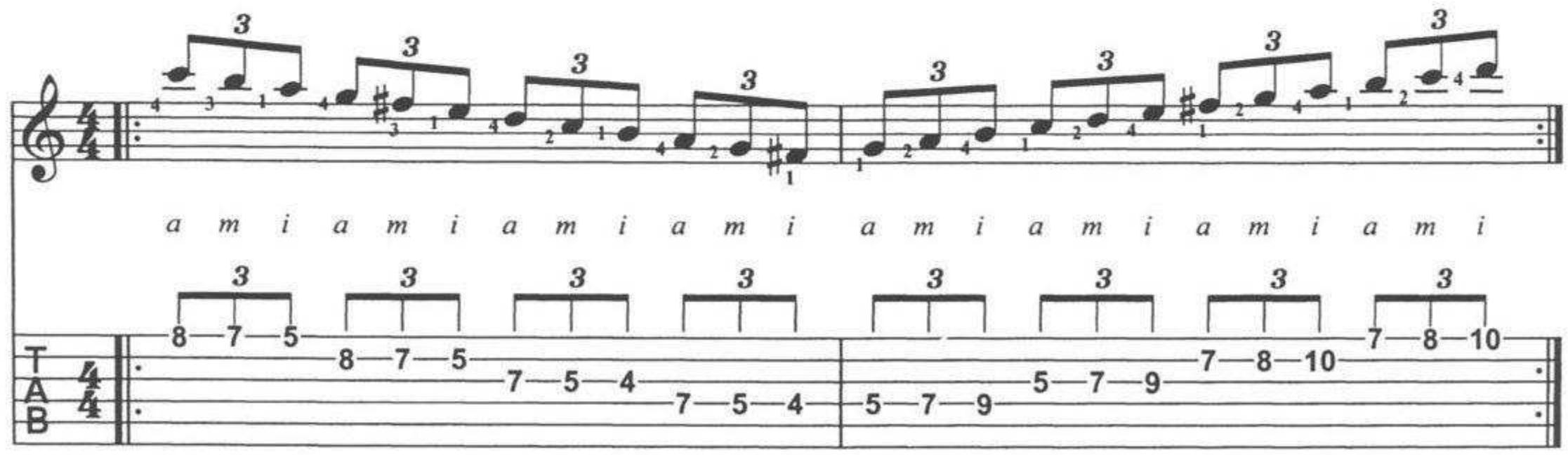


Let us expand this sequence to include two more strings. There is a stretch involved, but with a little practice, you should be able to tackle it.

Exercise #10c

♩ = 100

3-Finger Scales - Part III

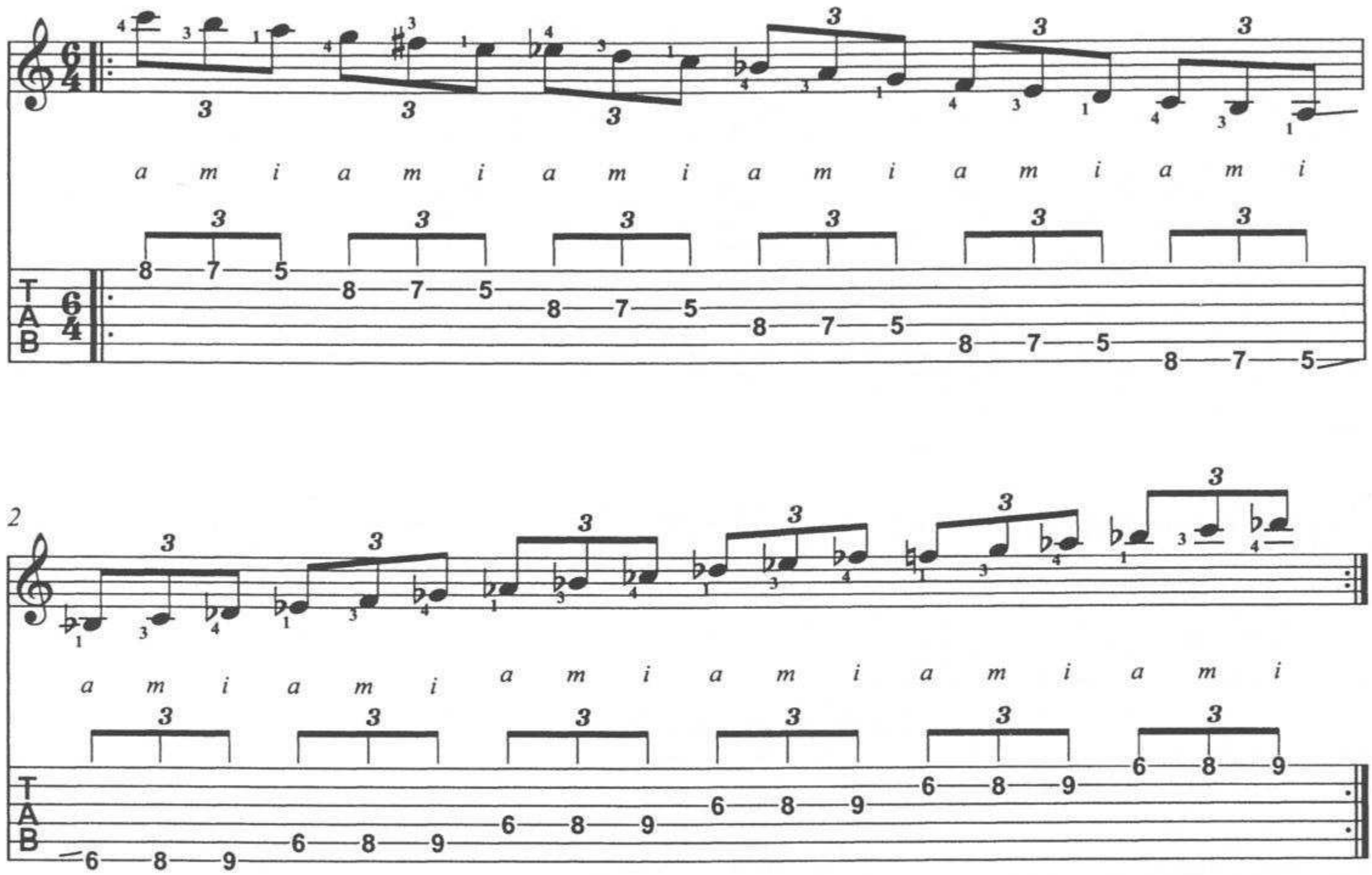


Finally, let us expand this sequence to include the last two strings. This sequence will be mostly chromatic in nature. The LH fingering will be the same throughout.

Exercise #10d

♩ = 100

3-Finger Scales - Part IV



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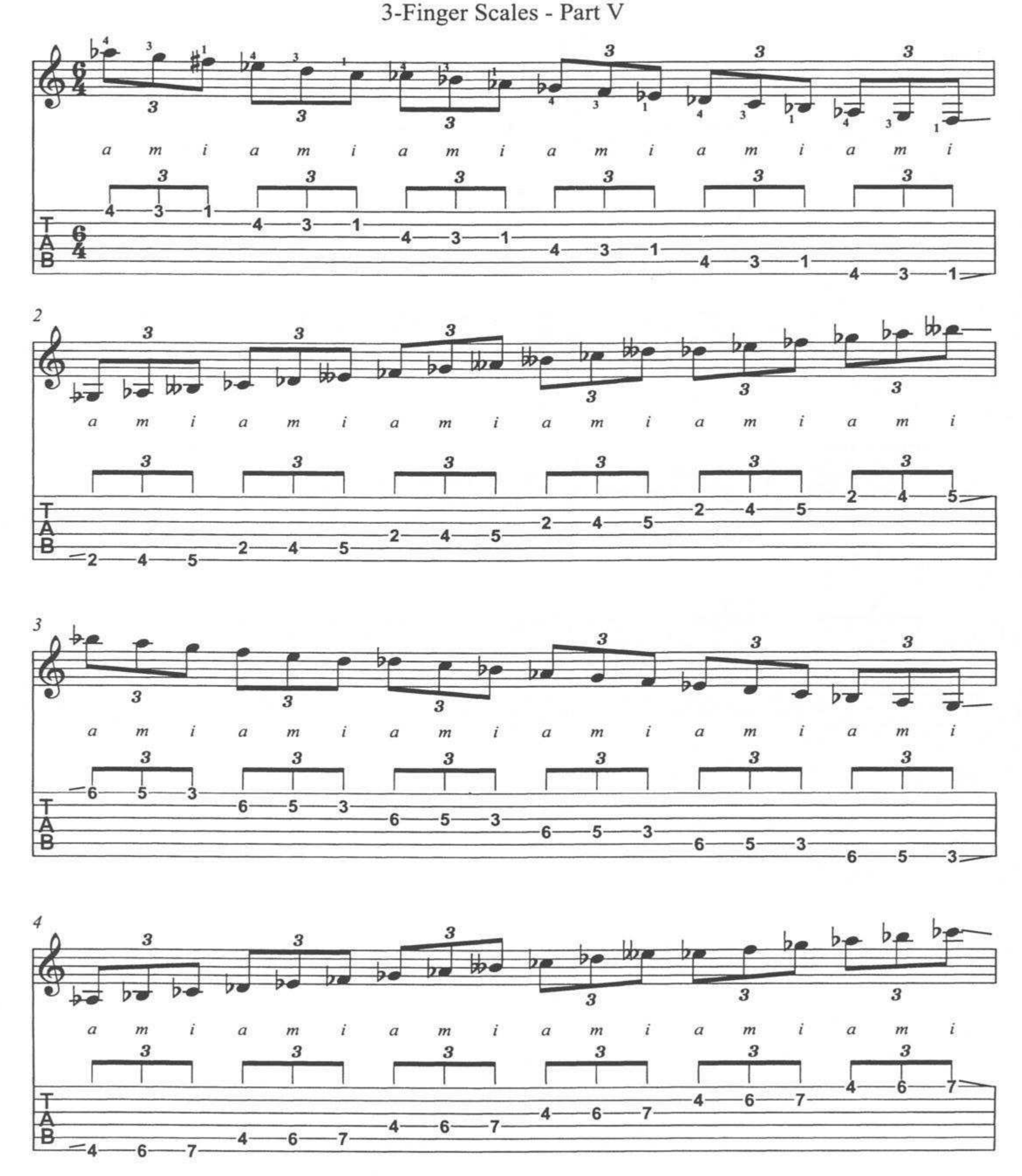
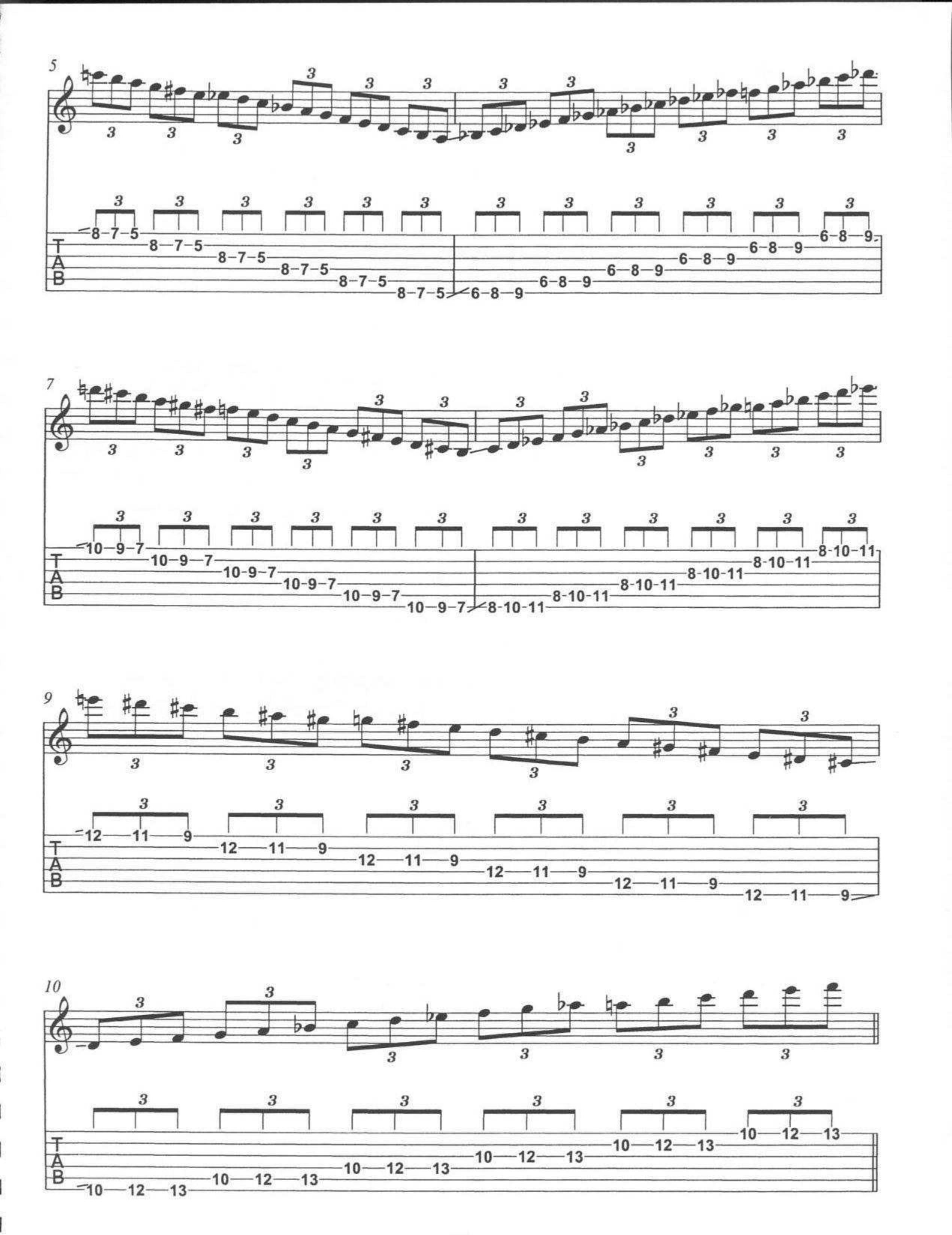
This next, final sequence makes a terrific exercise for scale techniques in general. When used with the aforementioned way of RH fingering, it will certainly help your tremolo reach new heights of speed and control.

Exercise #10e

3-Finger Scales - Part V




5
7
9
10
T
A
B

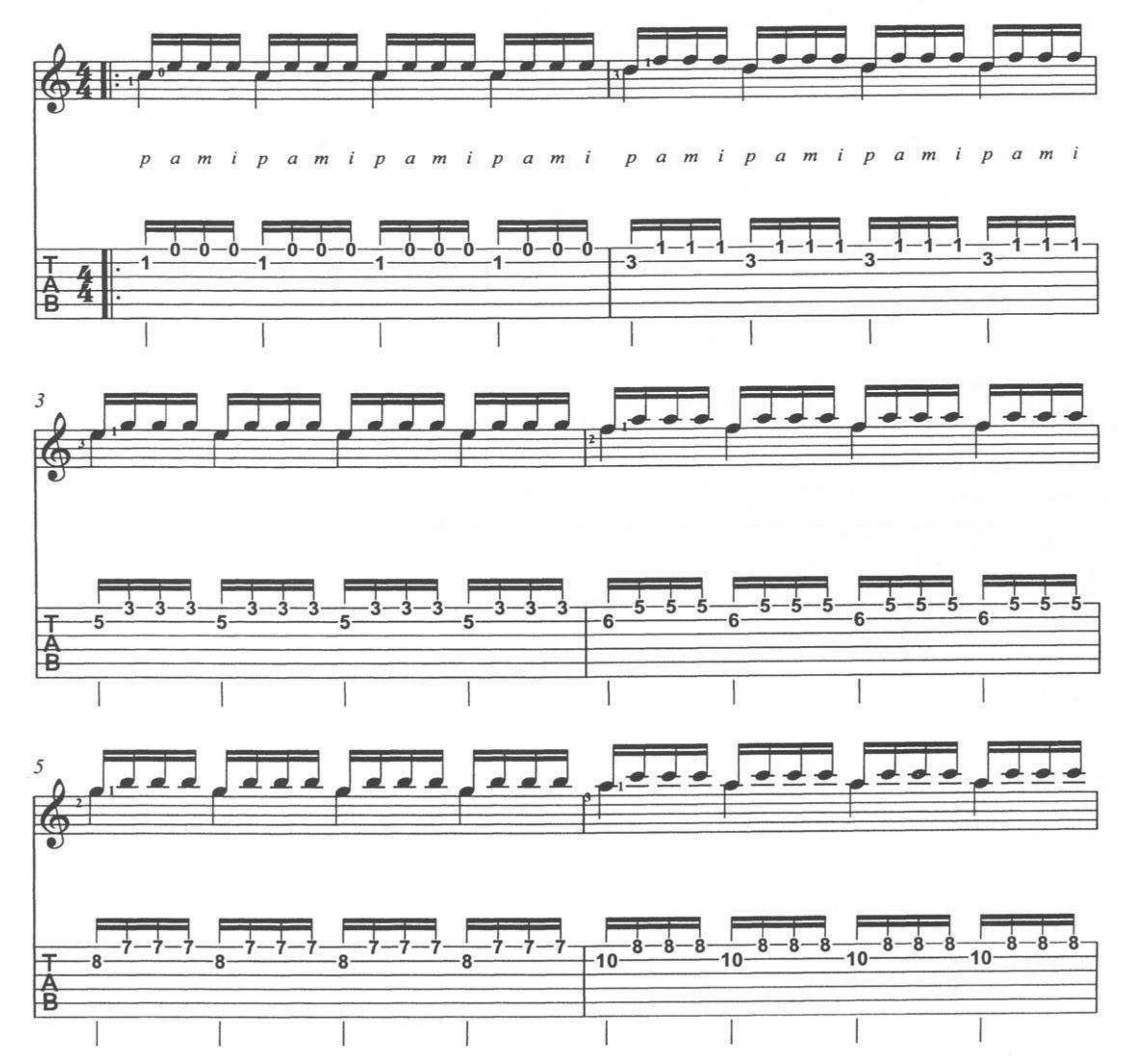
Using All the Bass Strings

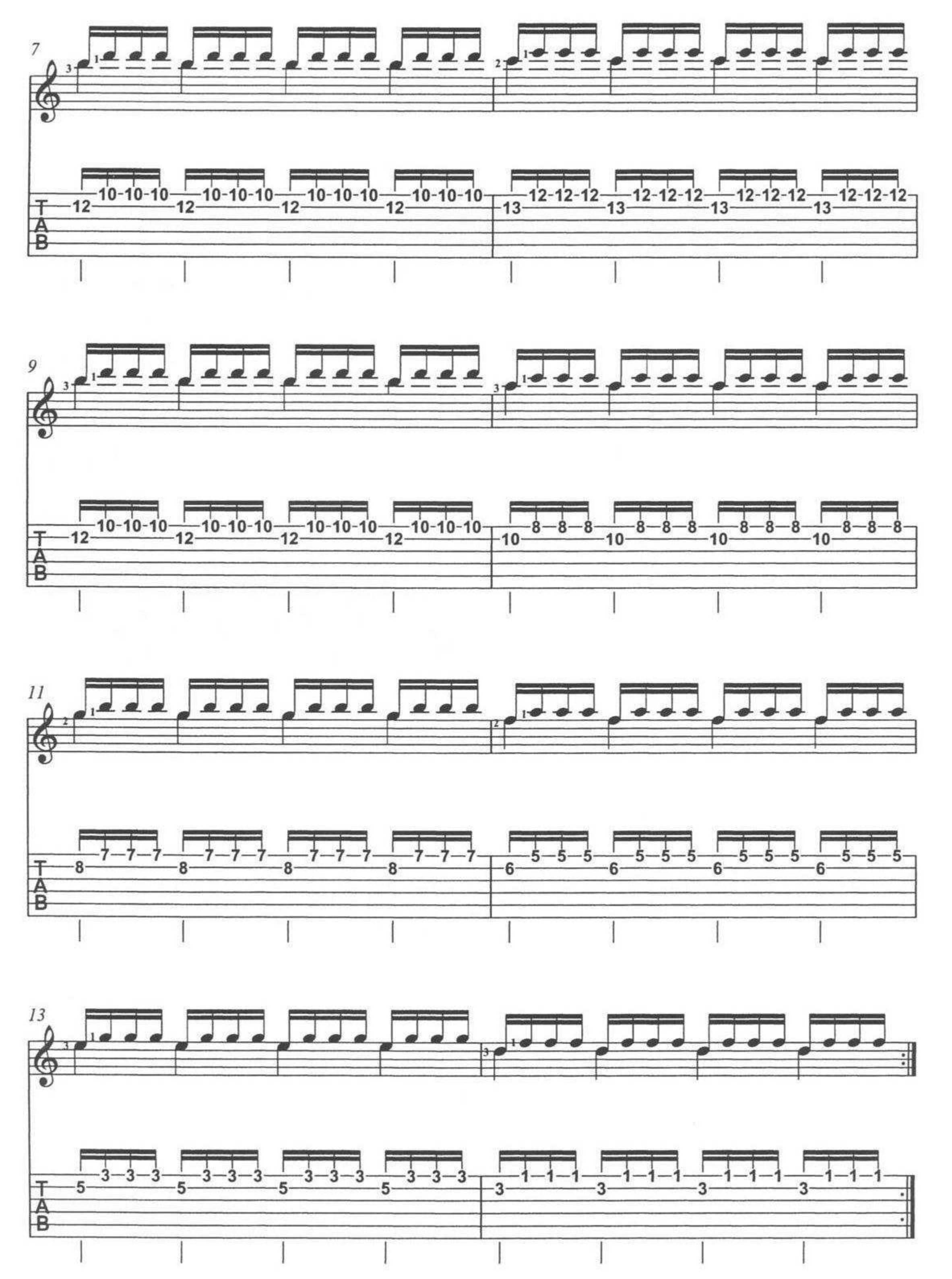
The importance of accurately controlling the motion of the RH thumb is an aspect of tremolo technique that is very often underrated. When initially practicing tremolo, make sure that you are able to **employ all the bass strings** in your playing. Just because you are moderately comfortable playing tremolo on the high E string with the thumb playing the third string, it doesn't necessarily mean that the same will be true when the thumb is playing the low sixth string! When practicing using the RH thumb, make sure you concentrate on one bass string at a time.

Here is an exercise playing parallel thirds on the first and second strings, with the thumb playing the seconnd string all the time and a-m-i playing the first string. This sequence is based on the C major scale.

Exercise #11

♩ = 70 Parallel 3rds on First & Second String



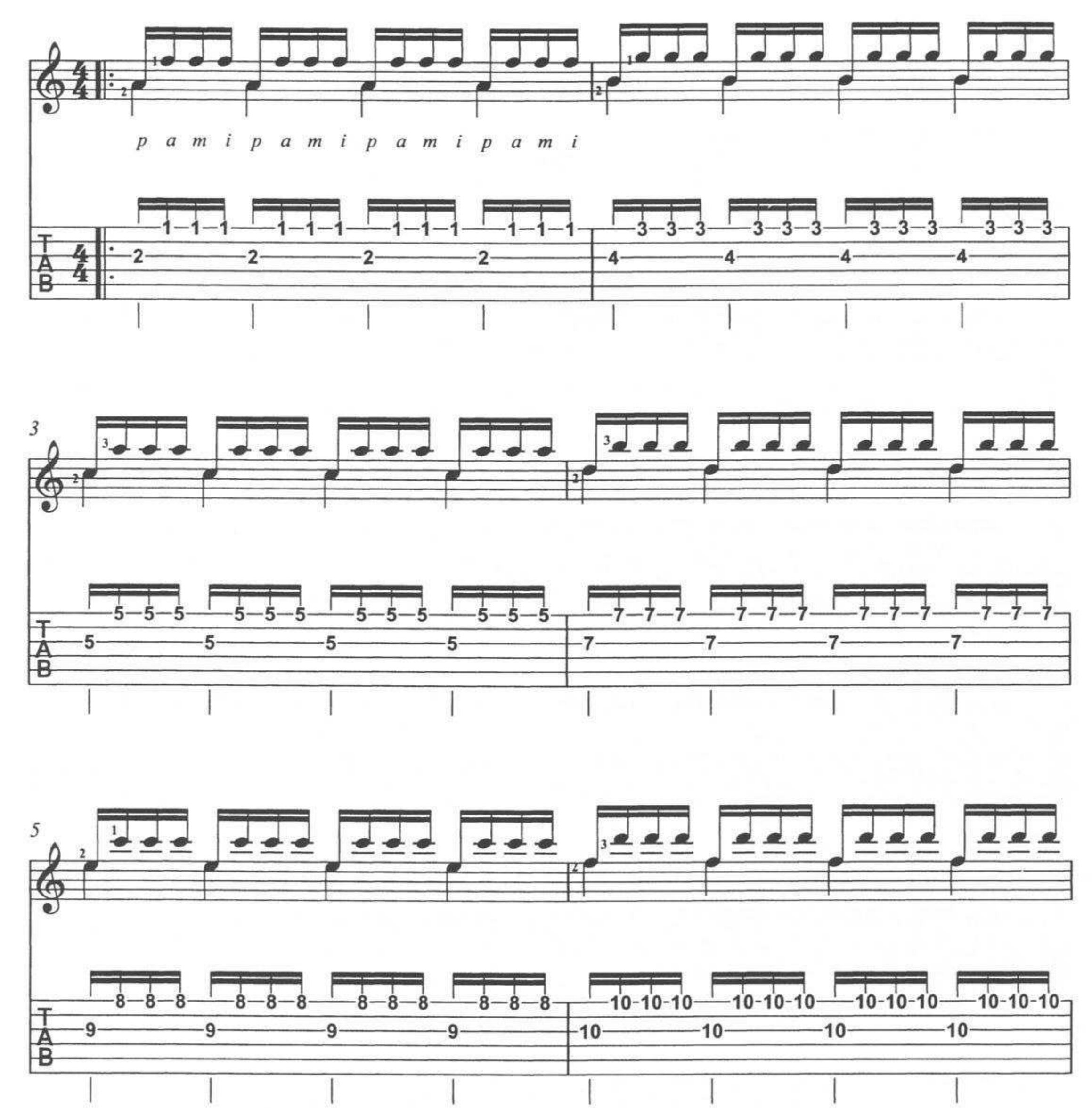

7
9
11
13
T
A
B

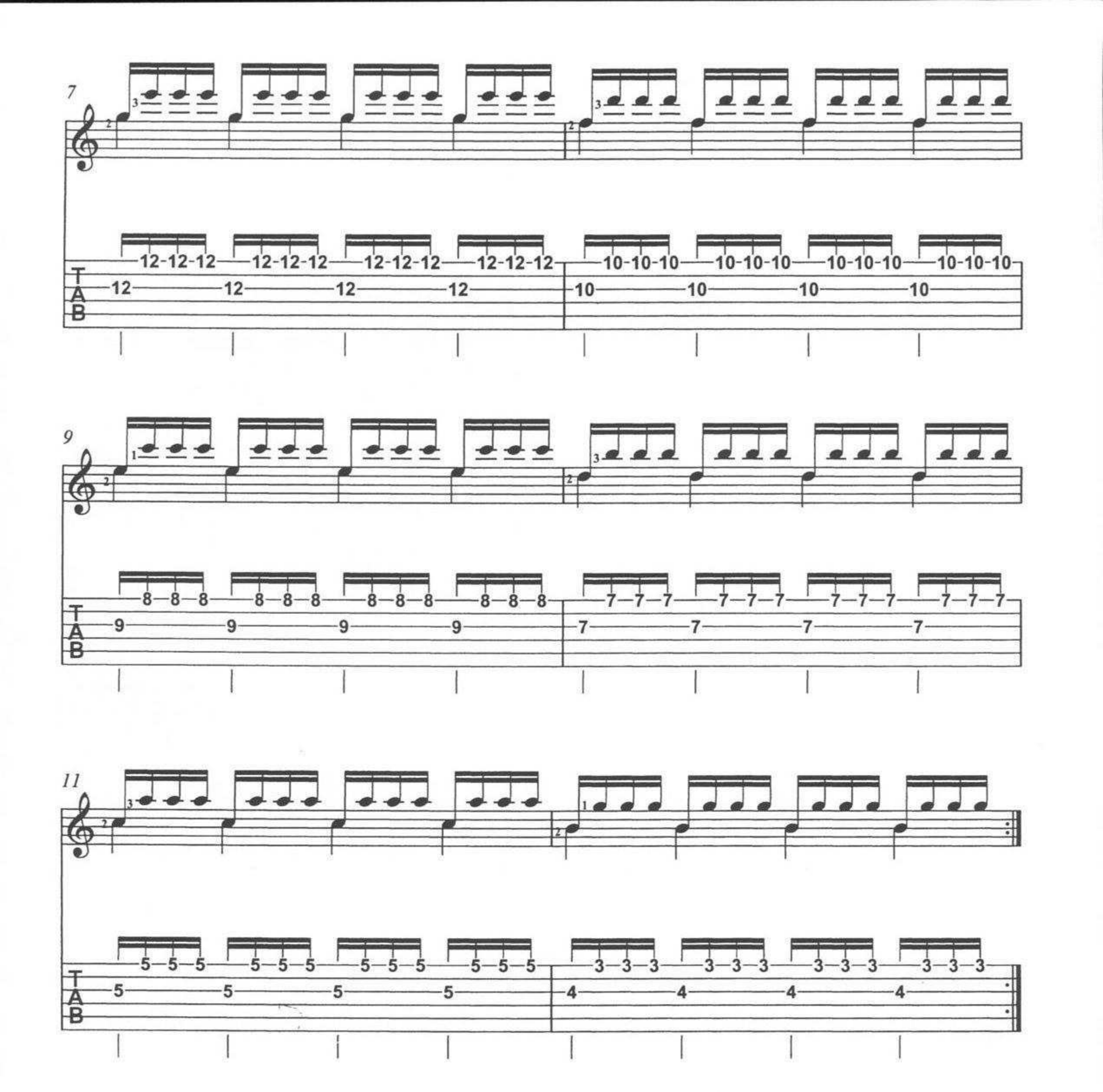
This next exercise in parallel sixths will help train your thumb to play on the third string, with the tremolo on the first string. Keep playing it until you feel you have total control over it.

Exercise #12

♩= 70

Parallel 6ths on First & Third Strings

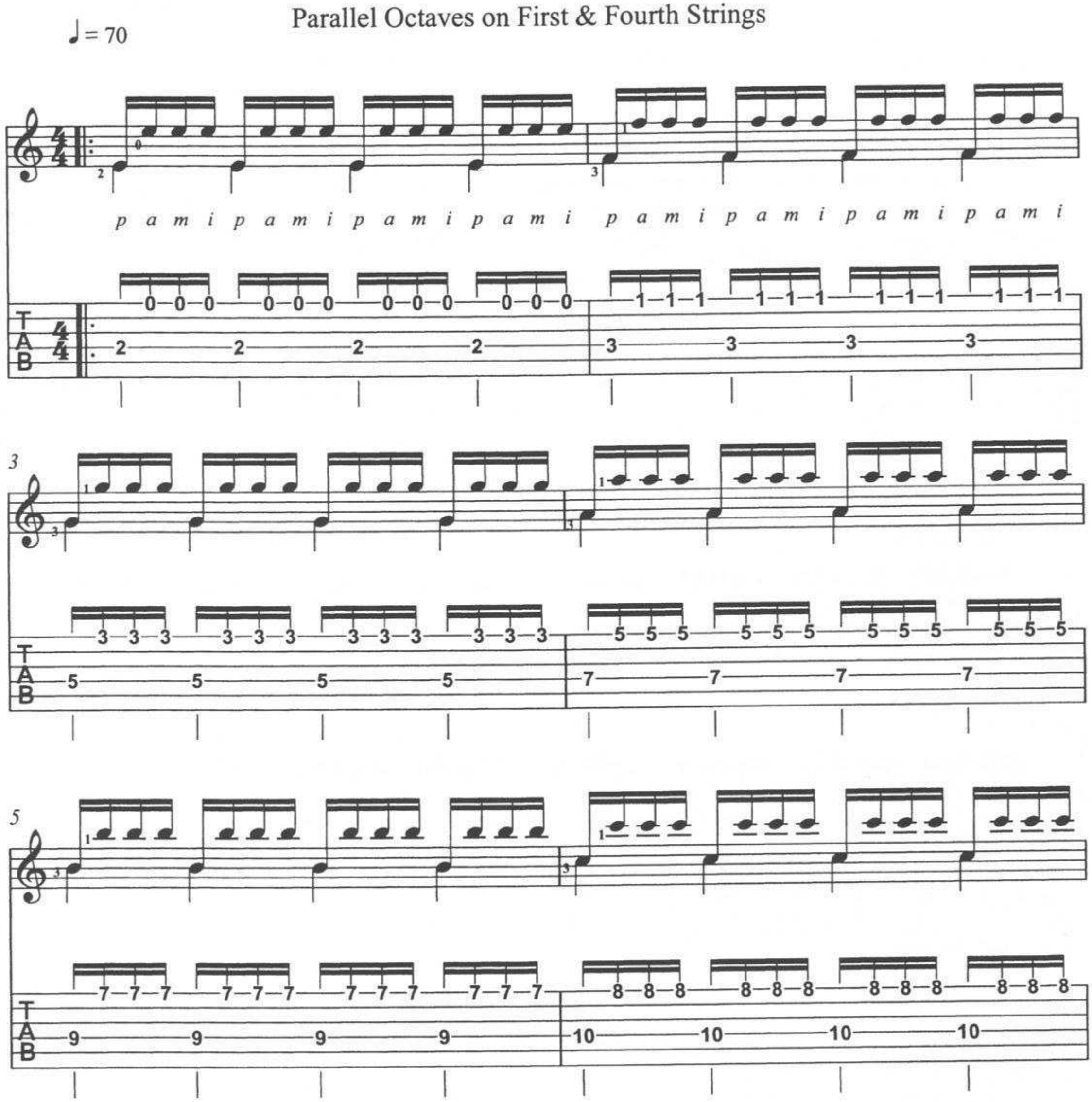


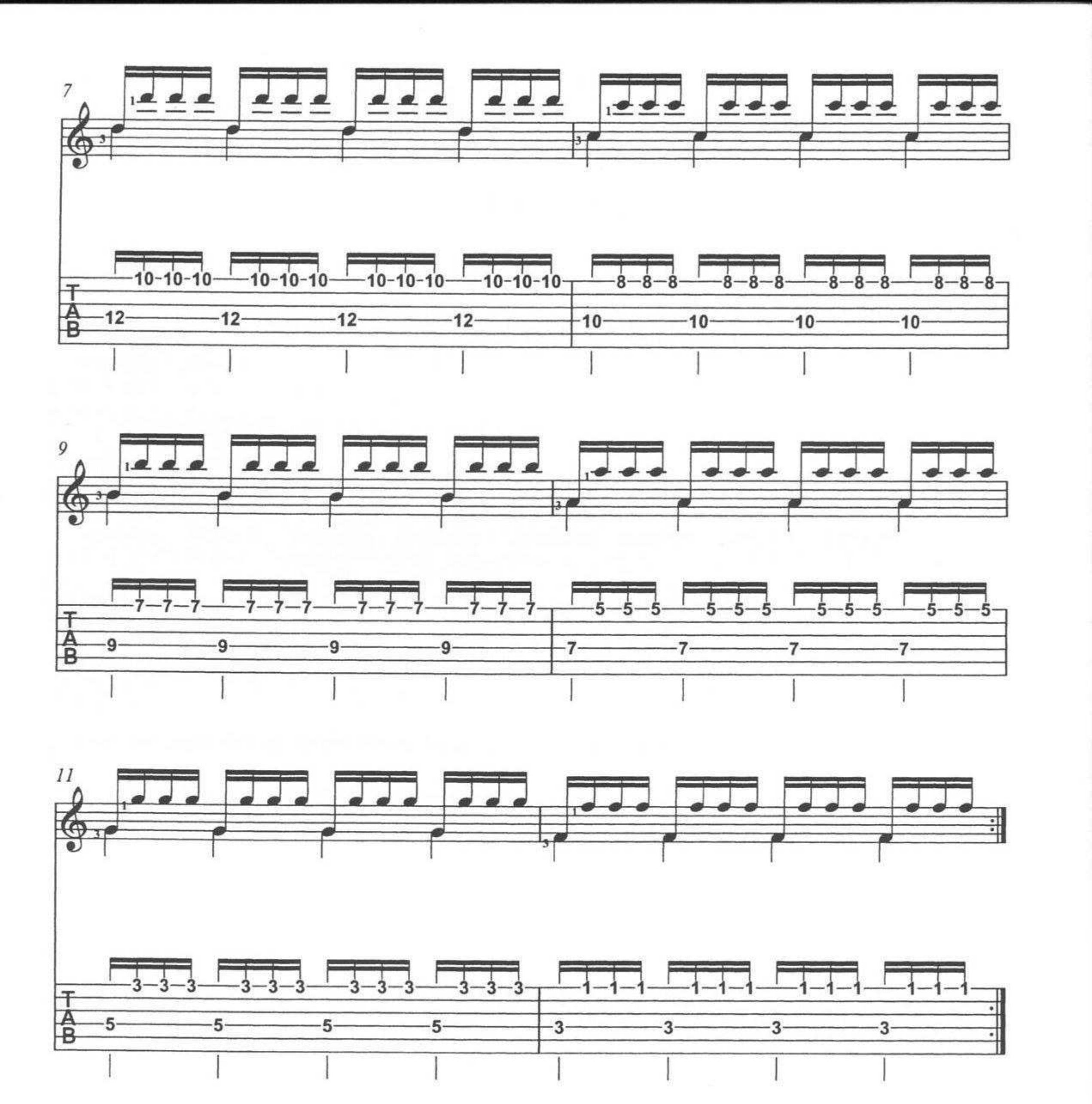

7
12-12-12 12-12-12 12-12-12 12-12-12
12 12 12 12
10-10-10 10-10-10 10-10-10 10-10-10
10 10 10 10
9
8-8-8 8-8-8 8-8-8 8-8-8
9 9 9 9
7-7-7 7-7-7 7-7-7 7-7-7
7 7 7 7
11
5-5-5 5-5-5 5-5-5 5-5-5
5 5 5 5
3-3-3 3-3-3 3-3-3 3-3-3
4 4 4 4
TAB

For our next exercise, let's use parallel octaves on the fourth and first strings. Pay attention to the balance of the sound. Do not let your thumb overshadow the tremolo notes, or the other way around!

Exercise #13

Parallel Octaves on First & Fourth Strings

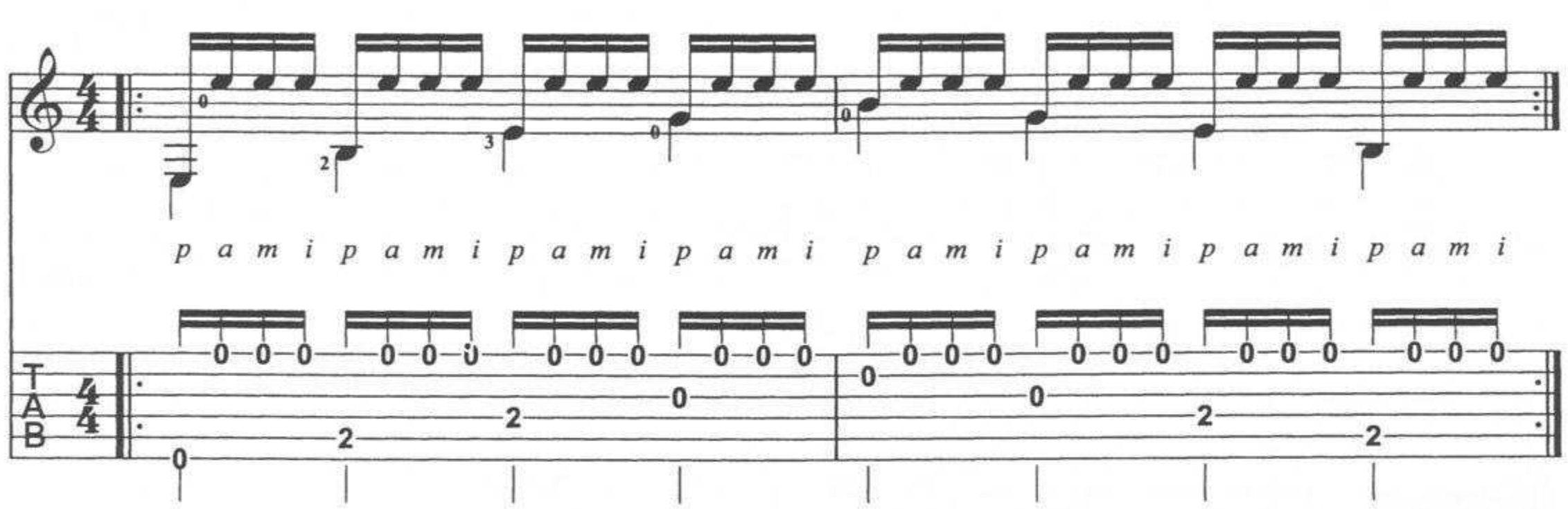



7
10-10-10 10-10-10 10-10-10 10-10-10 8-8-8 8-8-8 8-8-8 8-8-8
TAB
12 12 12 12 10 10 10 10
9
7-7-7 7-7-7 7-7-7 7-7-7 5-5-5 5-5-5 5-5-5 5-5-5
TAB
9 9 9 9 7 7 7 7
11
3-3-3 3-3-3 3-3-3 3-3-3 1-1-1 1-1-1 1-1-1 1-1-1
TAB
5 5 5 5 3 3 3 3

To further the string changing concept with the RH thumb, let's take a first position Em chord and play it using tremolo. The thumb will be moving on every available string (apart from the first).

Exercise #13b

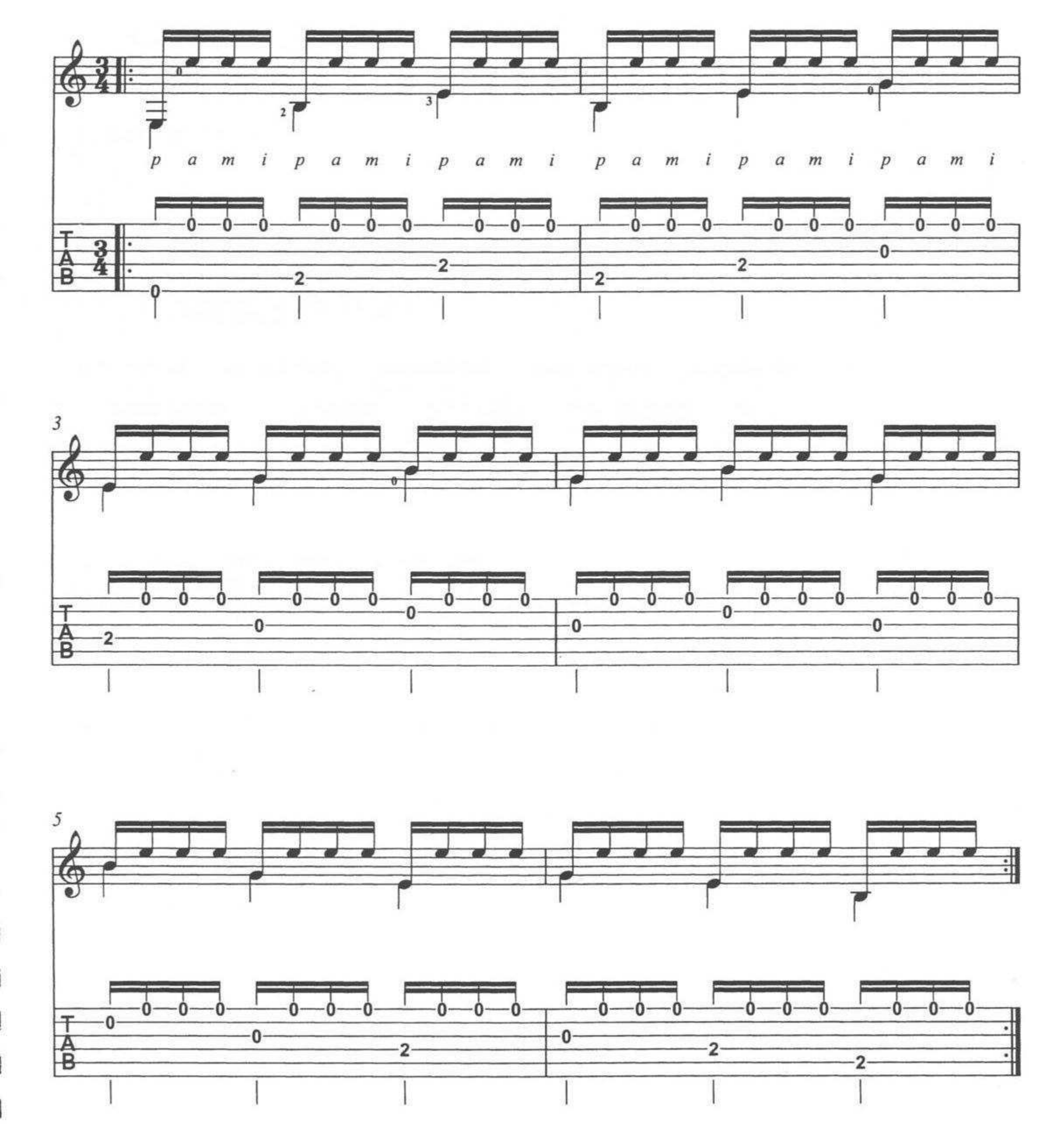
Changing Strings with the Thumb



Now, let us train our thumb to move freely back and forth between strings, in both directions. We will use our trusty Em chord again.

Exercise #13c

Changing Strings with the Thumb - Part II

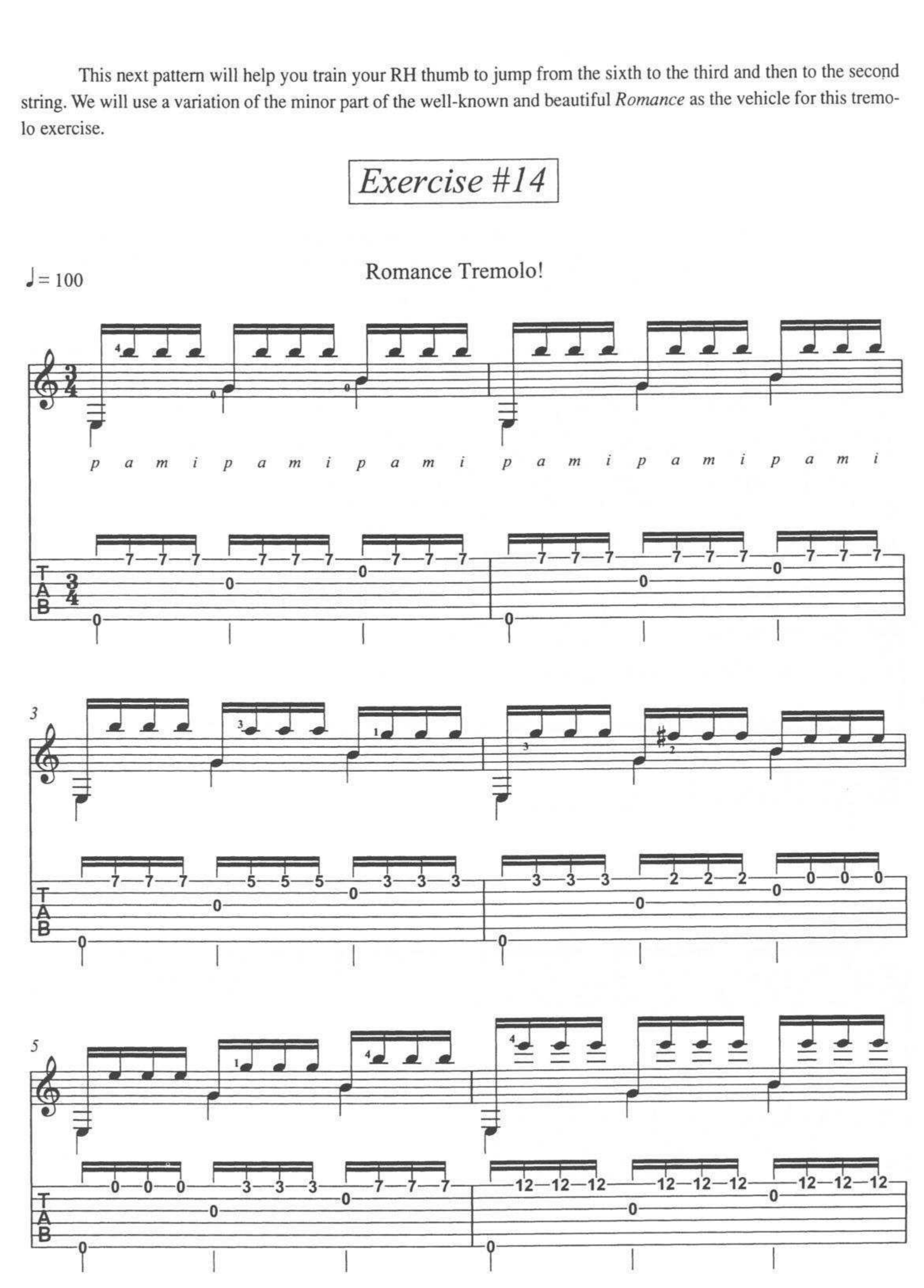


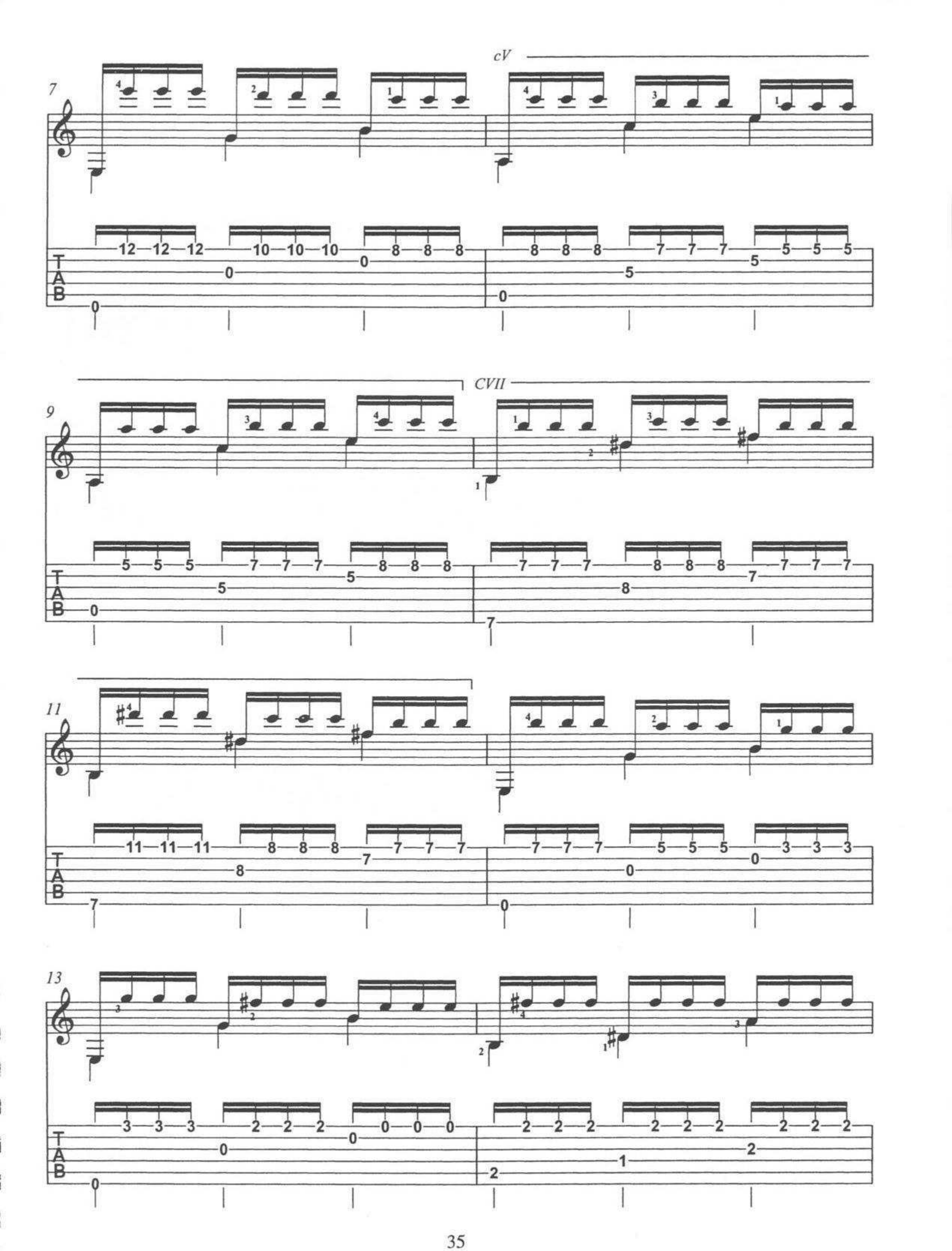
This next pattern will help you train your RH thumb to jump from the sixth to the third and then to the second string. We will use a variation of the minor part of the well-known and beautiful *Romance* as the vehicle for this tremolo exercise.

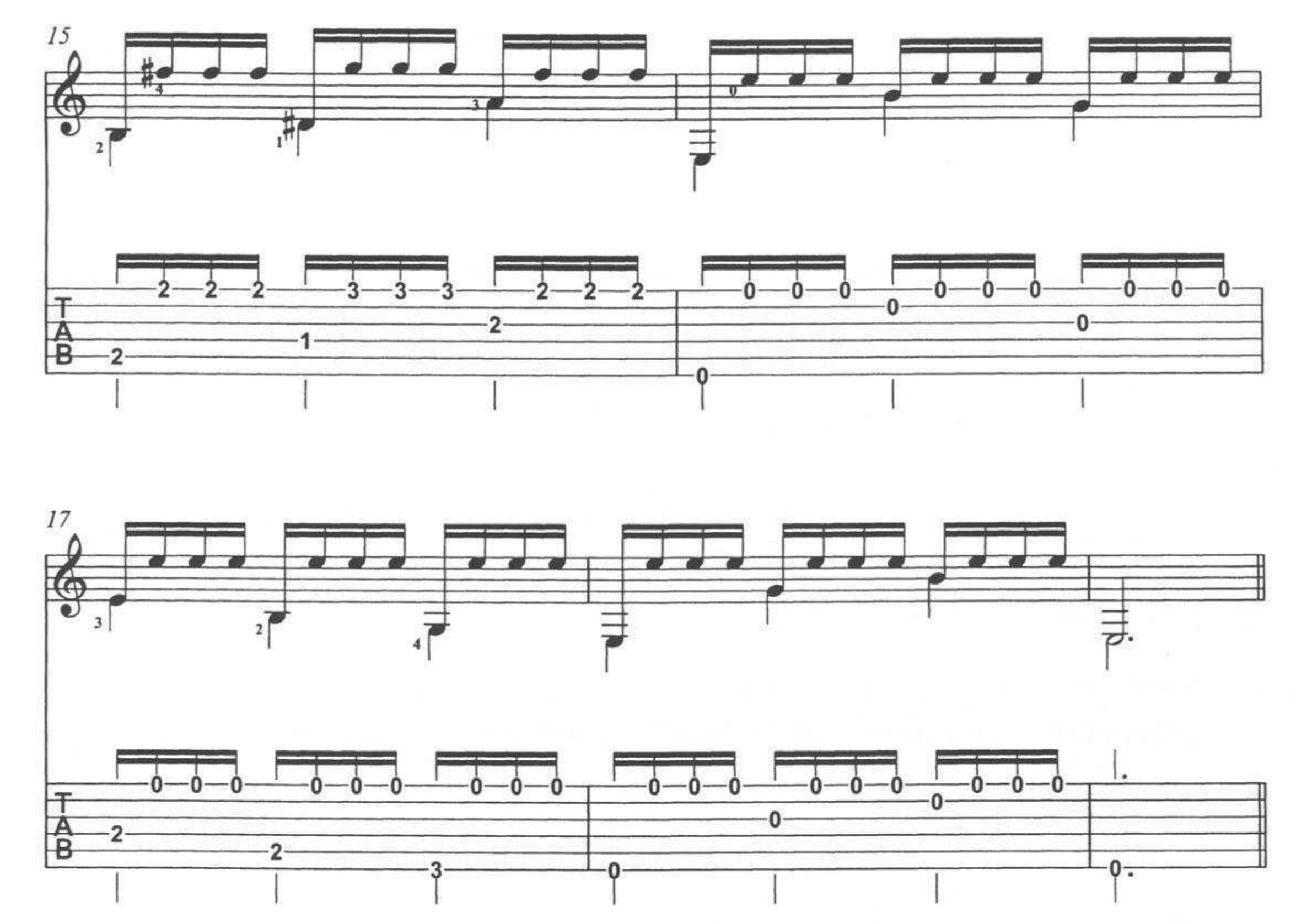
Exercise #14

♩= 100

Romance Tremolo!



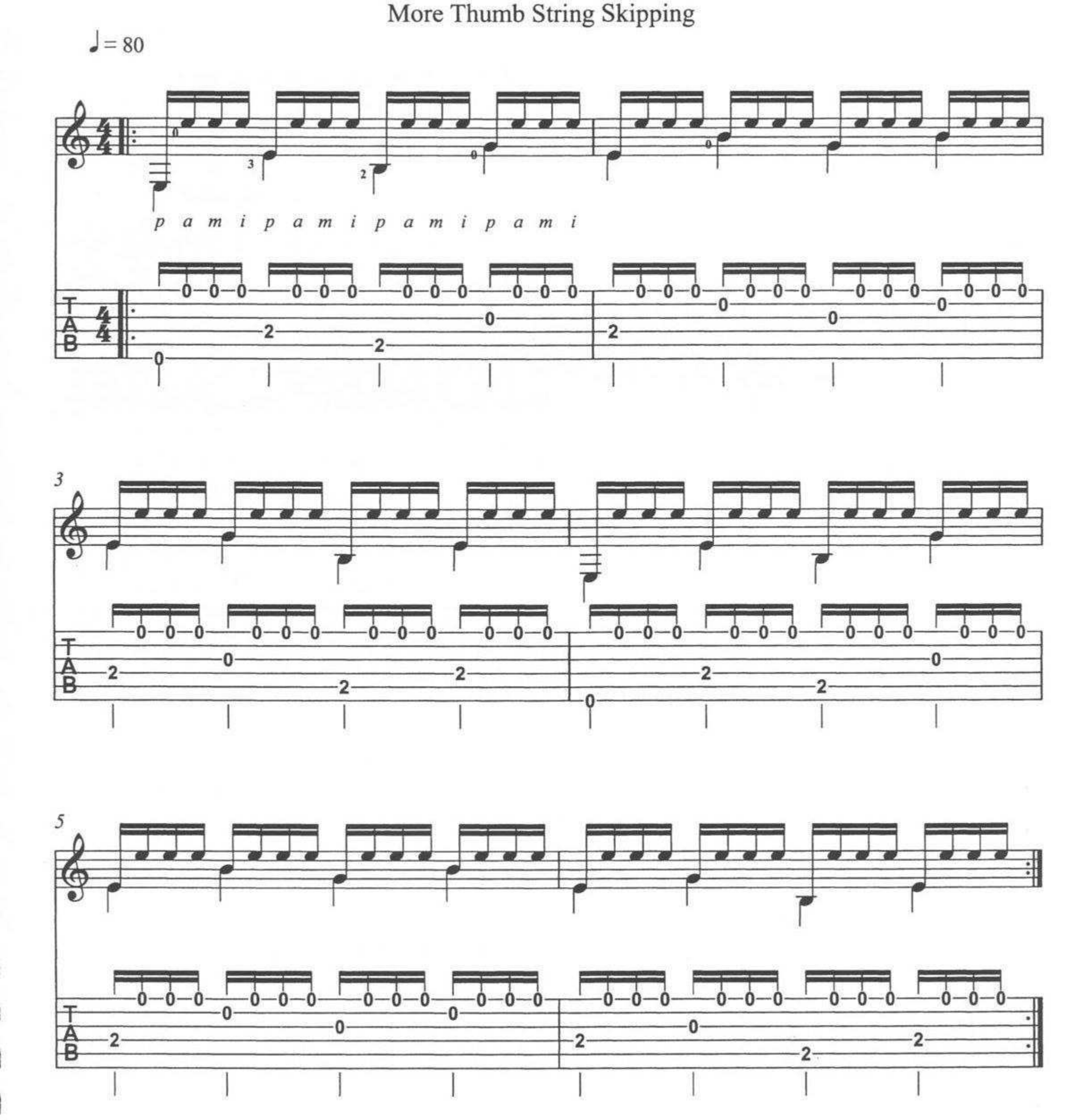

7
cV
9
CVII
11
13
TAB


15
17
T
A
B

You will have to master extreme string crossings with the thumb while leaving the tremolo intact! In this example, we will use a single E minor chord played in the first position. The thumb movement is loosely based on the Villa-Lobos *Study #1* pattern, with significant string crossings of the thumb.

Exercise #15

More Thumb String Skipping

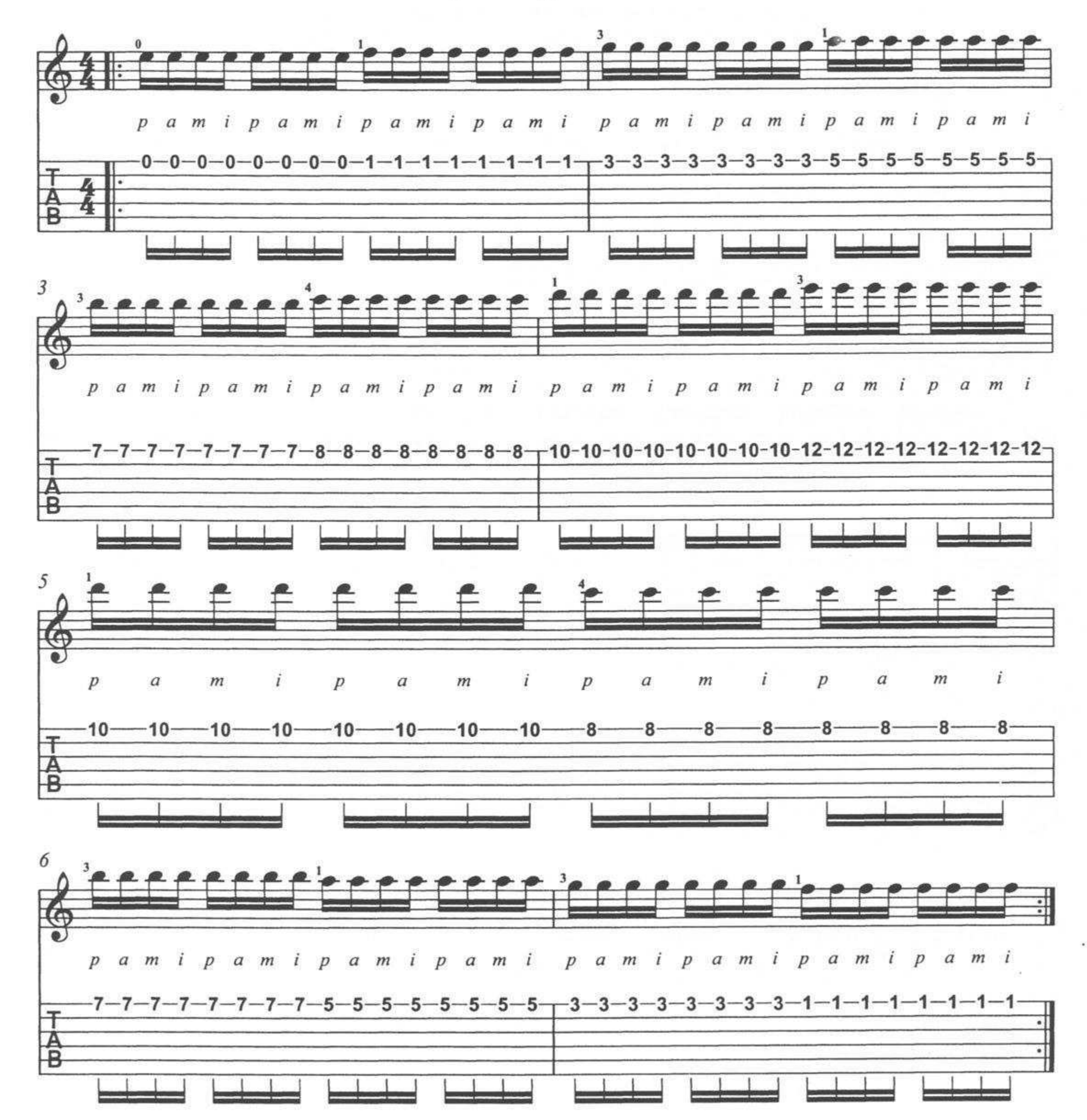


Single-String Tremolo

Single-string tremolo is another great way to smooth out any rhythmic inconsistencies in your tremolo technique. Playing tremolo on the same string makes it very easy to spot any problems in your sound.

Exercise # 16

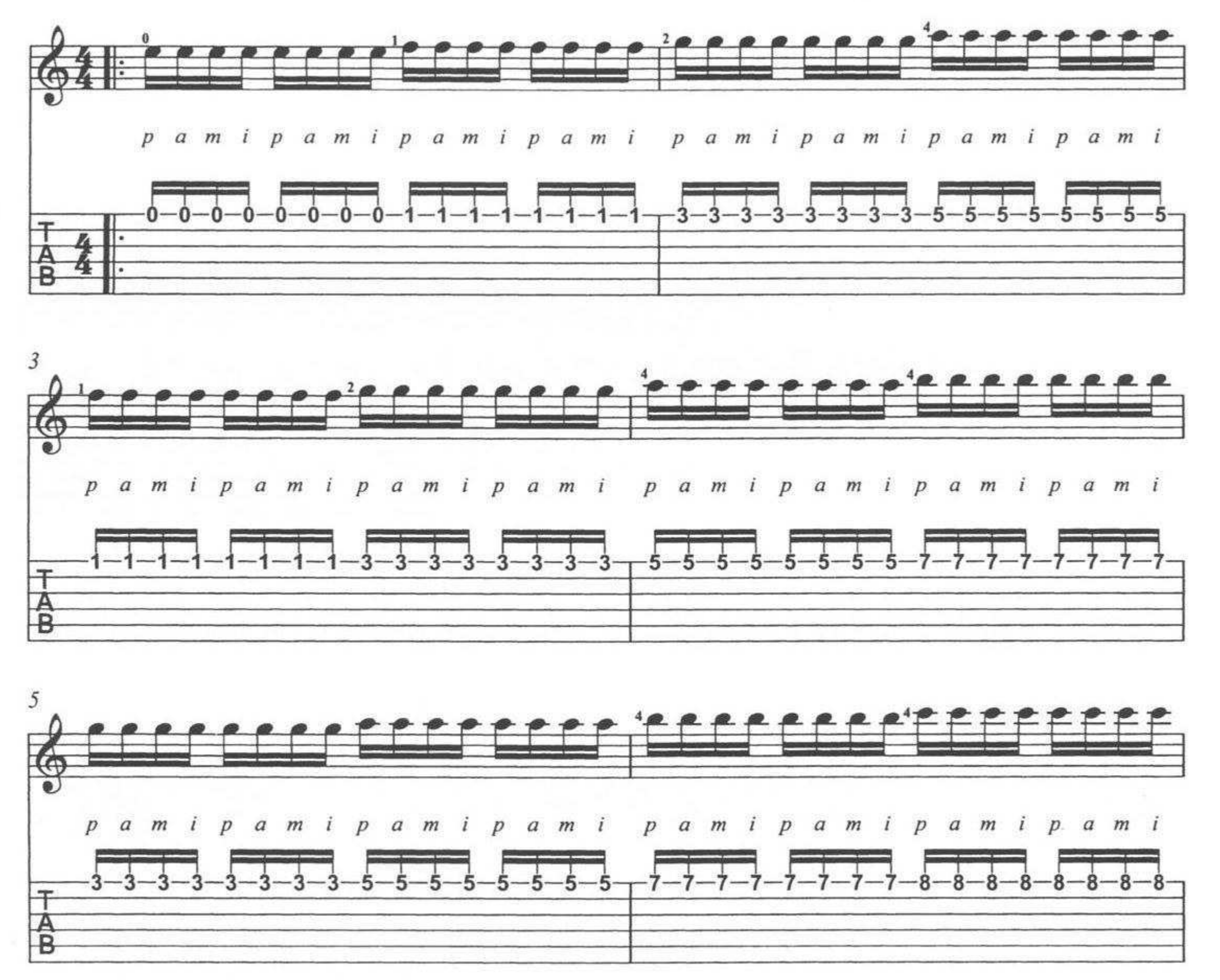
Single-String Tremolo

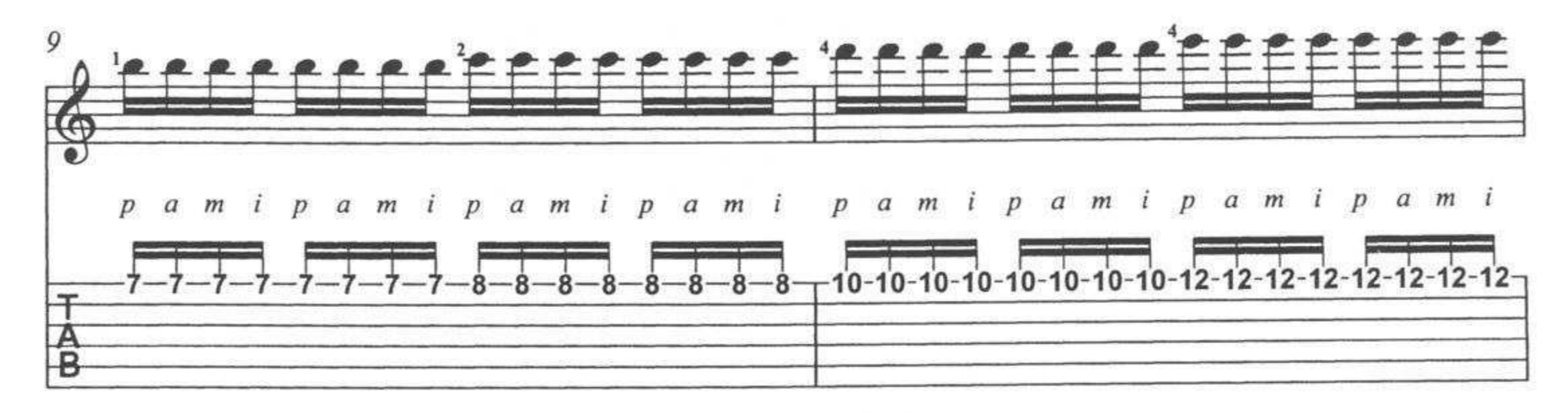


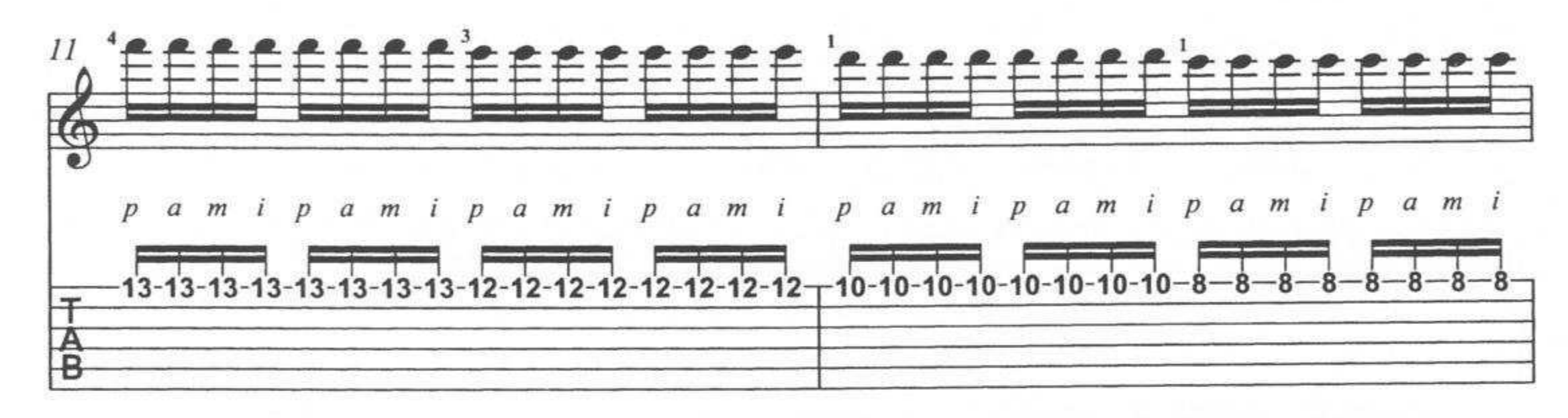
To make the sequence longer and of greater didactic value, let's play the same A minor scale on the first string using a four-note repeating sequence. Don't forget to practice these patterns on the other strings as well!

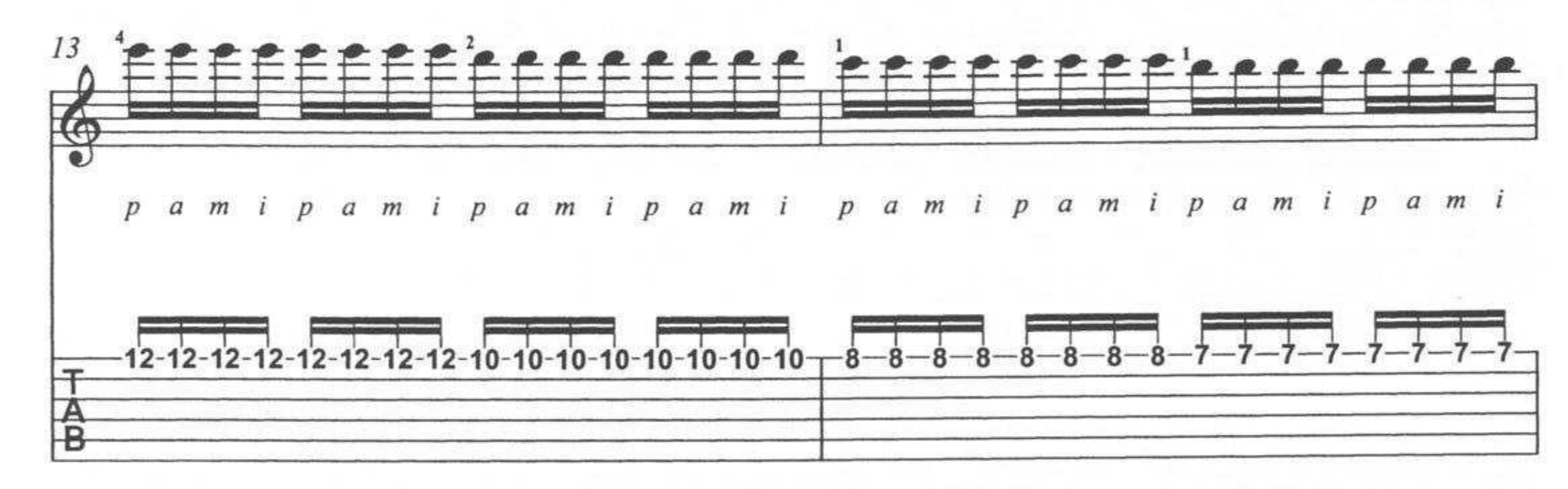
Exercise # 16b

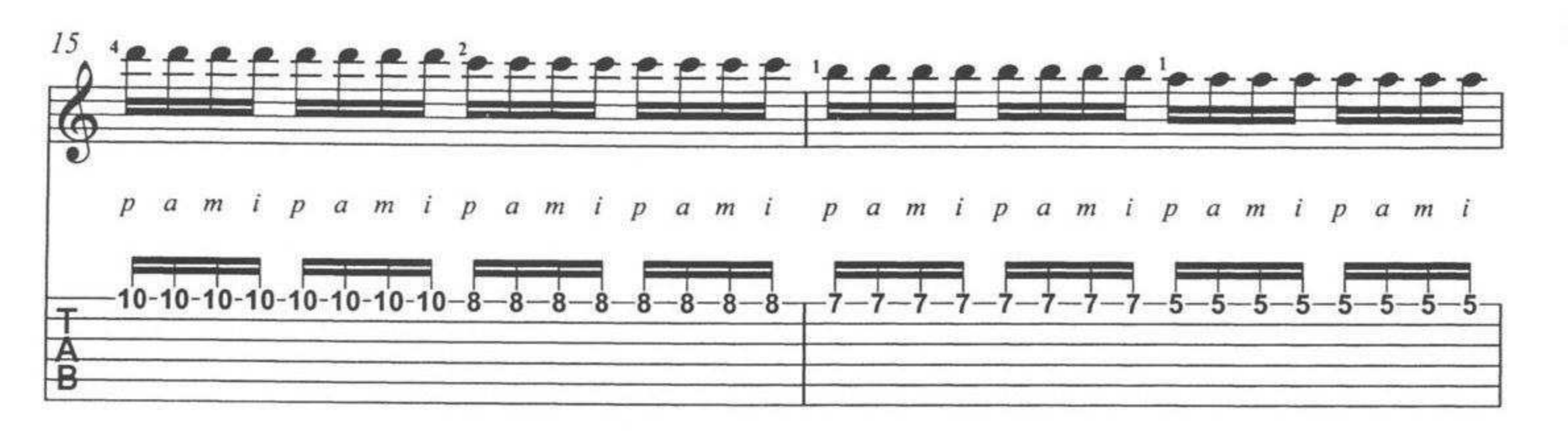
Single-String Tremolo - Part II

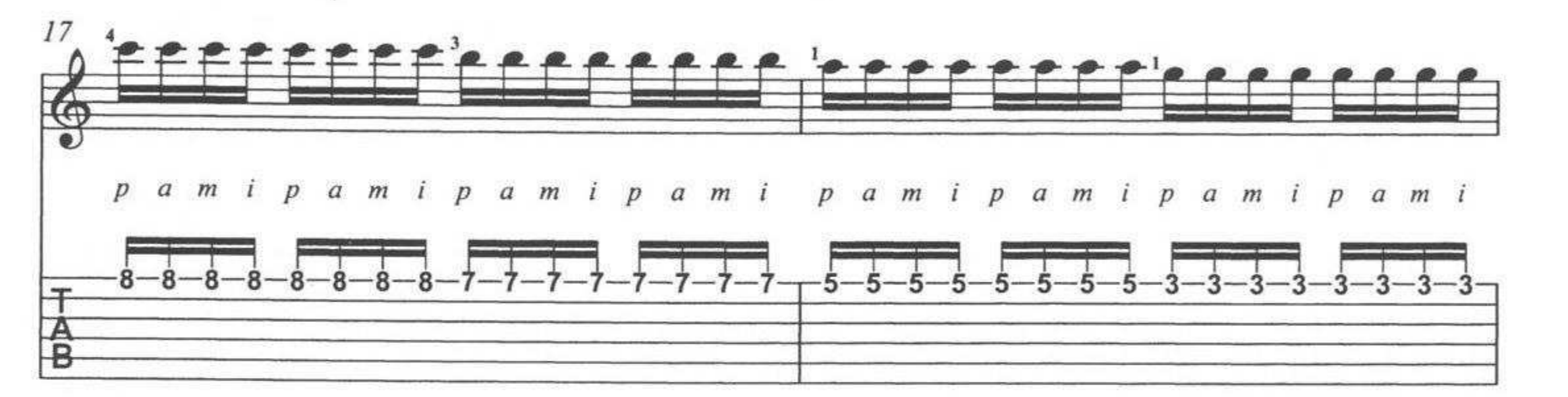


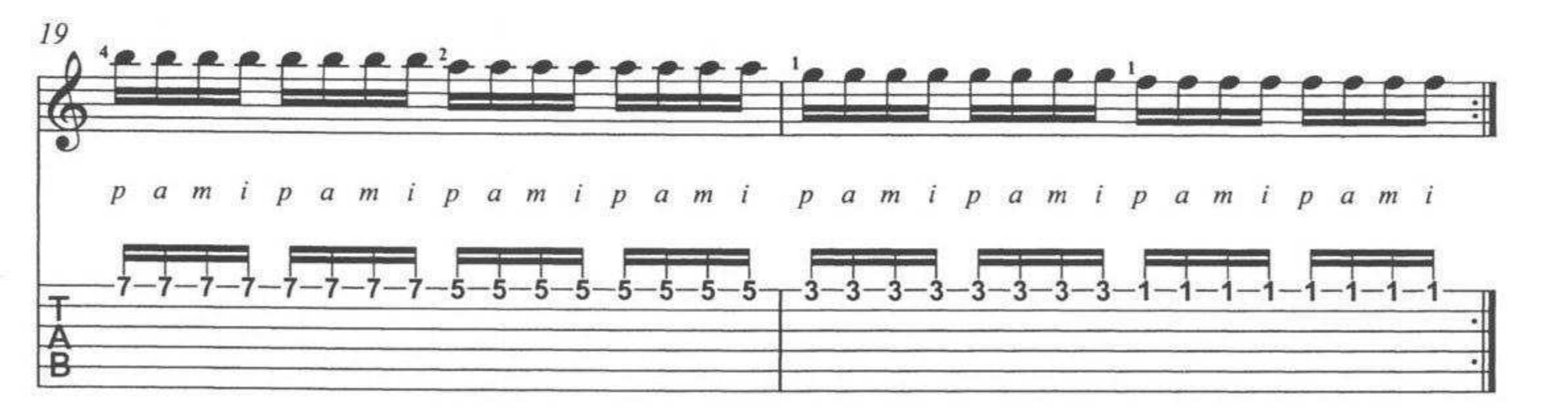

9
p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i
7-7-7-7-7-7-7-7-8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8-10-10-10-10-10-10-10-10-12-12-12-12-12-12-12-12
TAB


11
p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i
13-13-13-13-13-13-13-13-12-12-12-12-12-12-12-12-10-10-10-10-10-10-10-10-8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8
TAB


13
p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i
12-12-12-12-12-12-12-12-10-10-10-10-10-10-10-10-8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8-7-7-7-7-7-7-7-7
TAB


15
p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i
10-10-10-10-10-10-10-10-8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8-7-7-7-7-7-7-7-7-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5
T
A
B


17
p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i
8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8-7-7-7-7-7-7-7-7-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-3-3-3-3-3-3-3-3
T
A
B

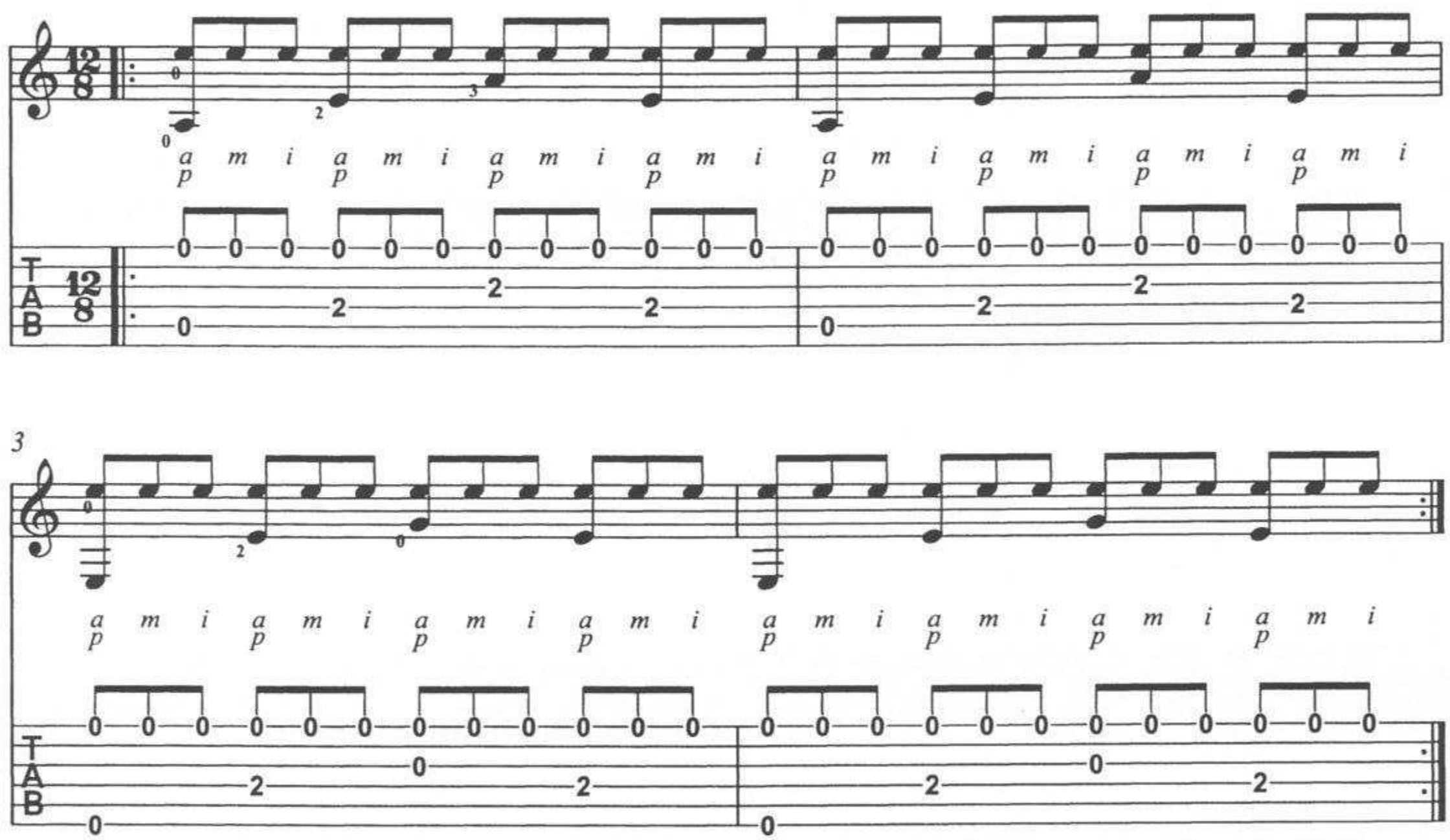

19
p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i
7-7-7-7-7-7-7-7-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-3-3-3-3-3-3-3-3-1-1-1-1-1-1-1-1
T
A
B

"p" and "a" Playing Simultaneously

This practice technique will assist markedly in **making the ring finger follow immediately after the thumb in the classical tremolo**. Instead of playing the sequence *pami* as four distinct notes, we will play the thumb and ring finger simultaneously, effectively resulting in triplets! This will instill greater rhythmic control over the ring finger, thus helping us control it more precisely. The chord progression used will be very simple, as in the majority of these examples, in order to concentrate on right-hand technique.

Exercise # 17

Thumb & Ring Finger Combination

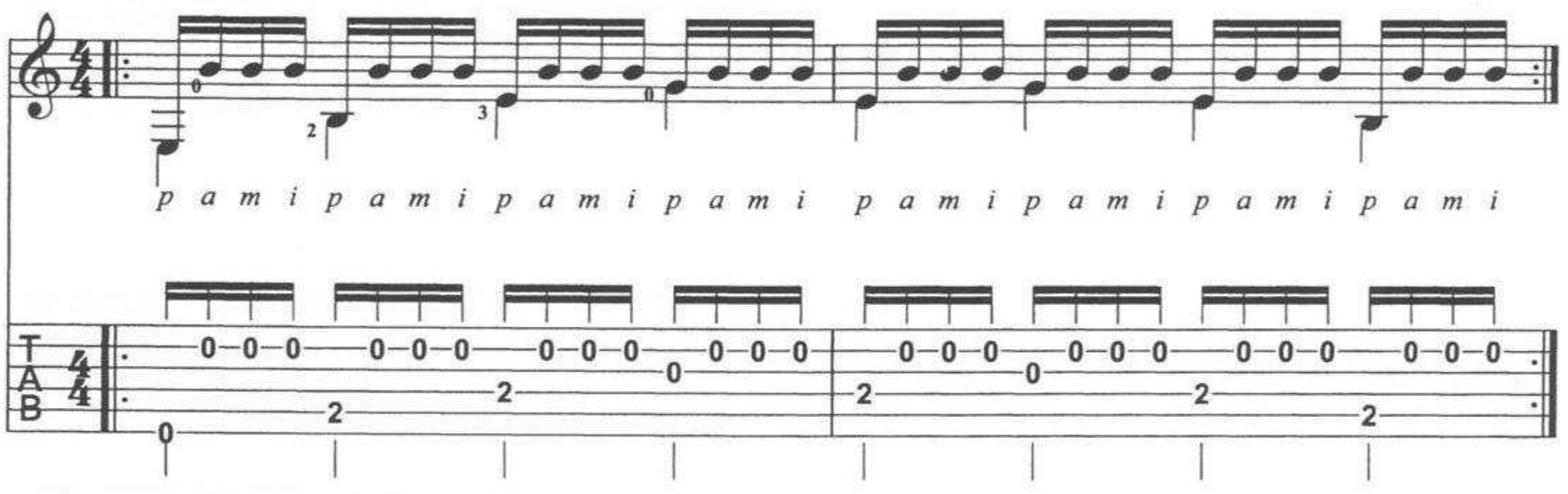


Tremolo on the Inside Strings

Now we approach what may well be the hardest part of tremolo technique; playing tremolo **on the inside strings,** usually the second and third strings. The most common problem is that the right-hand fingers (a-m-i) tend to hit the adjacent strings after they have played their part in the tremolo, that is after having hit the correct string. Correcting this problem will bring you much closer to the complete mastery of tremolo technique. In the following exercise, we will play an Em chord in the first position, while sustaining a second-string tremolo on the open B string.

Exercise # 18

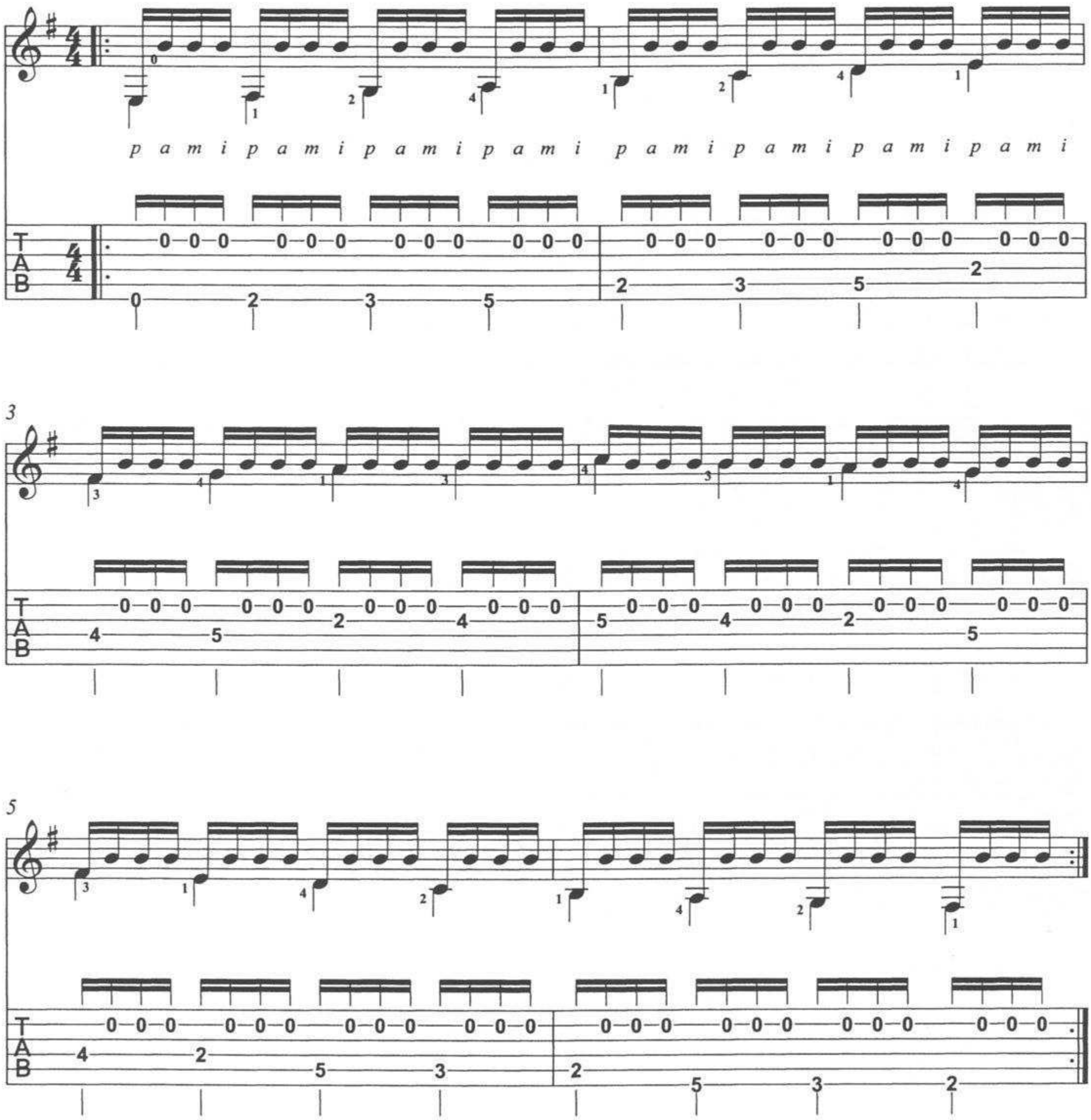
Tremolo on the "inside" strings - Part I



In our next exercise we will play an E natural minor scale in the first position while sustaining a second string tremolo on the open B string.

Exercise # 18b

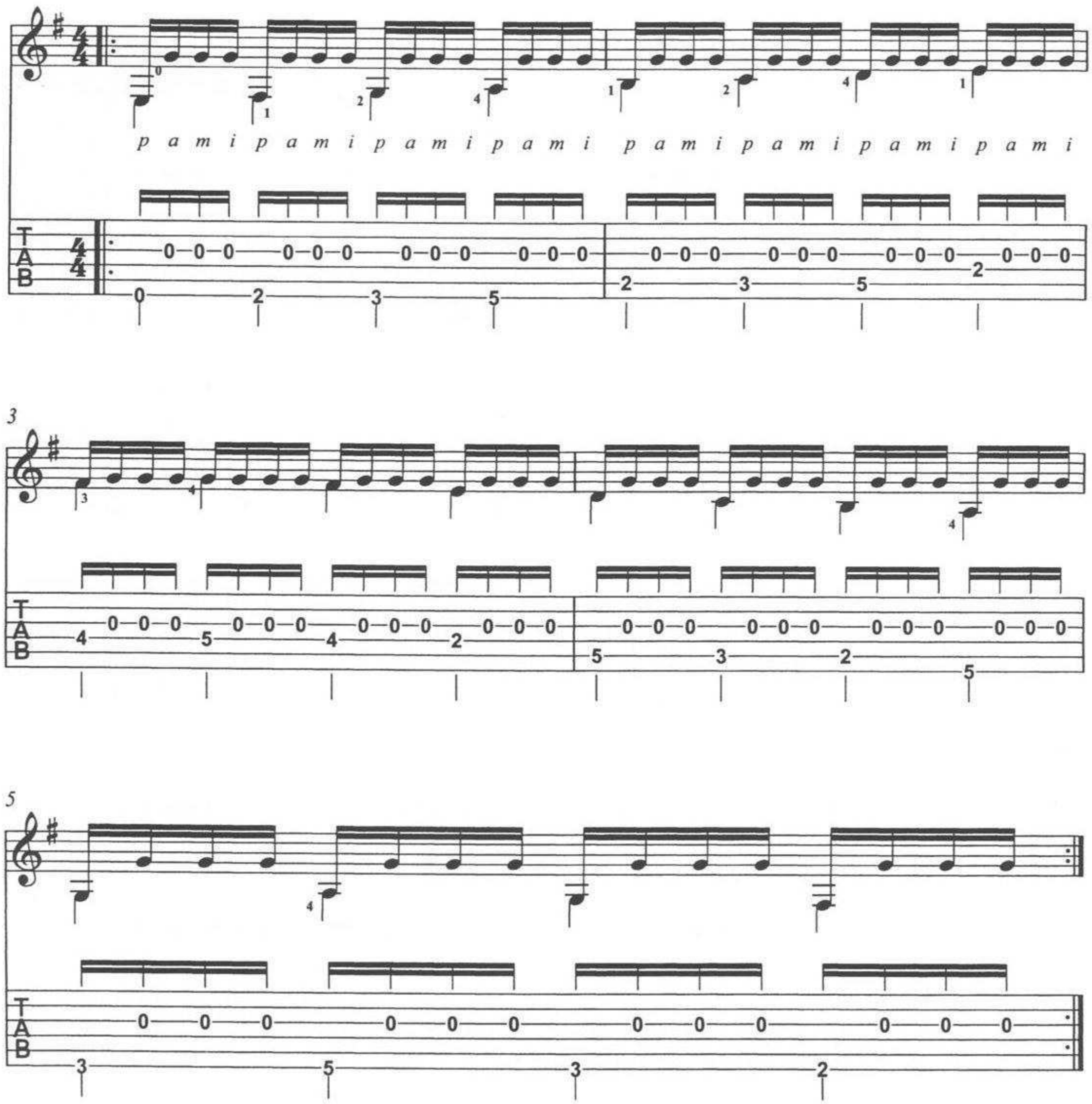
Tremolo on the "Inside" Strings - Part II



Now repeat the exact same thing, but this time keeping the tremolo on the open third string.

Exercise # 19

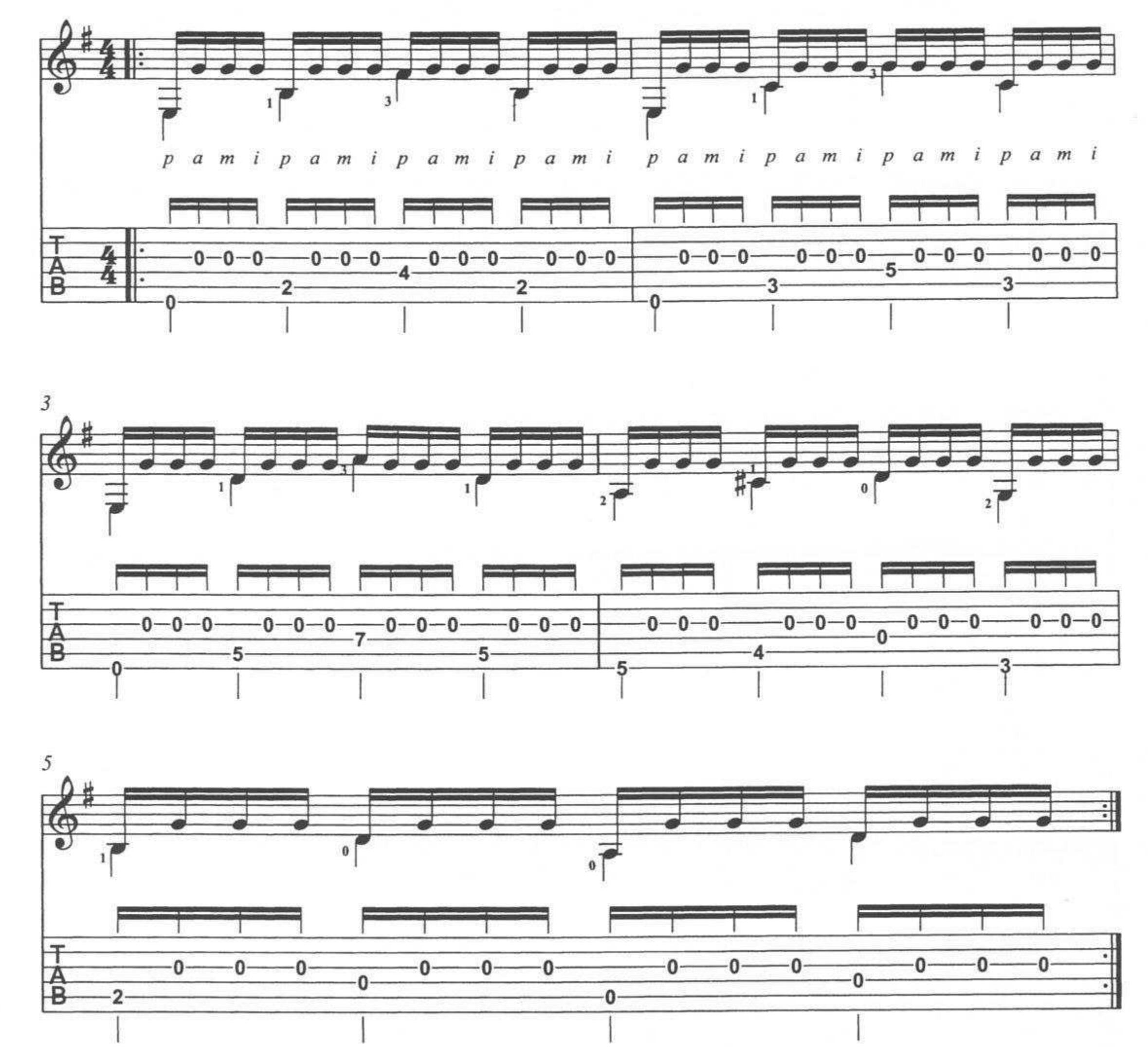
Tremolo on the "Inside" Strings - 3rd String



Here is another example of tremolo on the third string. The chord progression is similar to the one used by the band *Metallica* in their tune "Sanitarium".

Exercise # 19b

Tremolo on the "Inside" Strings - 3rd String Part II



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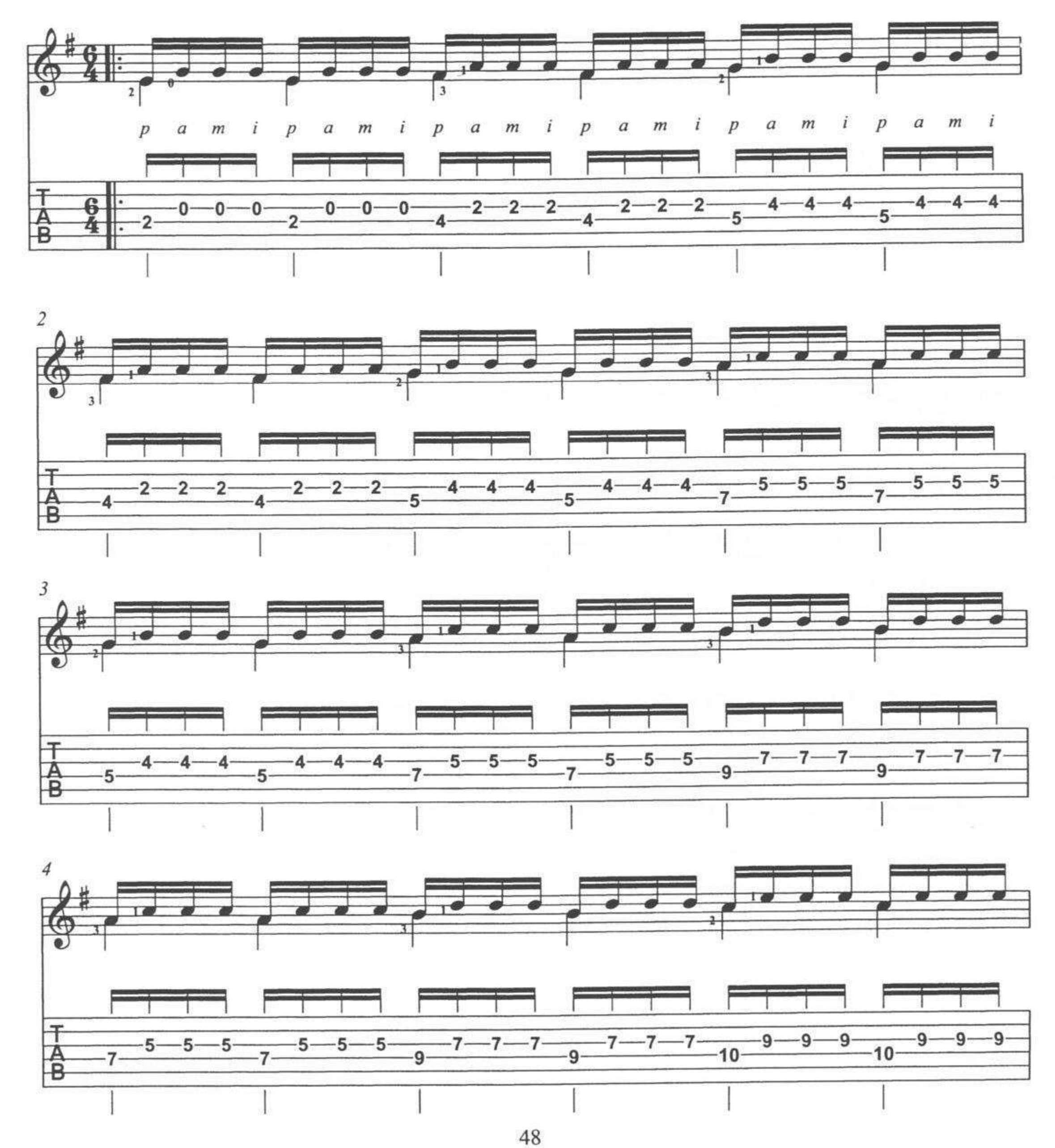
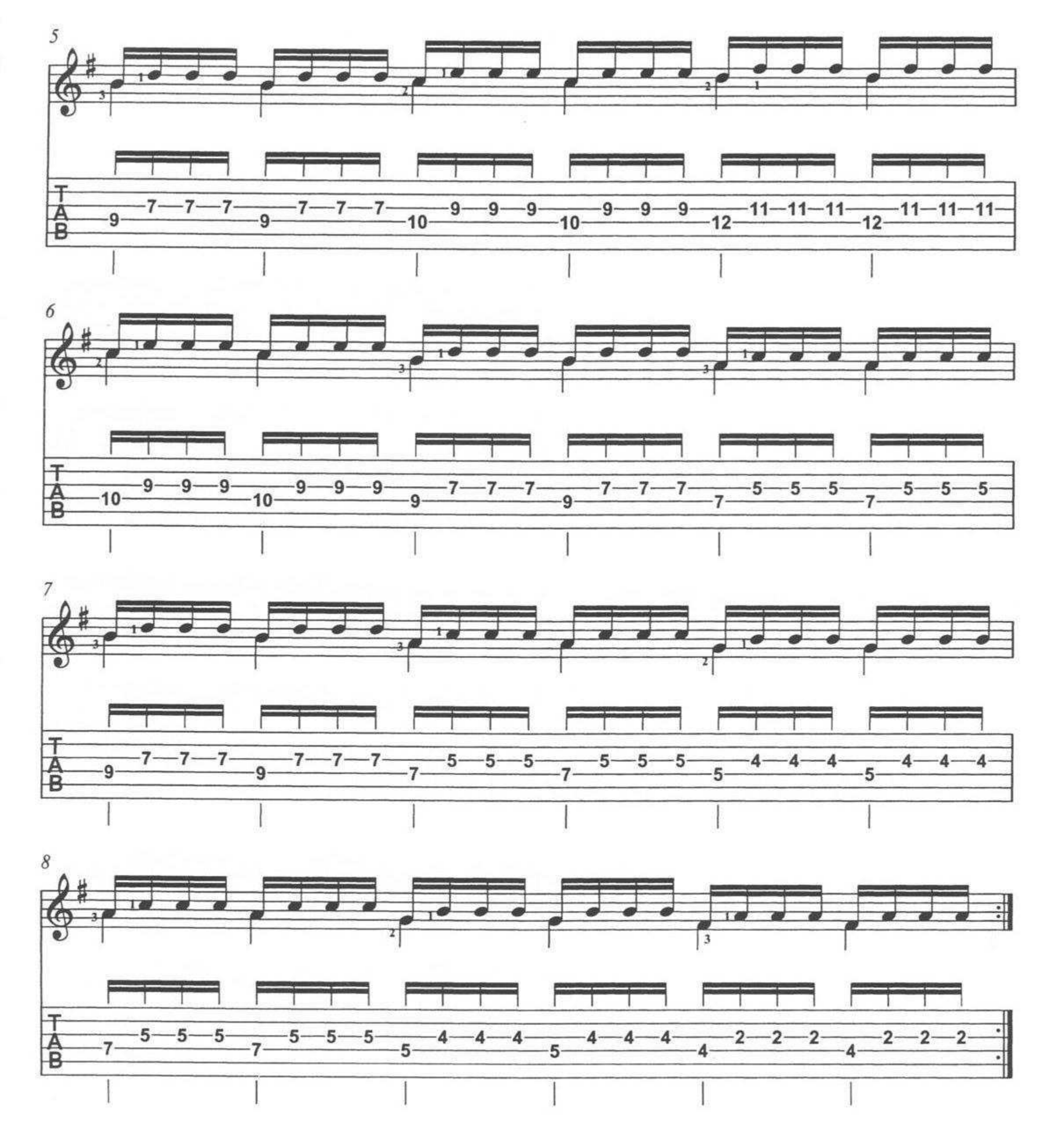
In our next exercise, we will play parallel thirds. This will train your thumb to move out of the way of the incoming fingers and help make your tremolo more even and stronger, no matter what string it is played on. We'll will start with the third and fourth string combination using the E natural minor scale.

Exercise # 20

Diatonic Thirds on Adjacent Strings - 4th & 3rd Strings

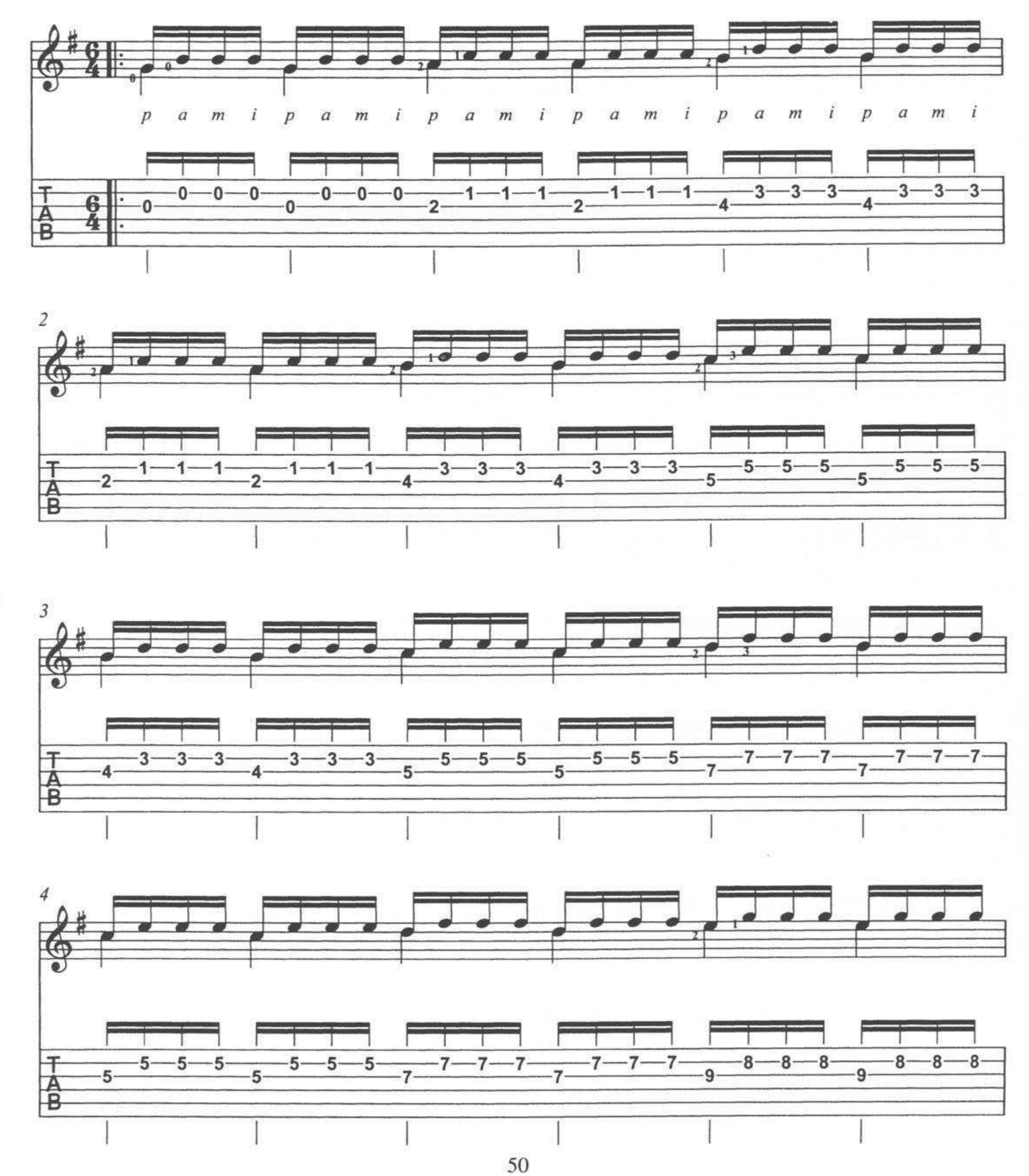


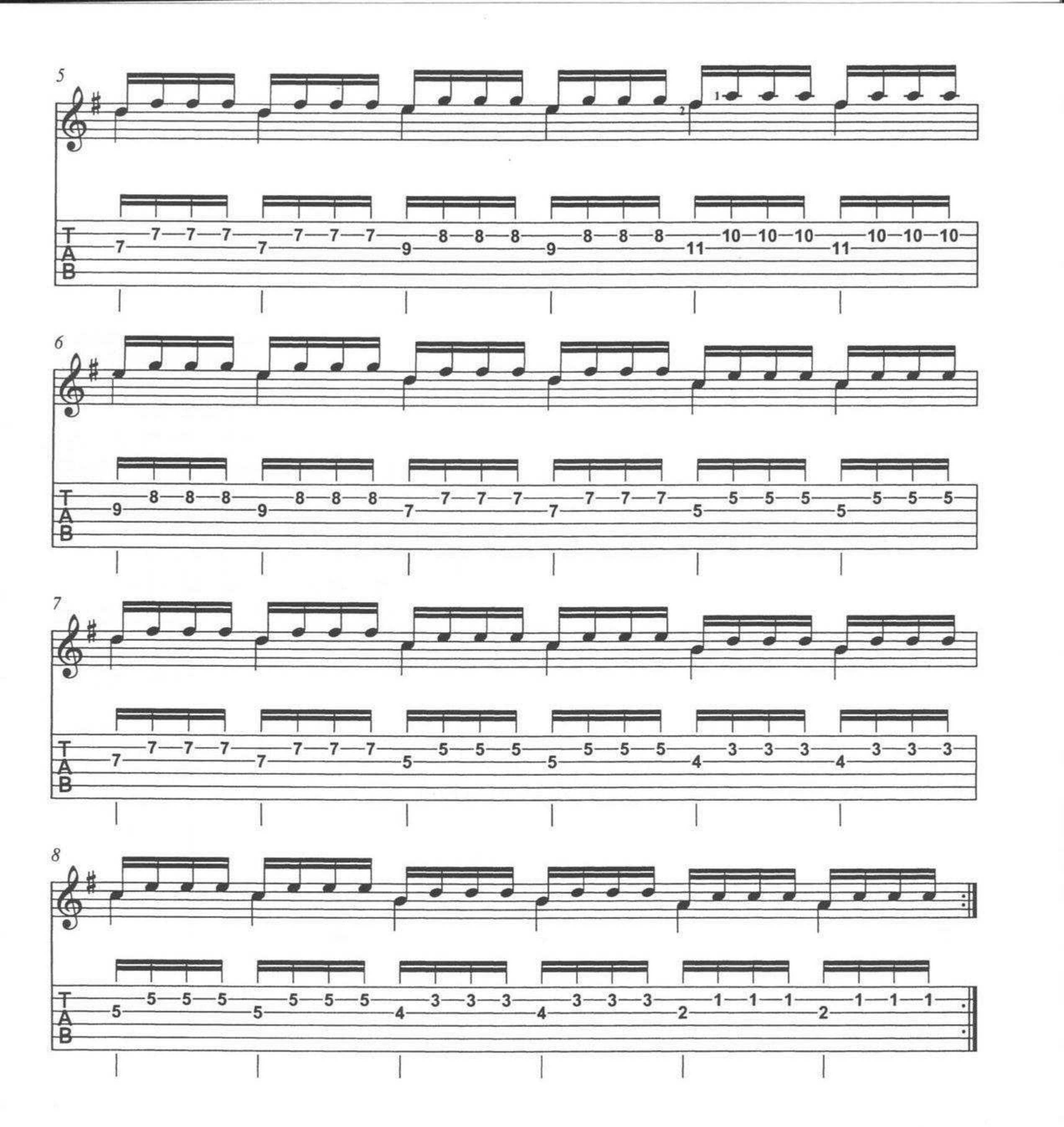

5
6
7
8

Let's continue with parallel thirds on the third and second strings.

Exercise # 20b

Diatonic Thirds on Adjacent Strings - 3rd & 2nd Strings

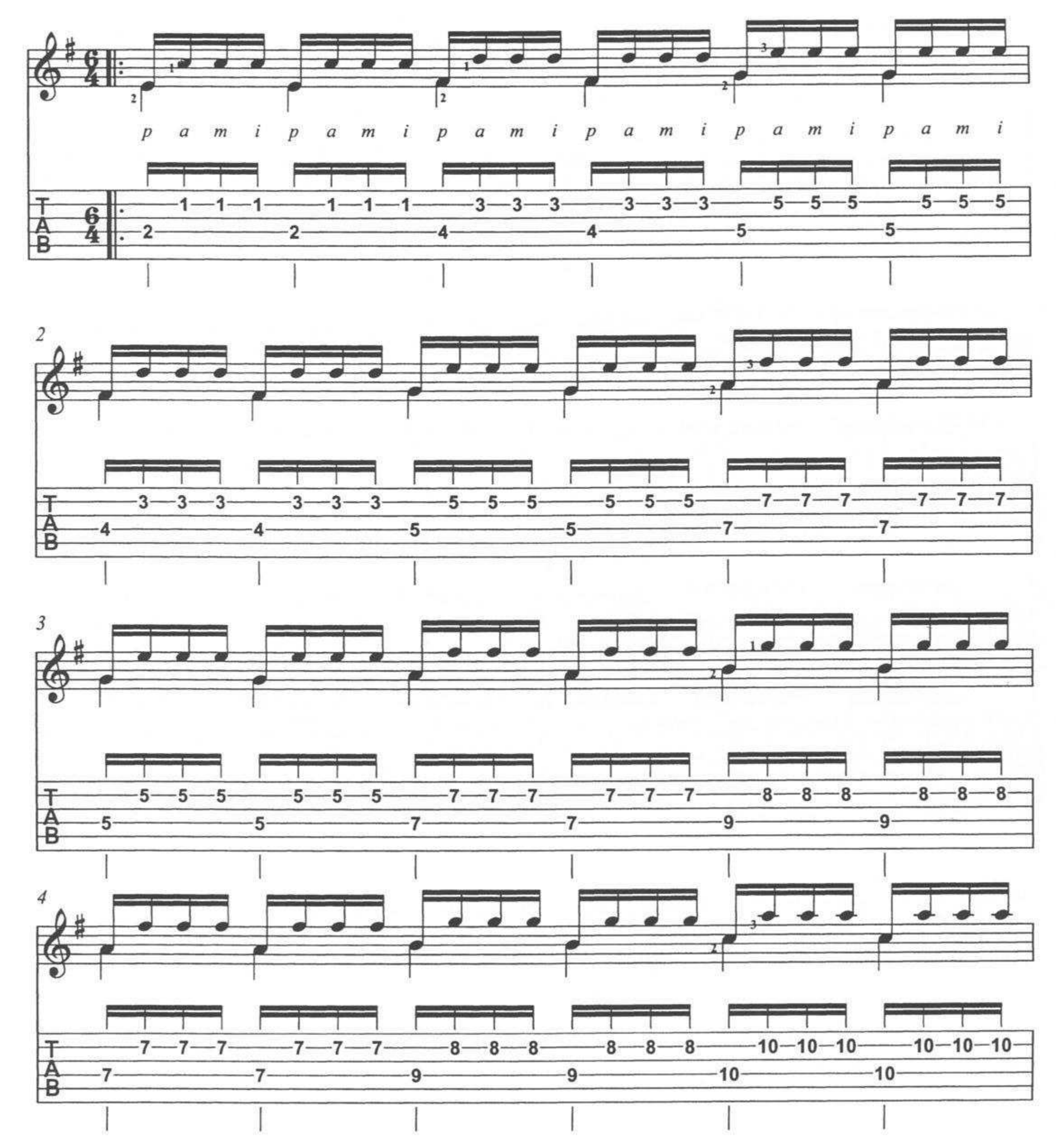


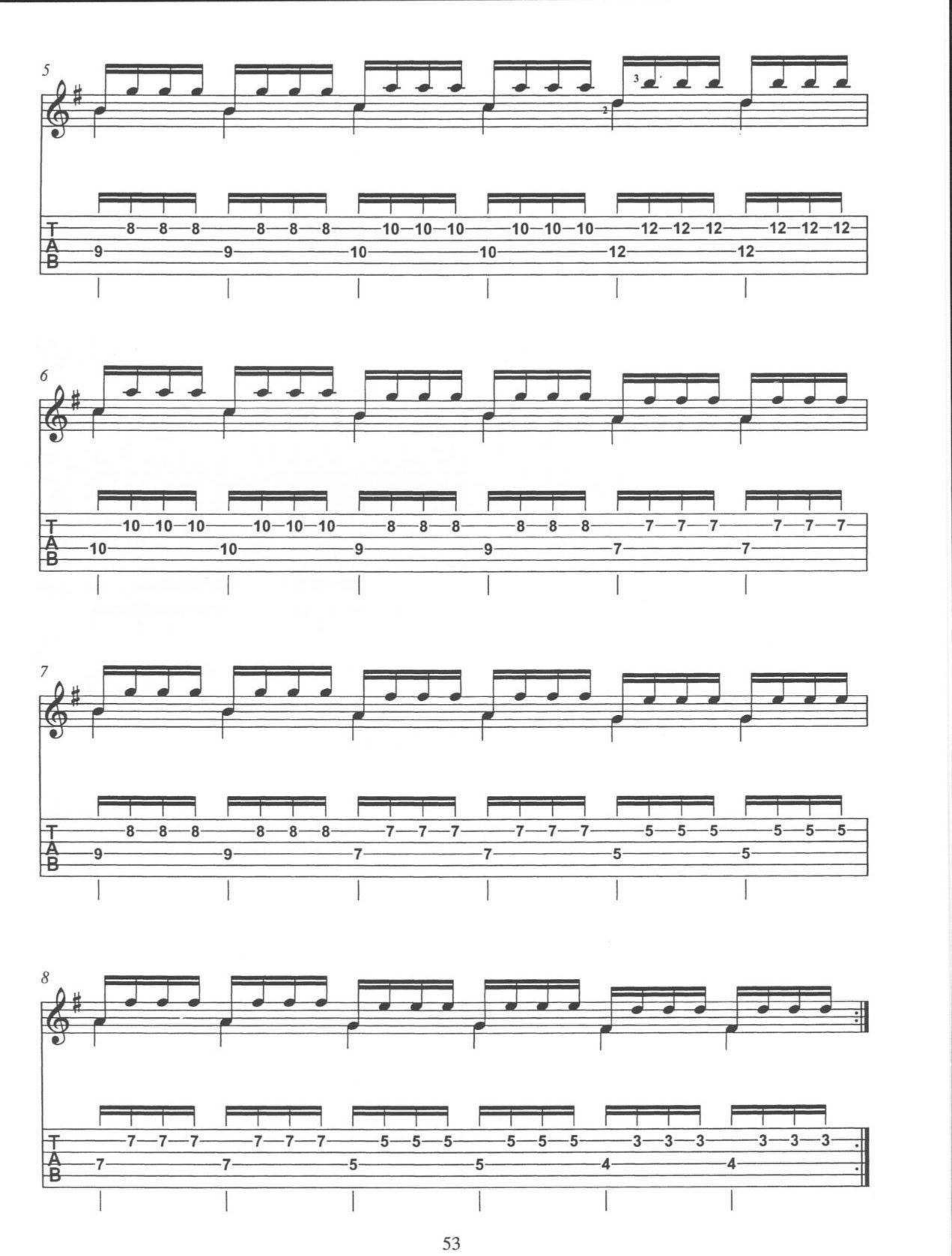

5
6
7
8
T
A
B

In order to develop the same ability to a more advanced degree, but with variable thumb-tremolo distance, we will now play parallel sixths in the key of E natural minor.

Exercise # 21

Diatonic Sixths - 4th & 2nd Strings




5
T A B
8 8 8 8 8 8 10 10 10 10 10 10 12 12 12 12 12 12
9 9 10 10 12 12
6
T A B
10 10 10 10 10 10 8 8 8 8 8 8 7 7 7 7 7 7
10 10 9 9 7 7
7
T A B
8 8 8 8 8 8 7 7 7 7 7 7 5 5 5 5 5 5
9 9 7 7 5 5
8
T A B
7 7 7 7 7 7 5 5 5 5 5 5 3 3 3 3 3 3
7 7 5 5 4 4

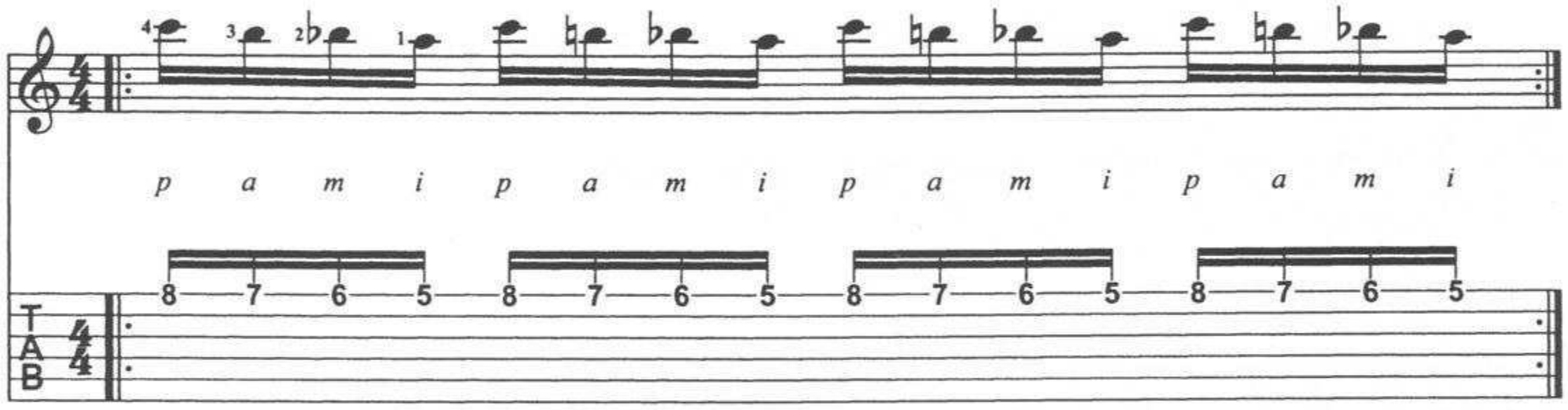
Quasi-Chromatic Scales

Here is a repeating quasi-chromatic exercise that will help in developing rhythmical evenness as well as a uniform sound quality within the tremolo strokes. It will also do absolute wonders for your RH/LH coordination: **Tremolo Scales**! As always, start very, very slowly!

The first pattern is a four-note repeating sequence on the first string.

Exercise # 22

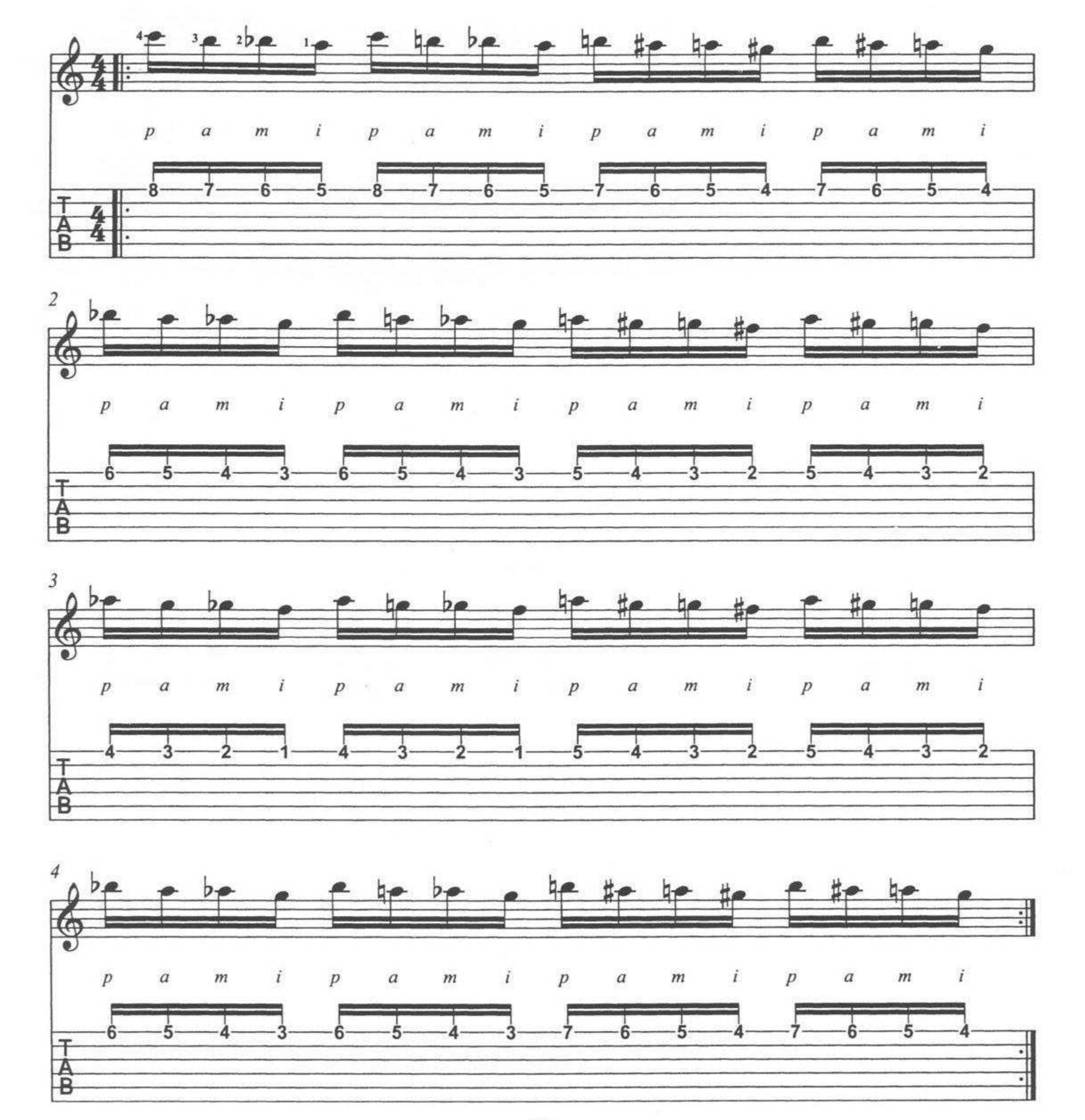
Single String Tremolo - Part II
Chromatic Scale Sequences



The second pattern is an eight-note repeating sequence moving chromatically along the first string.

Exercise # 22b

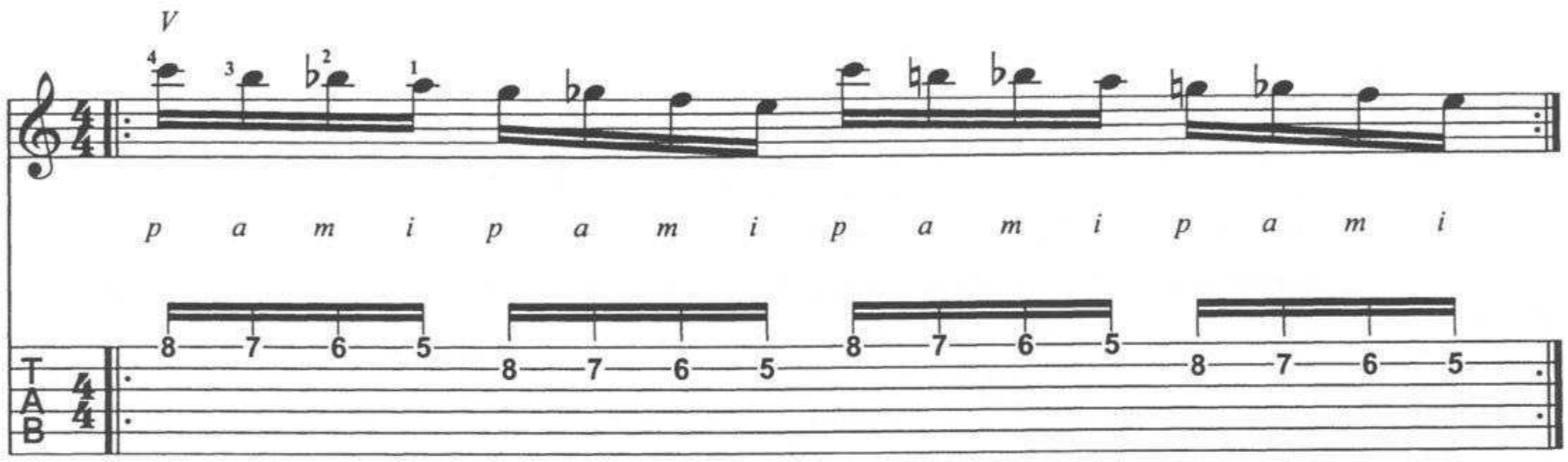
Single-String Tremolo - Part II
Chromatic Scale Sequences



The third pattern is an eight-note repeating sequence on the first and second strings.

Exercise # 22c

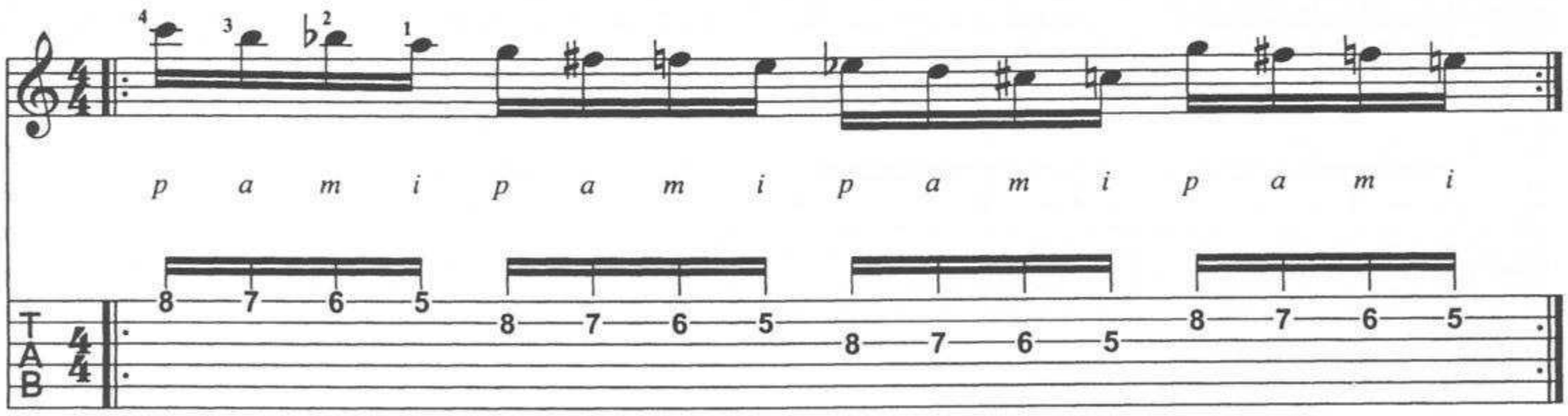
Single-String Tremolo - Part II
Chromatic Scale Sequences



The fourth pattern is a 16-note repeating sequence on the first, second and third strings.

Exercise # 22d

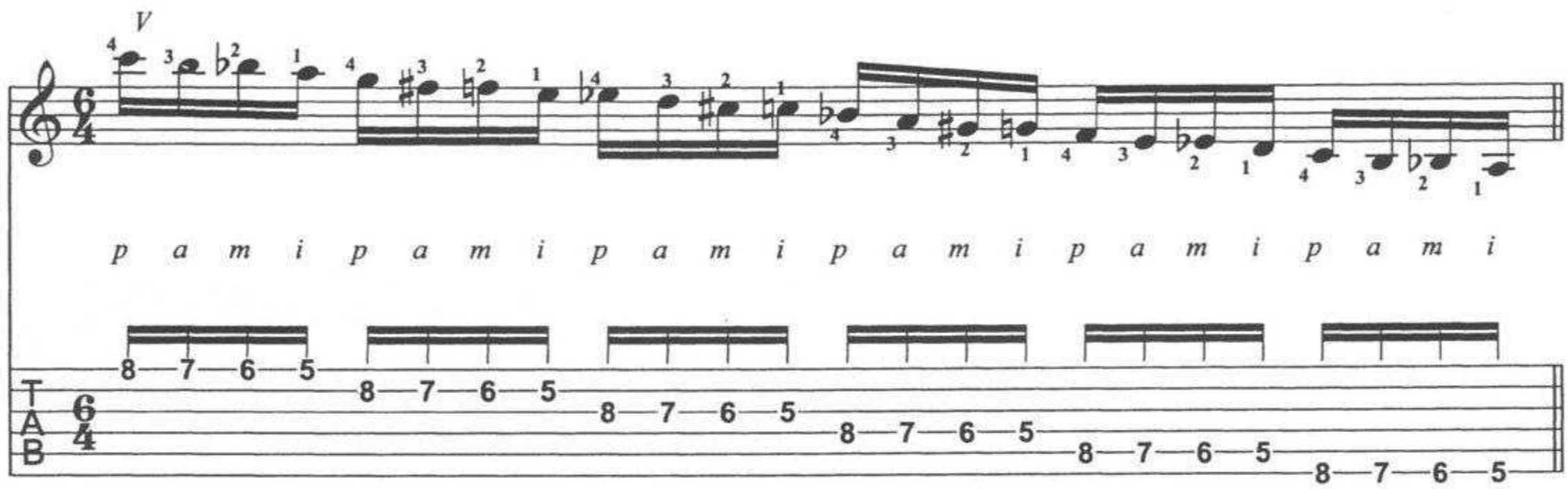
Single-String Tremolo
Chromatic Scale Sequences - Part IV



The fifth pattern is a four-note chromatic sequence repeating on all six strings of the guitar.

Exercise # 22e

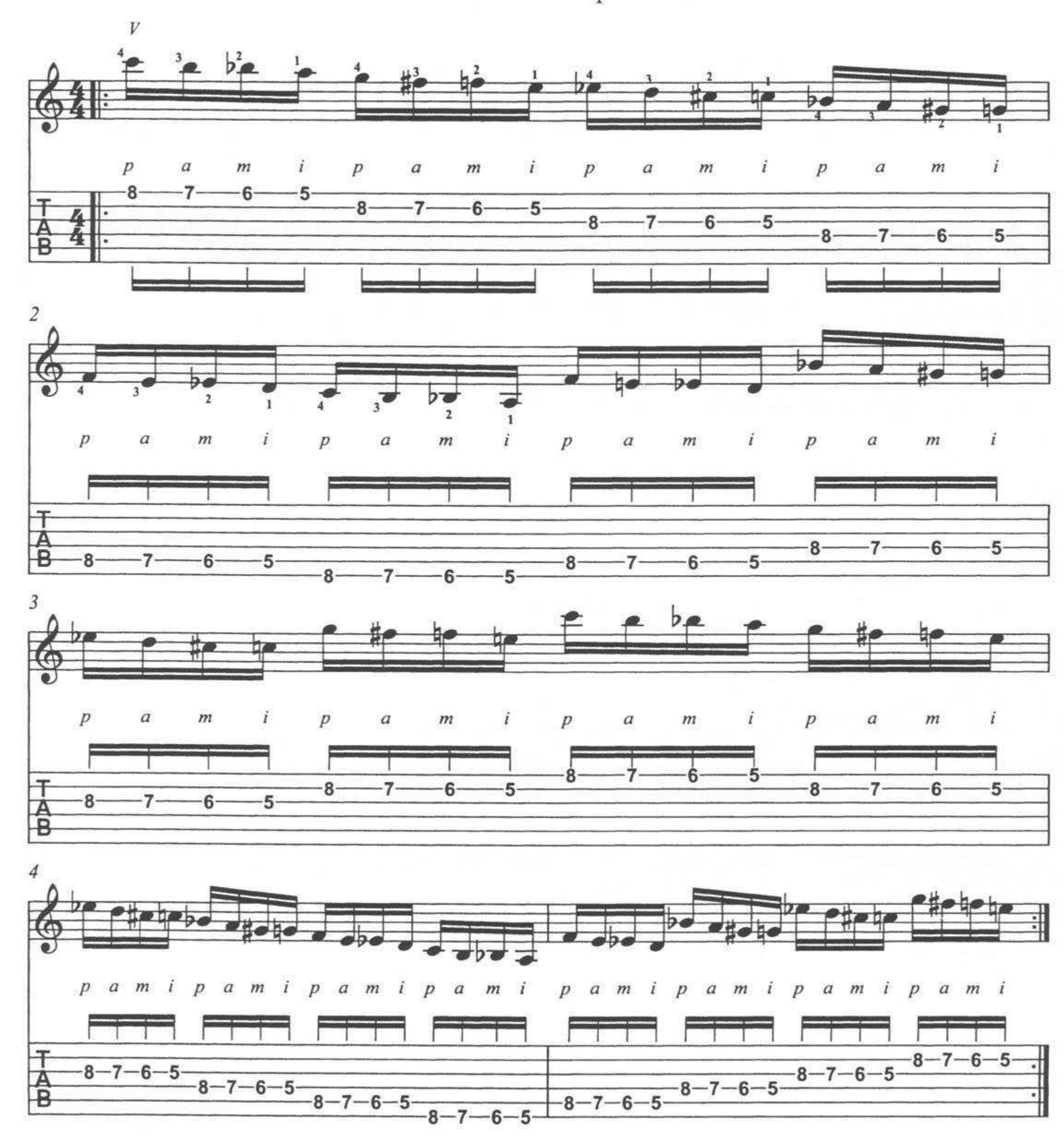
Single-String Tremolo - Part V
Chromatic Scale Sequences



The sixth pattern is a four-note chromatic sequence repeating on all six strings of the guitar, ascending and descending.

Exercise # 23

Single-String Tremolo - Part II
Chromatic Scale Sequences



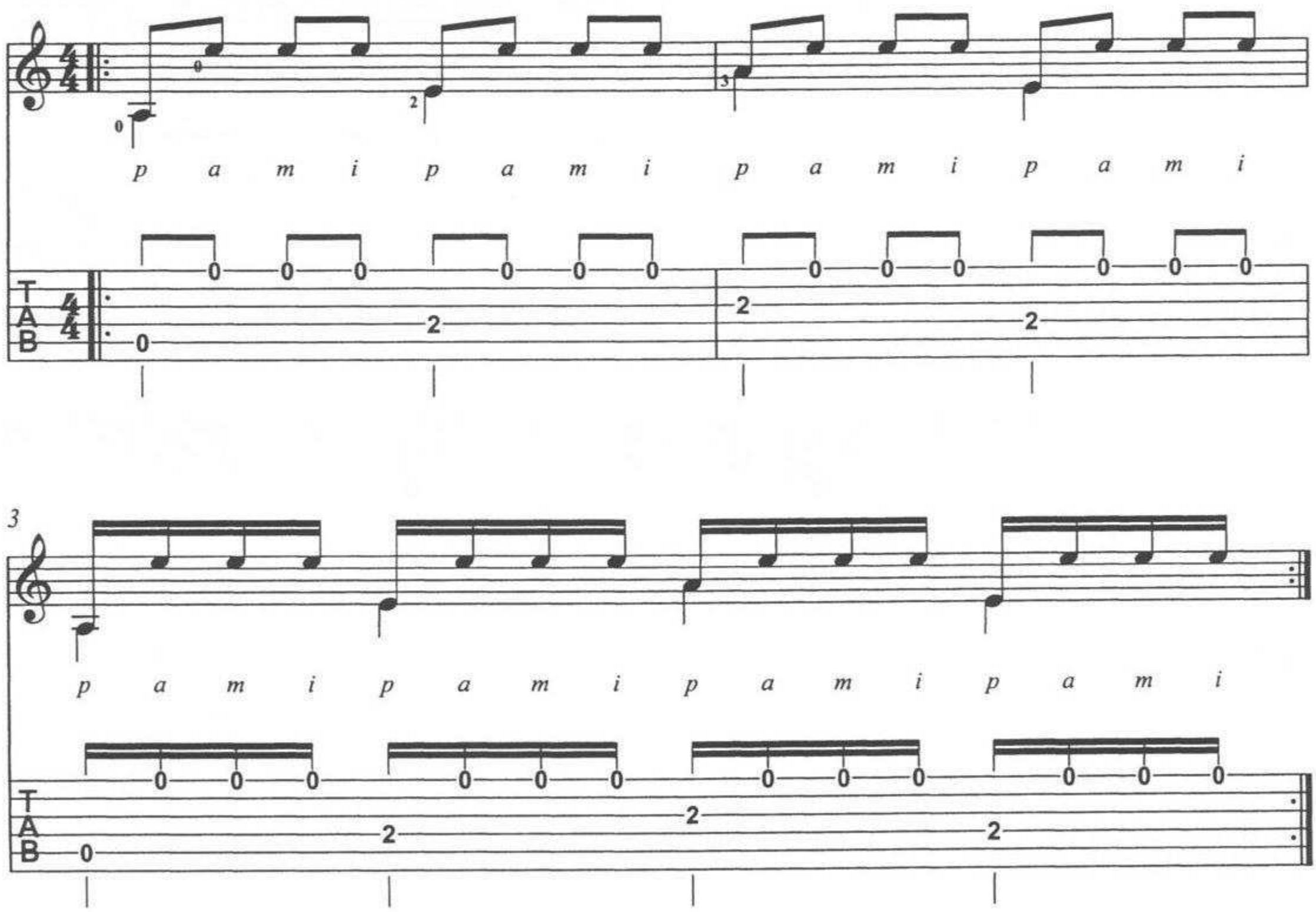
Speed Bursts

Here is a great tremolo practice tip I picked up from **Scott Tennant**. Scott is a member of the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet and lectures at the University of Southern California. You should definitely check out his recording of Rodrigo's works! He suggests using *speed bursts* to practice tremolo in the following manner;

First, play the tremolo twice, counting each note as an eighth note and then double the speed so that each note is a 16th note. Speed bursts are also extremely helpful in scalesand arpeggios. Here is a simple example of this technique over a static A minor chord. This excellent practice method helps significantly in controlling the tremolo motion.

Exercise # 24

Tremolo Speed Bursts



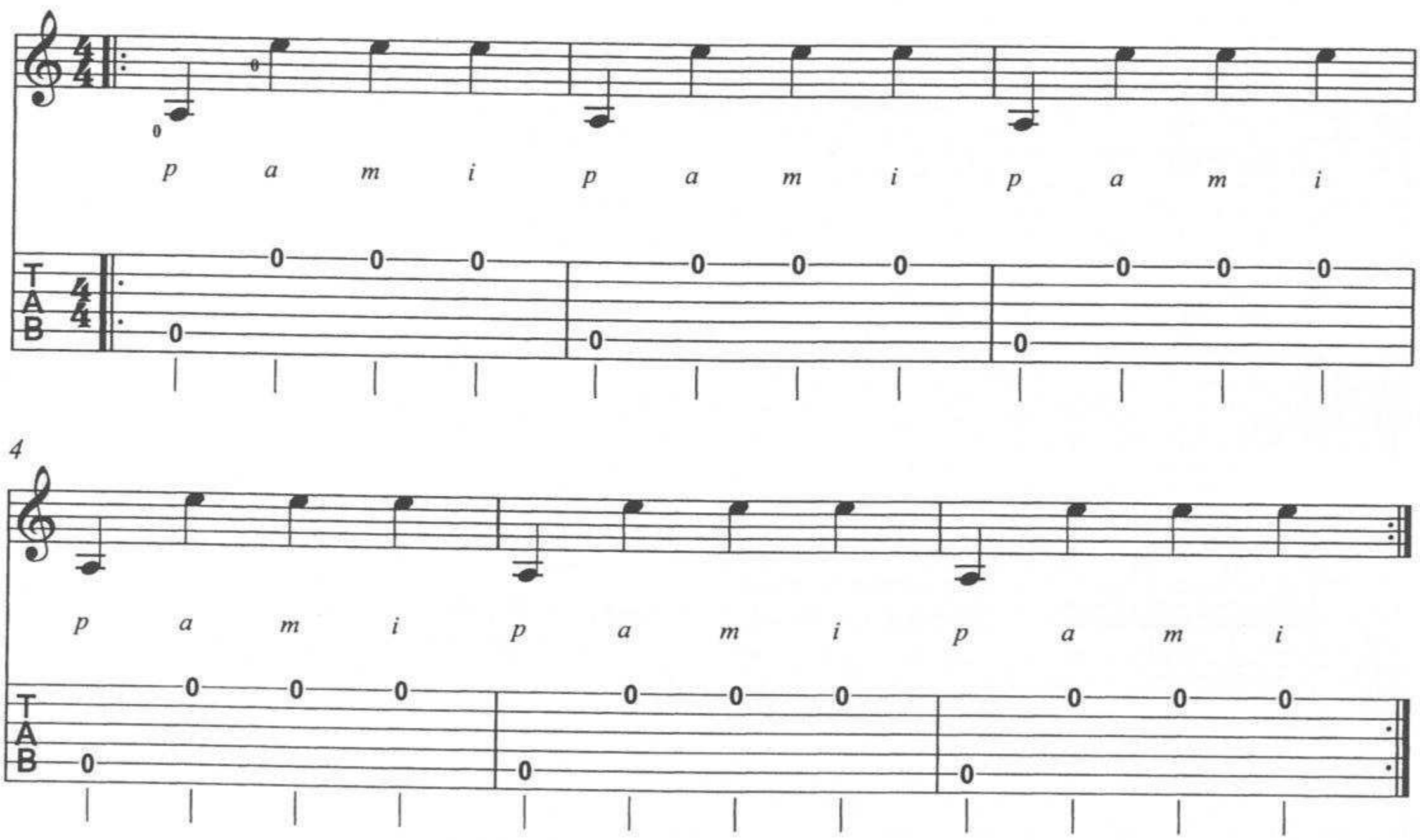
Rhythmic Tricks

If your tremolo is still rhythmically inconsistent, try to practice with a metronome beating fast (around 160bpm) but **play quarter notes**. Pay specific attention to the thumb; make sure that the thumb stroke is even and playing "in the pocket" of the beat. Moreover, make sure the return stroke of the thumb is slow and even. Be careful not to let the thumb return too fast! The reason for this is you want the thumb to be under total control. Very slow practice with a metronome set at one click-per-note will help rid your playing of rhythmic inconsistencies.

Exercise # 25

mm=180

Playing with Rhythms

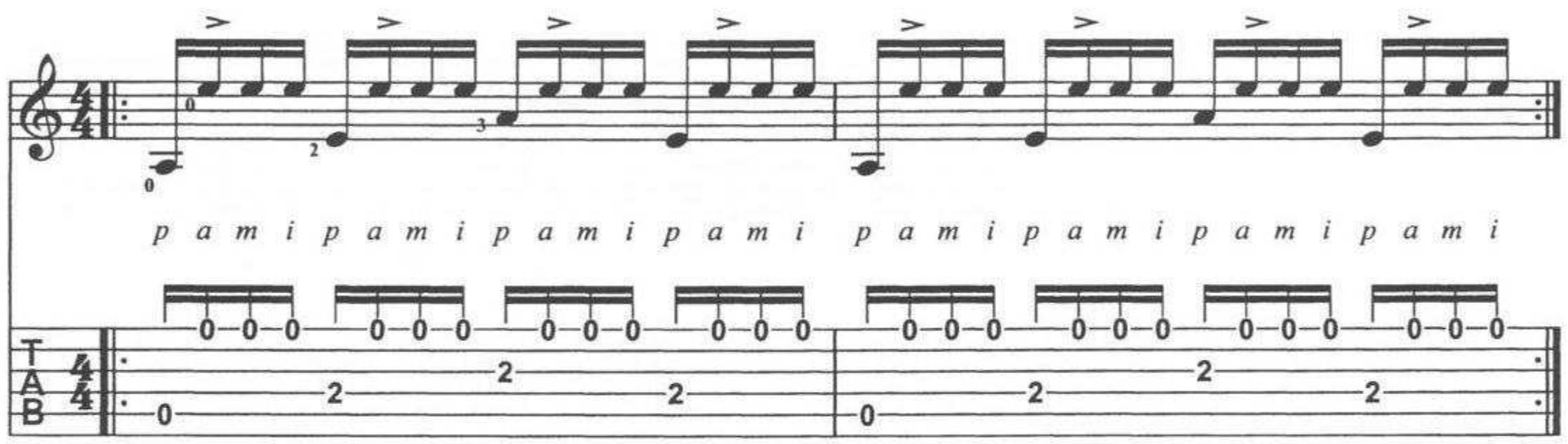


More Rhythmic Tricks

One of my classical guitar teachers in the mid-90s, **David Oakes**, showed me another rhythmic practice trick. Purposefully accenting syncopated variations of the regular tremolo pattern seems to help players gain more control of the tremolo. Follow the notation carefully and accent the notes indicated. First, we will accent the "a" finger.

Exercise # 26a

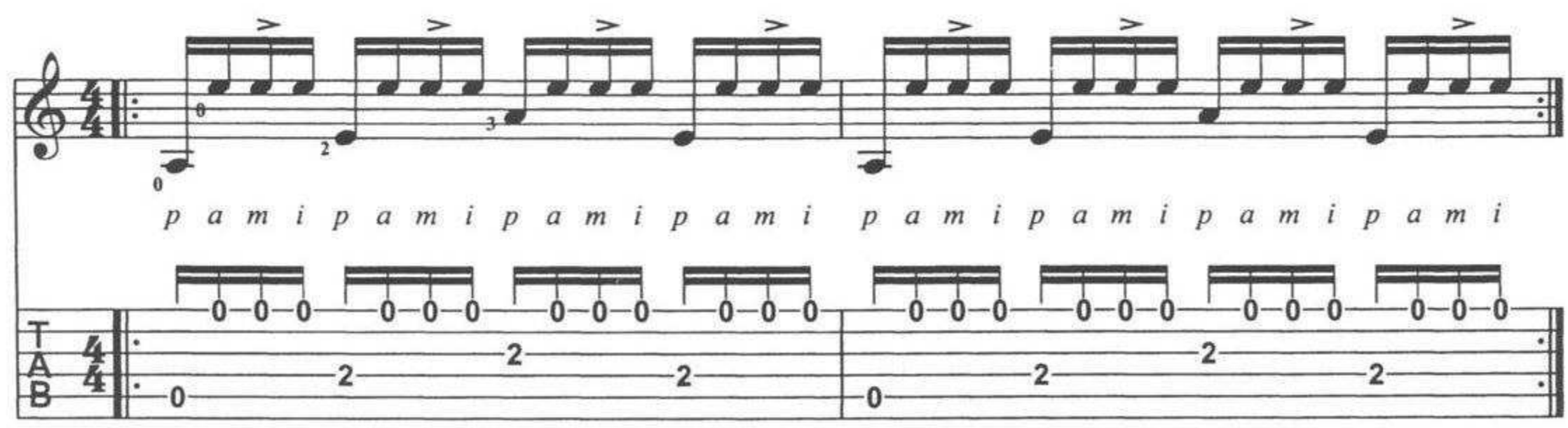
More Rhythmic Tricks -Ring Finger



Now, do the same thing, accenting the "m" finger.

Exercise # 26b

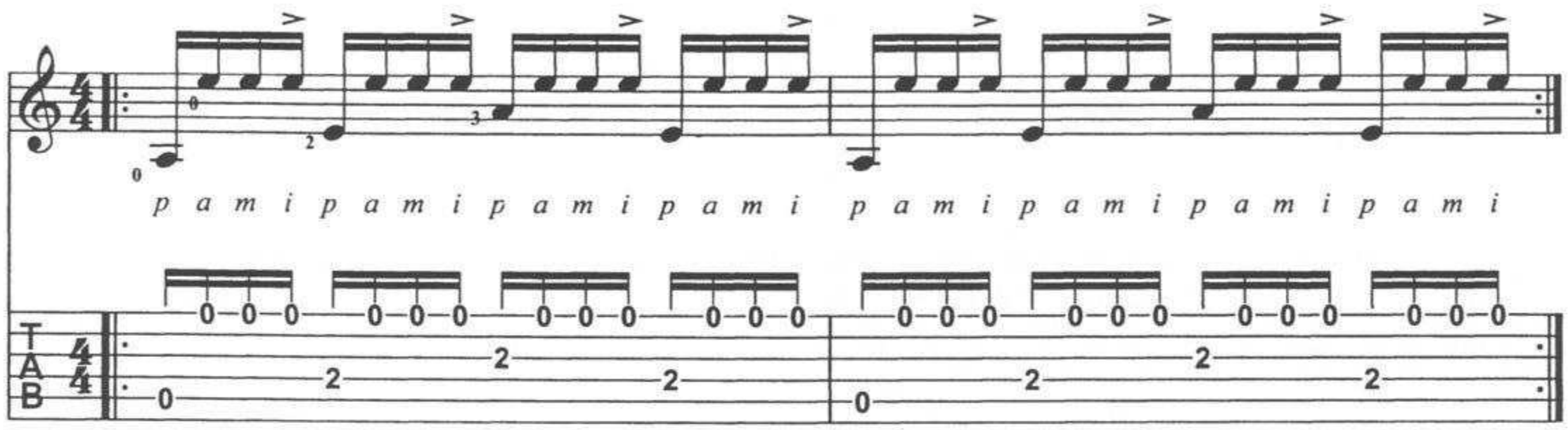
More Rhythmic Tricks - Middle Finger



Finally, the "i" finger.

Exercise # 26c

More Rhythmic Tricks - Index Finger



I would suggest practicing these three exercises in one practice session, one after the other, perhaps for five minutes each. At the end of the 15 minutes, your tremolo will be very "warmed up" and even!

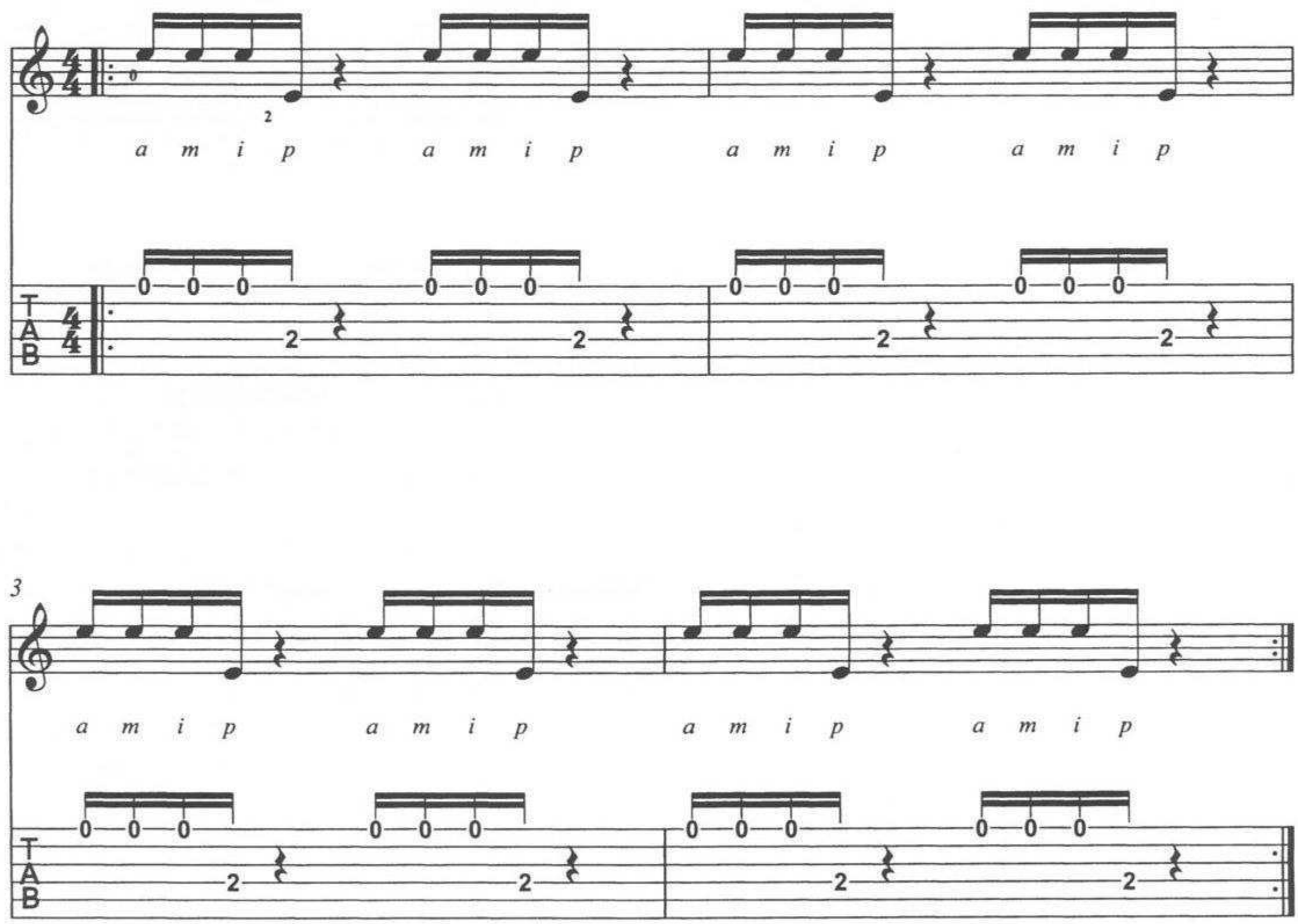
Even More Rhythmic Tricks!

Here is an technique the great classical guitarist **David Russell** taught me in one of his master classes years ago: Practice playing tremolo where you only play one tremolo pattern (four notes) in a row, rest for a quarter beat, play the pattern again, rest for a quarter beat. However, DO NOT start with the thumb!

First, start the tremolo with the ring finger and follow the usual pattern.

Exercise # 27a

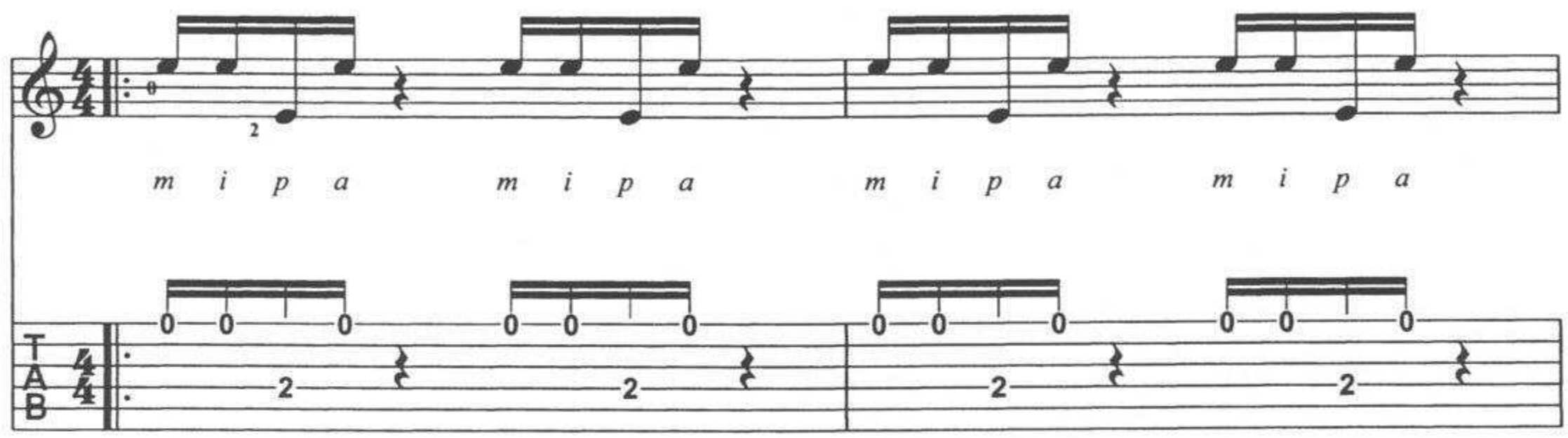
Rhythmic Displacement - Ring Finger

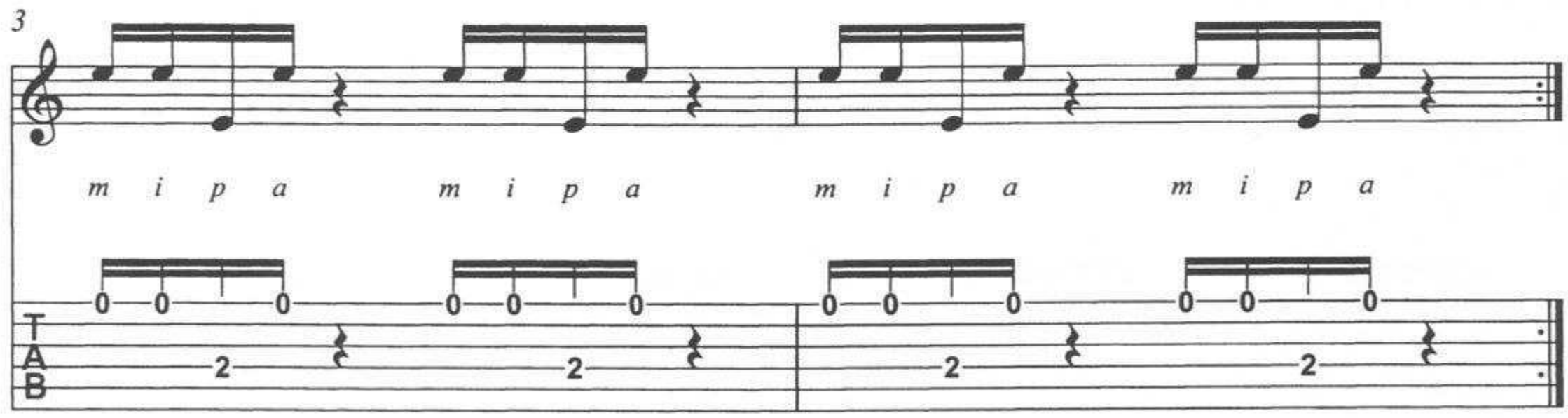


Our second pattern starts with the "m" finger.

Exercise # 27b

Rhythmic Displacement - Middle Finger

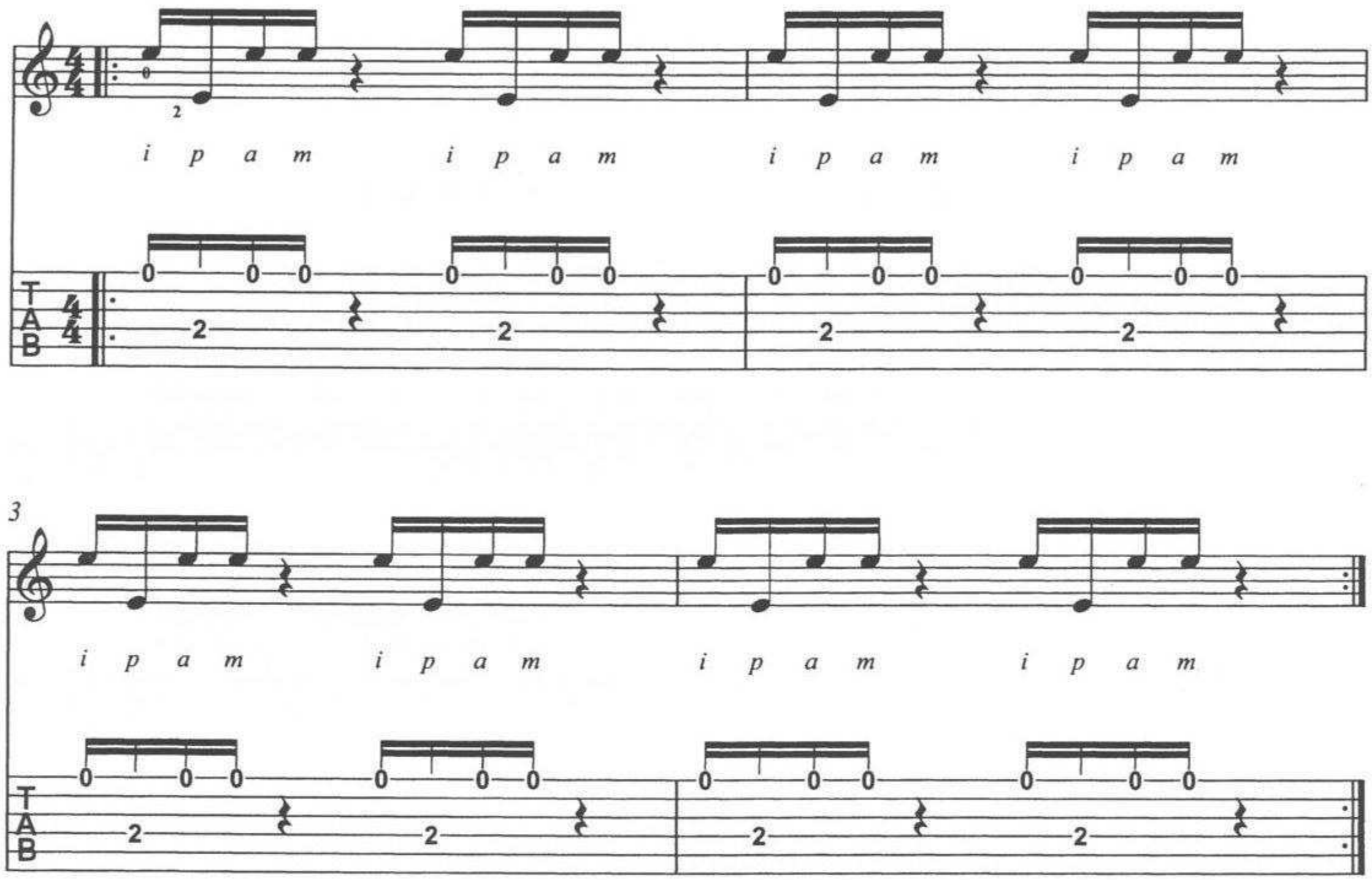




The final pattern starts with the index finger.

Exercise # 27c

Rhythmic Displacement - Index Finger



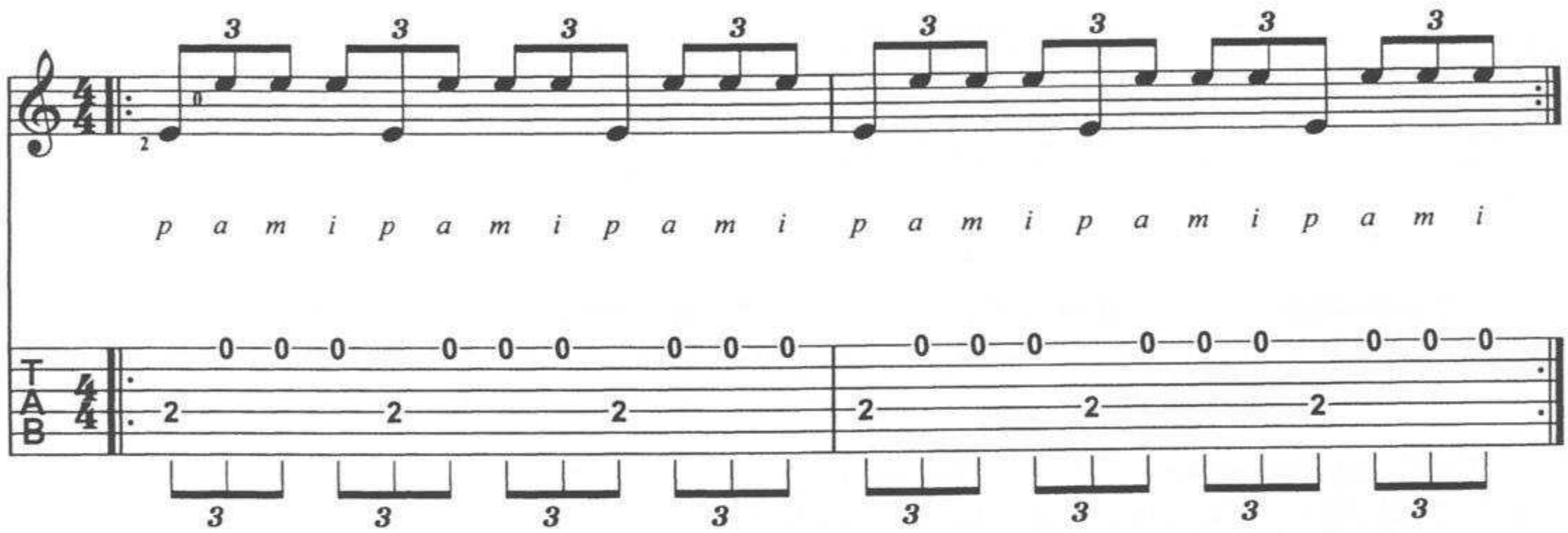
This is a variation on the idea presented previously in the "More Rhythmic Tricks" section. I would suggest a similar practice schedule for this series of exercises. Practice each pattern for five minutes, and then go to the next for five more minutes and the final for another five minutes for a total 15-minute tremolo workout!

Final Rhythmic Trick: Triplets

Another great way to increase control over the tremolo technique is to play all the tremolo notes as triplets. This has the effect of smoothing out rhythmic inconsistencies, since you will have to alternately accent each finger within the tremolo pattern. Here is a simple example, based on a first position Dm chord.

Exercise # 28

Even More Rhythmic Tricks - Tremolo Triplets



This will probably take some time to get used to, but stick with it. The secret to complete mastery of the tremolo lies in being able to control the smallest nuances of sound and rhythm.

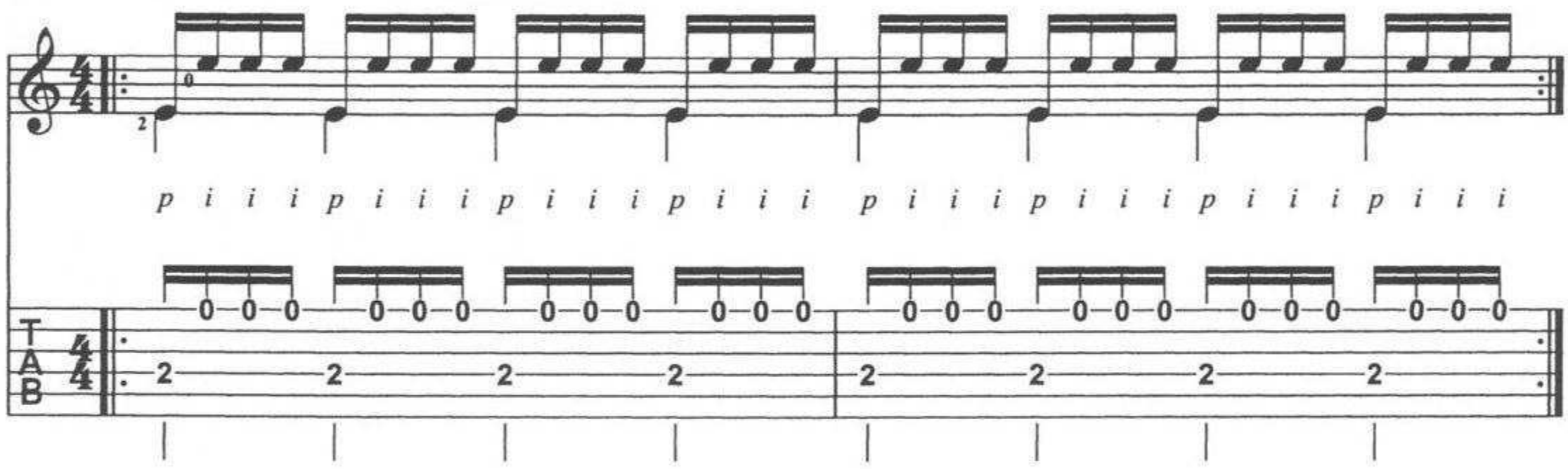
Advanced Right-Hand Finger Independence

Since tremolo is (usually) performed at a relatively high speed, there is another issue that enters the equation of the mechanics of playing it properly: the return of the fingers to their original position after each one has played its note. Here is a very original exercise (originally created by **John Sloan**) that helps improve finger independence and return time after a stroke.

Play tremolo using only two fingers. This helps train the fingers to get back to a "ready" position quickly in preparation for the next stroke. Our first example will use the pattern: thumb, index, index, index (piii).

Exercise # 29a

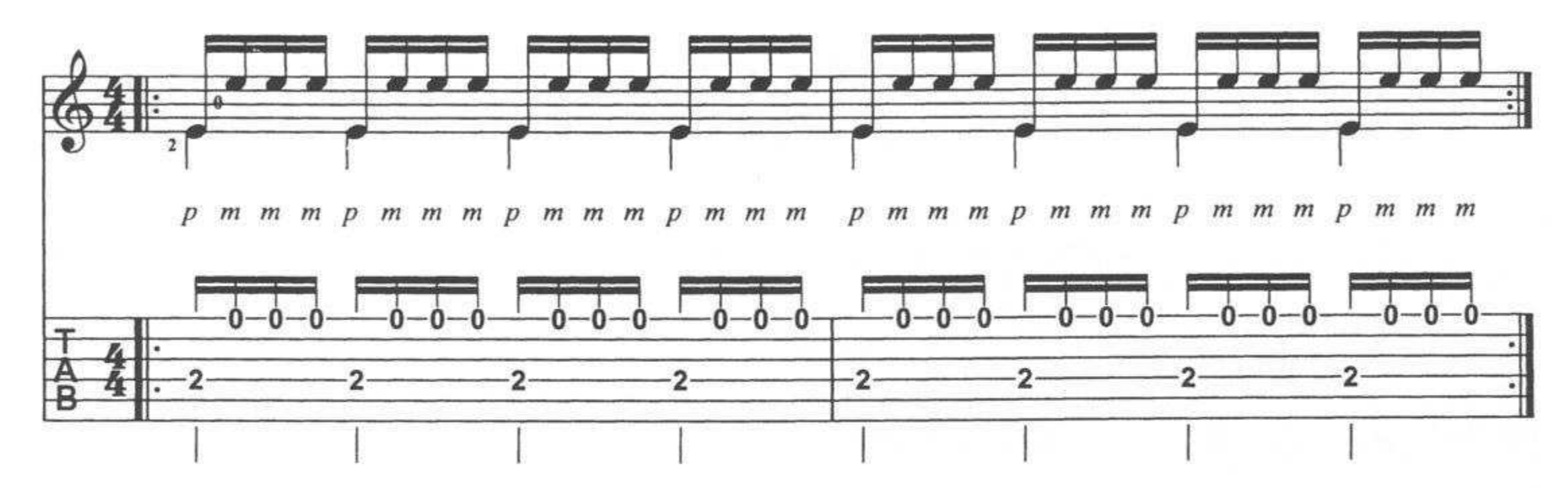
Right-Hand Finger Return - Index Finger



Our second example will use the pattern: thumb, middle, middle, middle (pmmm).

Exercise # 29b

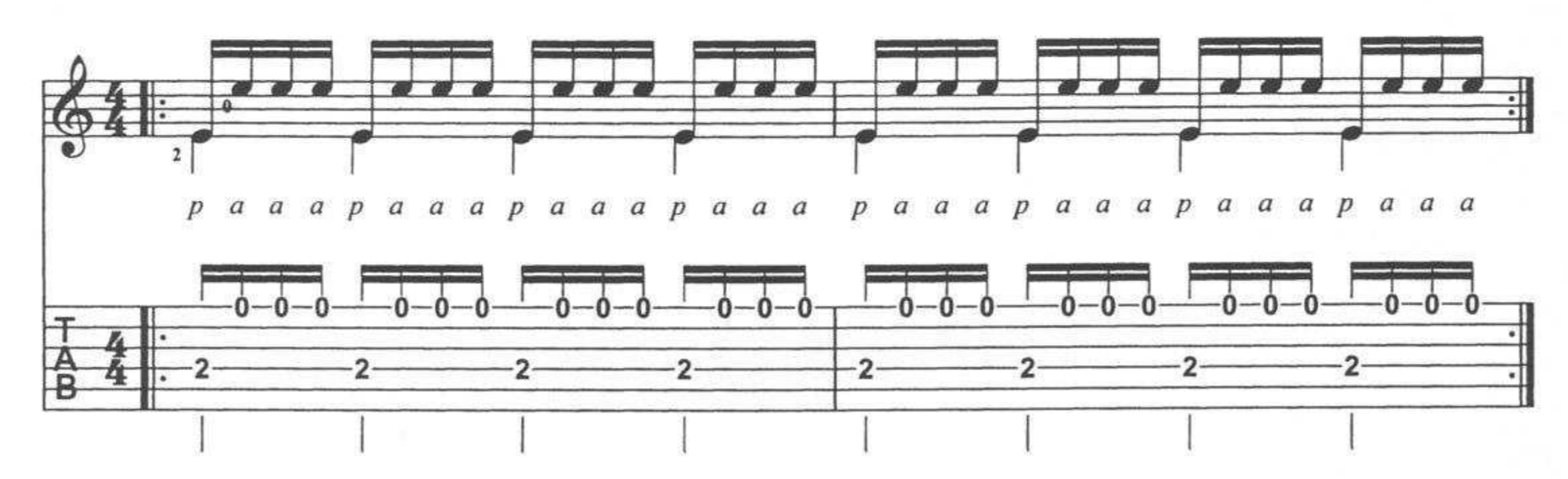
Right-Hand Finger Return - Middle Finger



Our final example will use the pattern: thumb, ring, ring, ring, (paaa).

Exercise # 29c

Right-Hand Finger Return - Ring Finger



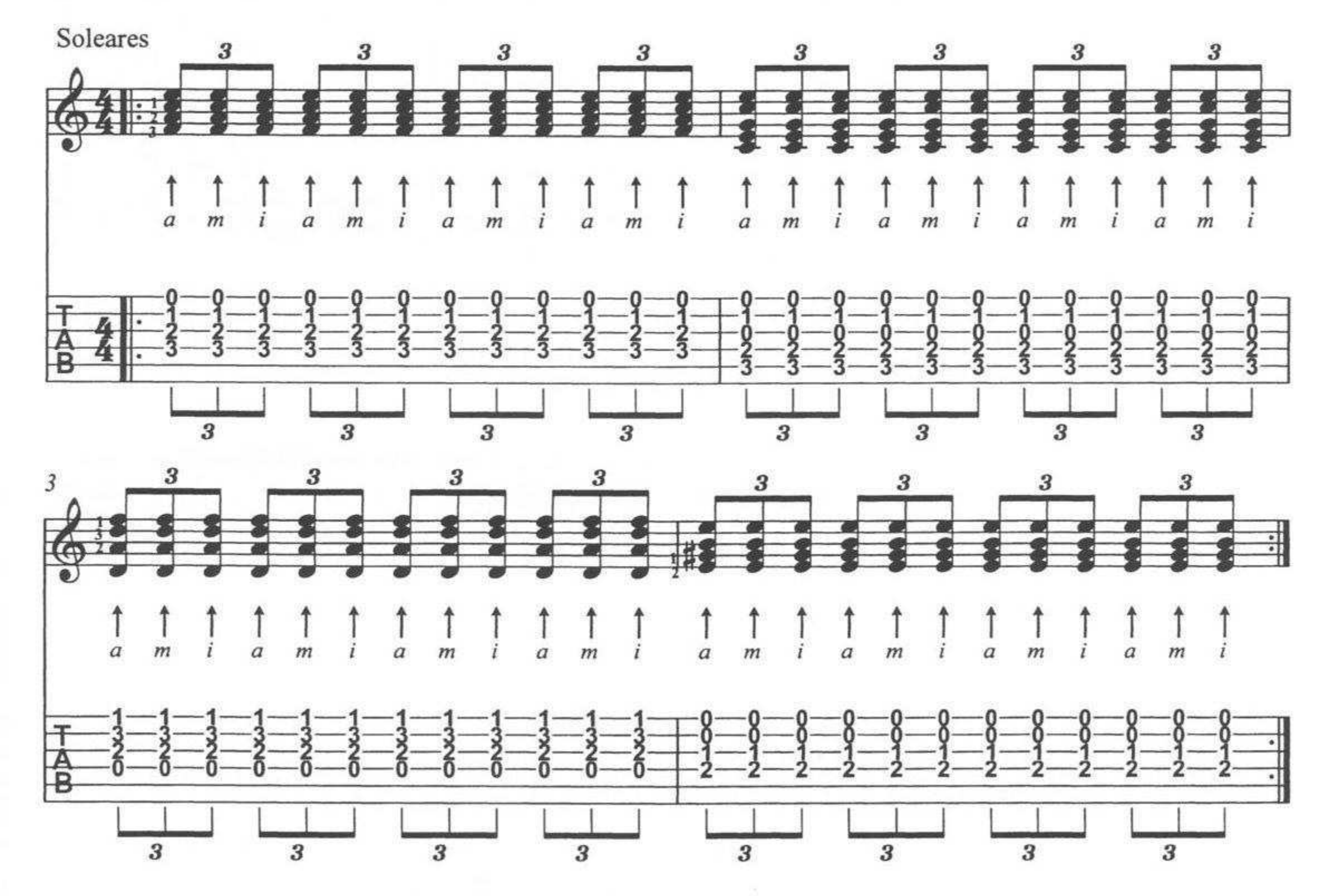
CAUTION: DO NOT try to go very fast with these exercises; If you do, you risk injuring your right-hand fingers, especially the ligaments. These exercises make your right-hand fingers work three times harder than they usually do and three times faster! So, for your hand's sake, TAKE IT SLOW!

Rasgueados

On the subject of dealing with the quick and accurate return of the RH fingers to their original point we should mention that the muscles used for this motion are the *extensor muscles*. These muscles are not used directly when playing the guitar (ie. plucking). The only guitar technique that exercises them directly is the **flamenco rasgueado**. Practicing "ami" continuous rasqueados is an excellent way to train these often neglected muscles. The motion involves the same fingers used in the tremolo, in the same order; however, they move in the opposite direction, therefore facilitating the *return* of the fingers to the ready to play position.

Exercise # 30

a-m-i Rasgueados



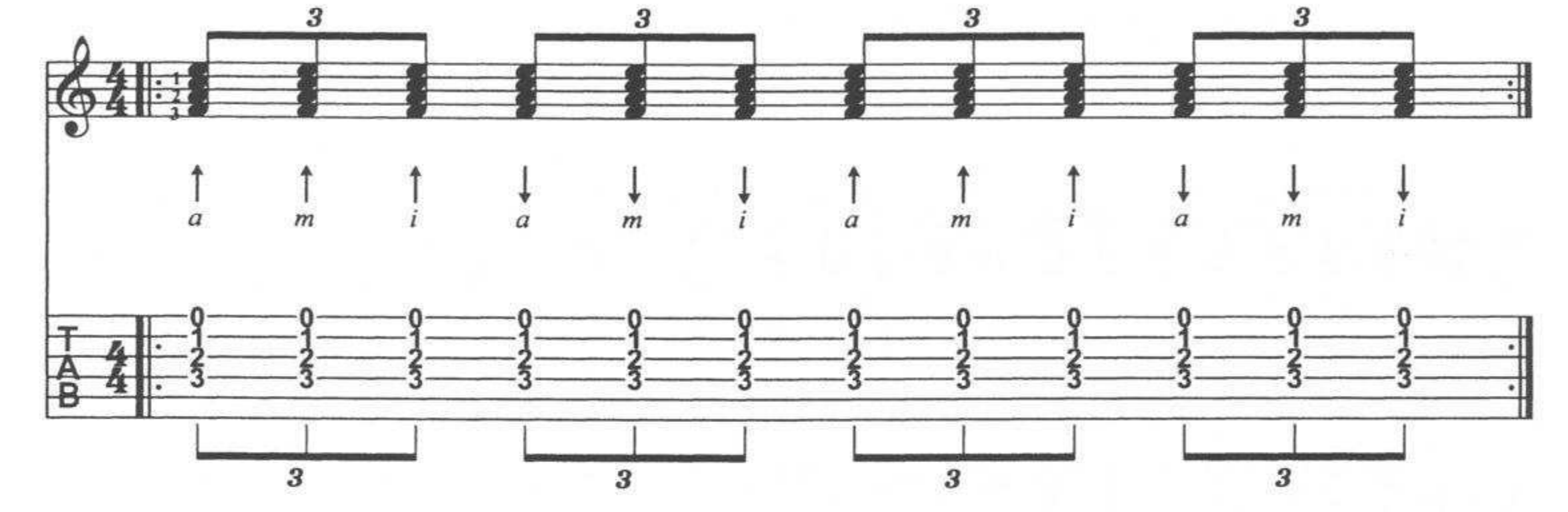
If you are interested specifically in rasgueado techniques, I suggest you refer to my book *The Art of Rasgueado* (MB98405), published by Mel Bay Publications. This book outlines, explains and traces the historic and technical development of over 80 different rasgueado patterns and explains how these can be used in all kinds of guitar music. It will keep you busy for a long, long time!

Continuous a-m-i Rasgueados

According to outstanding classical guitarist and esteemed scholar and educator **Stanley Yates**, you should also practice the continuous ami rasgueado, as this will substantially help with the return of all fingers. Here is an example of a continuous ami rasgueado pattern.

Exercise # 30b

a-m-i Continuous Rasgueado



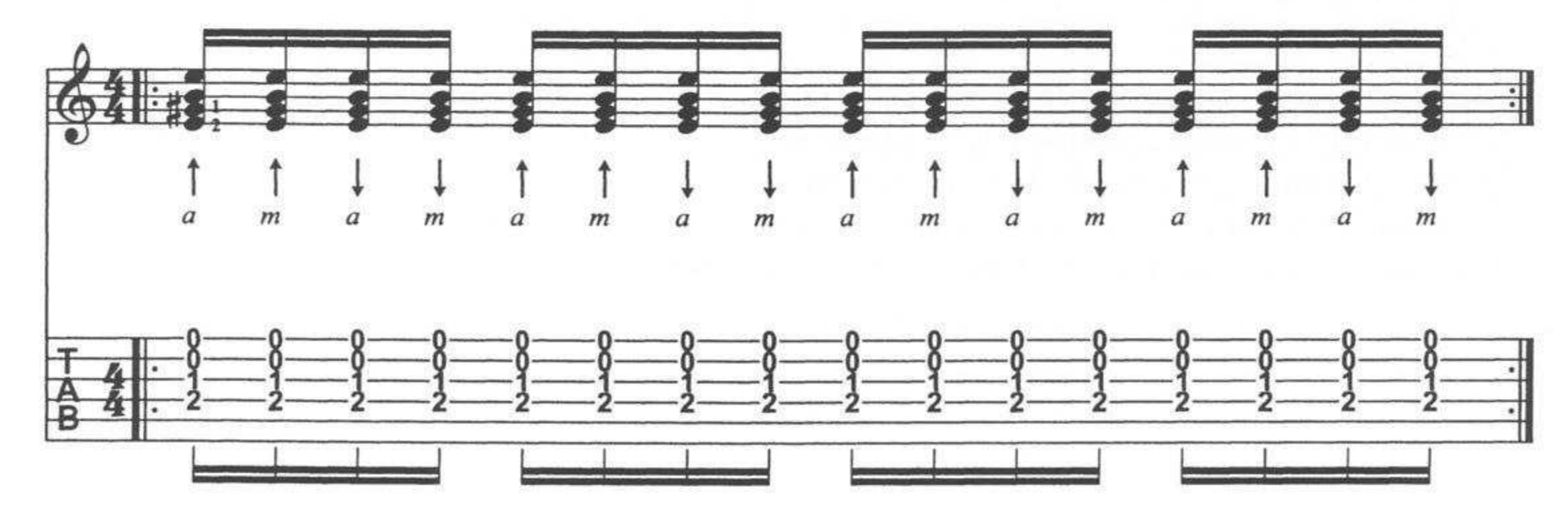
Continuous Rasgueado with a-m

On the subject of rasgueados, another excellent way of strengthening your ring-middle and ring-index combinations is to practice continuous rasgueados using these patterns! A few minutes every day should be enough of this taxing exercise. Be careful not to overdo these patterns!

Try the ring-middle combination first!

Exercise # 31

a-m Continuous Rasgueado

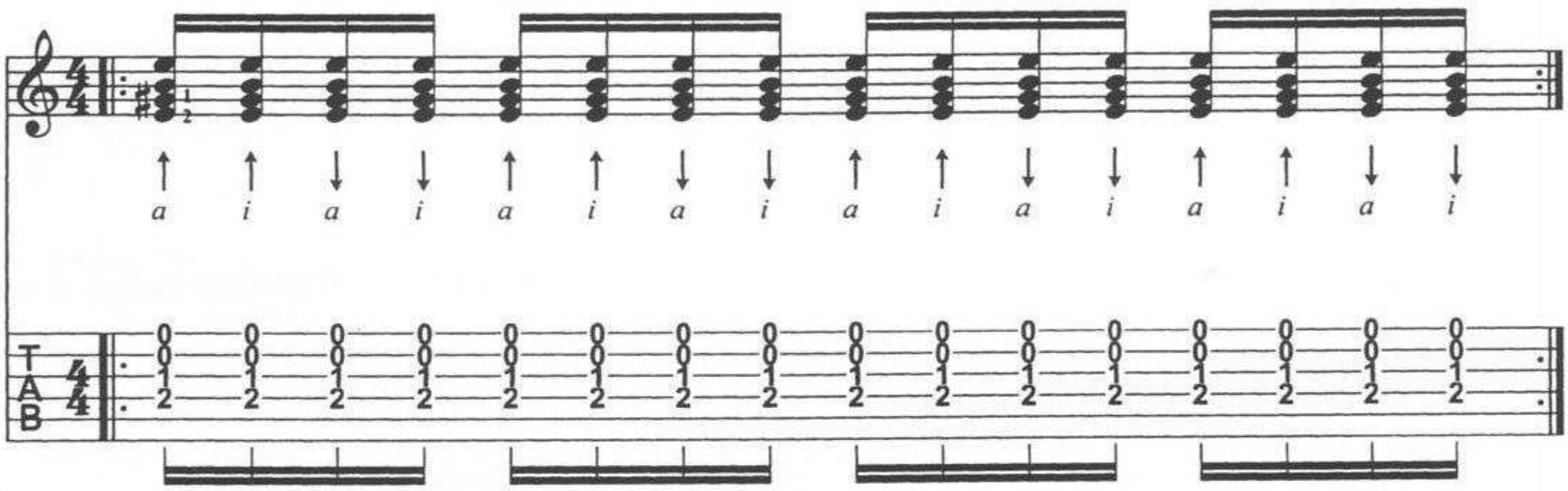


Continuous Rasgueado with a-i

Repeat the same pattern with the ring-index combination.

Exercise # 31b

a-i Continuous Rasgueado

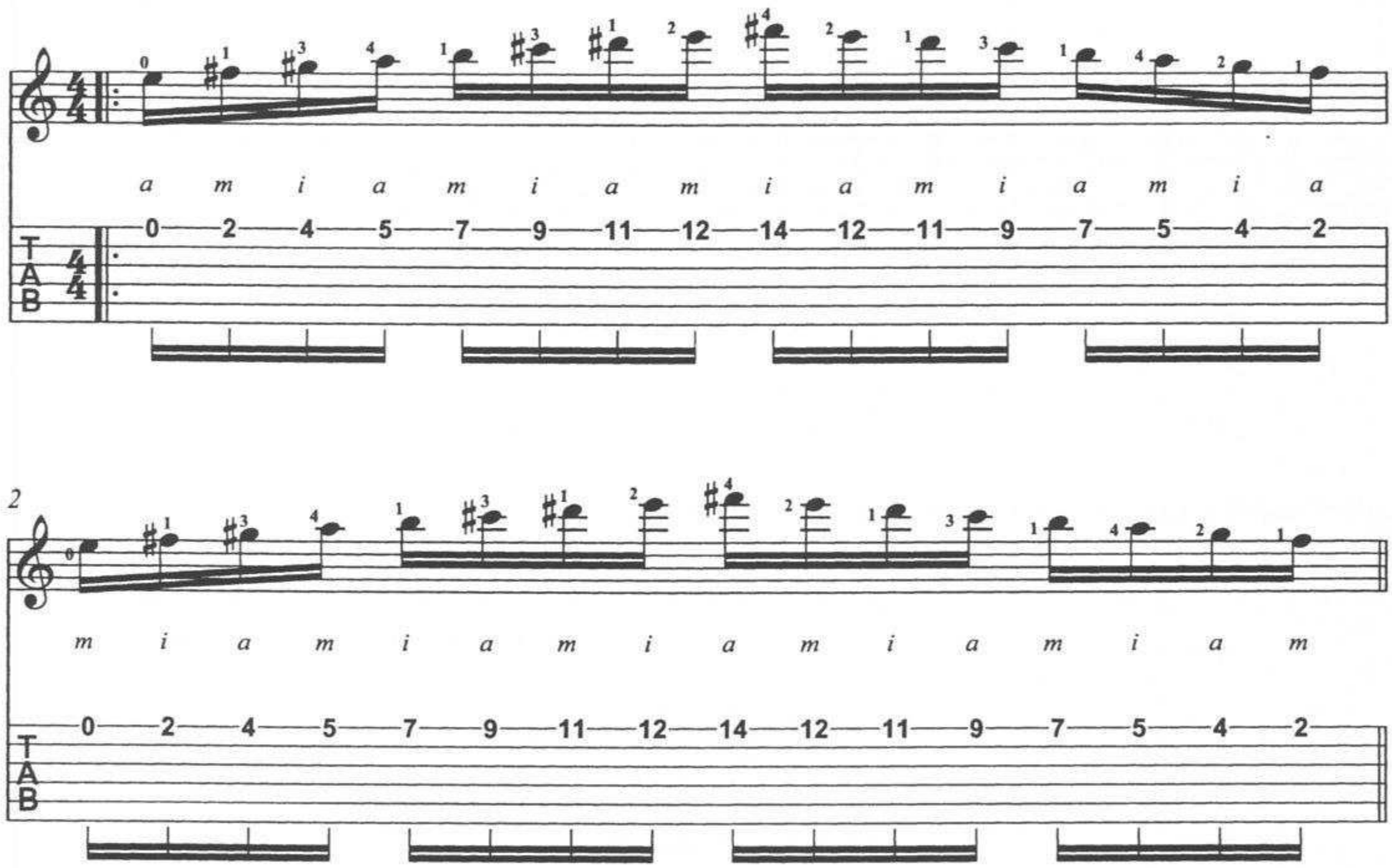


More Single-String Scales

The great concert guitarist and distinguished educator **Sharon Isbin** suggests playing single-string scales on all strings using ring-middle-index alternation. Here's an example she uses employing the E major scale on the first string. Repeating the example three times rotates the RH fingerings through all possible combinations!

Exercise # 32

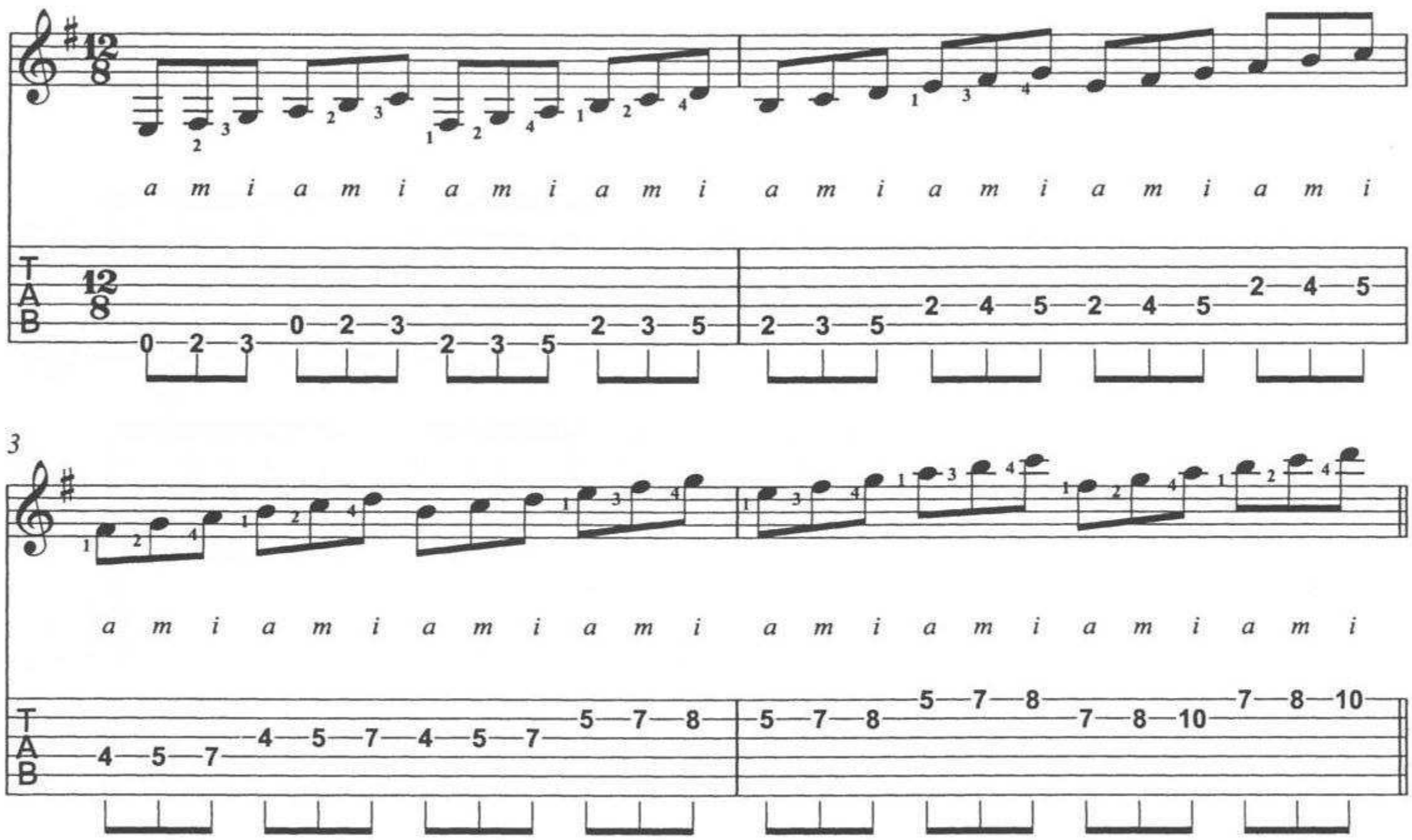
More Single-String Scales - Part I



Finally, here is a much longer and more challenging scale sequence that uses the E natural minor scale on all six strings of the guitar. Be patient with this one!

Exercise # 32b

More Single-String Scales - Part II

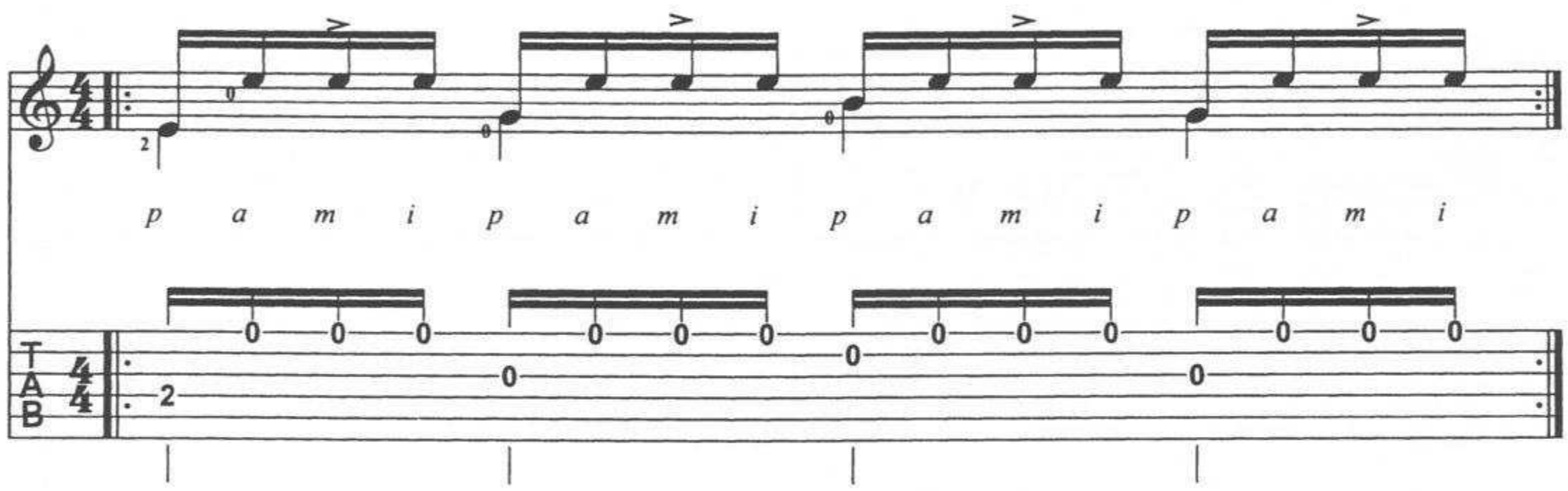


Middle-Finger Rest Stroke

Sharon Isbin also advocates practicing the *pami* tremolo very slowly while playing a rest stroke with the middle finger! This approach has the advantage of breaking down the tremolo pattern into two rhythmically equal parts, consisting of two sets of two 16th notes each, therefore thwarting the "gallop" that might otherwise emerge. As you (VERY gradually) increase the tempo, you will not be able to do a rest stroke any more, but try to retain the accent on the middle finger. Here is a simple example of this technique, using a first position Em chord.

Exercise # 33

Middle Finger Rest Stroke

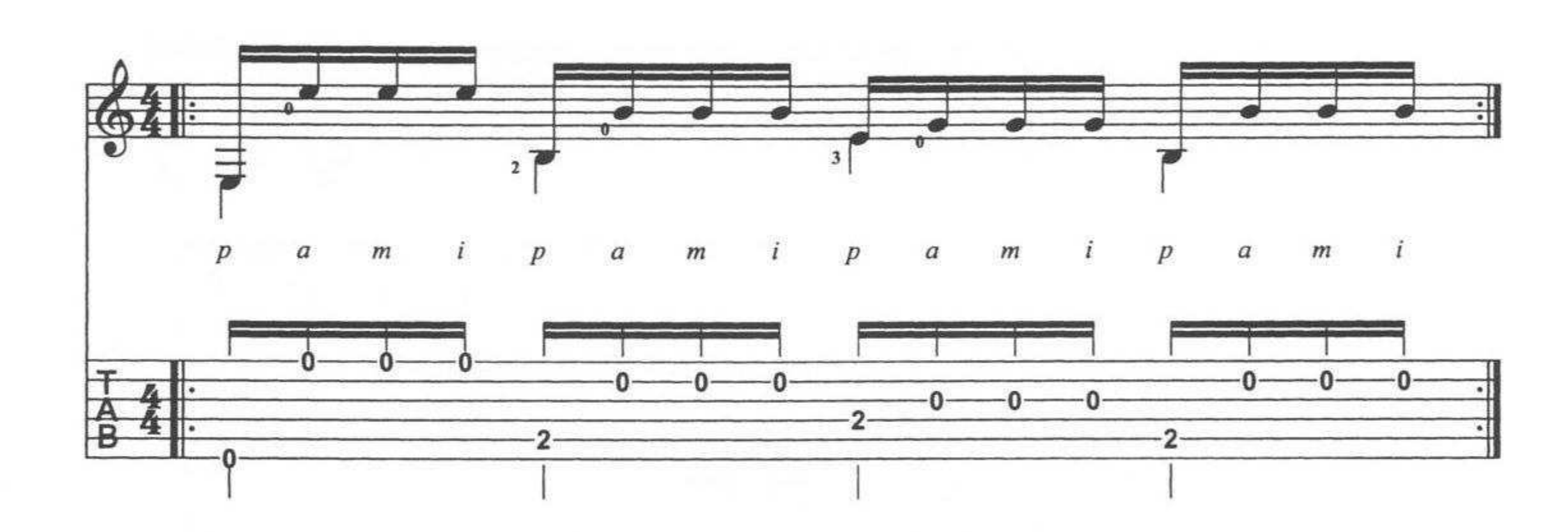


Tremolo Arpeggios

Once the student has good rhythmic control and sufficient speed with the tremolo, the most prevalent technical problem seems to be at the point where there is a string change on the tremolo. For example, when the tremolo moves from the first string to the second string, the other way around or any other combination of changing strings, especially if this change is continuous! The extraordinary flamenco guitarist **Gerardo Nuñez** showed me the following exercise which aims to rectify the aforementioned problem. We will be playing a simple arpeggio moving from first, to second, to third and back to the second string (1-2-3-2). However, on EACH string we will be playing a full a-m-i tremolo pattern! It is harder to explain on paper than it really is, so have a look at the music!

Exercise # 34

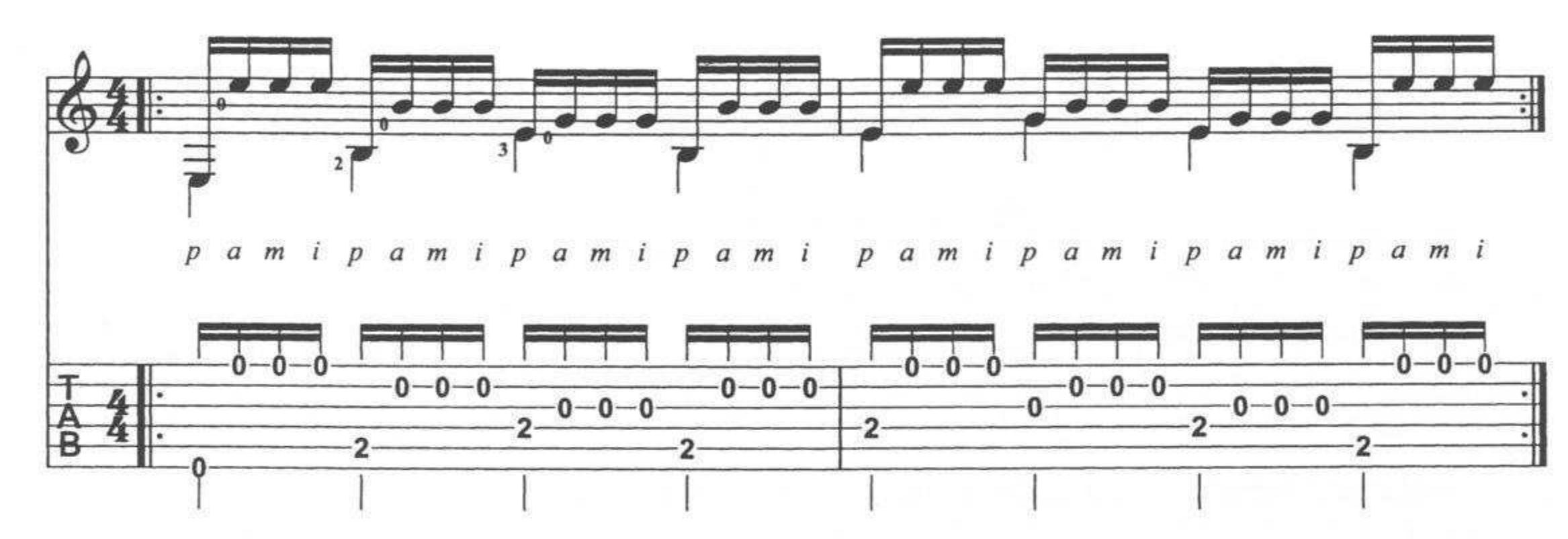
Tremolo Arpeggios - Part I



In order to gain maximum efficiency from this excellent practice pattern, it would be a good idea to examine variable distances between the thumb and the tremolo string while executing it. To become proficient with all kinds of movement of the tremolo figure, strive to play patterns that introduce variable thumb-tremolo distances. Here's another example based on the open position Em chord.

Exercise # 34b

Tremolo Arpeggios - Part II



Some Final Words: Tremolo as an arpeggio

As a final note, to conclude this section of the book, let me offer you another very interesting way of viewing the tremolo technique:

Look at the tremolo as a single string arpeggio!

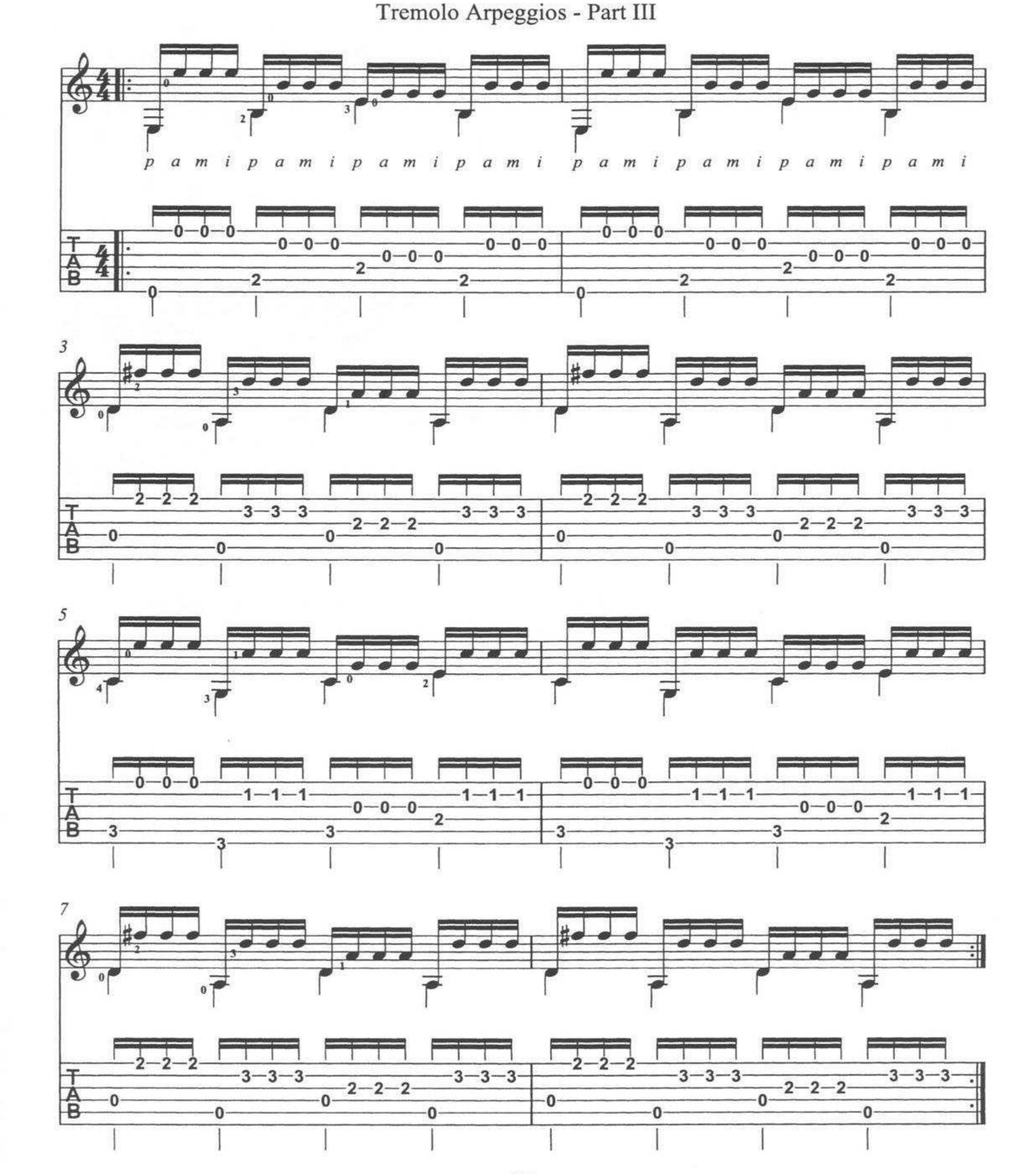
This way, you can use all the time-tested, regular arpeggio exercises and patterns, especially the Giulliani RH arpeggio exercises, in order to enhance your tremolo practice patterns.

Important Note: By perfecting your tremolo technique you are getting better at one of the most difficult RH techniques of the guitar. This will VERY MUCH help your playing in general, apart from the obvious ability to play tremolo pieces!

Let's conclude our practice on this concept by taking a simple chord progression (Em-D-C) and using tremolo technique to arpeggiate each chord. As always, feel free to substitute any chords you like.

Exercise # 34c

Tremolo Arpeggios - Part III



Chapter 2

Variations on Traditional Tremolo

The traditional classical guitar p-a-m-i tremolo pattern has been with us for a very long time. However, it is by no means the only tremolo pattern! A variety of different tremolo patterns exist, some very similar to the original, some quite distinct! In this section we shall examine the various patterns that have been used as substitutes for the "original" *p-a-m-i* tremolo. Keep in mind that most of these patterns will require a considerable initial effort on your part before you are able to come to an informed conclusion concerning their technical merits and their eventual usefulness as vehicles of musical interpretation! In short, stick with them for a while before you adopt or abort them!

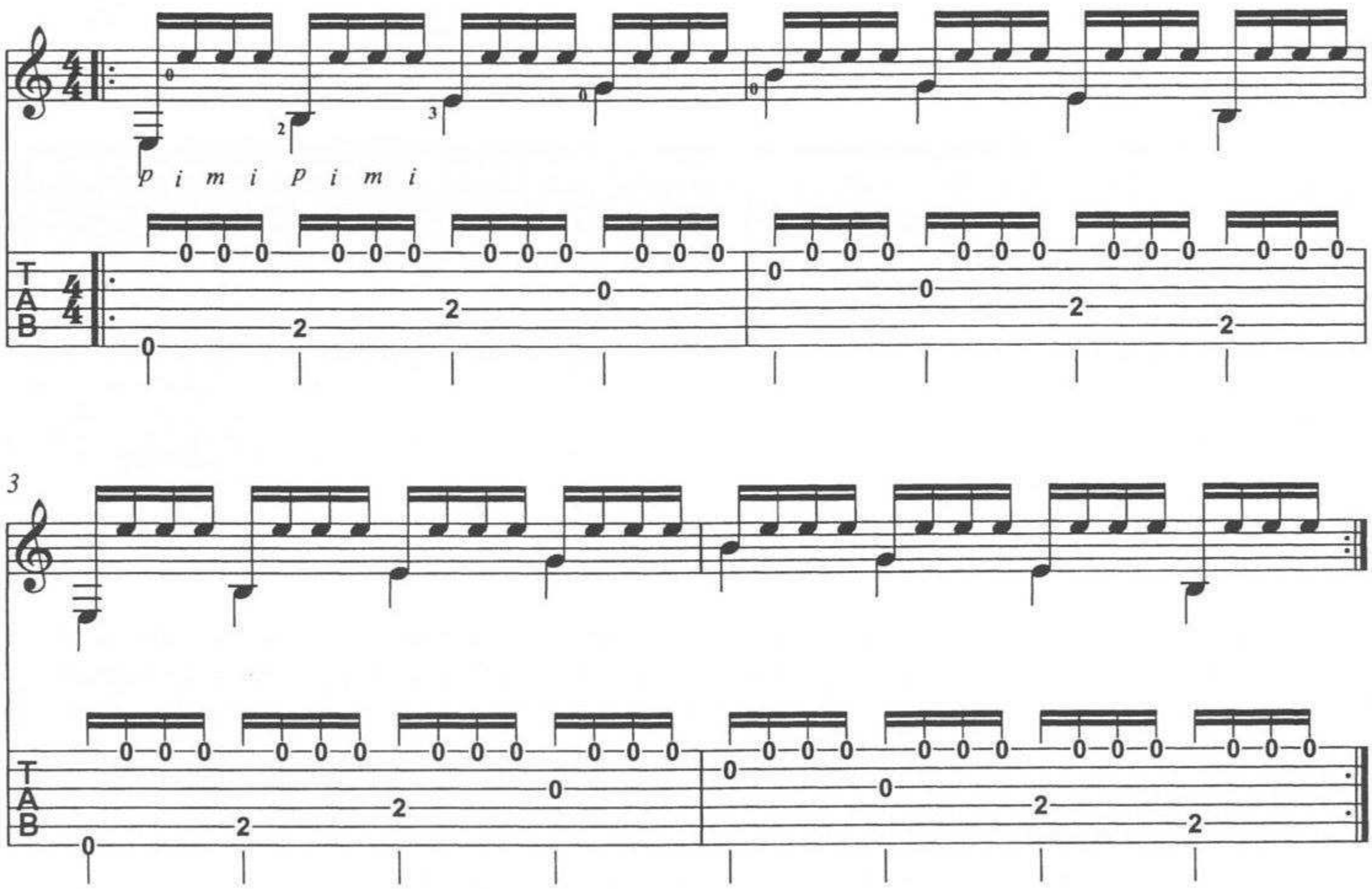
Variation #1 – The p-i-m-i Tremolo

This is one of the easiest tremolo variations. It is perfectly suited to slower pieces that require firm control of the tremolo. This pattern is especially good for beginners since it produces a smoother, less choppy sound. It is also easy to control the tempo and the dynamics using this pattern, much easier than with the traditional classical *pami* tremolo. However, you will need to slowly build up your endurance and speed! This pattern is fairly tiring for the index finger, since it is used for two out of the three tremolo notes!

Let's use a simple Em chord to practice this pattern.

Exercise # 1

p-i-m-i Tremolo



Variation #2 – The p-i-a-i Tremolo

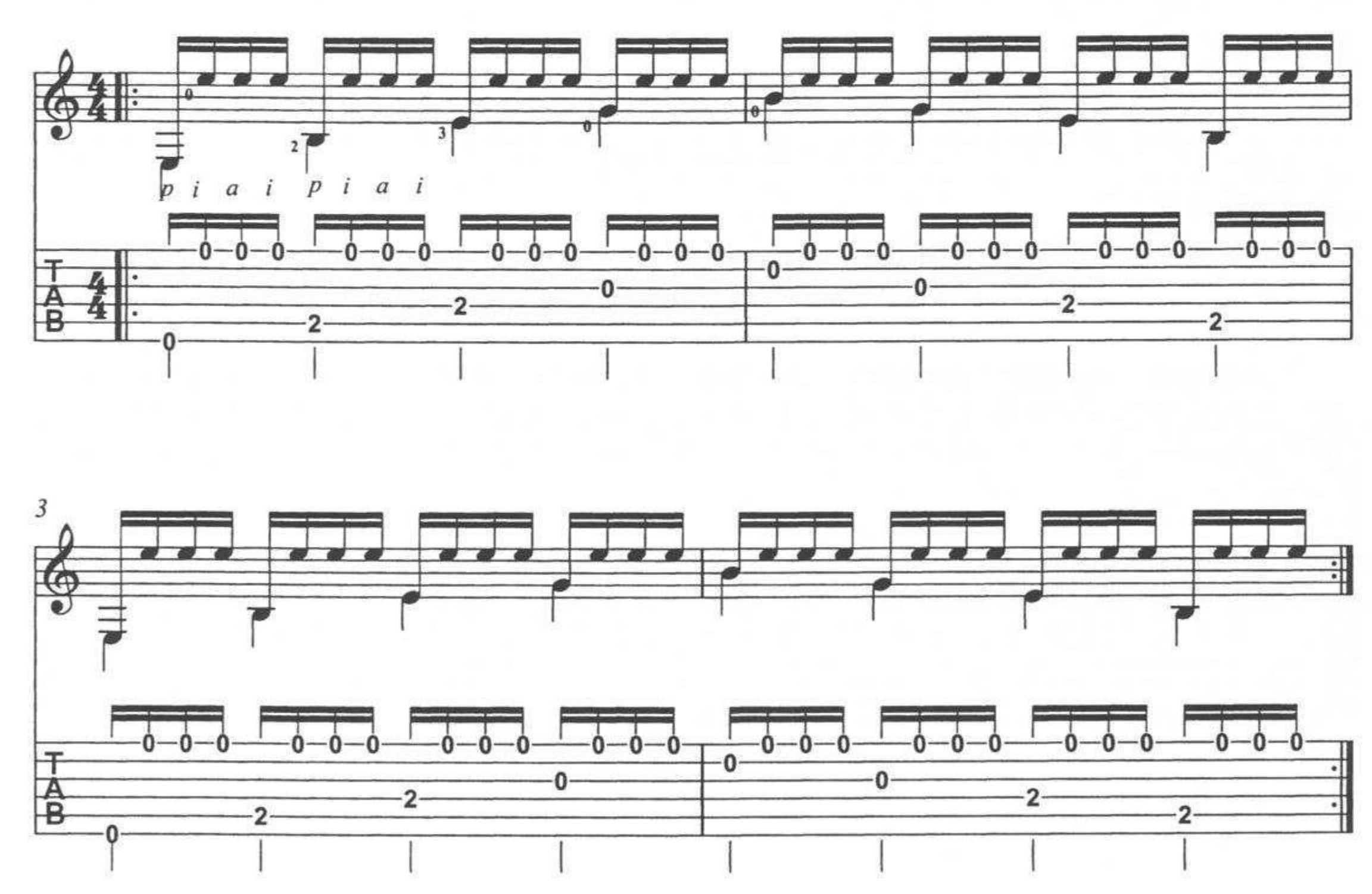
This is a variation of the previous tremolo. The only difference is that *the ring finger substitutes for the middle finger*. This change raises a couple of interesting points: The relative length of the index finger and the ring finger is roughly the same on most people. This makes this pattern particularly comfortable to play on a single string, since there is no need to compensate for any significant difference in digit length by tilting the RH.

On the other hand, the ring finger is also significantly weaker and less independent than the middle finger, which means that it will have to try harder to keep up with the more agile and responsive index finger! However, once this is accomplished, the added ability of your ring finger will help you with your playing in general, not just with the tremolo!

Let's use the same Em chord to practice this pattern.

Exercise # 2

p-i-a-i Tremolo



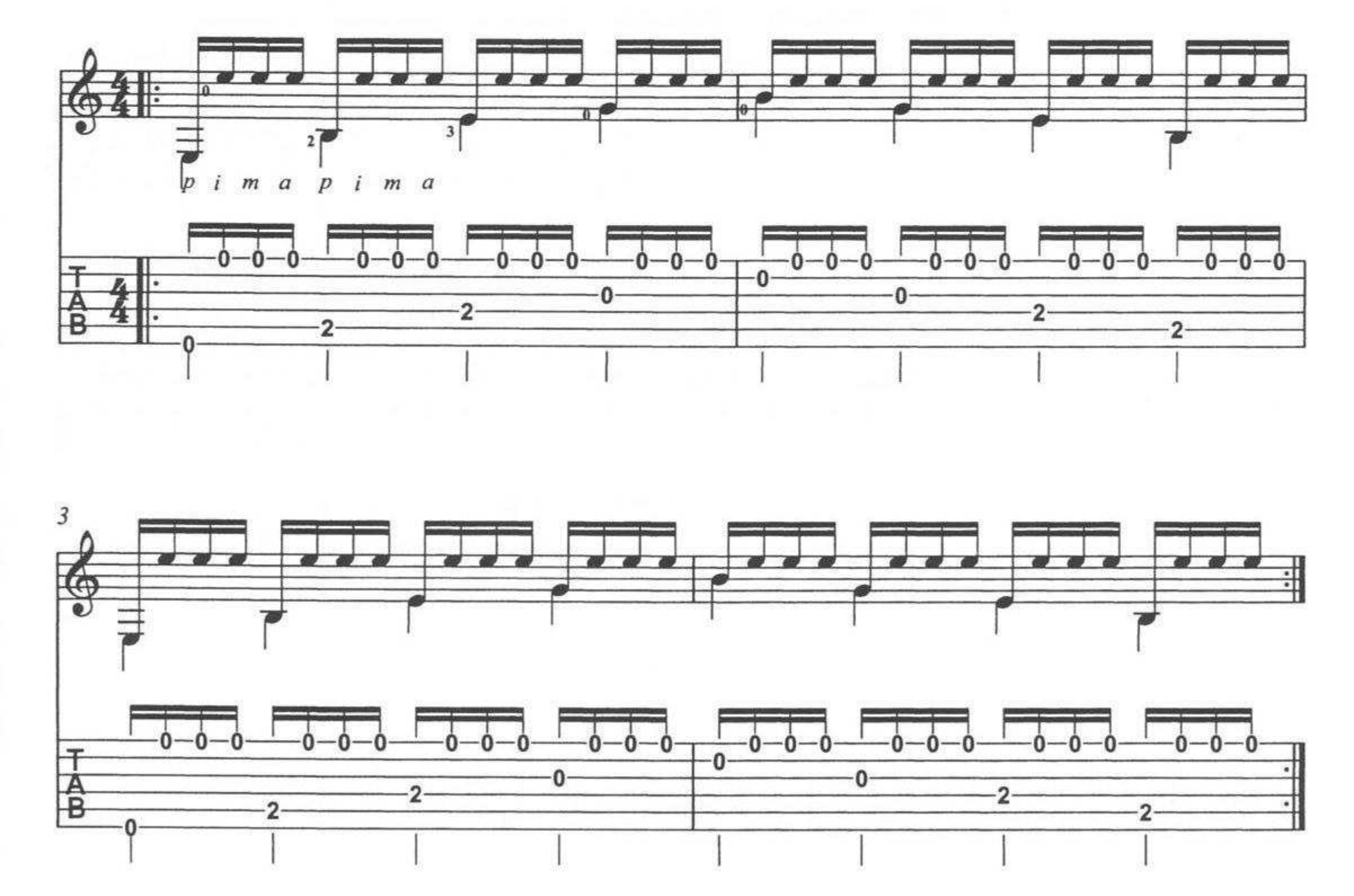
Variation #3 – The p-i-m-a Tremolo

Here is another variation of the traditional tremolo! In this pattern, you need to reverse the finger sequence of the treble tremolo notes. Instead of playing the usual *p-a-m-i*, you will be playing *p-i-m-a*. When initially practicing this pattern, be mindful that the middle and ring fingers have a natural tendency to move together. You should take care that this tendency does not disrupt the rhythmic integrity of your pattern! Many classical guitarists find this to be easier and smoother than the traditional *p-a-m-i* pattern. In my own playing, I've found that it brings out a slightly different inflection or timbre, which can be effectively used for tonal color variations. The *p-i-m-a* pattern is significantly less fatiguing for the RH fingers, but it is a little more troublesome to maintain a steady, unwavering rhythm. You should also take care that your ring finger does not hit the string harder or louder than the other fingers.

Once again, let's use our well-worn Em chord to practice this pattern.

Exercise # 3

p-i-m-a Tremolo



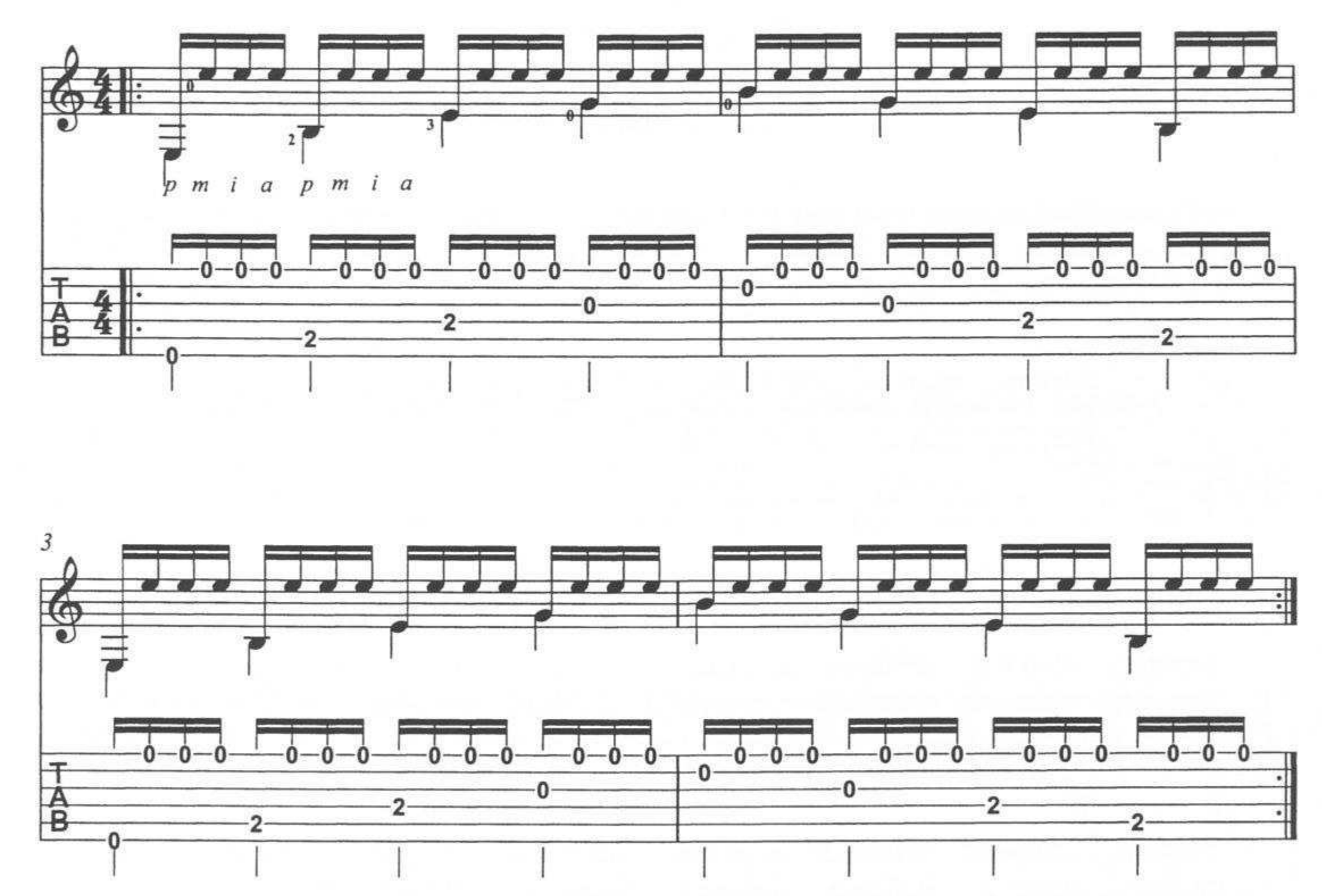
Variation #4 – The *p-m-i-a* Tremolo

Here is a slightly more unusual variation of the traditional tremolo! This pattern reverses the index-middle sequence of the previous one. It is a little more difficult to play; but easier to master rhythmically. Since it does not follow the natural sequence of the RH fingers in either direction (either *a-m-i* or *i-m-a*), it is bound to take a little longer to master than the other patterns.

You probably guessed that, once again we'll use an Em chord to practice this pattern.

Exercise # 4

p-m-i-a Tremolo



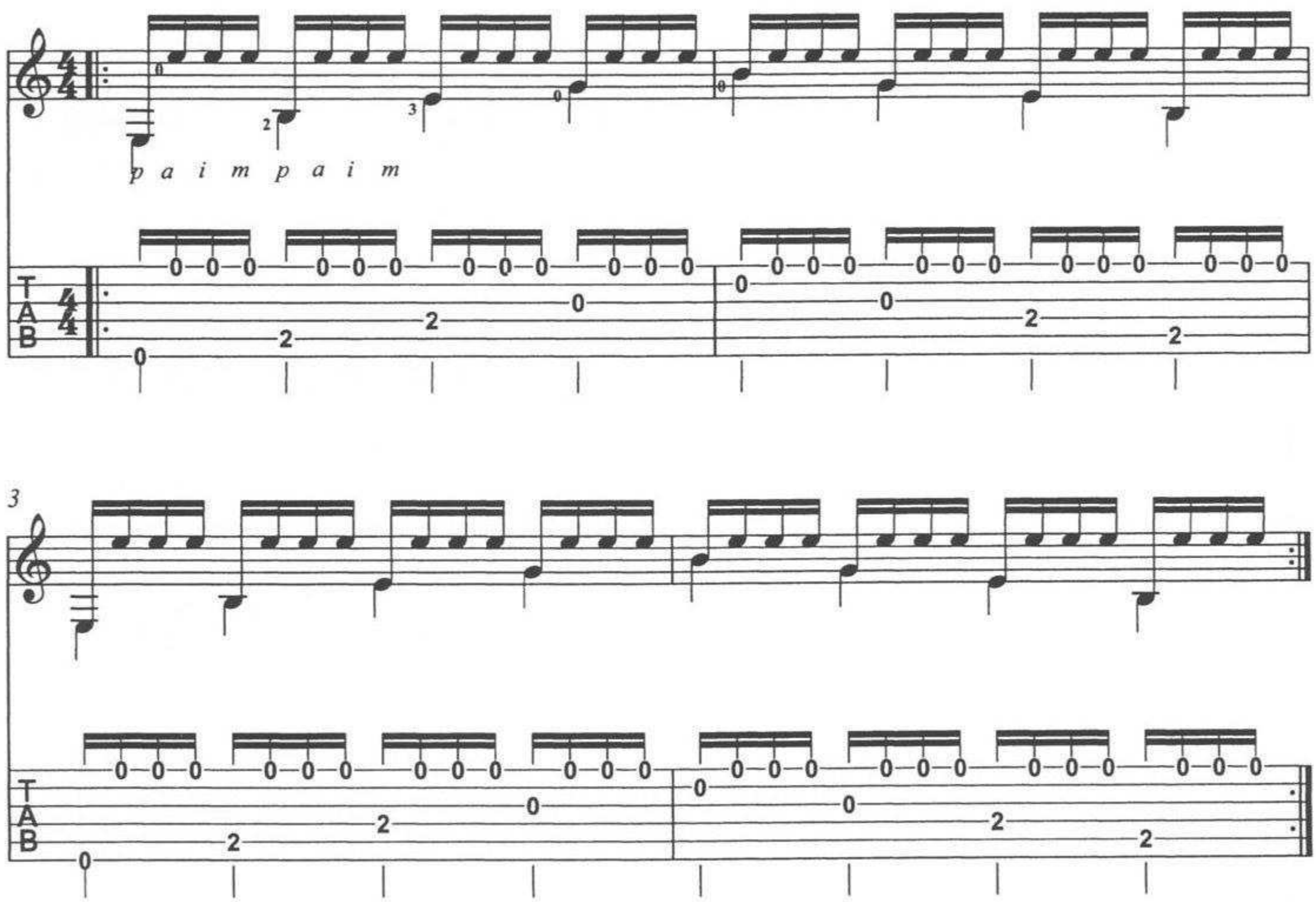
Variation #5 – The p-a-i-m Tremolo

Here is what I consider the strangest tremolo pattern! This is a finger combination that will most probably feel quite unnatural at first. With practice, it is possible to achieve decent speed and sound quality. However, I have not been able to find a reason to prefer this pattern to any of the aforementioned ones!

To conclude, let's use our usual trusty Em chord to practice this pattern.

Exercise # 5

p-a-i-m Tremolo



Chapter 3

Extended Tremolo Techniques

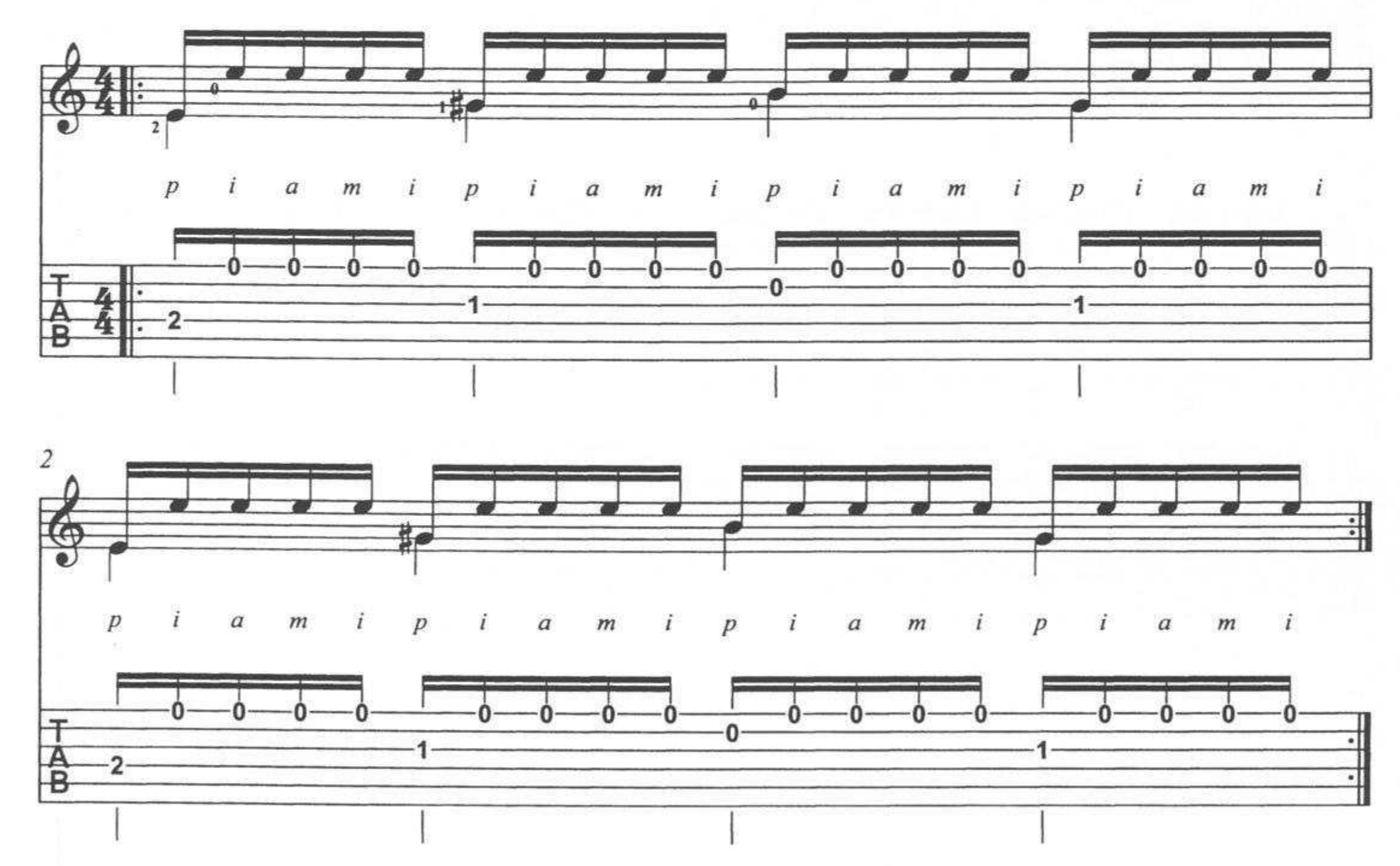
In this chapter, we will examine the various extended tremolo techniques. We will cover the different flamenco guitar tremolos and their variations and examine the innovations of contemporary players.

Flamenco Tremolo – Traditional

Flamenco guitarists use a variation of the classical tremolo, a five-note tremolo performed *piami*. Here's an example using a simple first position E major chord.

Exercise # 1

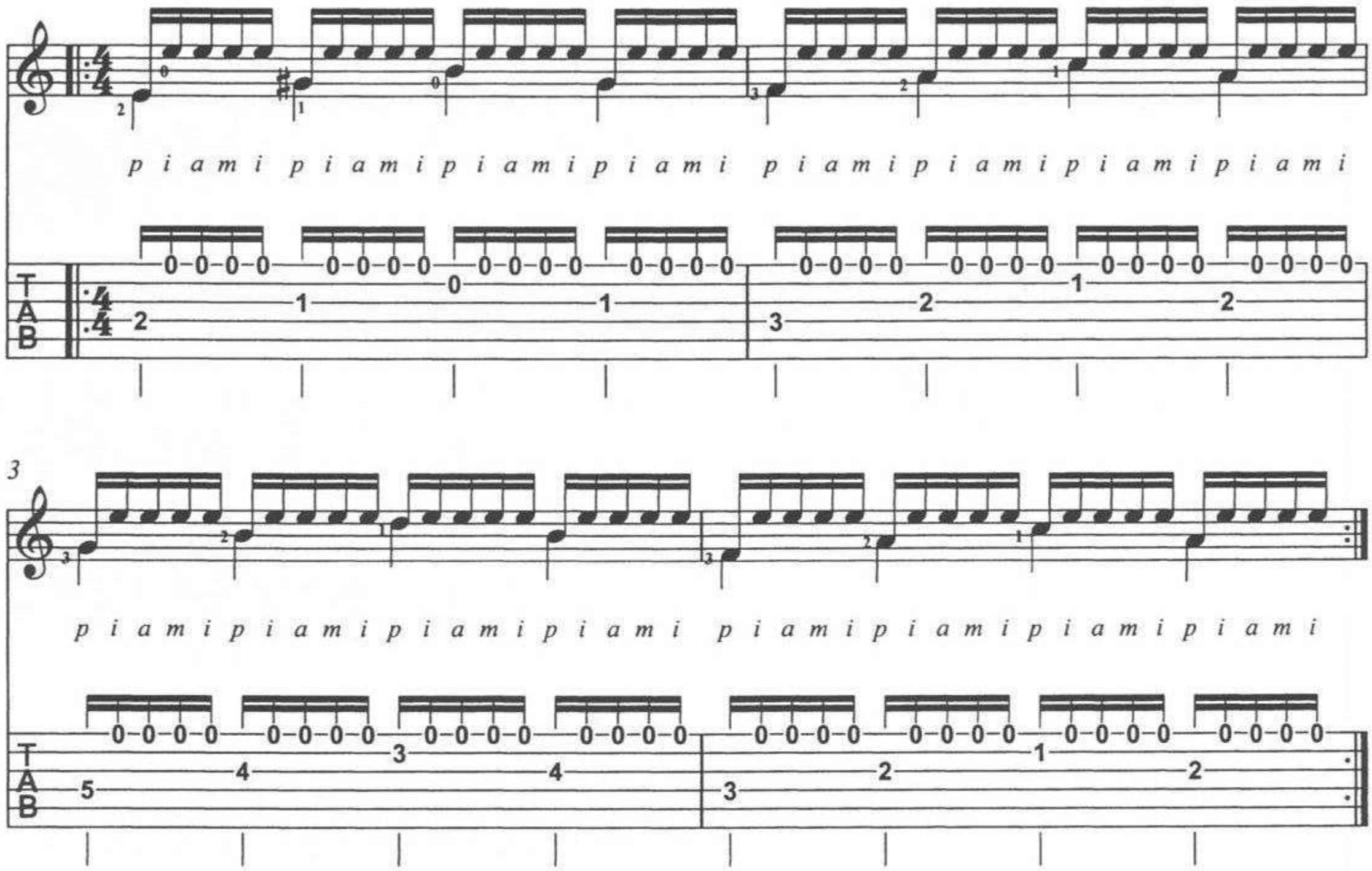
Elementary Flamenco Tremolo



Here is another simple example, based on the E Phrygian Mode. The chords are E major, F maj7 and G6.

Exercise # 2

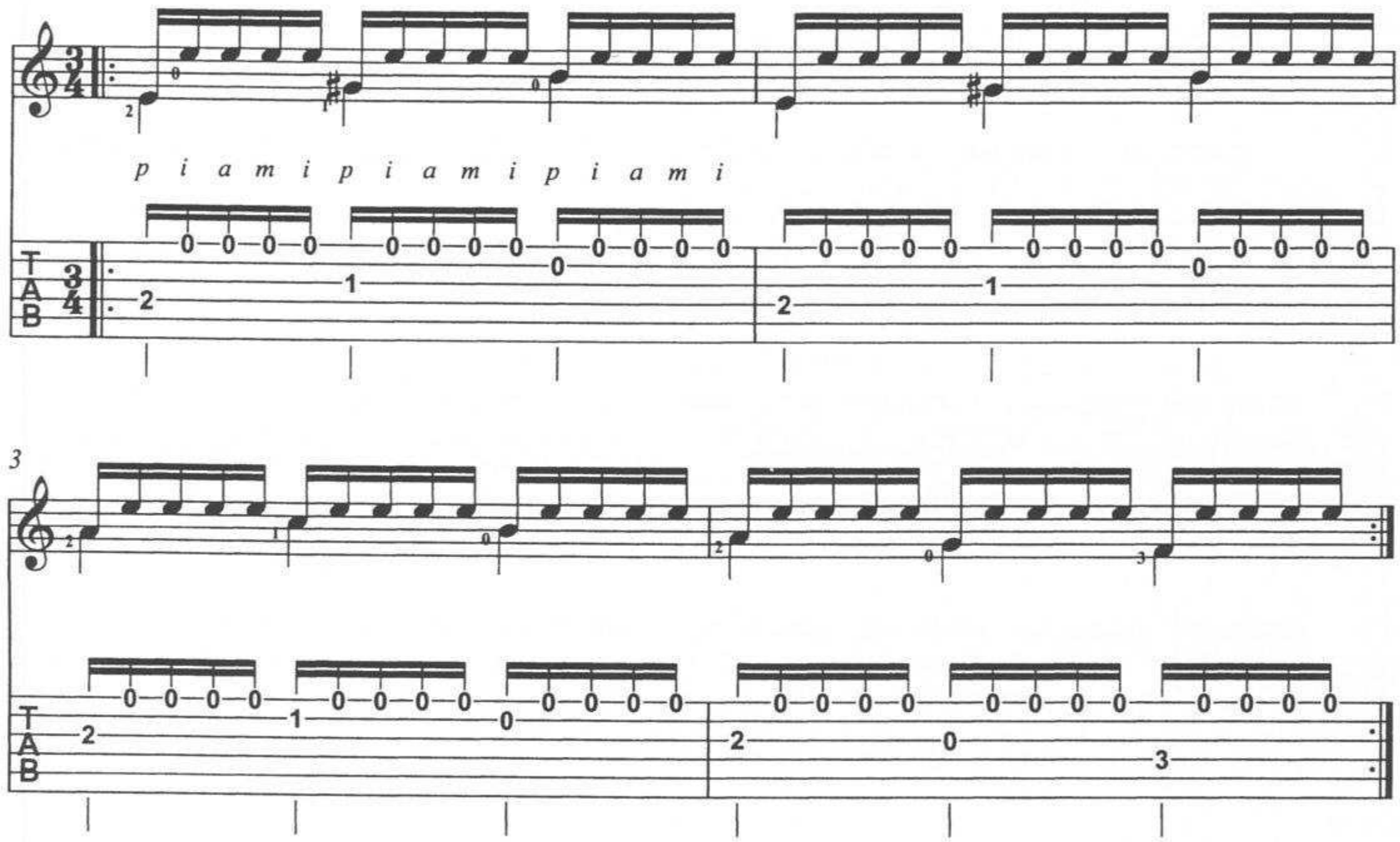
Elementary Flamenco Tremolo - Part II



Here is an example of flamenco tremolo based on the famous tune "Malagueña" by the great composer Lecuona. The speed of the piece is a little slower than the average classical guitar tremolo, due to the extra stroke of the index finger.

Exercise # 3

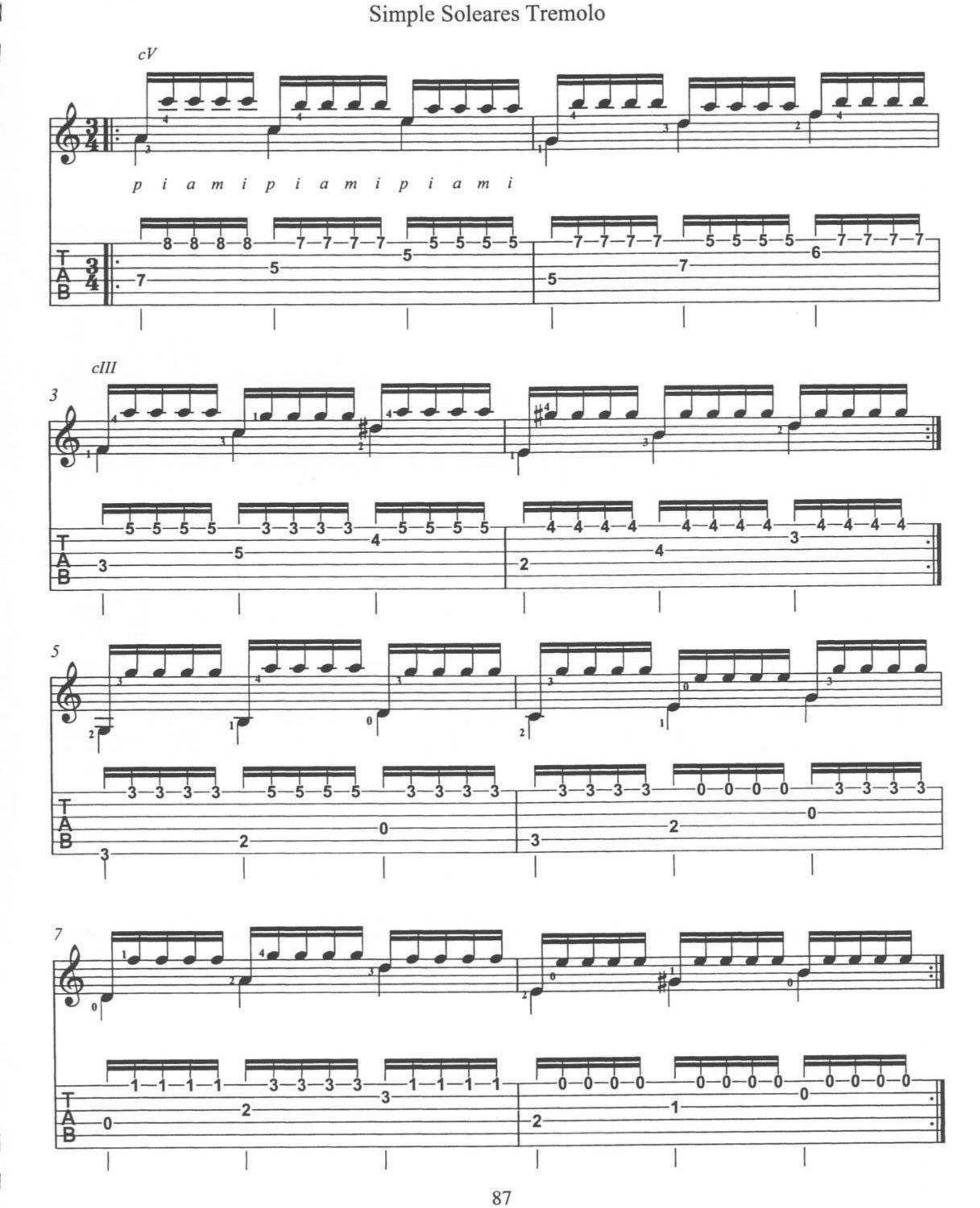
Malagueña de Lecuona



Let us make things a little more interesting. Here is another example, based on the traditional flamenco form of the Soleares. This time the tremolo note will not be constant; it will shift within the 16th-note grouping.

Exercise # 4

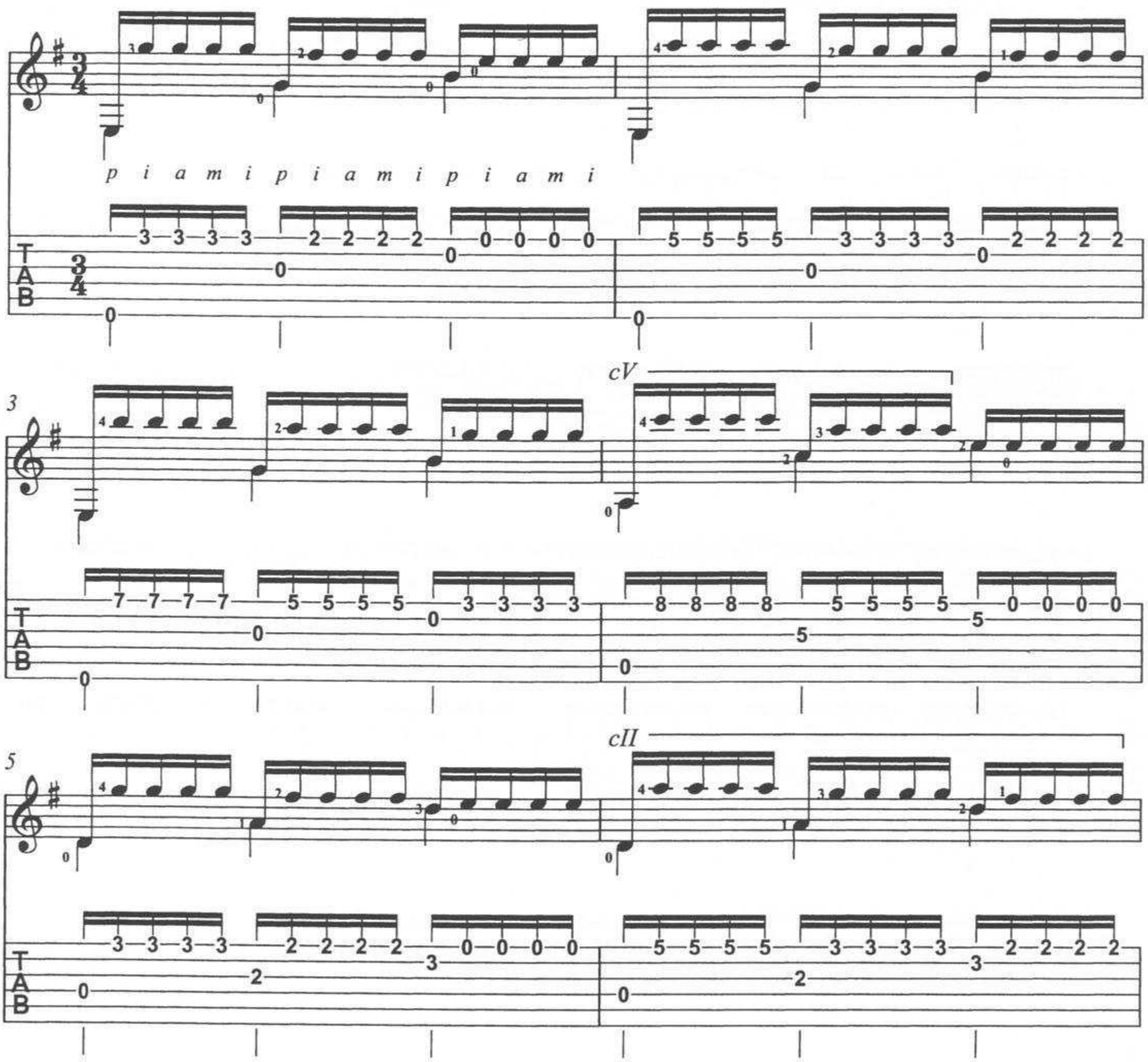
Simple Soleares Tremolo

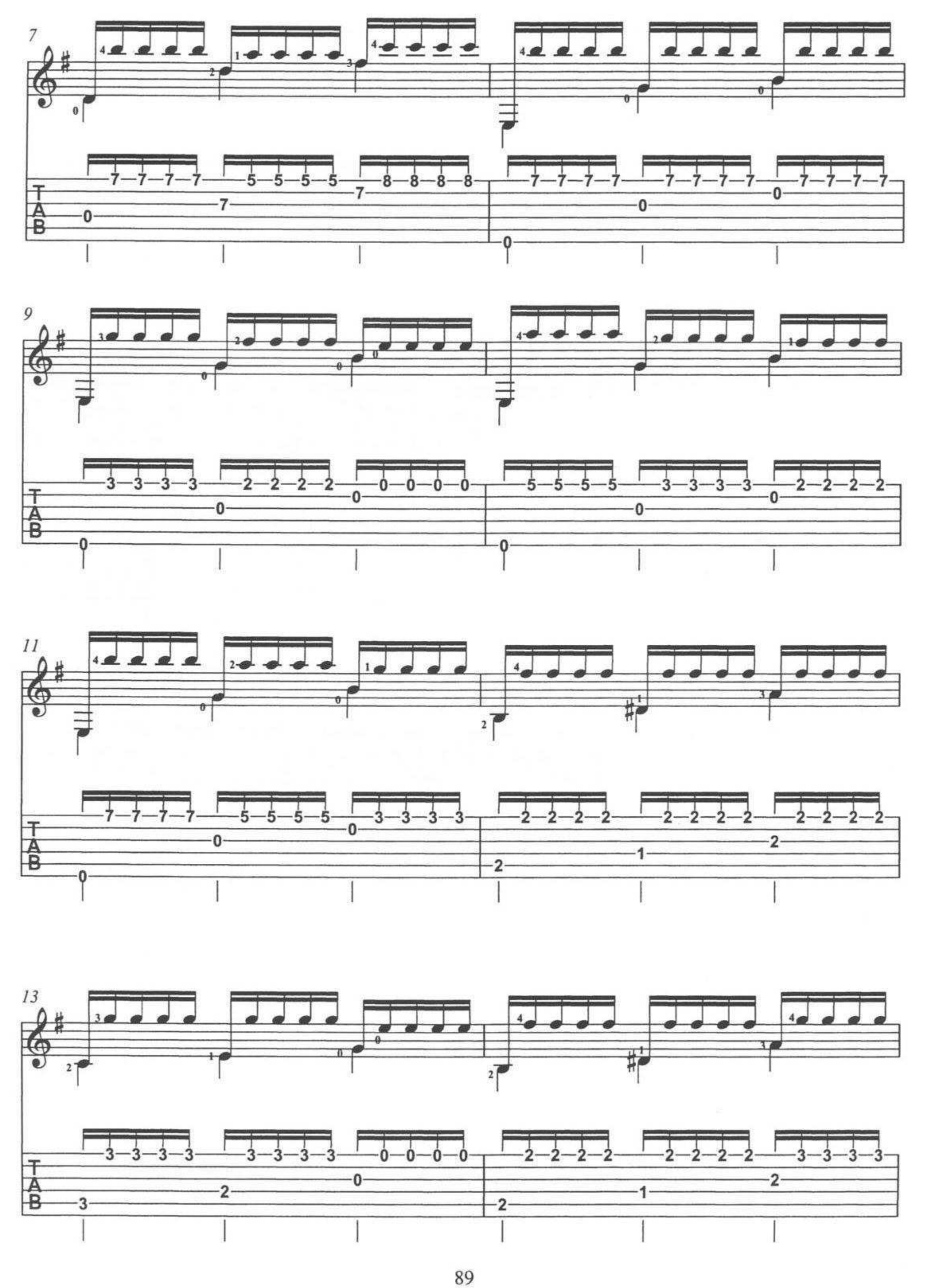


Here is a study in the key of Em that has a nice moving melody in the tremolo voice. This kind of tremolo is quite typical of traditional flamenco guitar. The harmony is based on the chords Em, Am, D, B7, Cmaj7(♯11). It is not as difficult as it might look initially! Most of the time you will be holding a specific easy chord shape and playing the melody with the tremolo.

Exercise # 5

Study in Em

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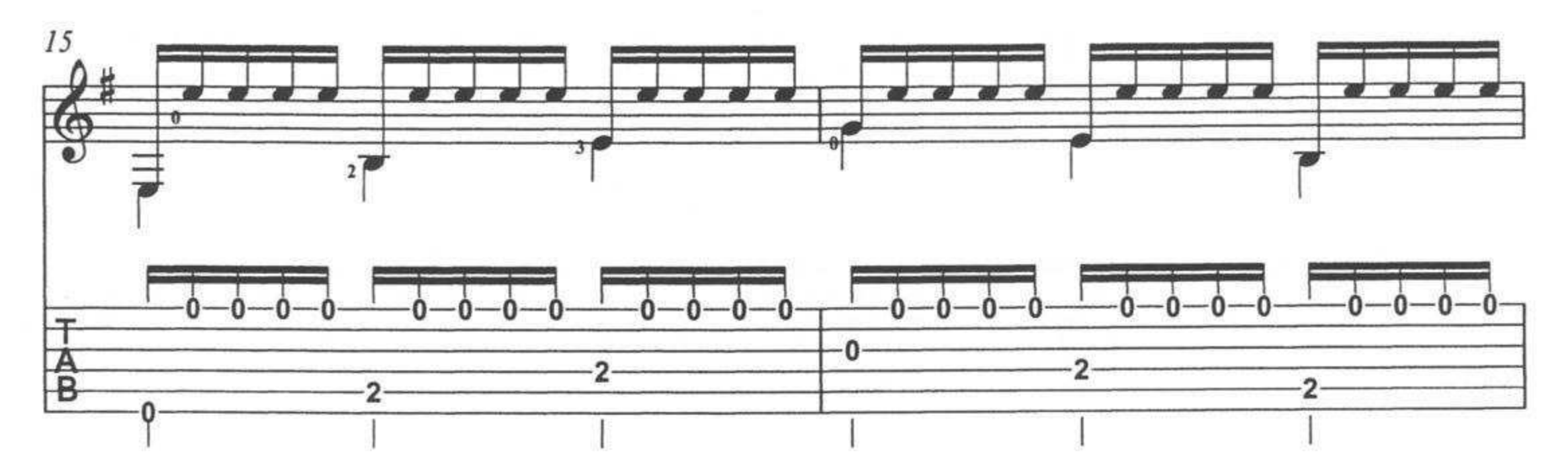
15
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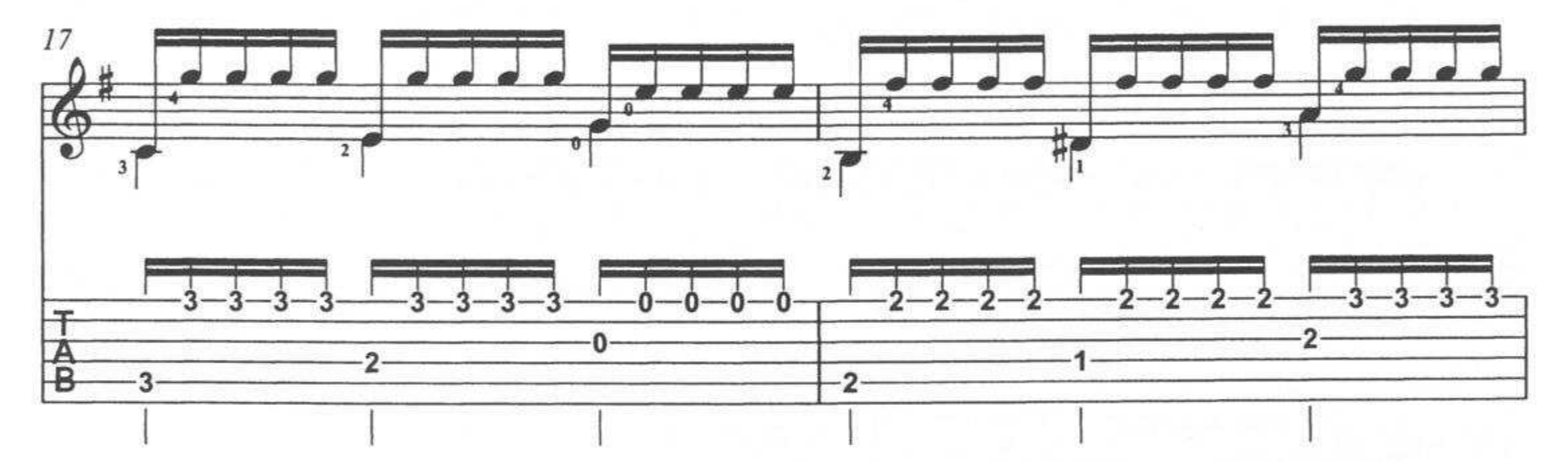
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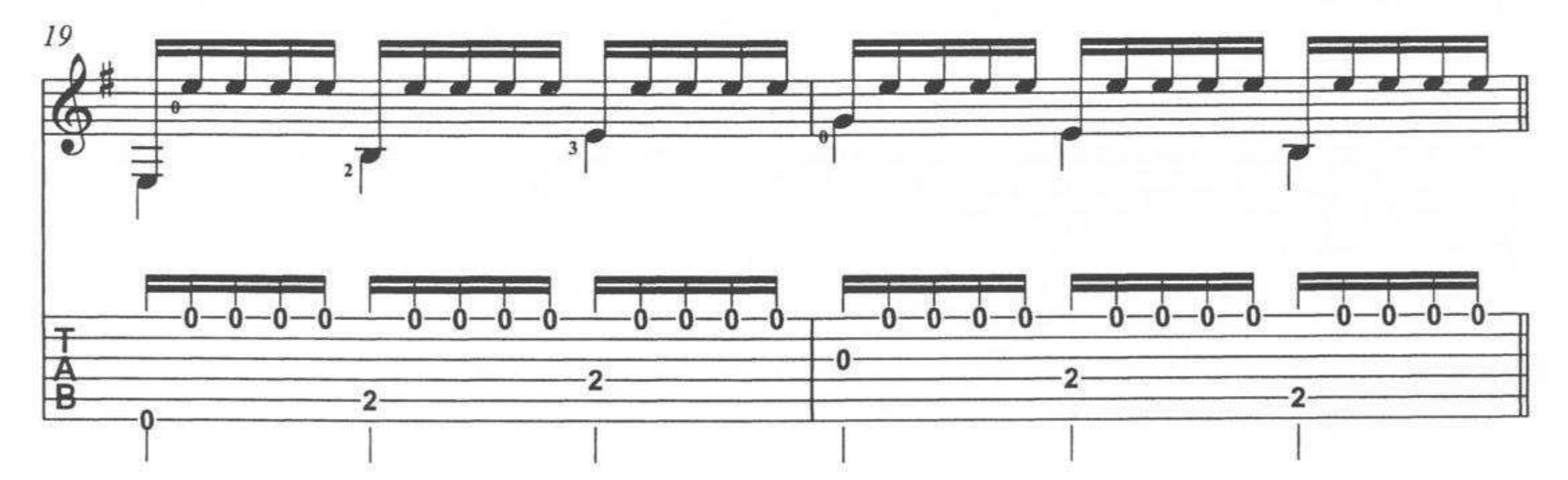
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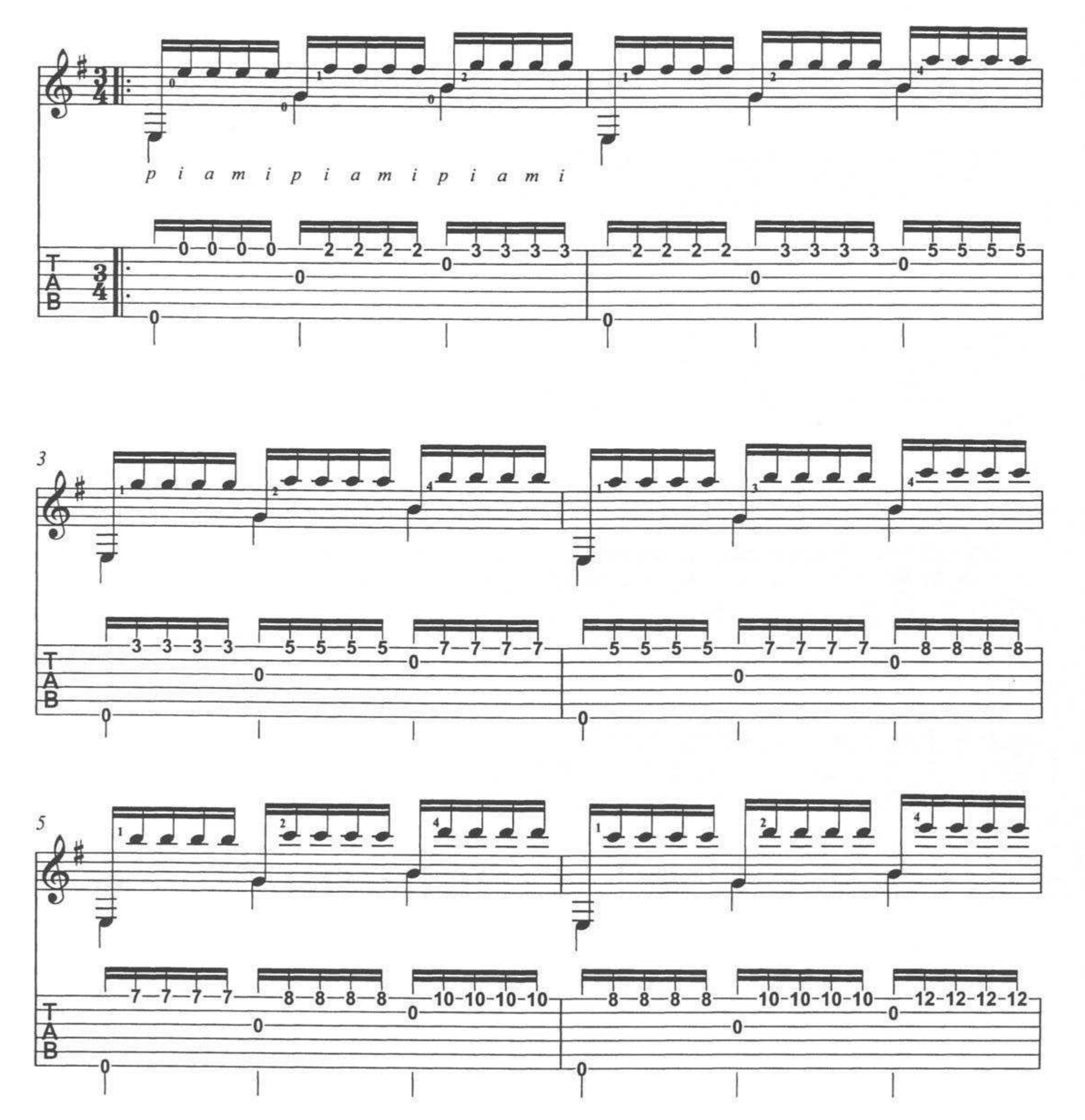
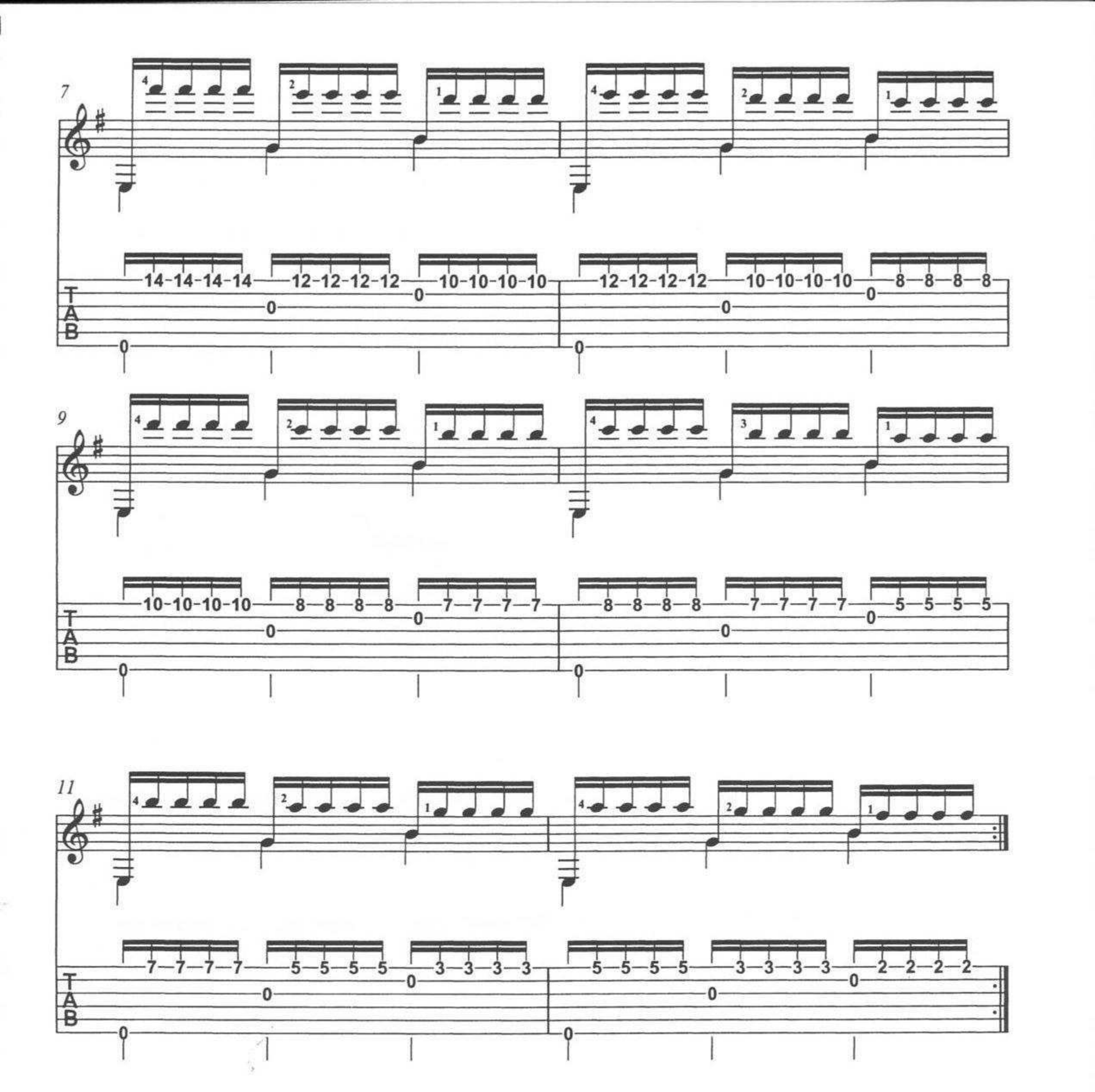
Here is another study in the key of E natural minor. This one includes a repeating ascending and descending diatonic sequence that moves horizontally on the guitar.

Exercise # 6

Study in Em




7
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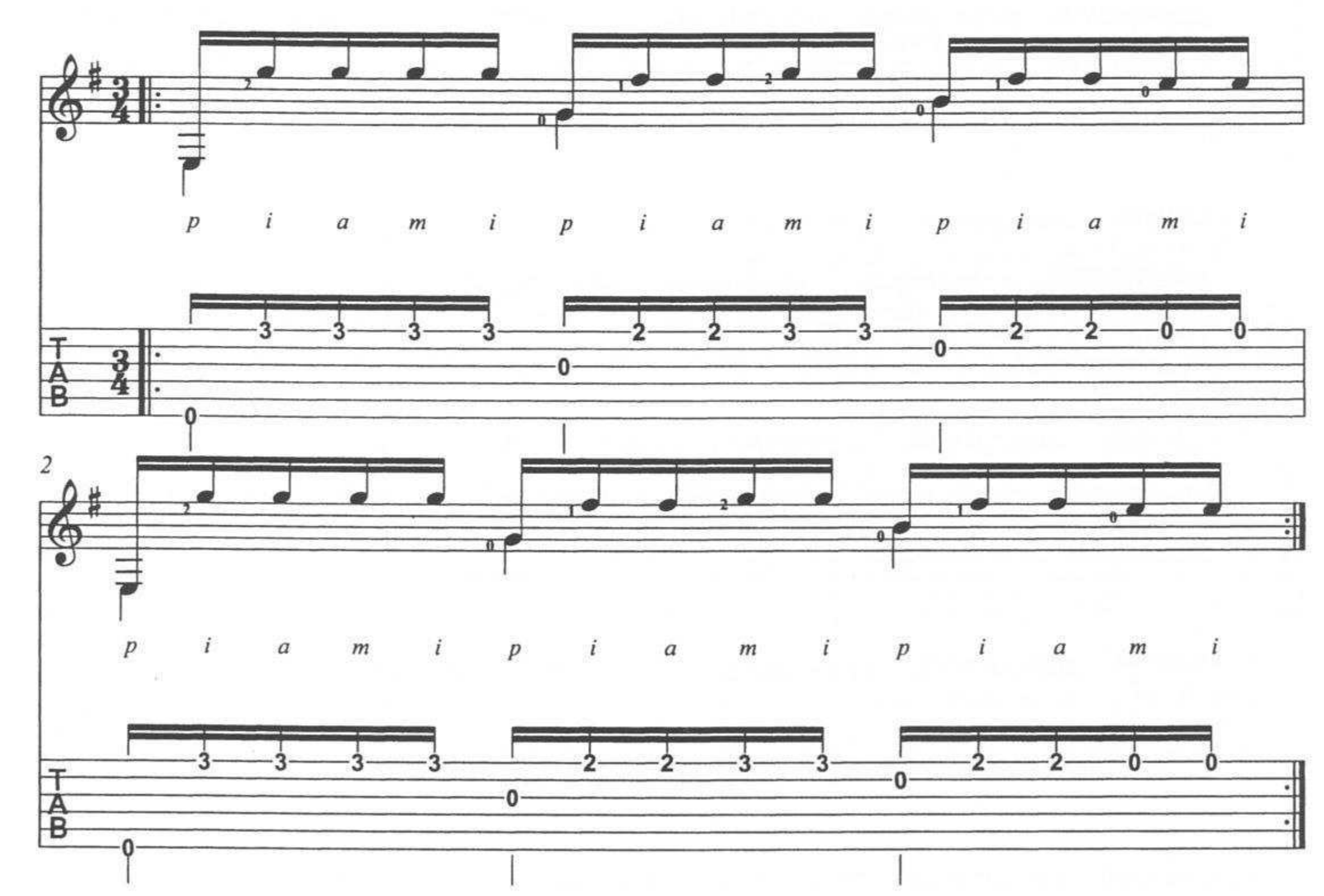
Flamenco Tremolo – Advanced

Now we will tackle what I consider the really beautiful and much more difficult kind of flamenco tremolo. I know it is going to sound very difficult, but please bear with me and I will guarantee that you will have it down in very little time. I advise you though NOT to attempt to play the following examples if you have not already played the examples previously presented in this chapter! Doing so will most probably frustrate you and cause you to give up! Master the former examples, then you will be ready to tackle the following subject.

The lyrical flamenco tremolo is the "**melody line**" tremolo. This is a term I came up with in order to distinguish it from the other kinds of flamenco tremolo, as there are more coming up! What it boils down to is that *we will be changing notes in the melody WITHIN the tremolo!* Let me illustrate this with a simple example based on the Em chord:

Exercise # 7

Melody Line Tremolo - Beginner



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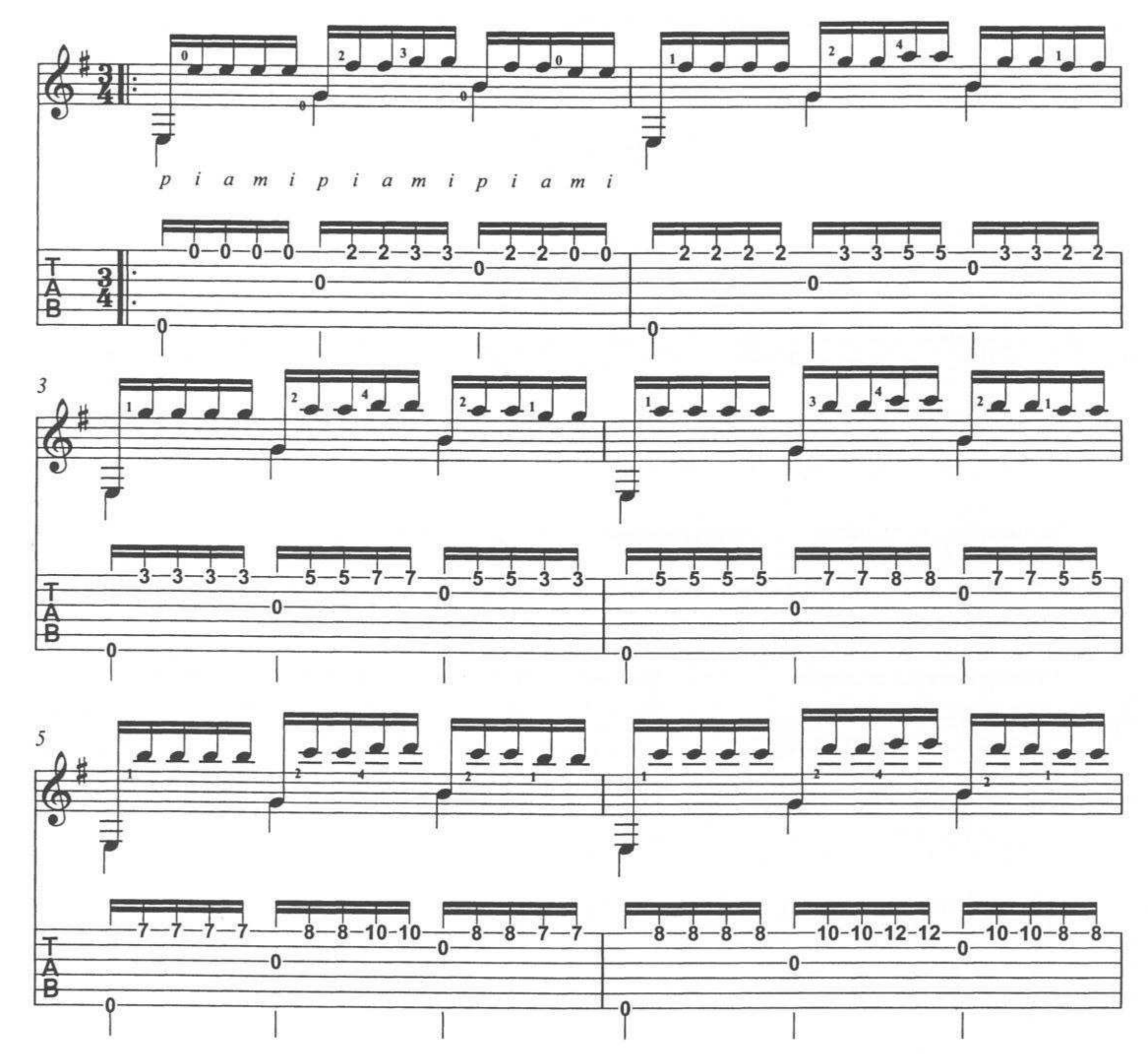
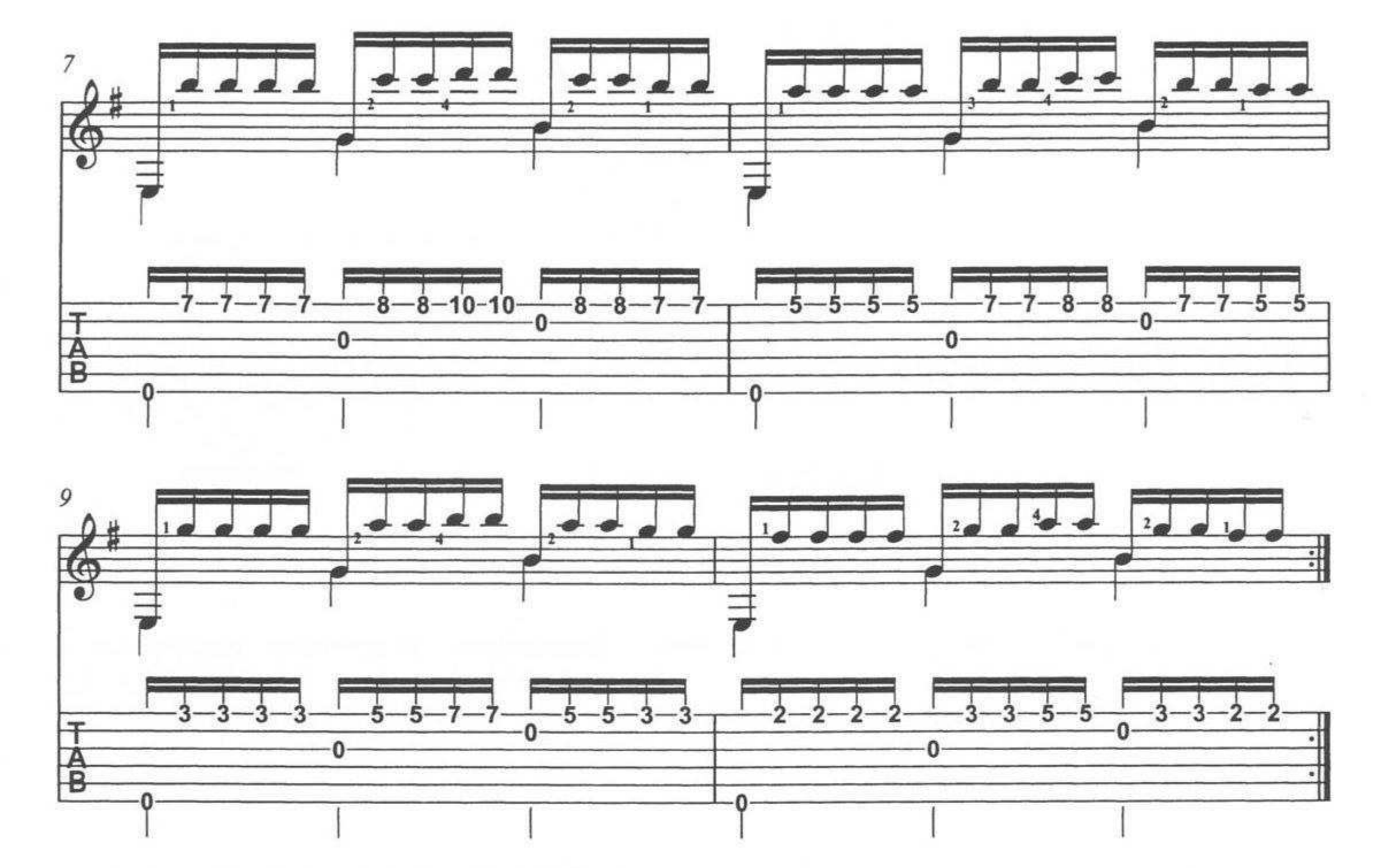
Again, if you have never encountered this tremolo form before, it will probably look really difficult, but if you stay with it and practice it slowly, you will have it down very soon! Here is another example, involving an ascending sequence using the Em scale.

Exercise # 8

Melody Line Tremolo - Em Scale

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A
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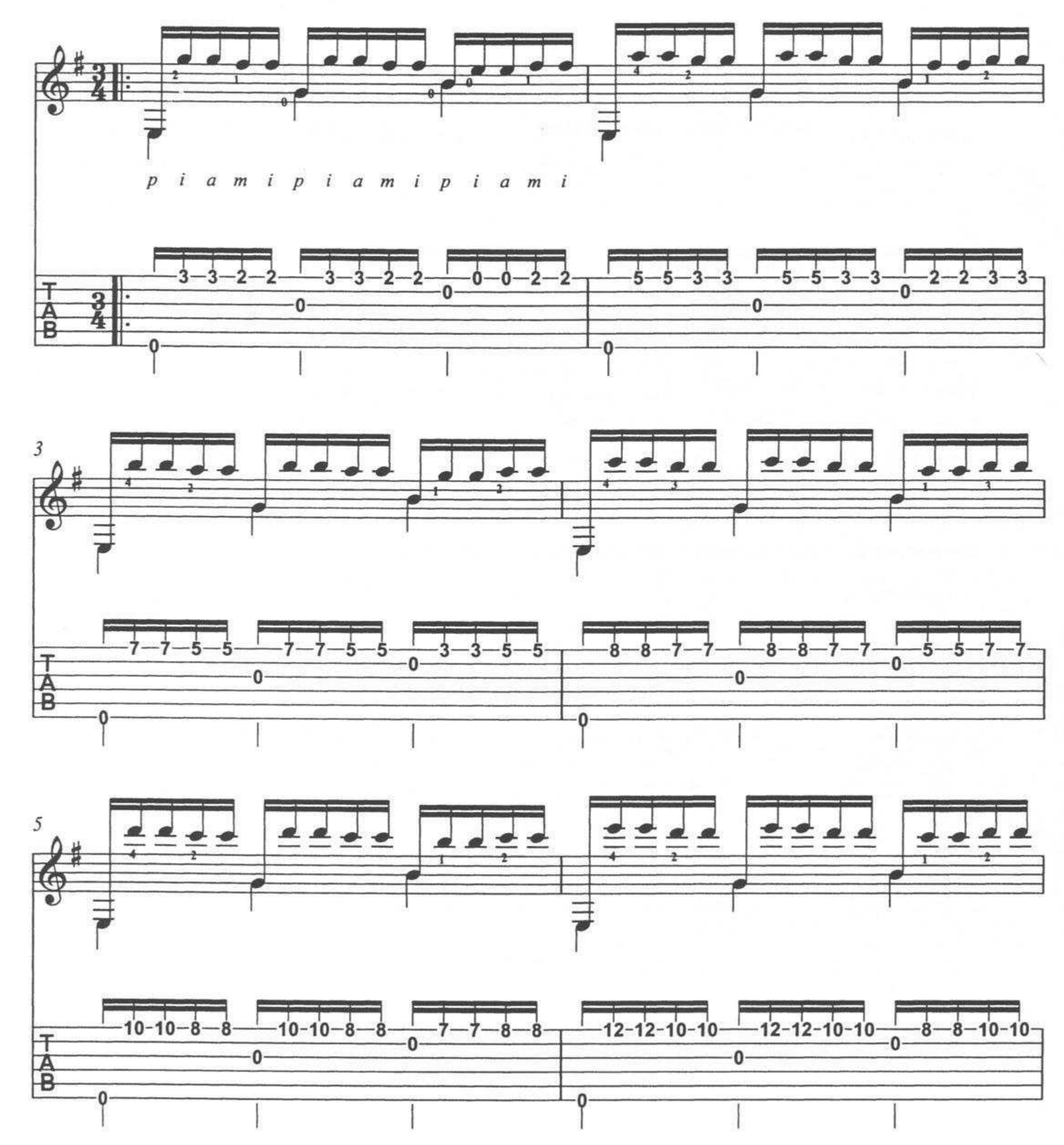
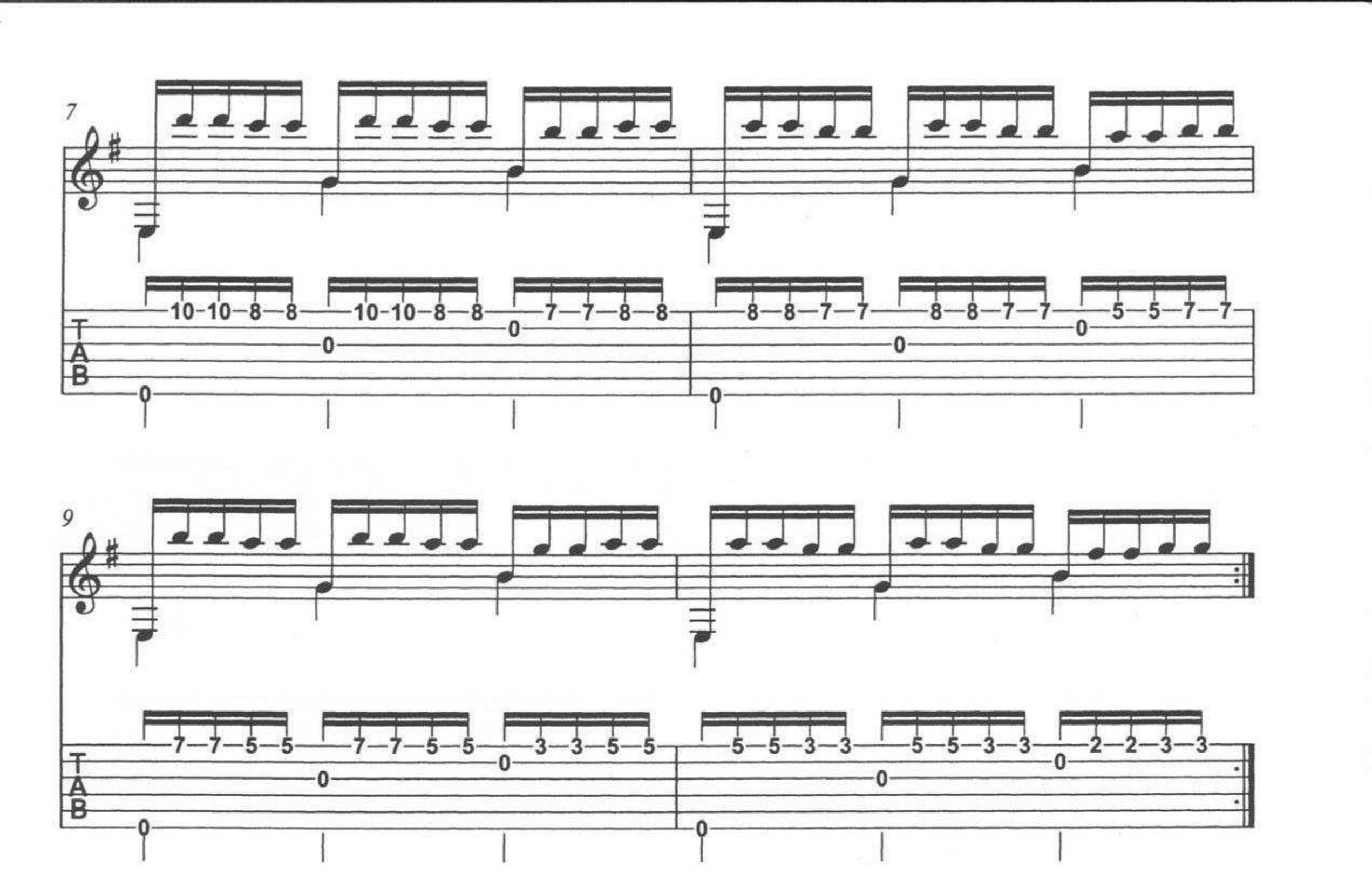
T
A
B

Here is another scalar example, slightly more difficult. This one requires you to change notes in the tremolo segment of every sequence. This example will also use an ascending sequence of the Em scale.

Exercise # 9

Melody Line Tremolo - Em Scale




7
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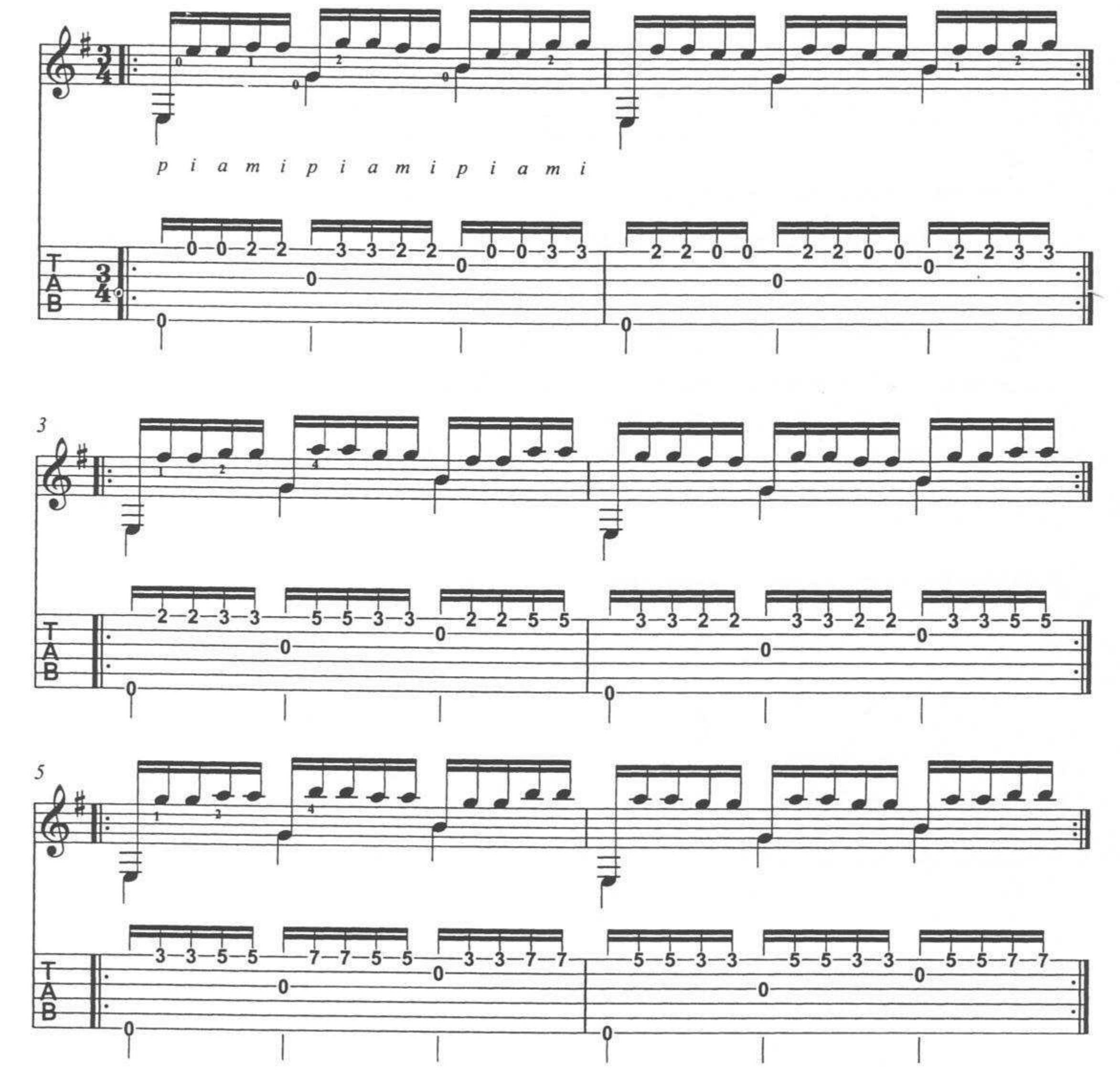
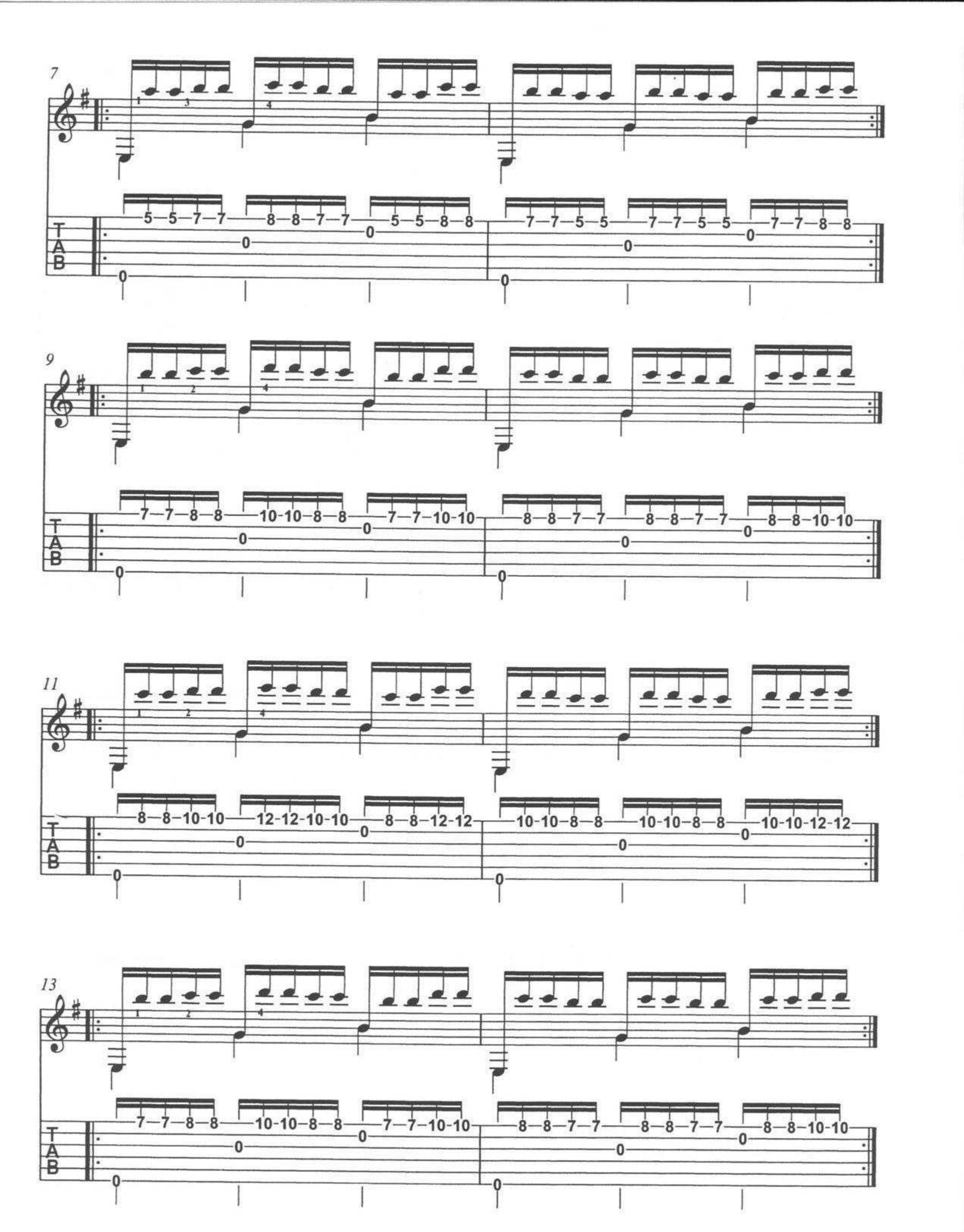
7 7 5 5 7 7 5 5 3 3 5 5 5 5 3 3 5 5 3 3 2 2 3 3

Finally, here is a last scalar example, slightly more difficult than the last. This one requires you to change notes in the tremolo of every sequence and moves in both ascending and descending directions at the same time. It is also much longer than the previous examples! This example is also based on the E natural minor scale.

Exercise # 10

Melody Line Tremolo - Em Scale

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TAB
5 5 7 7 8 8 7 7 5 5 8 8
7 7 5 5 7 7 5 5 7 7 8 8
9
TAB
7 7 8 8 10 10 8 8 7 7 10 10
8 8 7 7 8 8 7 7 8 8 10 10
11
TAB
8 8 10 10 12 12 10 10 8 8 12 12
10 10 8 8 10 10 8 8 10 10 12 12
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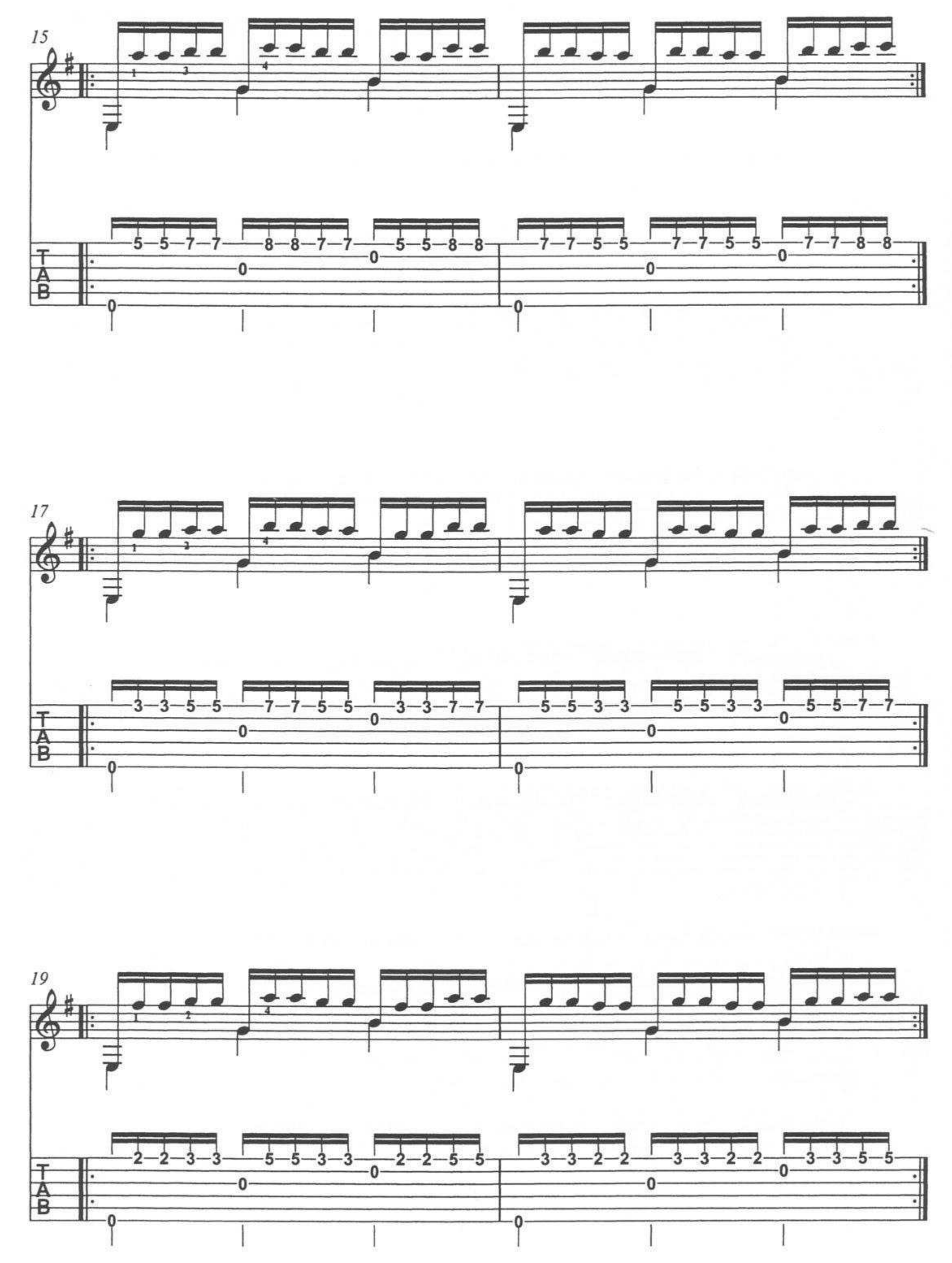
8 8 7 7 8 8 7 7 8 8 10 10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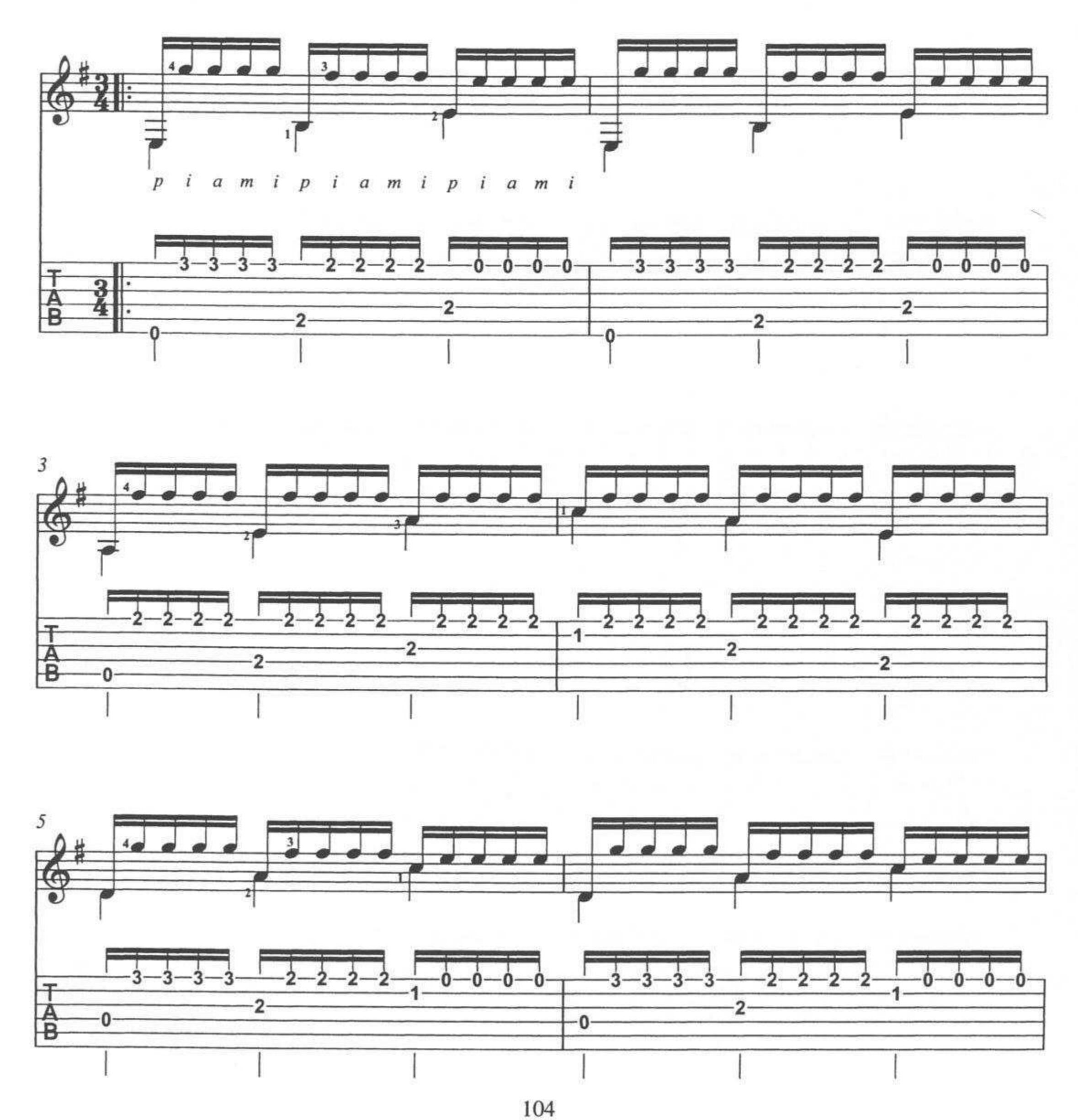
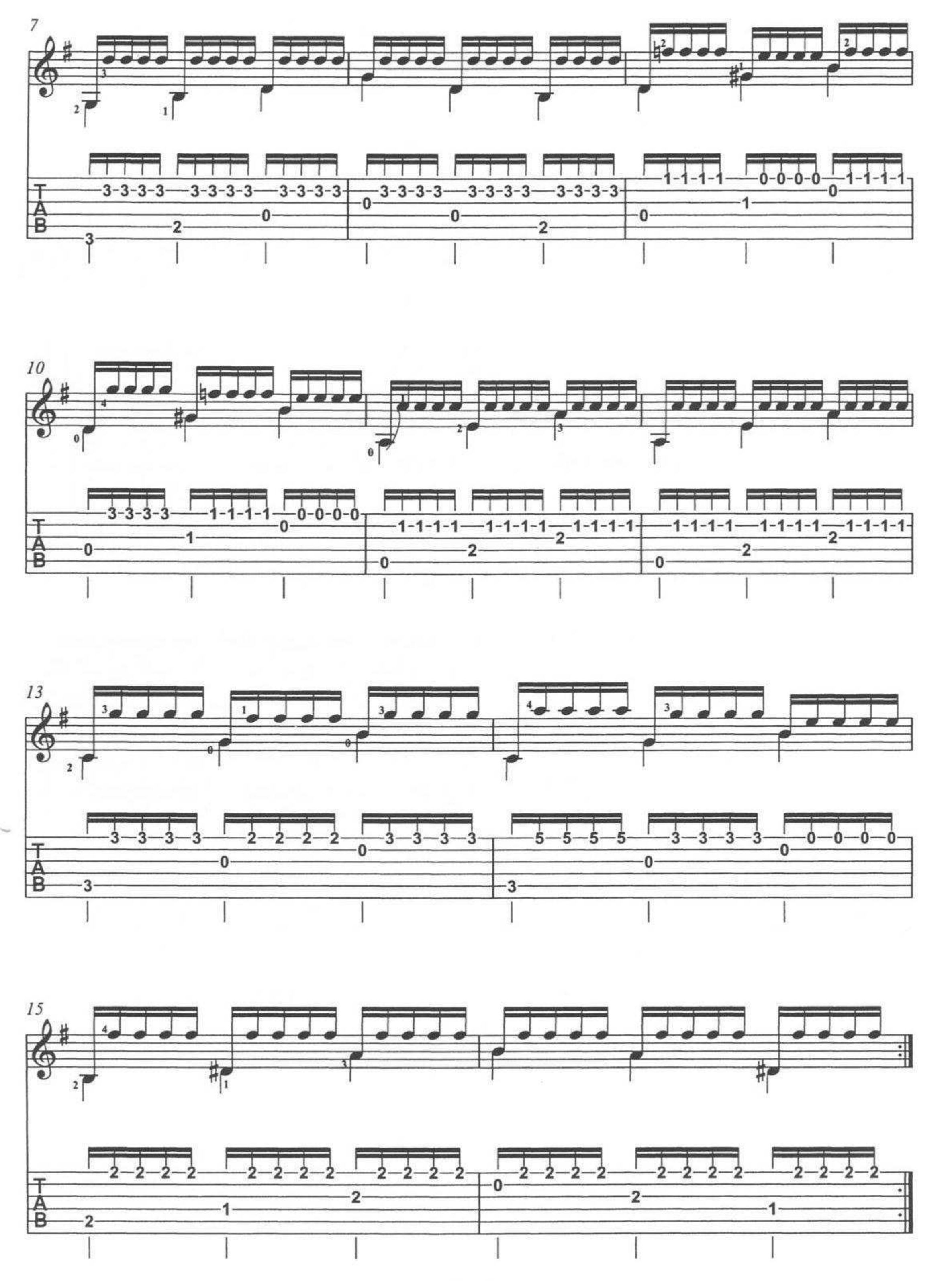
If you have managed to play the last example, you are well on your way to mastering the flamenco tremolo. Well done! Note however, that so far, we have been using only open strings as our basses and all the tremolo notes have been on the high E string! That is certainly not the case with most flamenco pieces!

Our next example is, again, just a little more challenging as it also involves holding various chord shapes while changing the notes within the tremolo. The complete composition "Angelika," based on the flamenco form of Granadinas is transcribed in my *Flamenco Journal* book (MB20925DP).

Exercise # 11

Angelika Tremolo - Easy Version

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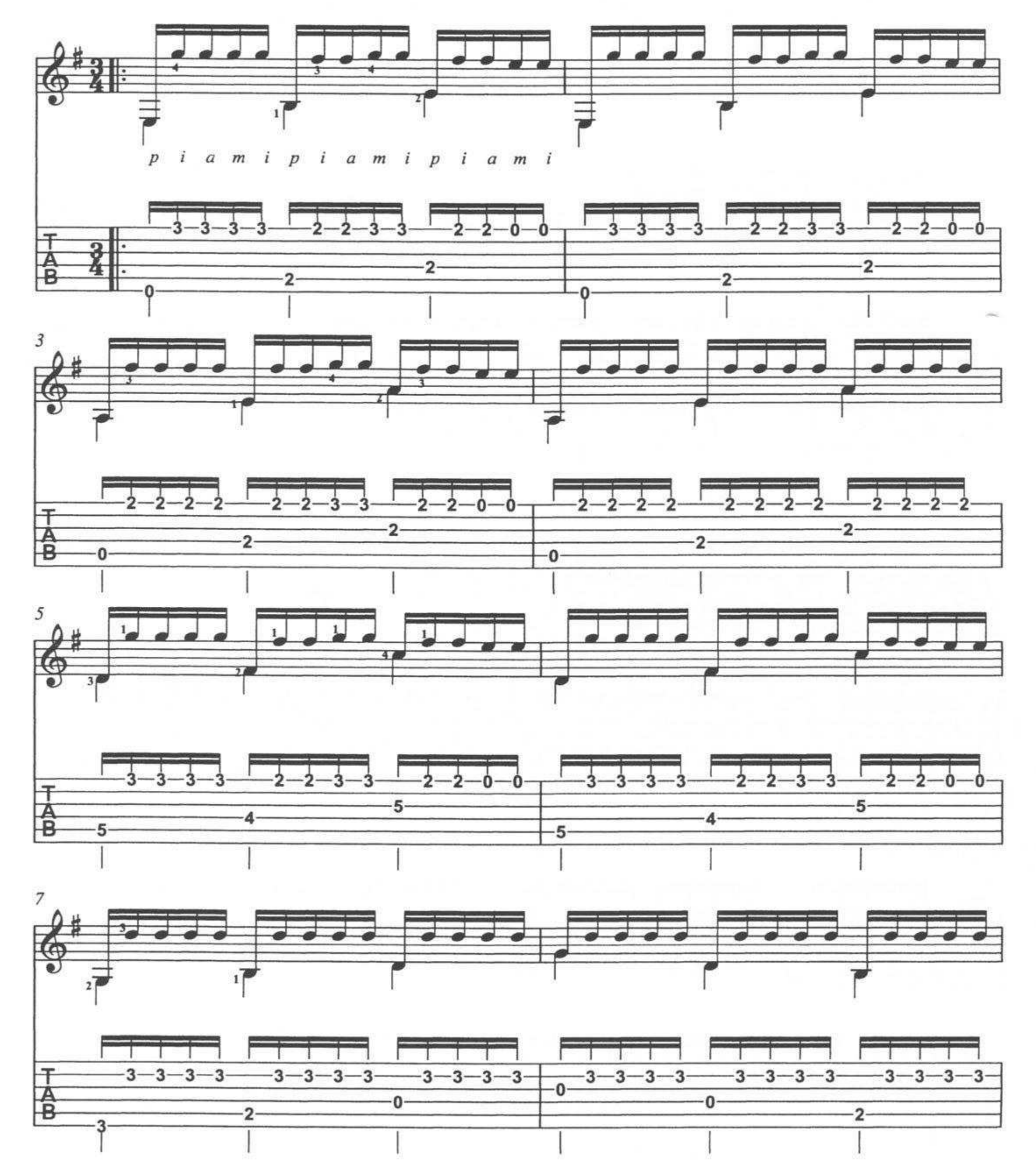
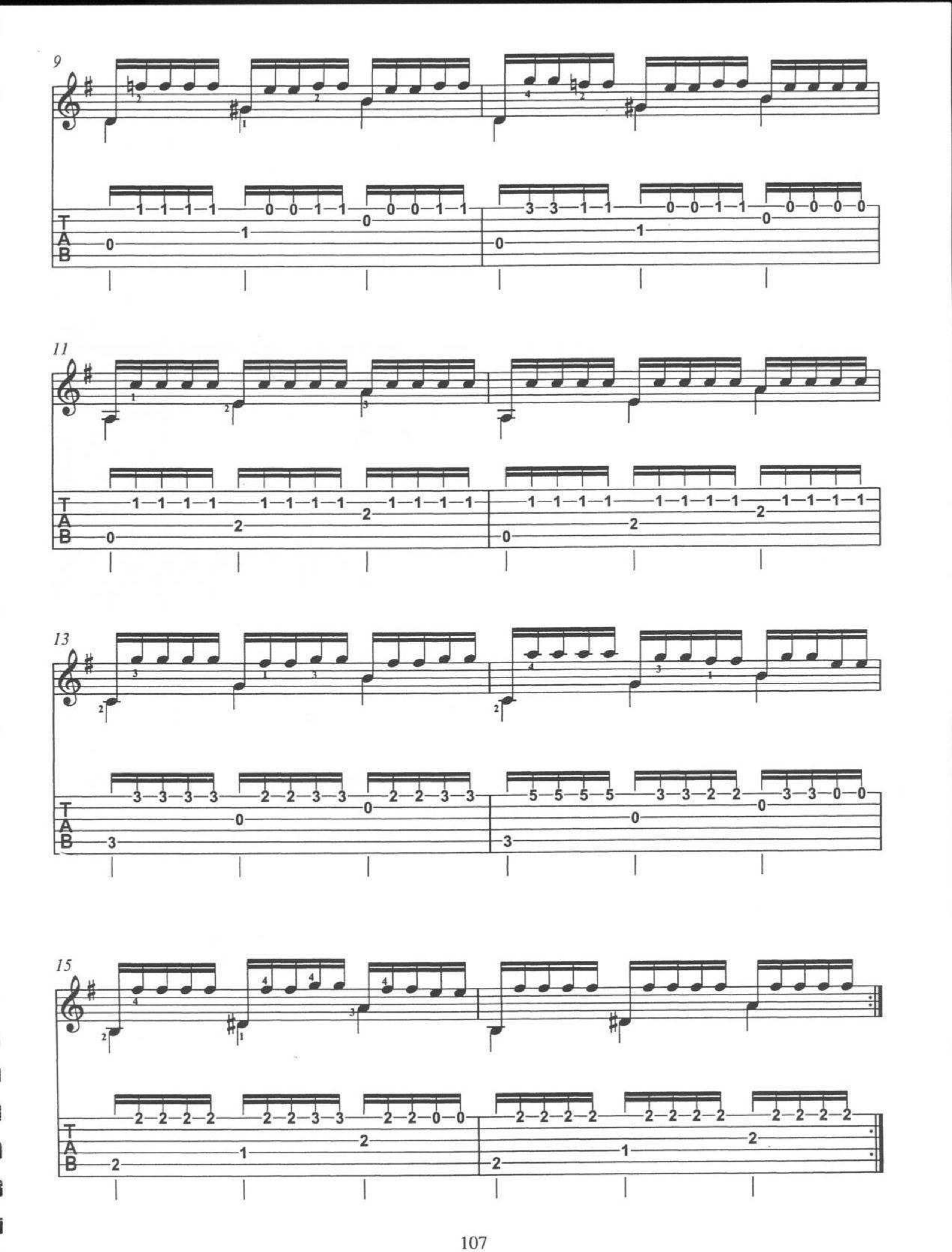
Next comes the "standard" version of the previous piece. In this version there is considerably more note changing within the tremolo pattern. Take your time in trying to decipher the desired timing of the notes.

Exercise # 12

Angelika Tremolo - Regular Version

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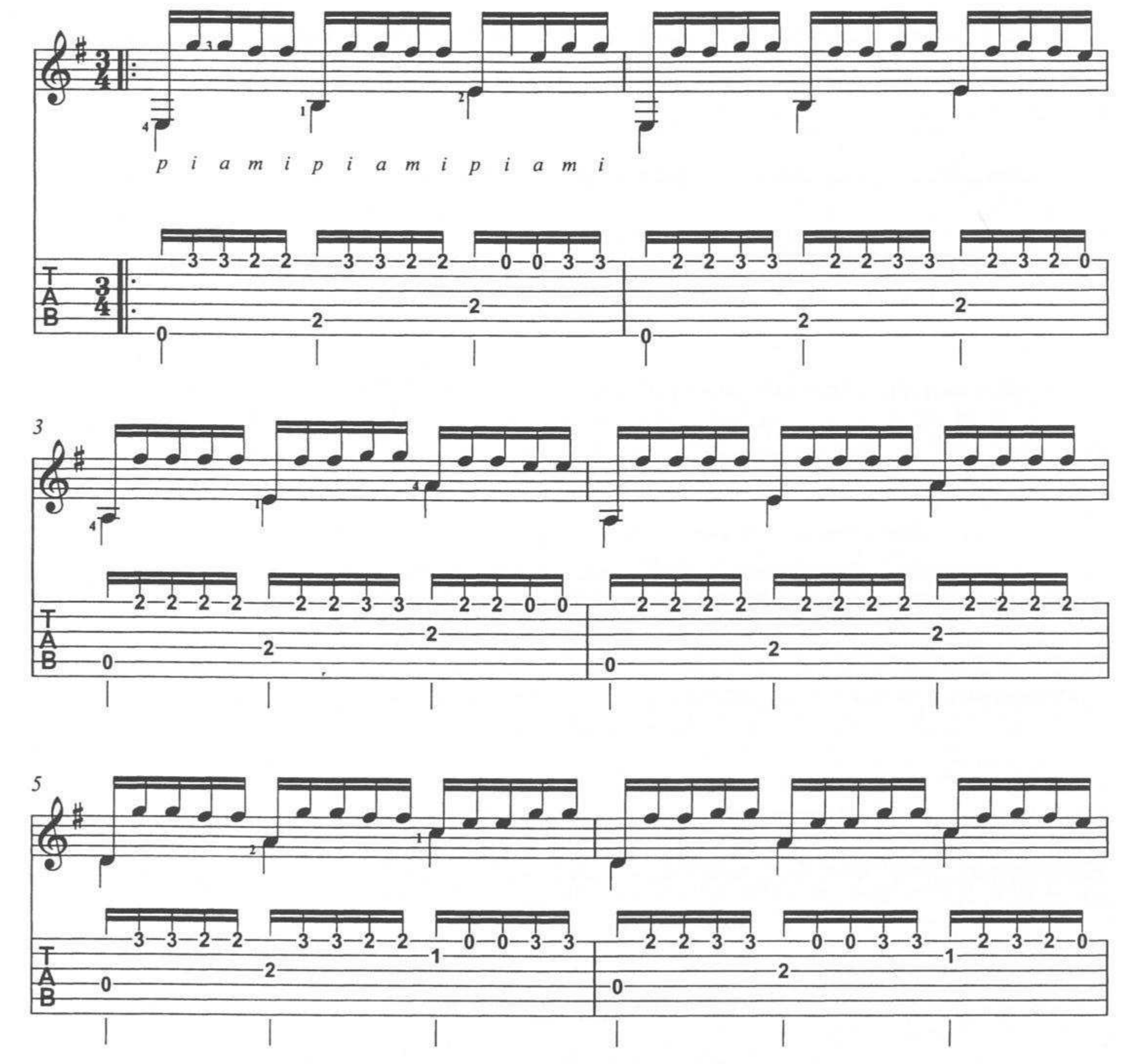
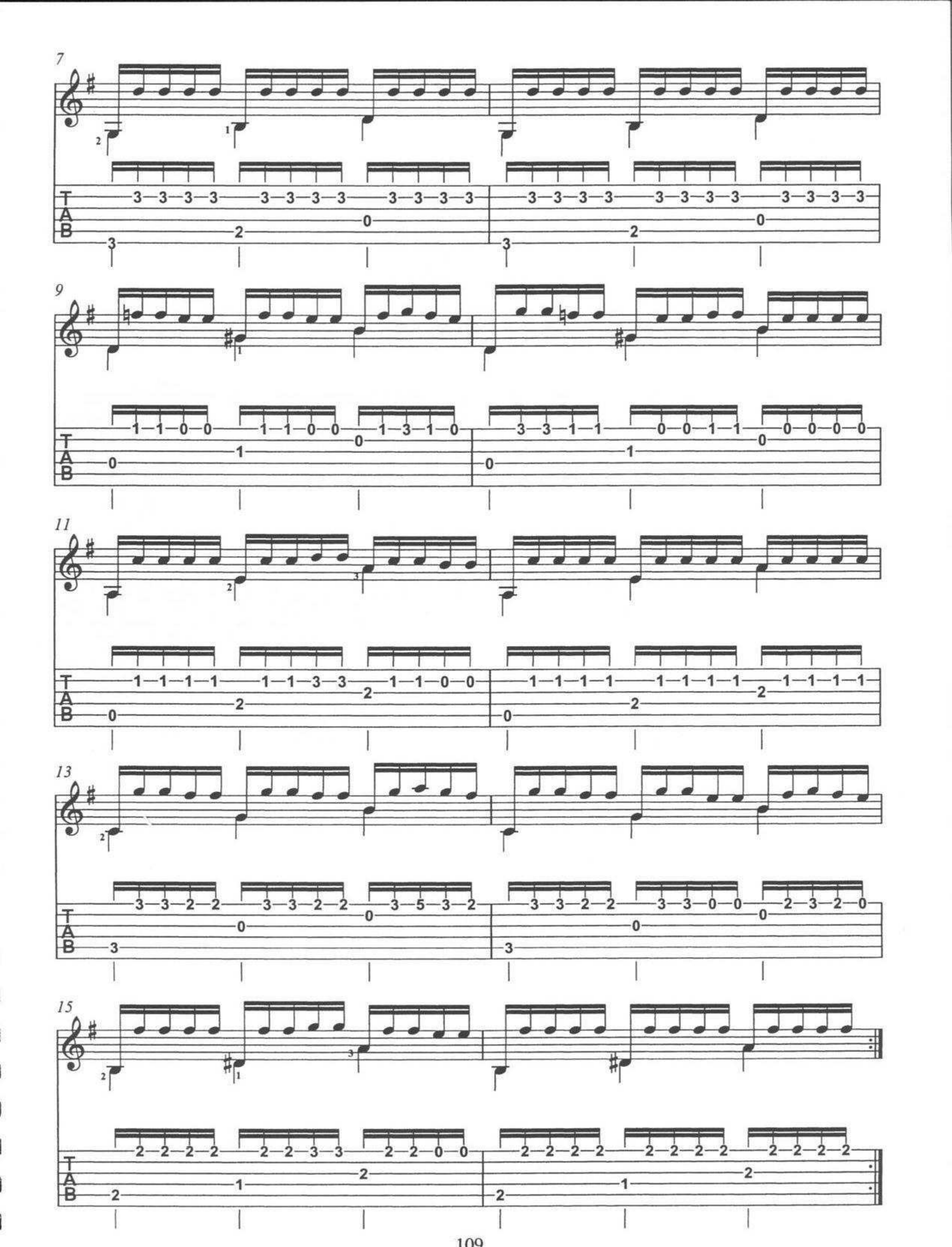
Finally, let us go to the "advanced" version of the tune. This version gets much trickier as, in many tremolo groupings, you will have to play four DIFFERENT notes! Granted, this is done at specific opportune places, but it is, as you probably imagine, no piece of cake! This is a very advanced technique and will take some time and effort to properly work into your playing. Once again, take your time in trying to understand the desired timing of the notes.

Exercise # 13

Angelika Tremolo - Advanced Version

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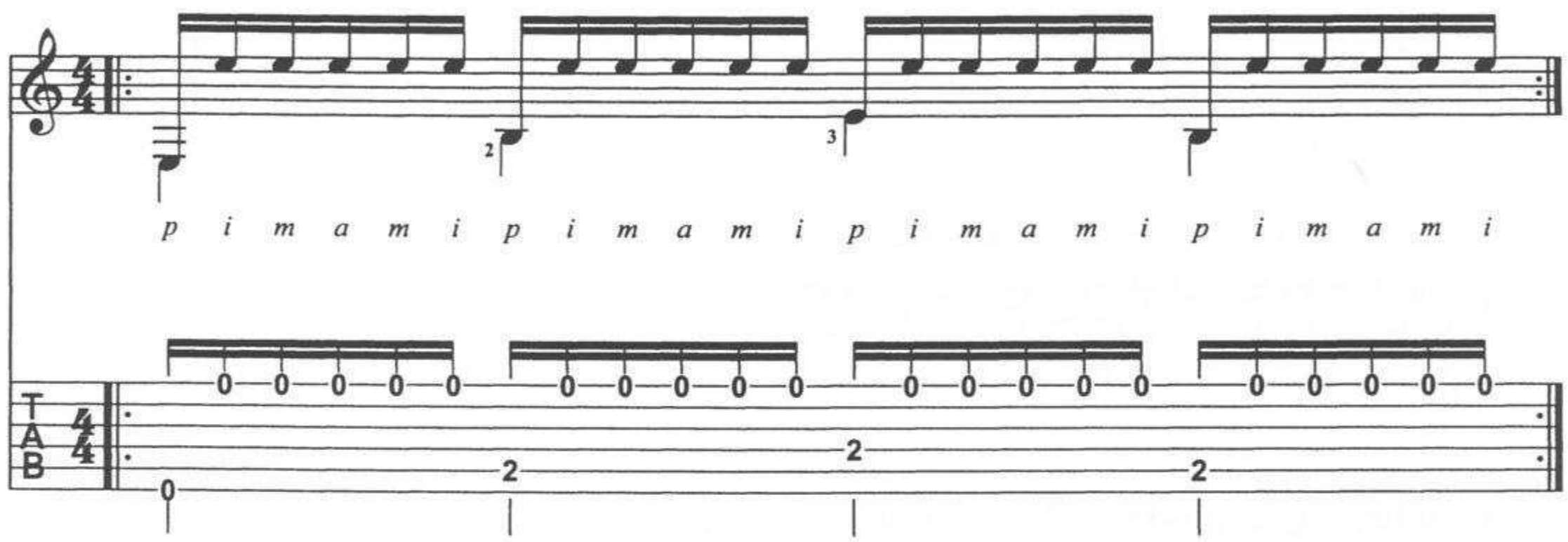
The Six-Note Flamenco Tremolo

The six-note flamenco tremolo is a variation of the traditional five-note flamenco tremolo. It is usually used on slower pieces, often when accompanying medium tempo flamenco dances. Its purpose is to "fill out" the sound and slow down the thumb alternation. Here's the most frequently used six-note tremolo pattern, played over a simple E major chord.

Exercise # 14

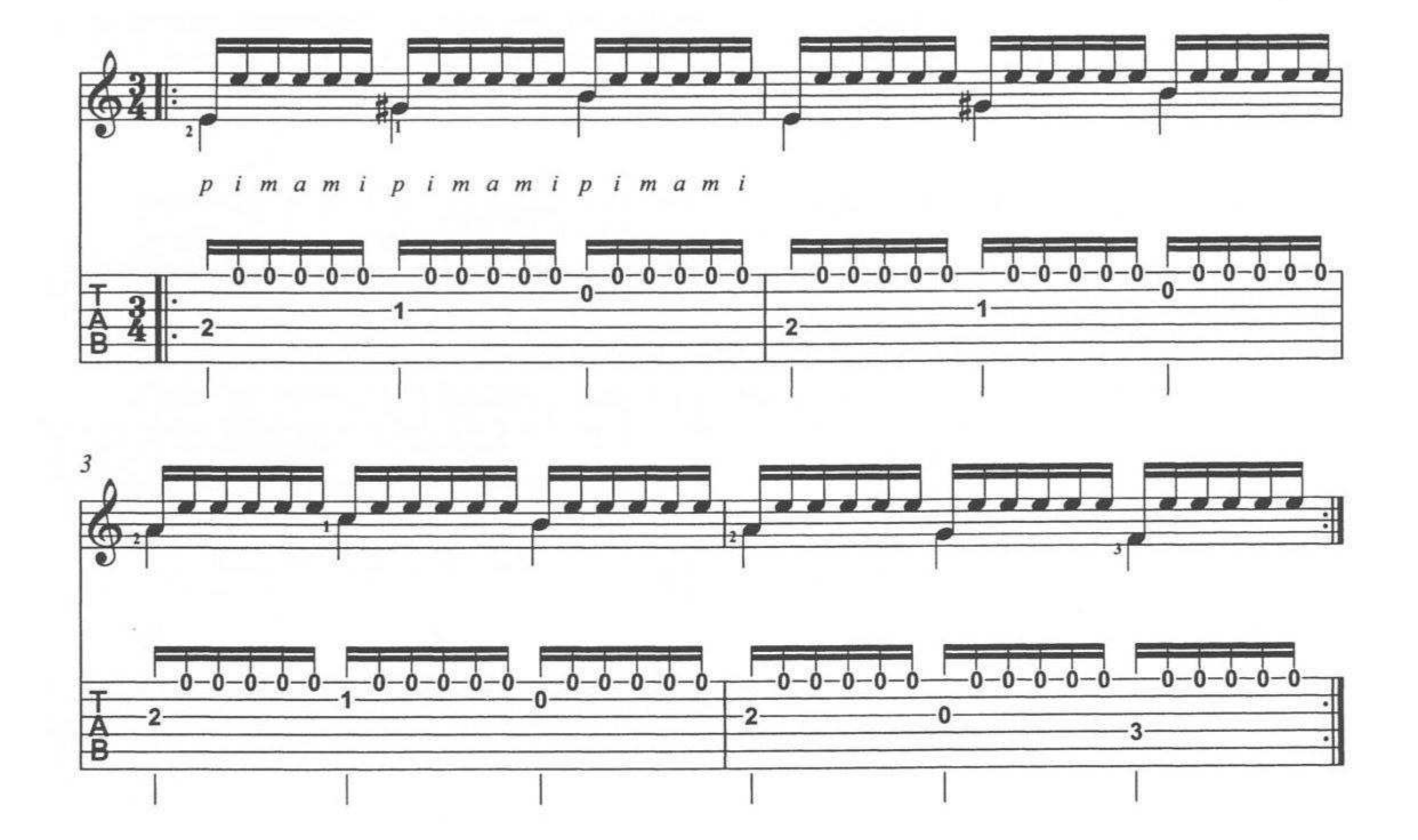
6-note tremolo



Let us repeat the famous "Malagueña" de Lecuona, this time played with the six-note flamenco tremolo. The speed of the piece is going to be even slower than before because we have an extra finger stroke, this time by the middle finger.

Exercise # 15

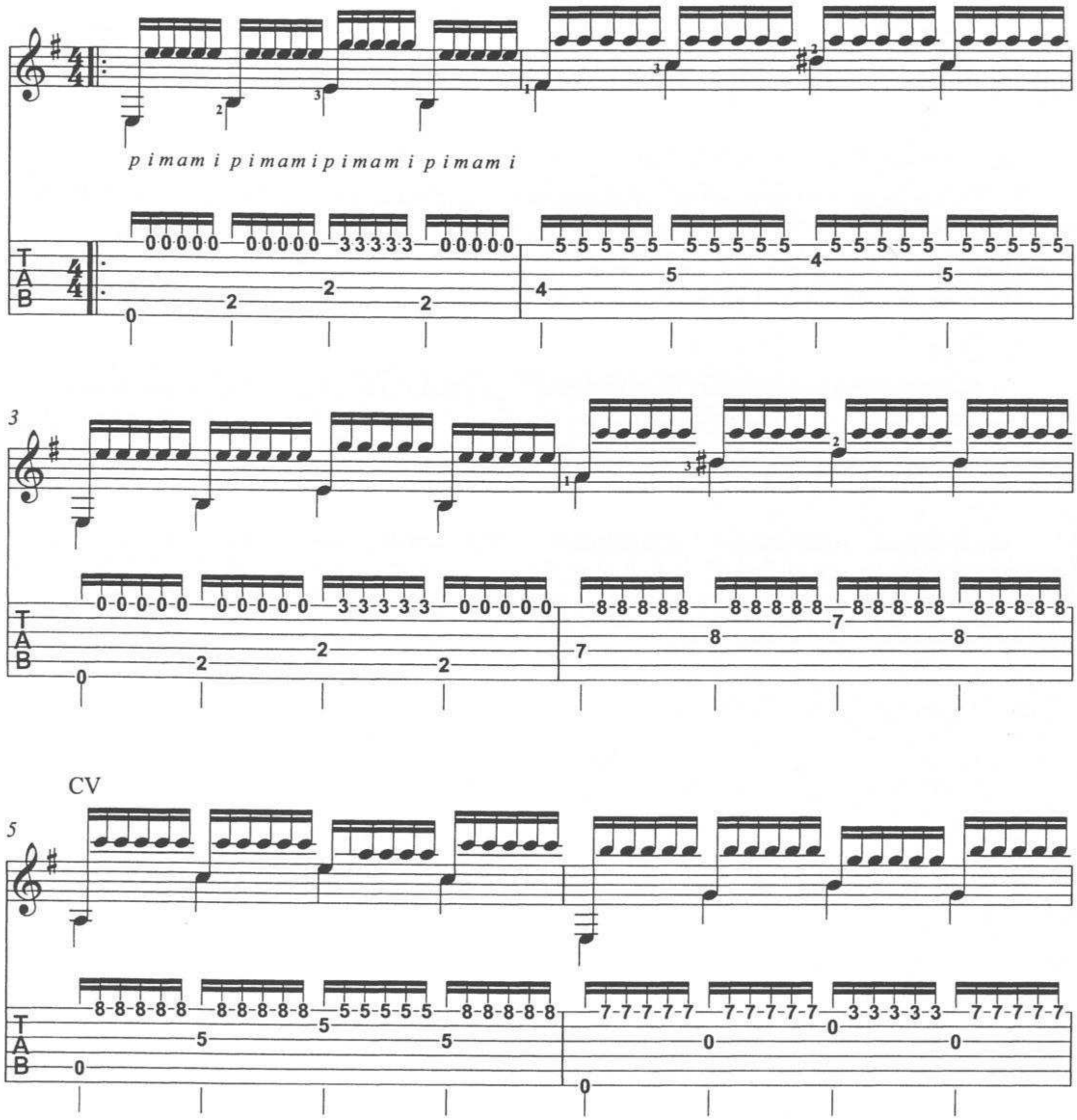
6-Note Tremolo - Malagueña



Here is an original study in the key of Em, written specifically for the six-note tremolo.

Exercise # 16

Study on 6-Note Tremolo



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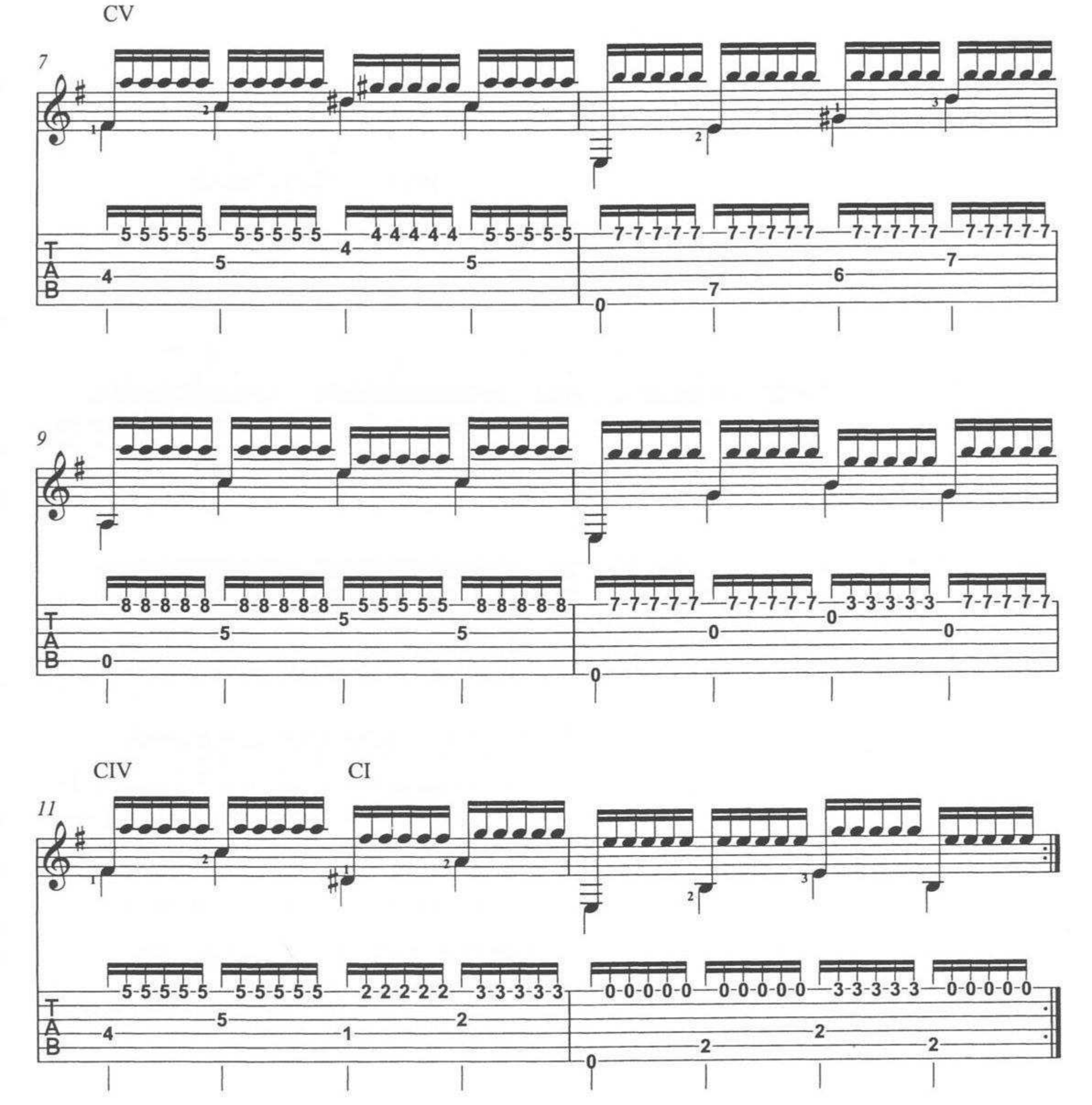
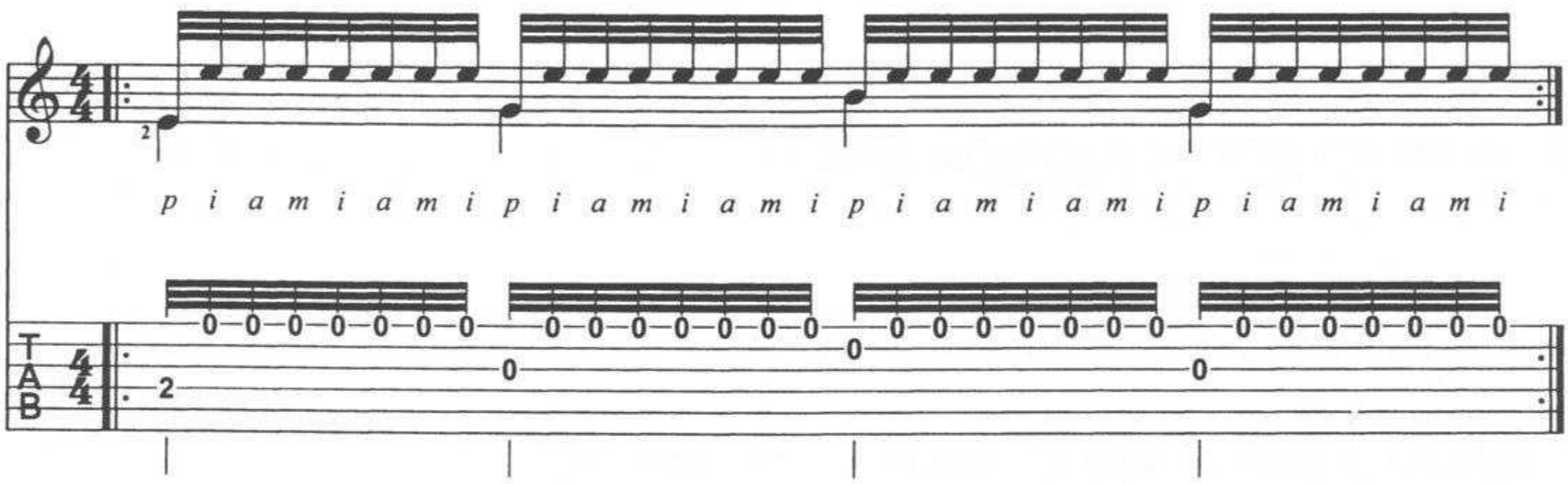


The Eight-Note Flamenco Tremolo

The eight-note flamenco tremolo is yet another variation of the traditional five-note flamenco tremolo. Again, it is used on slower pieces, often while accompanying dance! Its purpose is to "fill out" the sound and slow down the thumb alternation. Here's the most common eight-note tremolo pattern, played over a simple E minor chord.

Exercise # 17

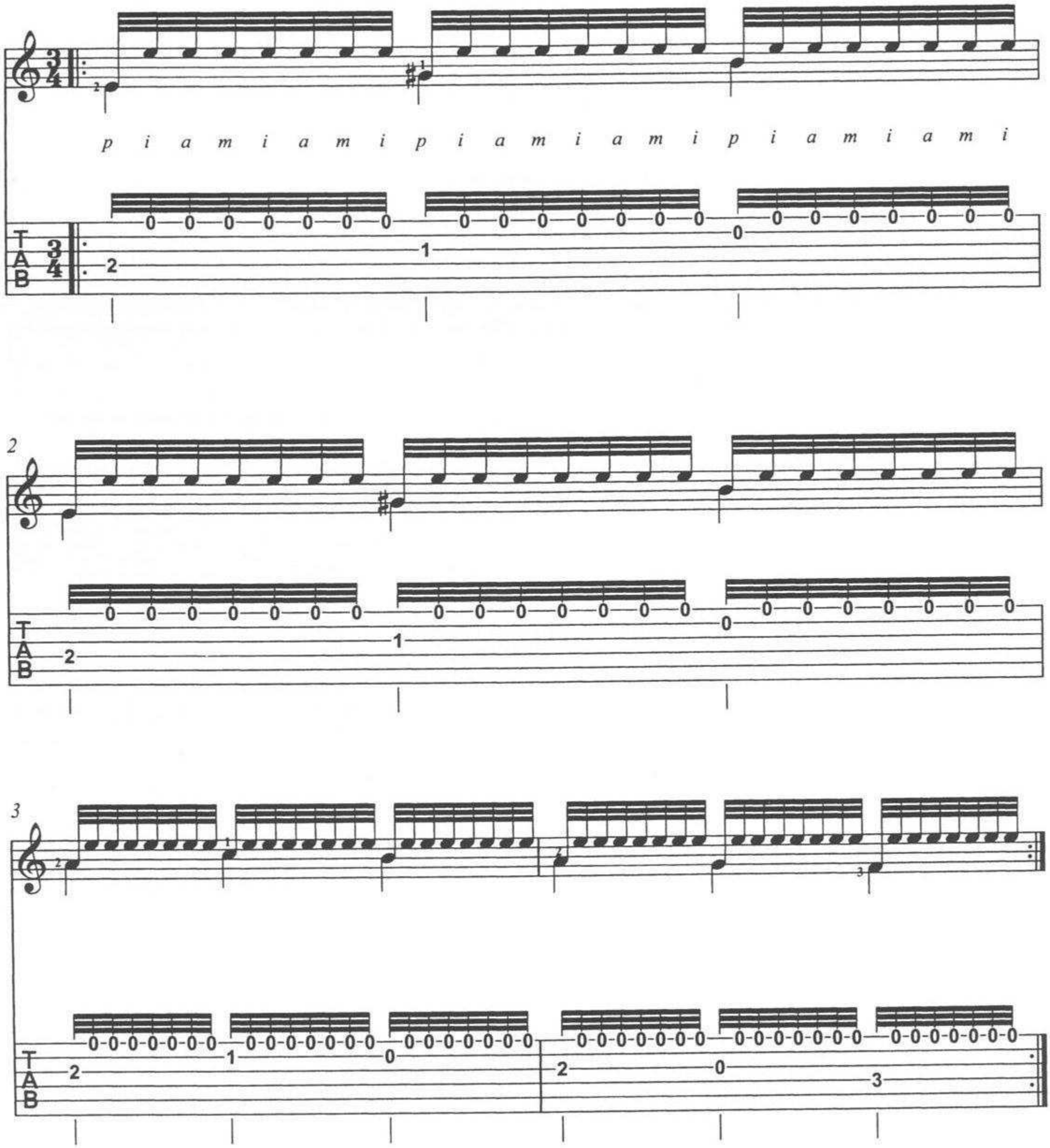
8-Note Tremolo



Again, let's repeat the "Malagueña", this time using the eight-note flamenco tremolo. The speed of the piece is going to be even slower than before, since we have two more notes than the six-note tremolo and three more notes than the traditional flamenco tremolo. The reason for using the same piece of music as an example is not for lack of repertoire or imagination; rather, is done in order to facilitate comparison of the different tremolo techniques and deep comprehension and assimilation of their inherent differences in speed, rhythm and timbre.

Exercise # 18

8-Note Tremolo - Malagueña

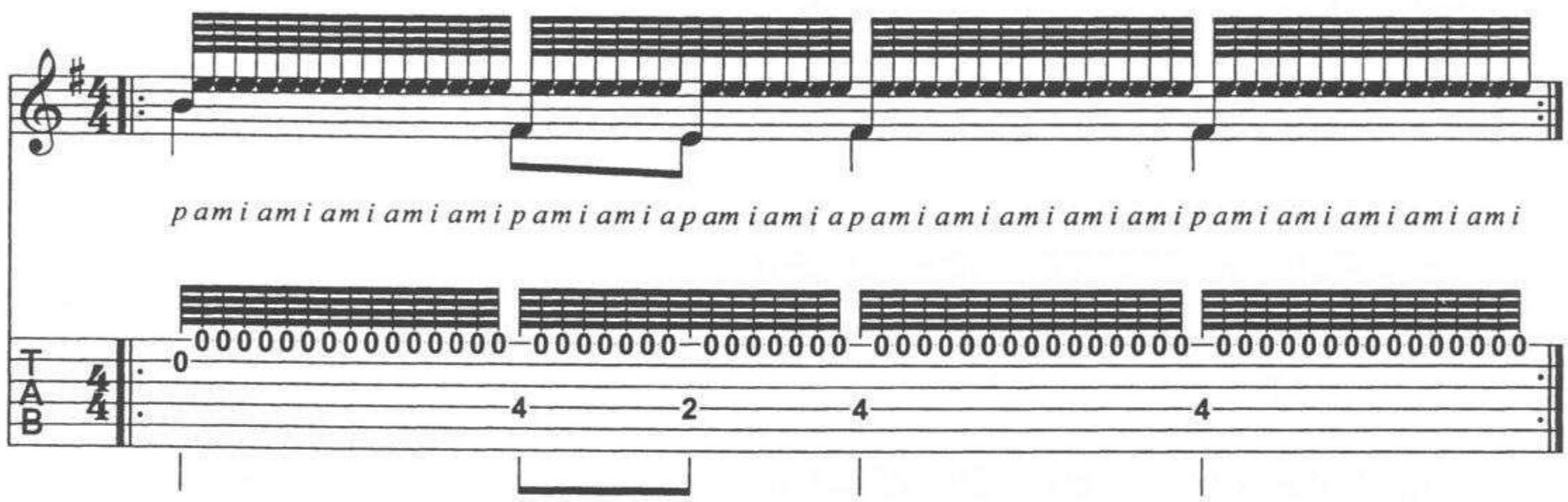


Continuous Tremolo

Manolo Sanlucar, one of the most important contemporary flamenco guitarists, uses this modern tremolo technique. The tremolo figure goes on continuously, while the thumb moves INDEPENDENTLY of the rhythm of the tremolo notes! Here's an example based on an Em chord, with the thumb part using notes from the Em scale.

Exercise # 19

Continuous tremolo



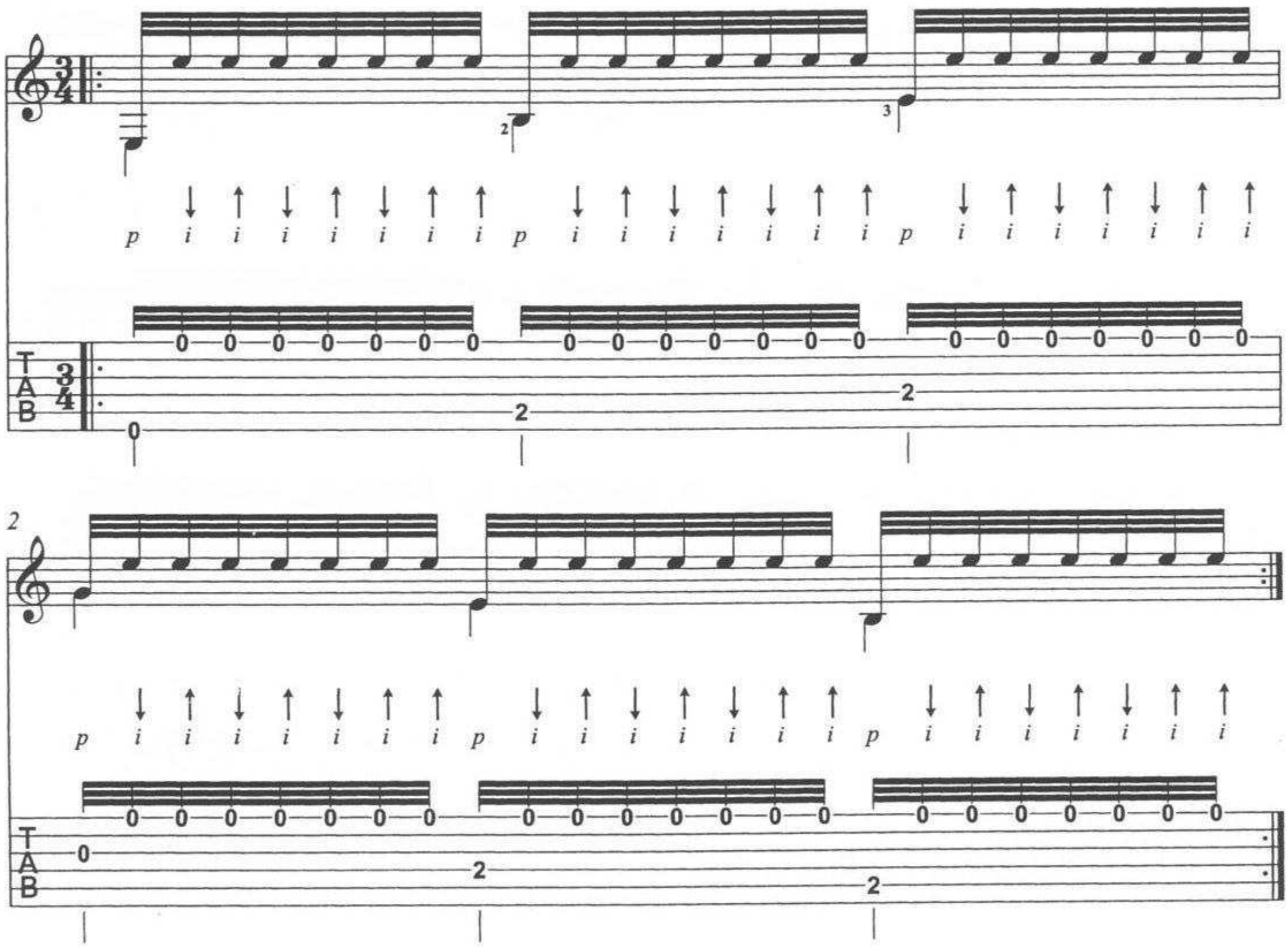
Here's a little trick that will make this pattern significantly easier to master. Try to think of it as a repeating six-note sequence played *a-m-i-a-m-i*. Then add the thumb strokes at the appropriate places. This is a very impressive technique when performed well and it really stretches the boundaries of what we expect from the nylon-string guitar, whether classical or flamenco! Stepan Rak uses this pattern as well!

Index Tremolo

Here is another very interesting, unusual tremolo technique in which the tremolo notes are provided solely by the strumming of the index finger. This finger, however, strums in BOTH directions, up and down! Here's an example, based on our usual Em chord. The first motion of the index is an upstroke.

Exercise # 20

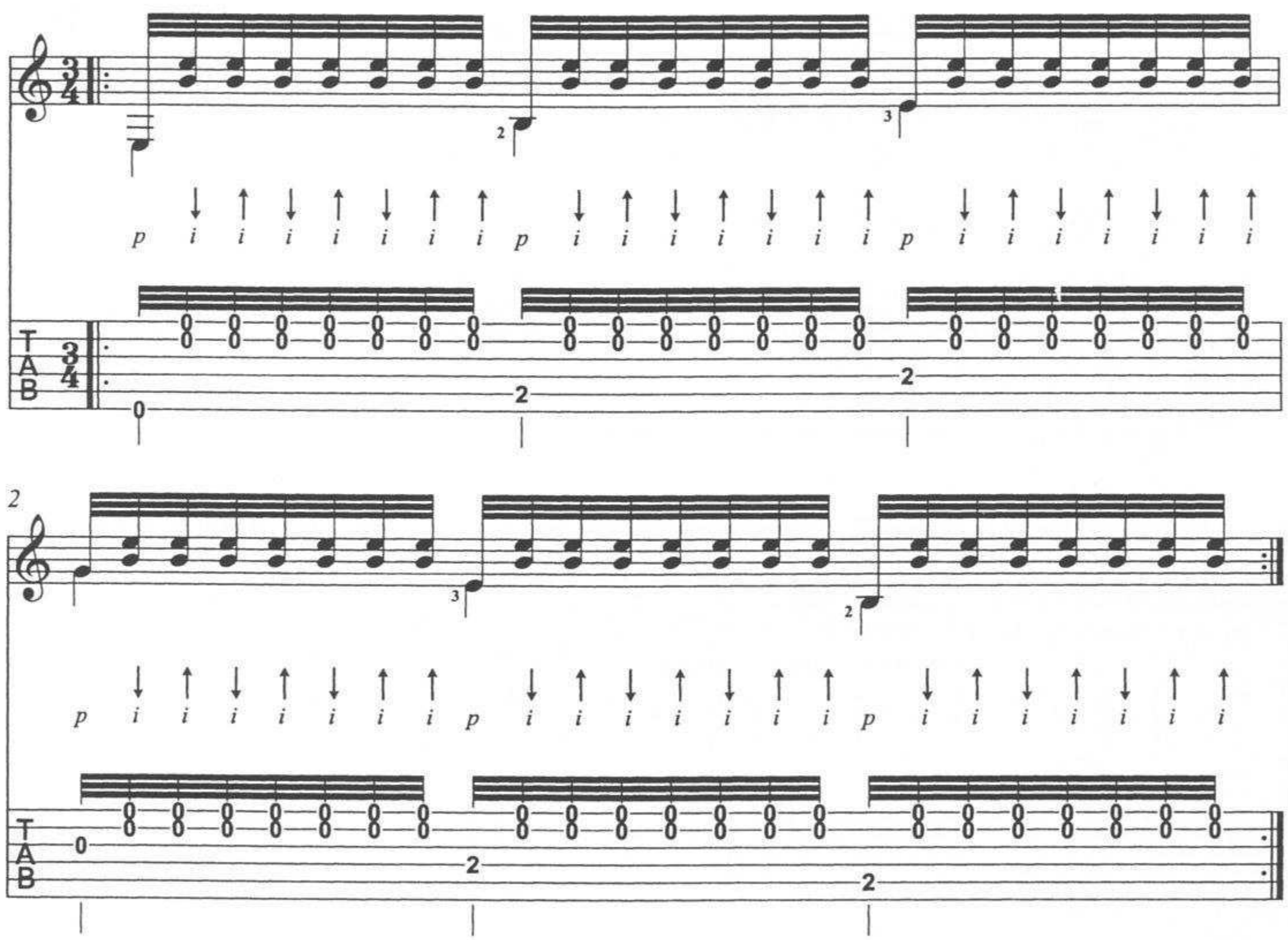
Index strumming tremolo



The natural expansion of this technique calls for strumming over more than a single string! So, now the index finger performs the exact same pattern, but this time strumming both the first and the second strings! As with the previous example, the tremolo notes are provided solely by the strumming of the index finger, which again strums in BOTH directions, up and down! Here's an example, based on our reliable Em chord. The first motion of the index is an upstroke.

Exercise # 21

Index Strumming Tremolo - 2 Strings



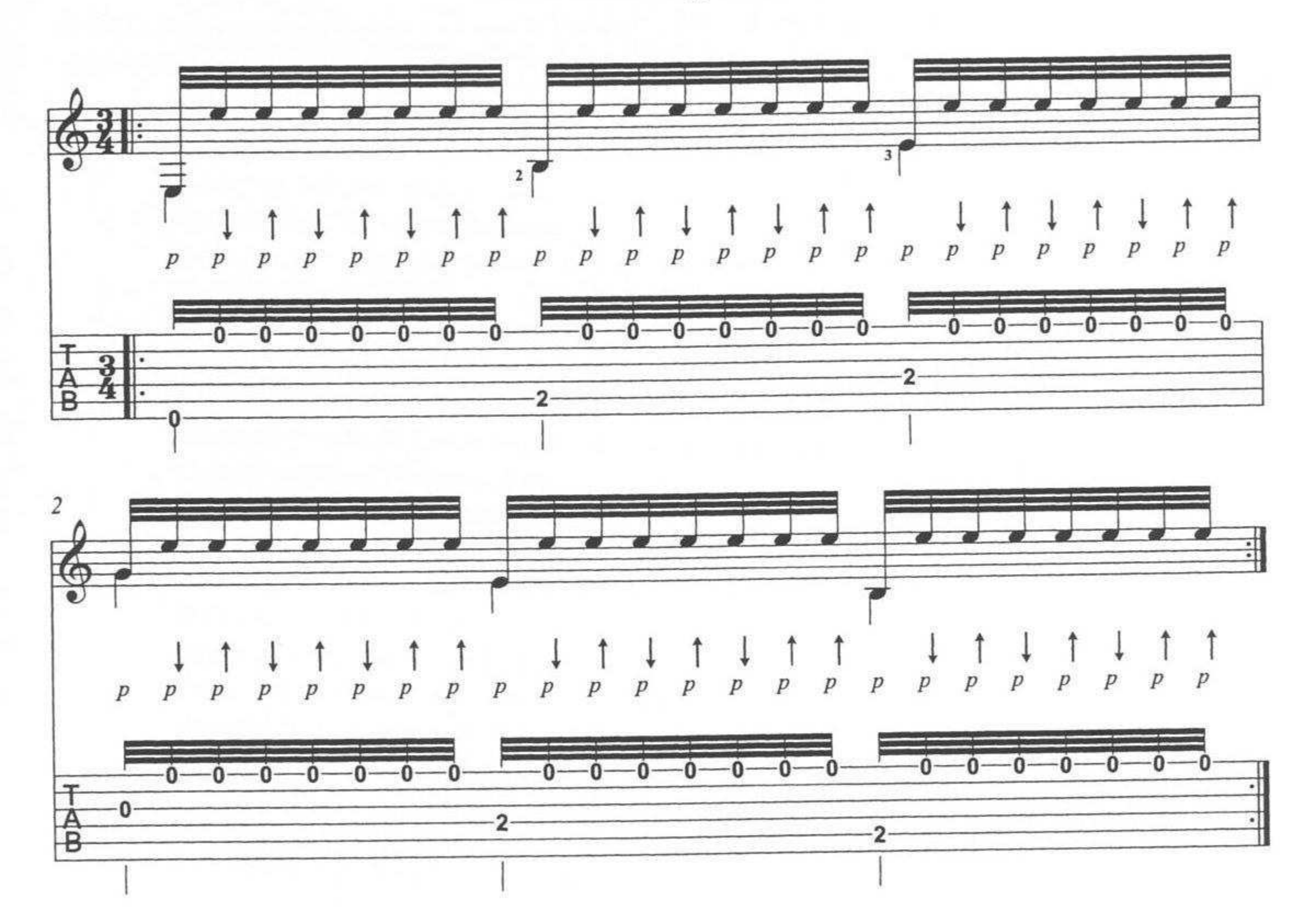
As you can hear, this technique mimics very well the tremolo sound of a mandolin or a balalaika!

Thumb Tremolo

On a similar vein, the thumb alone can provide a comparable tremolo, plectrum style. This can create a very convincing pick-style tremolo effect! In this example, the thumb starts playing the tremolo on the first string with an upstroke, but that is not obligatory. In other cases, it can start on a downstroke.

Exercise # 22

Thumb strumming tremolo



Contemporary Tremolo Innovators

Stepan Rak is probably the most important contemporary tremolo innovator! His music includes many different kinds of tremolos, ranging from very inventive and fiendishly difficult to downright impossible!!!

Several of his pieces involve a simultaneous tremolo on two strings achieved by using the normal RH fingering *pima*, but on the following strings; *a* and *i* on the first string and *m* on second string with *p* alternating between the bass and second string. This is sometimes combined with a third tremolo layer, created by rapidly hammering and pulling off the strings with the LH in such a way that interlocks with the RH!

He also uses a continuous *eami* pattern (with the thumb playing a similar pattern to the former technique). This is the only pattern where the little finger on the RH is used as part of the tremolo technique. His composition "Balalaika" includes many different tremolos.

The virtuoso Japanese classical guitarist **Kazuhito Yamashita** also uses various unconventional, idiomatic tremolos in his playing. Check out his recording of *Pictures at an Exhibition* for a demonstration of his unusual tremolo technique.

Tremolo Repertoire

Here is a list of as many classical guitar tremolo compositions I have been able to unearth! I'm sure that the list is not complete, but it is definitely quite effective and will keep anyone busy for a long, long time! I would like to thank **Vaggelis Sfikas, Kostas Zarkadoulas, David Oakes, David Schramm, Juan Serrano** and all the people at the Classical Guitar Mailing List and the rec.music.classical.guitar newsgroup for helping me with the compilation of this list with their posts throughout the years.

"Recuerdos de Alhambra" by Francisco Tárrega
"Un Sueño en la Floresta" by Agustín Barrios
"Una Limosna por el Amor de Dios" by Agustín Barrios
"Cancíon de la Hilandera" (Song of the Thread Spinner), by Augustín Barrios
"Campanas del Alba" (Bells of the Dawn) by Eduardo Sainz de la Maza, a 20th century Spanish composer
"Invocation et Dansa" by Joaquim Rodrigo has many tremolo passages
"Vidalita" by Eduardo Falu
"Nieve" by Eduardo Falu
"Una Lagrima" by Gaspar Sagreras
"Feste Lariane", the third variation by Luigi Mozzani
"Sueño" by Francisco Tárrega
"Sueño" (Reverie) by José Viñas, adapted for classical guitar by Domingo Prat
"Fantasía original" by José Viñas
"Early Dawn" by Aaron Shearer
"Tremolo (Estudio de Concierto) Op. 58" by Luis Gottchalks
"Cry of the Guitar" by Stepan Rak
"Hommage à Tárrega" by Stepan Rak
"Chernobyl" by Stepan Rak
"Balalaika" by Stepan Rak – an amazing, genuine tour-de-force of tremolo technique!
"El Delirio" by Albert Cano
"Merlin's Dream" by Nikita Koshin
"Zafra" and "Simancas" by F. Moreno-Torroba
"Melodía" by F. Moreno-Torroba – third movement of "Pieces caracteristiques"
"Mondnacht" (Moonlight Night), a Romantic piece composed by Bavarian guitarist-composer Heinrich Albert
"Ave Maria" by Franz Schubert, transcribed for guitar by José de Azpiazu, This is primarily a tremolo piece, performed in an alternate tuning
"Canto Triste" (Sad Melody) (1962) by Carmen Lenzi Tamburini
"Study" by Richard Pick
"Prelude #6" by Richard Pick from his work "Nine Preludes"
"Estudio" (1931) by Manuel Ponce
The third movement "Scherzino" "Cavatina Suite" by Alexander Tansman
"Misionera" by Fernando Bustomonte, arranged by Jorge Morel
"Tremolo Piece" by David Walbert
"Variations in Tremolo from Op. 21" by Giulio Regondi
"Sueño" by J. de las Heras
"Chant" by Brian Head
"Variation IV" from the movie "Excursion" by Nikos Mamangkakis

"Nostalgia" by Charalambos Ekmektsoglou
"Study #12" and "Study #23" by Dimitris Fampas from his work "24 Concert Studies"
"La Catira" by Antonio Lauro
The Fourth Variation from the "Sakura Theme and Variations" by Yuquijiro Yokoh, based on a Japanese Folk Song
"Romanza" Anonymous, transcribed for tremolo by Alexander Gluklikh
"ESZTERGOMIA" by Edmund Jurkowski
"Cinema Vals No. 1" by Evangelos Boudounis
"Melancolia" by Nikos Piperis
"Study No. 25" by Isaias Sávio
"Theme and Variations" by Giannis Fakides
"Lament in Tremolo Form" by Laurindo Almeida
"Panorama" by Mario Parodi
"Tema e Studio di Concerto" by S. Thalberg, transcribed by Tárrega
"Study No. 25" by Isaac Savio
"Notturno-Reverie Op. 19" by Giulio Regondi
"Prière" by Italian guitarist-composer Luigi Mozzani
"Trillo-Tremolo" by the Italian guitarist-composer Benvenuto Terzi
"Mondnacht" ("Moonlight Night") by Bavarian guitarist-composer Heinrich Albert

Flamenco Tremolo Repertoire

Moving to flamenco tremolo, things are a little more obscure... There are very few complete flamenco tremolo compositions! There is "Nana" by the great concert guitarist **Mario Escudero** and the totally amazing *Rondena* "Oracion" by the extraordinary flamenco master **Manolo Sanlucar** is mostly tremolo... On the other hand, most flamenco guitar compositions based on the forms of Granadinas, Rondenas, Malagueñas, Soleares, Faruccas, Mineras, Tarantas, Zambras and even a few Alegrias, include a substantial amount of tremolo!

Therefore, I will list a few flamenco compositions that I believe merit special consideration. These pieces include some very interesting flamenco tremolos, even if the tremolo technique makes up only part of the whole composition.

"Fuente y Caudal" by Paco de Lucía
"Farucca de Lucía" by Paco de Lucía – in my opinion, one of the most beautiful tremolo melodies ever!
"Delicada" by Sabicas
"Elegía" by Manolo Sanlucar
"Sierra Bermeja" by Enrique Melchor
"Olé mi Cadiz" by Sabicas
"Callejón de la Luna" by Vicente Amigo
"Ensueño" by Juan Serrano
"Barrio la Viña" by Paco de Lucía
"Alcala" by Rafael Riqueni
"Mi Inspiración" by Paco de Lucía
"Buscando Amores" by Manolo Franco
"Punta y Tacon" by Sabicas
"Falseta a Bordón" by Mario Escudero
"La Cartuja" by Gerardo Nuñez
"Salobre" by Paco Pena
"Malagueña de Lecuona" by Sabicas
"Alameda Vieja" by Moraito
"Cueva del Gato" by Paco de Lucía
"Sierra del Agua" by Vicente Amigo
"Recuerdos" by Manolo Franco
"Zurraque" by Quique Paredes
"Solea, Un Son Eterno" by Gerardo Nuñez
"Gloria al Niño Ricardo" by Paco de Lucía
"Candil Minero" by Enrique Melchor
"Profundidades" by Rafael Riqueni
"Tío Sabas" by Paco de Lucía
"Villa Rosa" by Rafael Riqueni

If you have not already done so, I strongly suggest checking out Juan Serrano's books, CDs and videotapes available through Mel Bay Publications. You will find a wealth of traditional flamenco tremolos included in these instructional materials.

If you would like to learn even more traditional flamenco tremolos, check out Juan Martín's book+CD+DVD sets, also available from Mel Bay Publications.

For a more contemporary approach I would suggest the numerous publications by Oscar Herrero, once again available from Mel Bay Publications.

Segovia and the Tremolo Technique

The great Spanish classical guitarist **Andres Segovia** is considered the father of the classical guitar. In his own playing, he used a different, somewhat easier pattern for the tremolo pieces he performed. He chose the pattern *pimi*! **Ruggero Chiesa**, one of the former Segovia's pupils at the Accademia Chigiana in Sienna during the 1950's, as well as the great classical guitarist **Carlos Barbosa Lima** verified Segovia's use of *pimi* tremolo. After finding out this fact, I spent a fair amount of time practicing this tremolo pattern. My conclusion is that it seems to offer a more complete dynamic control, as well as increased rhythmical accuracy and a uniform sound.

This is a very easy pattern to learn: if you have been playing classical guitar for a fair number of years, it will only take you a few minutes before you achieve satisfactory results! There seem to be two trouble spots: **endurance** and **speed**. To develop your endurance, gradually increase the continuous playing time of the pattern until you can play a complete tremolo piece using it. To develop speed, judiciously use your metronome and do not rush before you are ready!

Nail Talk

The length, shape and strength of the guitarist's nails are of paramount importance to his sound. Especially with the tremolo technique, I've observed that the condition of the performer's nails makes a significant difference in his/her ability to create a pleasant, captivating sound.

The following advice has been compiled, once again, from a variety of sources. Keep in mind, however, that you should DEFINITELY experiment with finding the solution that produces the best results for your own hands!

Nail Noise and Planting

As far as nail noise is concerned, this is a problem that torments even the best classical and flamenco guitarists! A particularly helpful solution is to use the "planting" technique. Here's a detailed explanation, based on an example by Scott Tennant:

> Before each tremolo note is played, first touch the string with the RH finger in such a way that the flesh dampens the string's vibration. Do not play at this point. With the finger in contact by flesh only, press downward lightly and engage the fingernail. The damping and subsequent nail engagement happens so quickly that it is almost simultaneous. Now play the note. Repeat the process with the next finger, and the next. The coordination required to avoid nail noise at high speeds is very delicate, so this approach must be practiced slowly and with strict adherence to avoiding initial nail contact and to appropriate damping. If practiced slowly enough, after a few weeks, the nail noise will disappear.

Nail Length

Here is a piece of advice that will have some classical guitar purists outraged! I suggest keeping the RH **nails fairly short** - they should extend only slightly beyond the end of the fingertips. This provides more flesh surface area to damp the string with. Longer nails make damping much more difficult. While it seems that longer nails produce a brighter and more definite tone, in most cases, the "clicking" sound plagues those who use them.

The best solution seems to be to grow your nails to the point where you can effectively dampen the strings and still get a clear tone. If you're clicking a lot during tremolo, your nails are probably too long! On the other hand, if your nails are too short the tone produced is not clear! If you're experiencing drag from flesh contact, then you're making too much or incorrect flesh contact, or the nails are WAY too short. There's definitely a line that can be crossed either way, and via observation and experience you can find what gives the best results. Contrary to popular belief, some of the best classical guitarists (John Williams, Manuel Barrueco, etc.) use short nails in their playing!

Bibliography

It is impossible to provide a complete breakdown of all the sources that provided me with all the information included in this book. However, I will try to note the most important books and publications I studied during my research for this educational project.

- *Classical Guitar Pedagogy* by Anthony Glise
- *Kitharologus* by Ricardo Iznaola
- *Pumping Nylon* by Scott Tennant
- *The Christopher Parkening Guitar Method* by Christopher Parkening
- *Guitar Lessons Books 1-6* by Julio Sagreras
- *L'Arte de la Manno Destra* by Mauro Storti
- *Guitar Book No. 3* by Evangelos Asimakopoulos
- *The Guitar* by Michael Stimpson
- *Classical Guitar Answer Book* by Sharon Isbin
- *Learning the Classic Guitar* by Aaron Shearer
- *The Guitarist's Complete Technique Kit* by Bryan Townsend
- *Guitar Tremolo and How to Achieve It* by Sophocles Pappas
- *The Guitar Technique* by Evangelos Boudounis
- *Classical Guitar Lessons* by Charalambos Ekmektsoglou
- *Flamenco Guitar Basic Techniques* by Juan Serrano
- *El Arte Flamenco de la Guitarra* by Juan Martin

A significant amount of material was assembled from the recorded transcriptions of hundreds masterclasses I have attended throughout the years.

Acknowledgements

There are numerous people that I would like to thank, without the help and support of whom, I would never have been able to achieve my personal and professional goals. The greatest thanks go to my parents, Efthalia and Konstantinos Anastassakis, for their continuous and multi-faceted support throughout all my years of study.

Very special thanks to my most important teacher and mentor Juan Serrano, the first person to actively encourage me to write.

To my grandparents Konstantinos and Maria Anassis who instilled in me a deep appreciation of ethnic music from a very young age.

To Stephen Rekas for his informed (and very necessary) editing.

I would be unforgivably remiss if I neglected to sincerely thank my teachers, Stelios Karaminas and David Oakes.

For his invaluable professional help, many sincere thanks to David Grimes.

For all the years of inspiration, I am forever indebted to the great flamenco masters Paco de Lucía, Juan Martín, Paco Peña, Vicente Amigo, Gerardo Nuñez, and Sabicas.

To my good friends and colleagues Sokratis Mastrodimos and Theodosis Temzelides for proofreading everything and catching (hopefully all) my mistakes.

Conclusion

Well, this effectively concludes this book! I hope you enjoyed reading it and practicing the various tremolo patterns outlined in it as much as I enjoyed writing and researching it.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the tremolo is a technique that seems to transcend the physical limitations of the guitar. In my opinion, it is a highly rewarding technique and it is definitely worth a significant amount of devoted study.

Let me once again repeat that you should be very careful when practicing the more advanced sections of this book. If you feel any pain or discomfort, stop and take a break!

As a shameless plug, if you enjoyed this book, make sure to check out my first flamenco book, available from Mel Bay Publications, titled *The Art of Rasgueado* (MB98405). It follows a very similar format to the book you are now holding, but deals exhaustively with the **rasgueado** technique and all its permutations in both flamenco and classical guitar. It covers over 80 different rasgueado patterns, plus the flamenco technique of *golpe* and includes an extended chapter devoted to playing the Rumba rhythm, as popularized by The Gypsy Kings, Ottmar Liebert, Oscar Lopez and Jesse Cook.

Finally, for those of you in perpetual search of new flamenco repertoire my latest Flamenco Book/DVD, available from Mel Bay Publications, titled *Flamenco Journal* (MB20925DP) includes over 140 pages of original compositions for solo flamenco guitar. The book comes with an instructional DVD that clearly demonstrates and explains all the flamenco specific techniques and rasgeuado patterns used in the compositions, as well as complete studio recordings of all compositions.

If you have any comments, suggestions or questions, feel free to email me at ioannis@ioannis.org. And while you are at it, check out my website at www.ioannis.org and my Myspace profile at www.myspace.com/ioannisanastassakis.

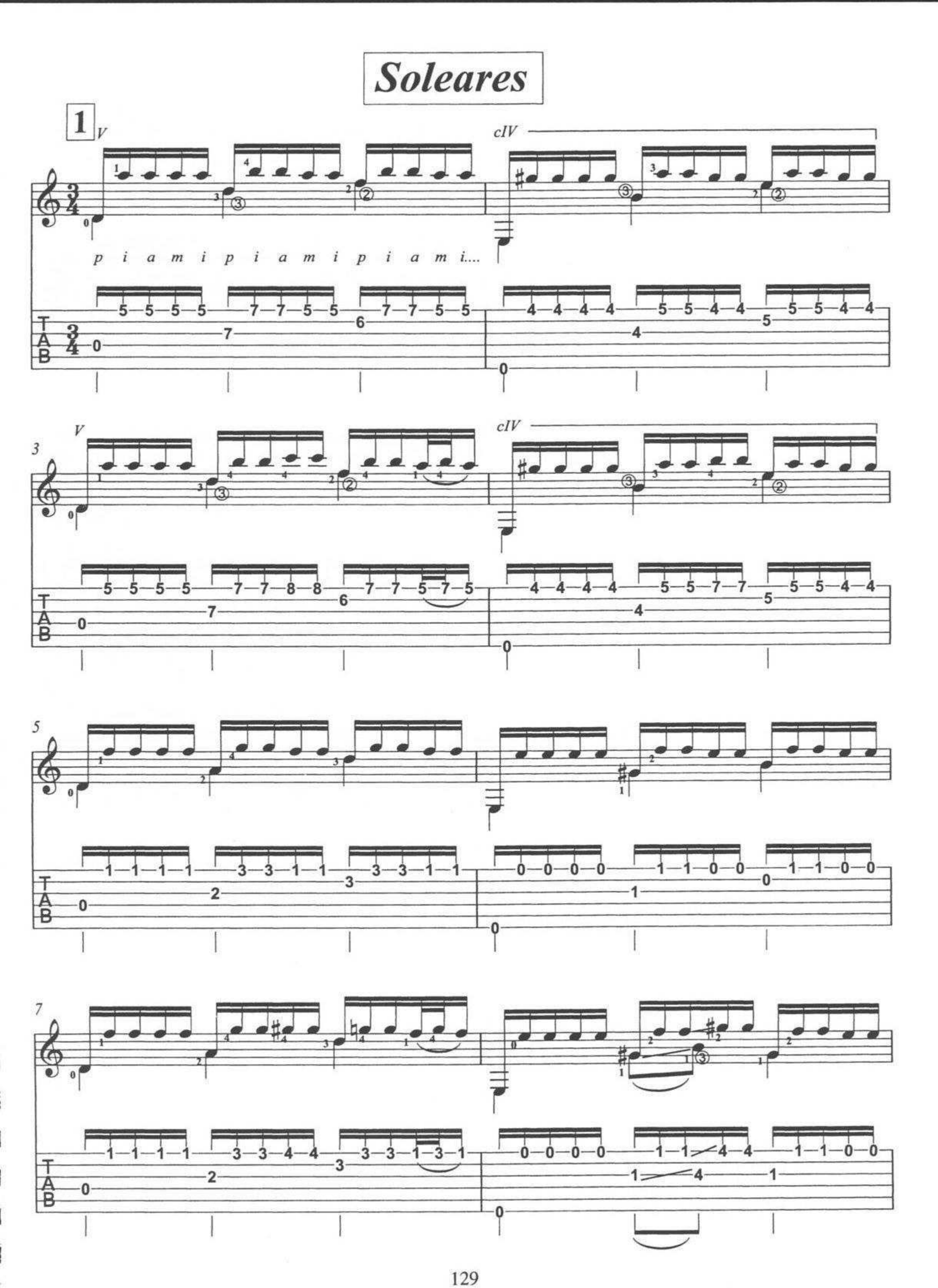
Best wishes,
Ioannis Anastassakis
Athens, Greece

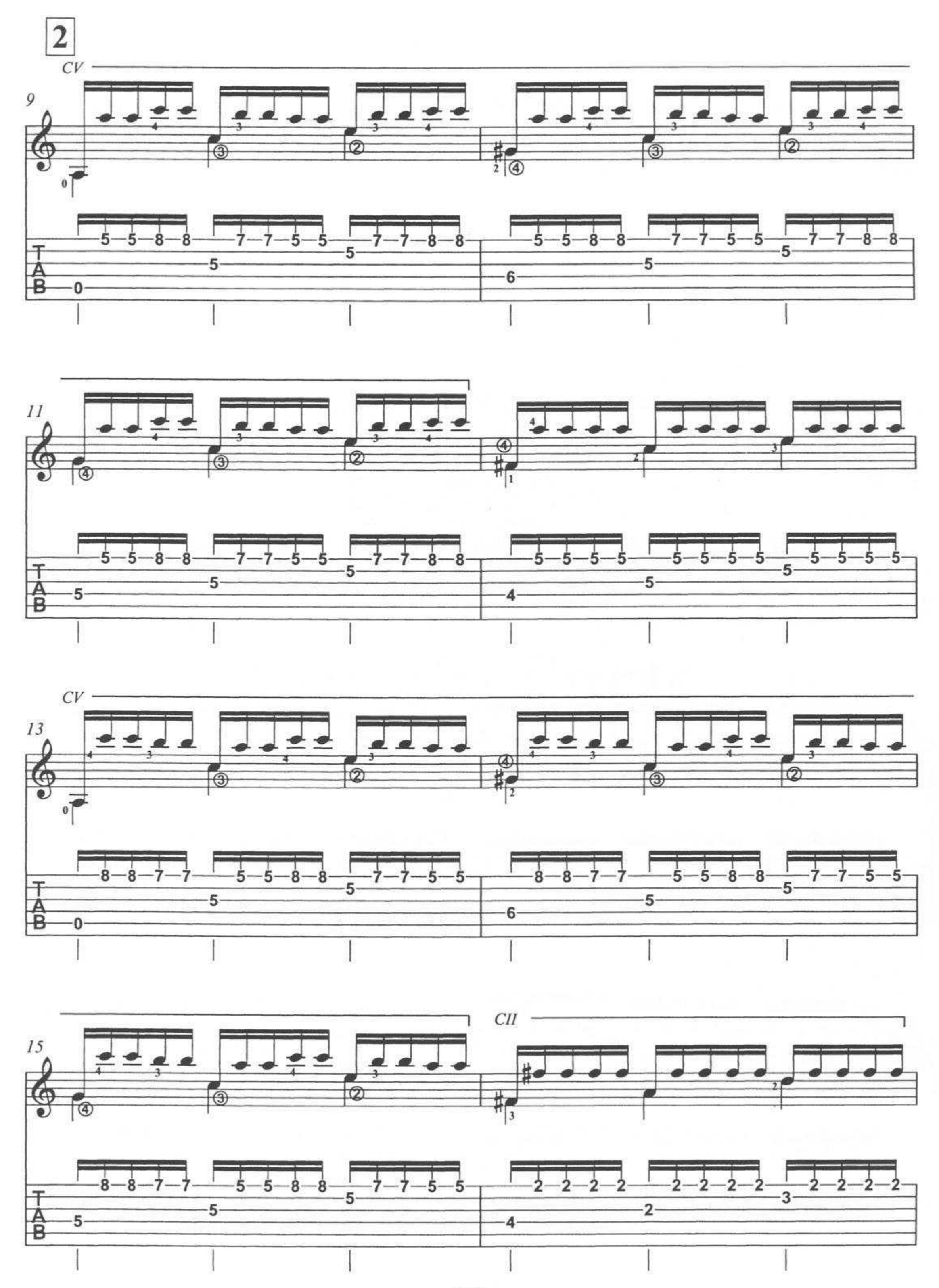
Bonus

Flamenco

Tremolo Parts

Soleares

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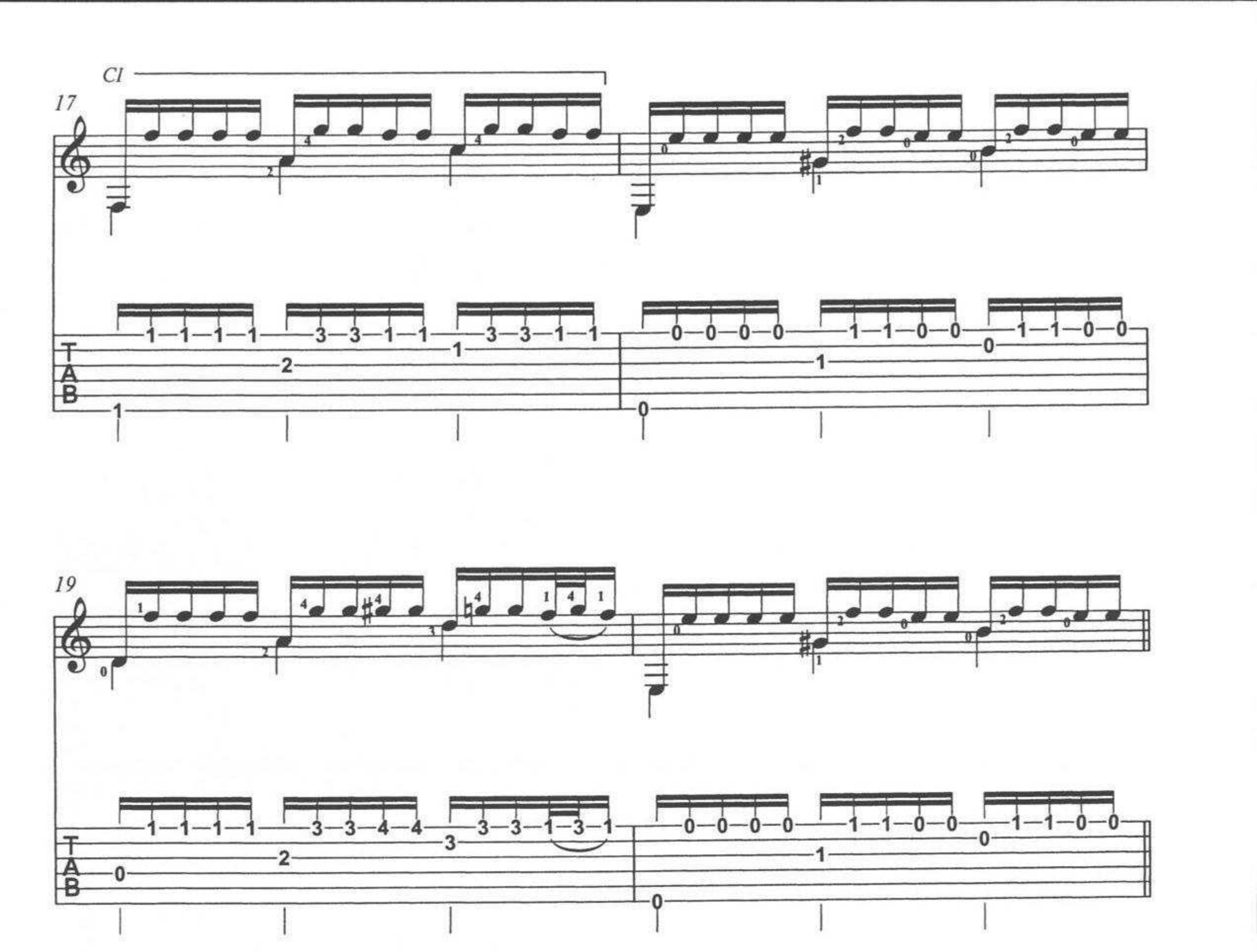
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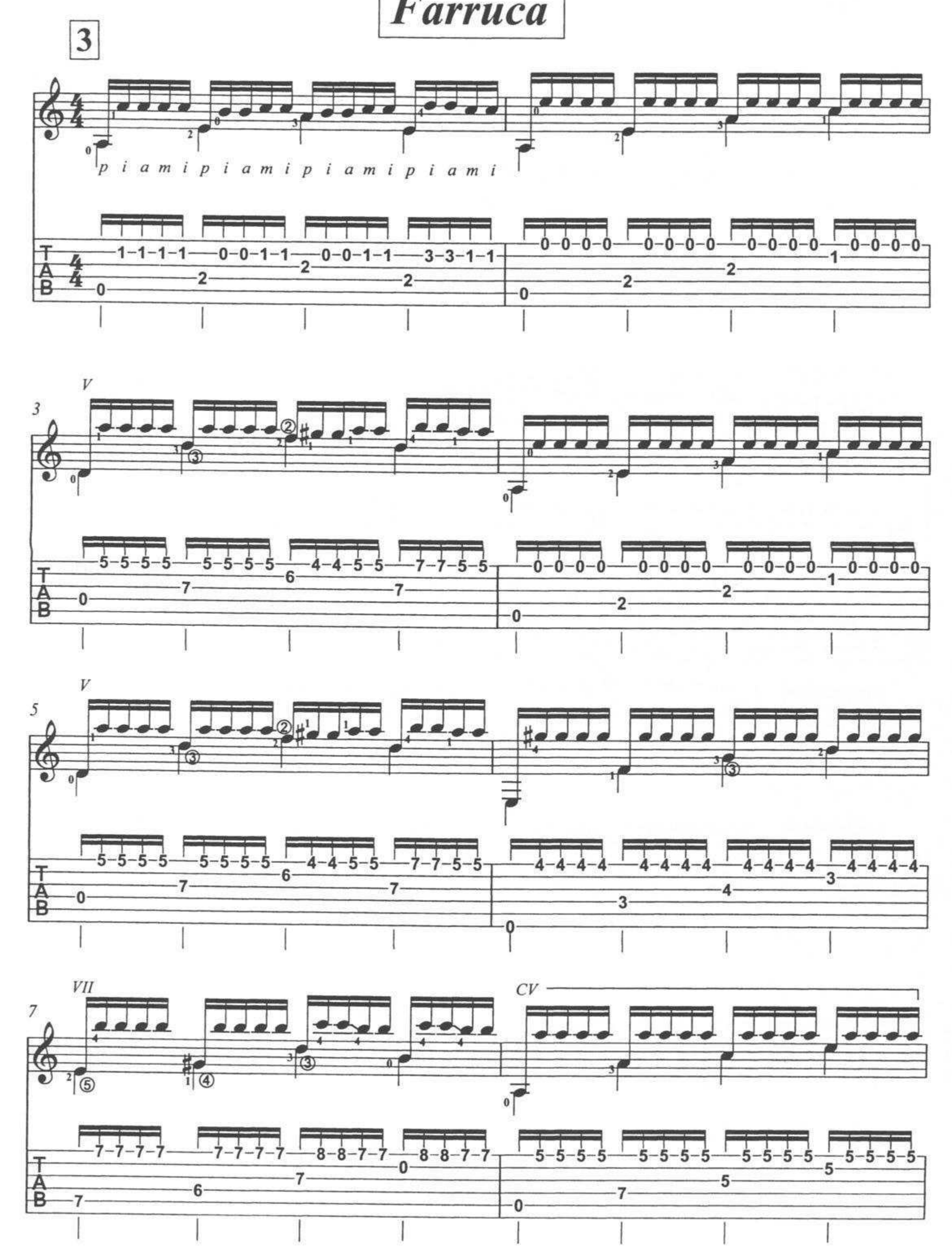

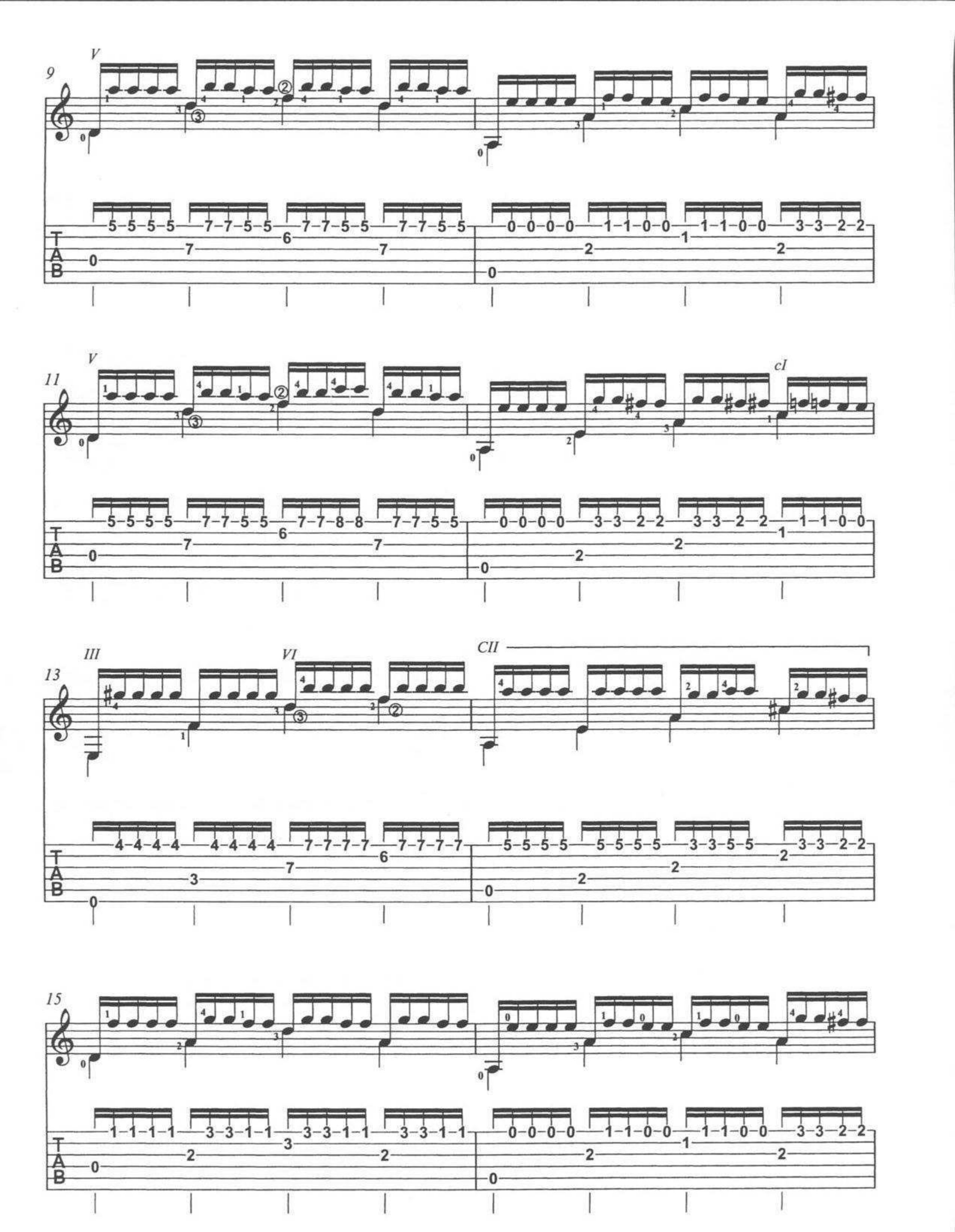
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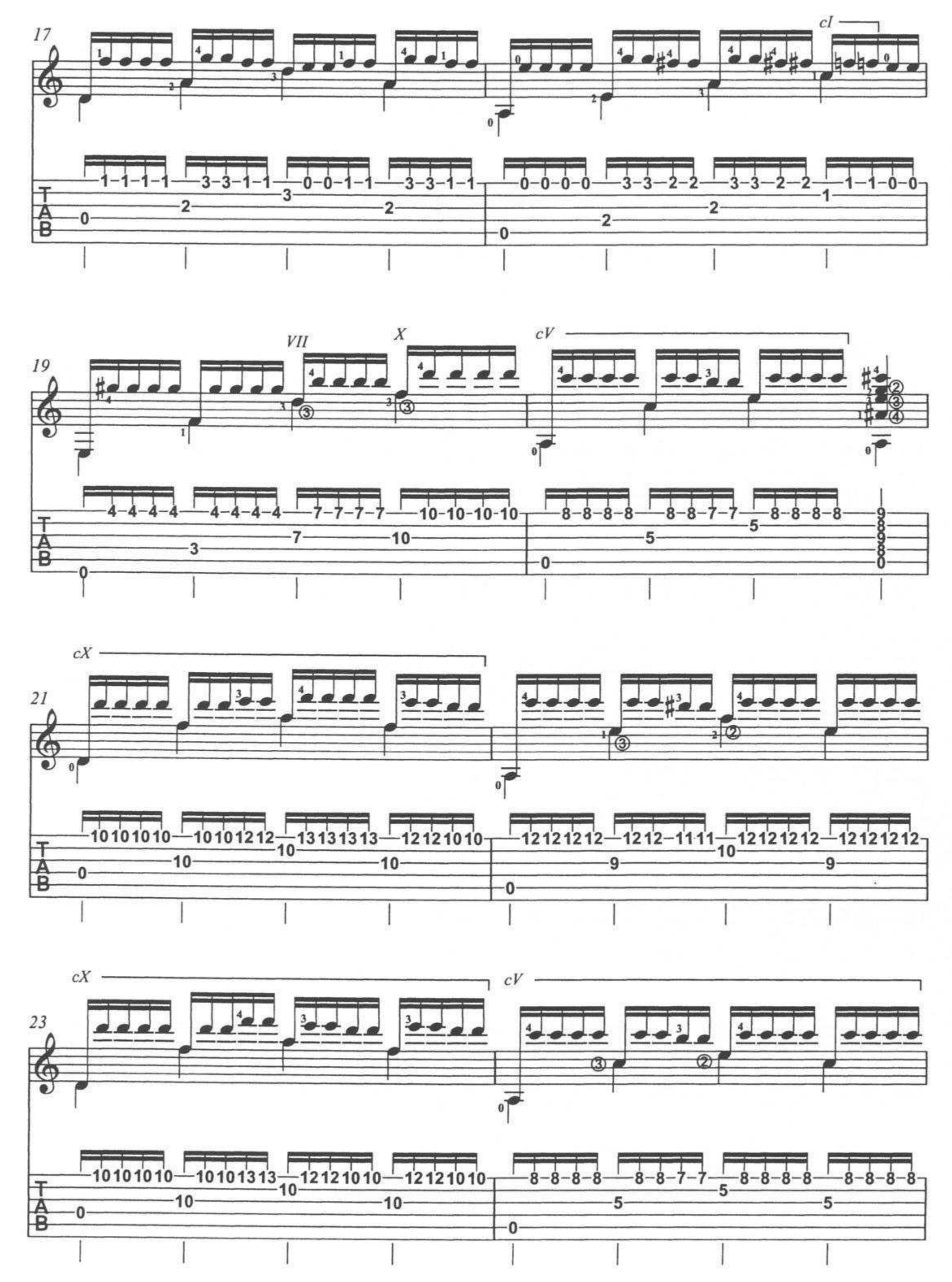
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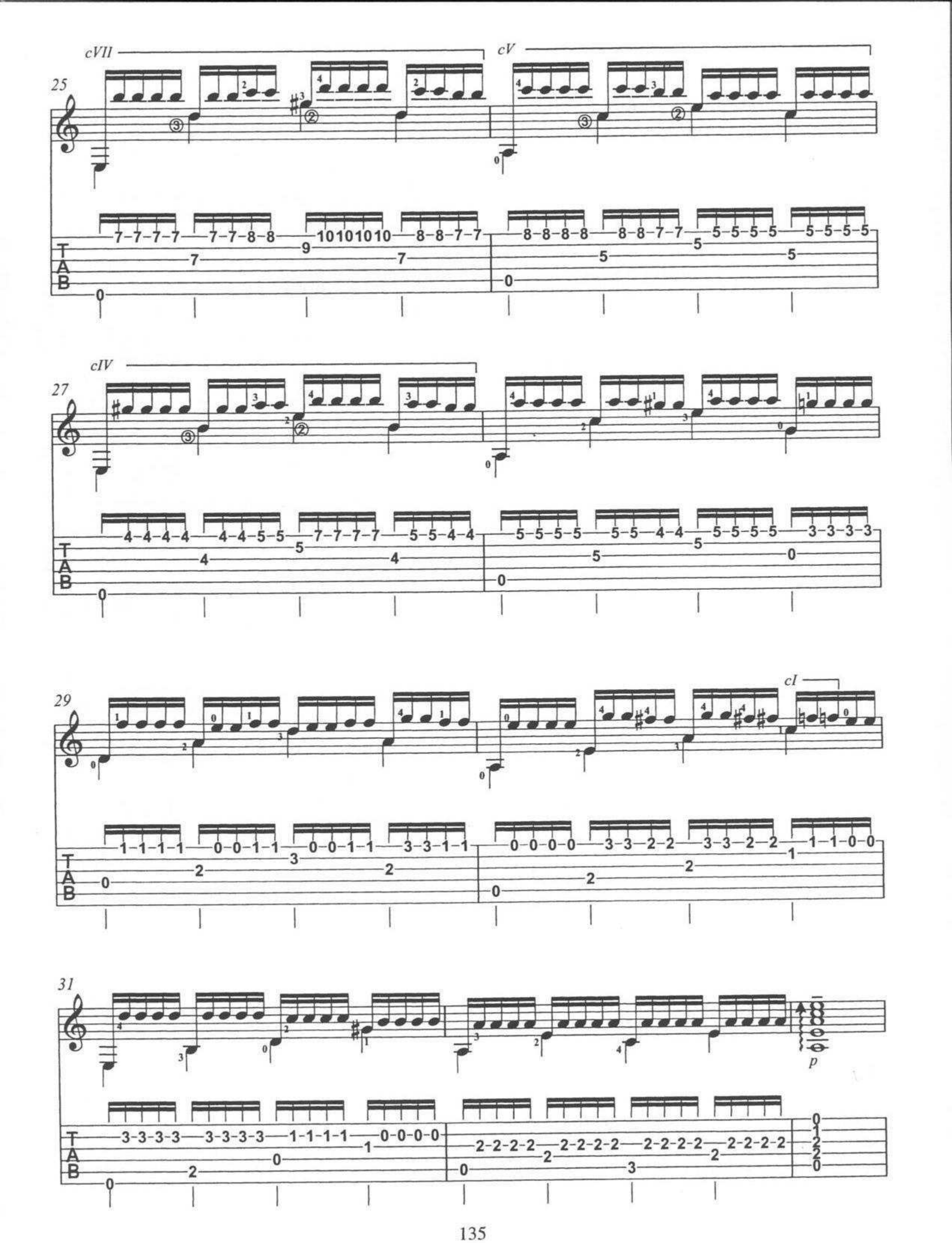
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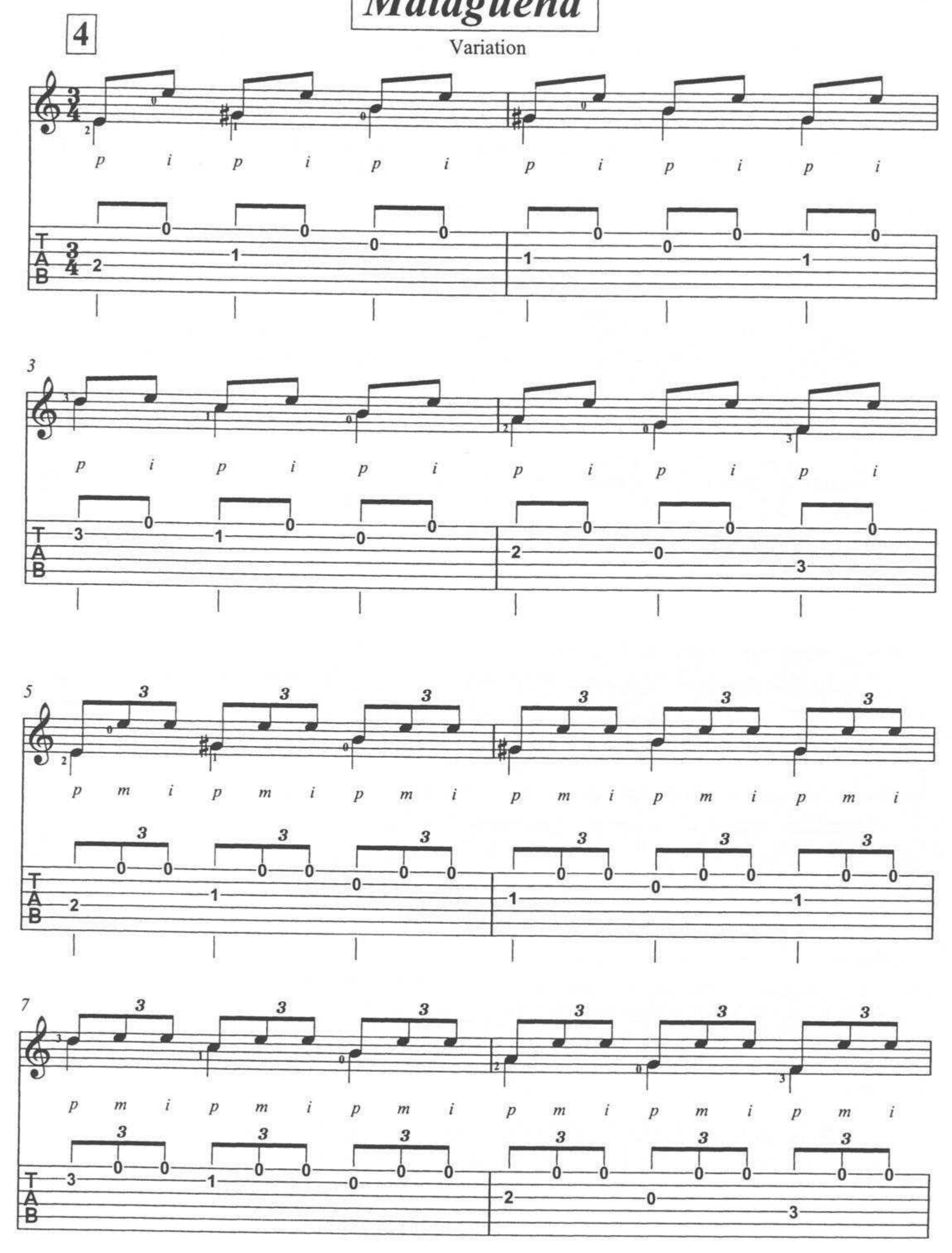

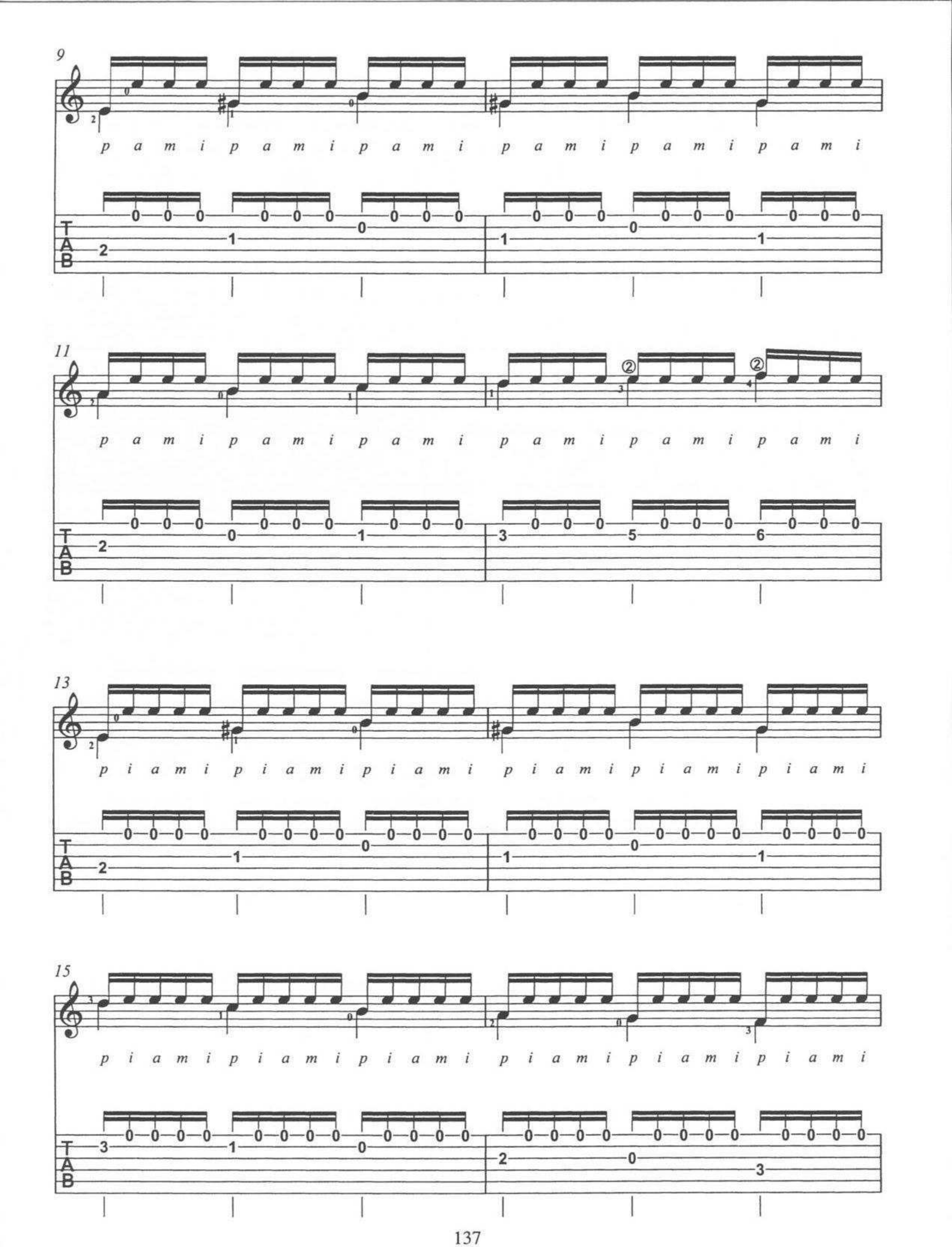
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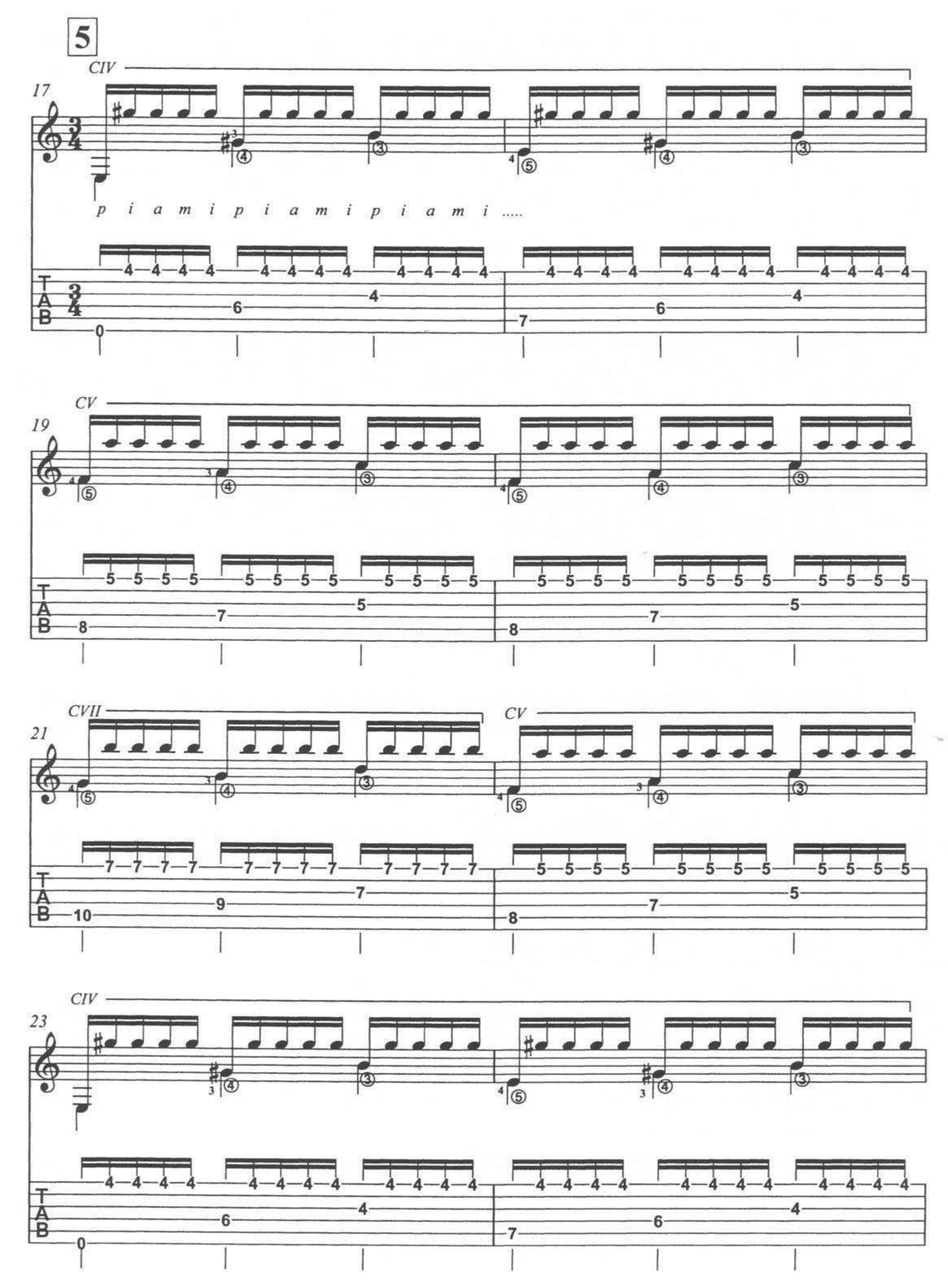
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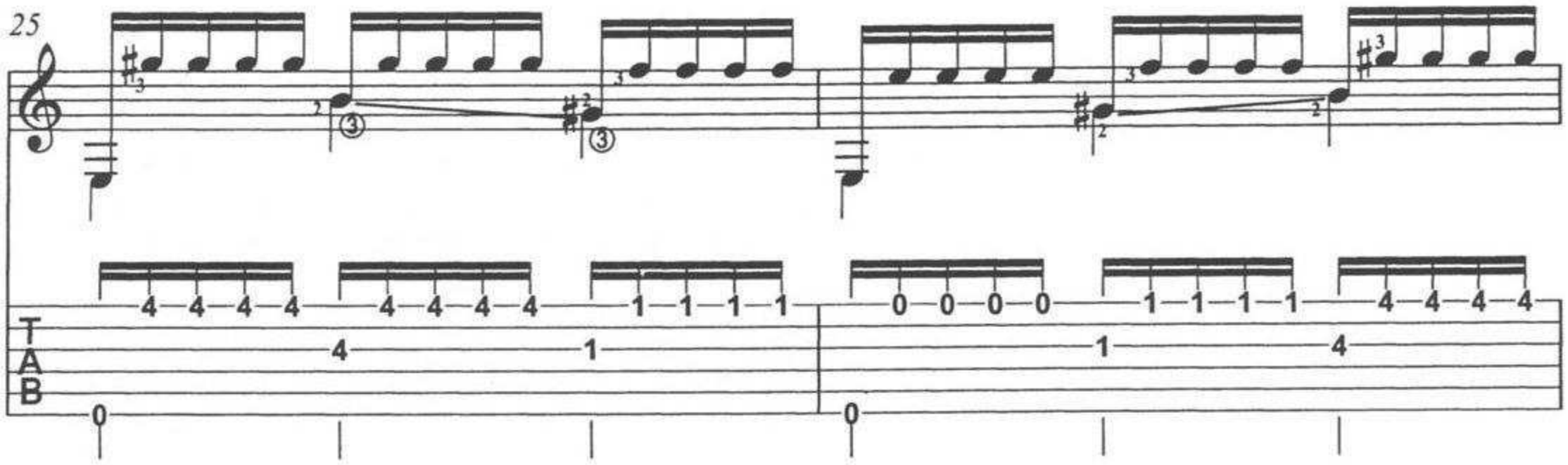
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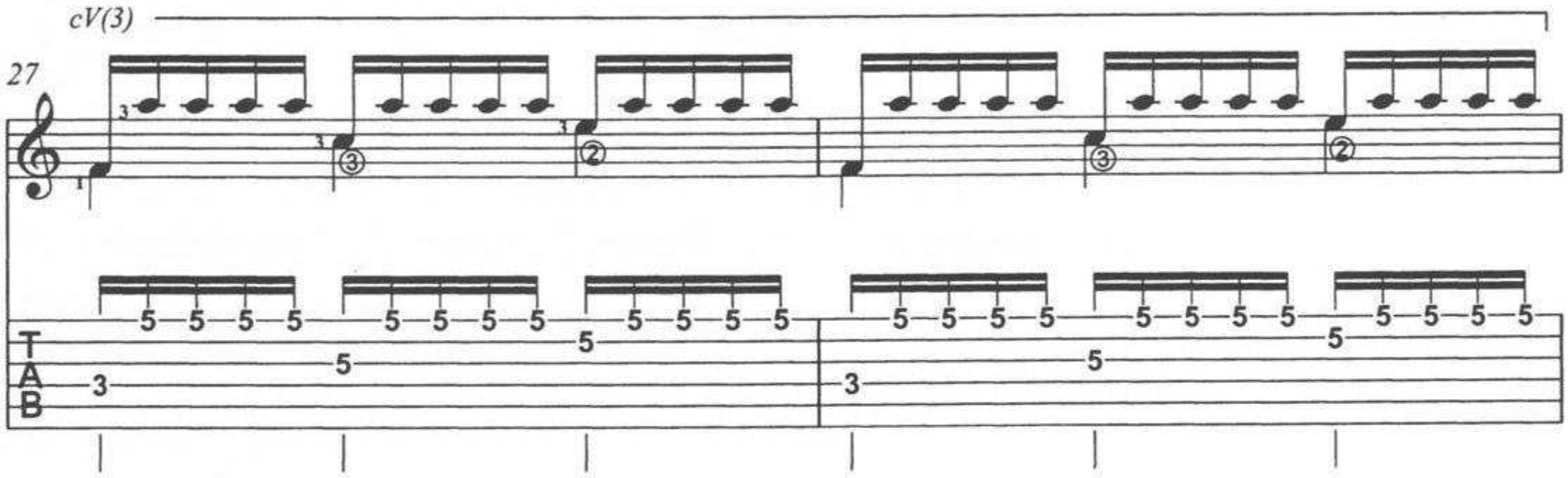
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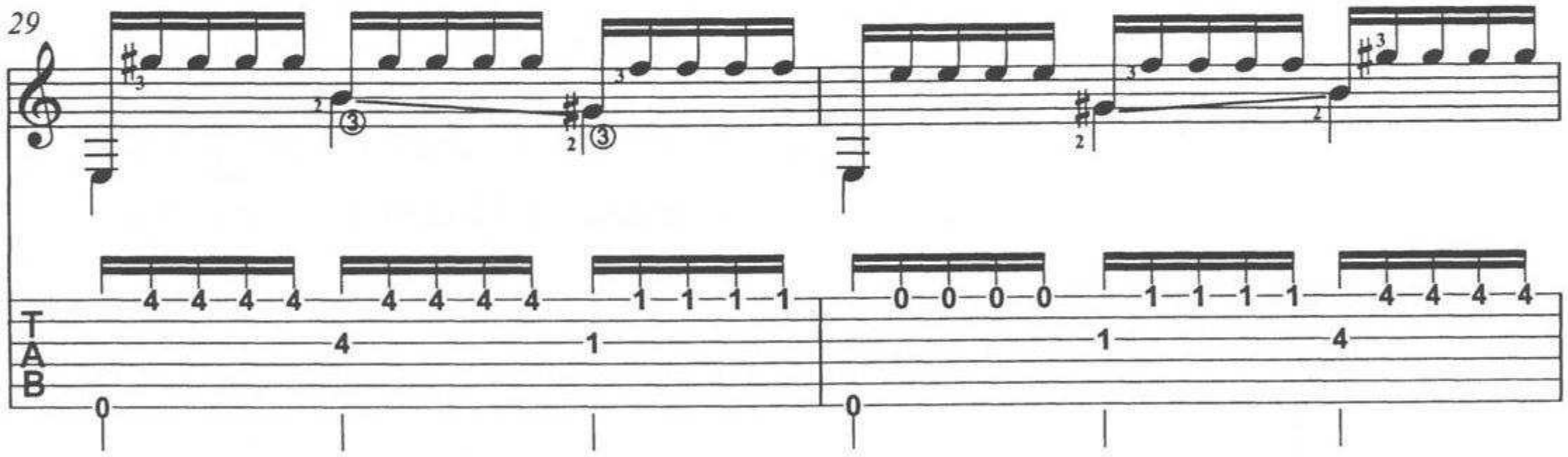
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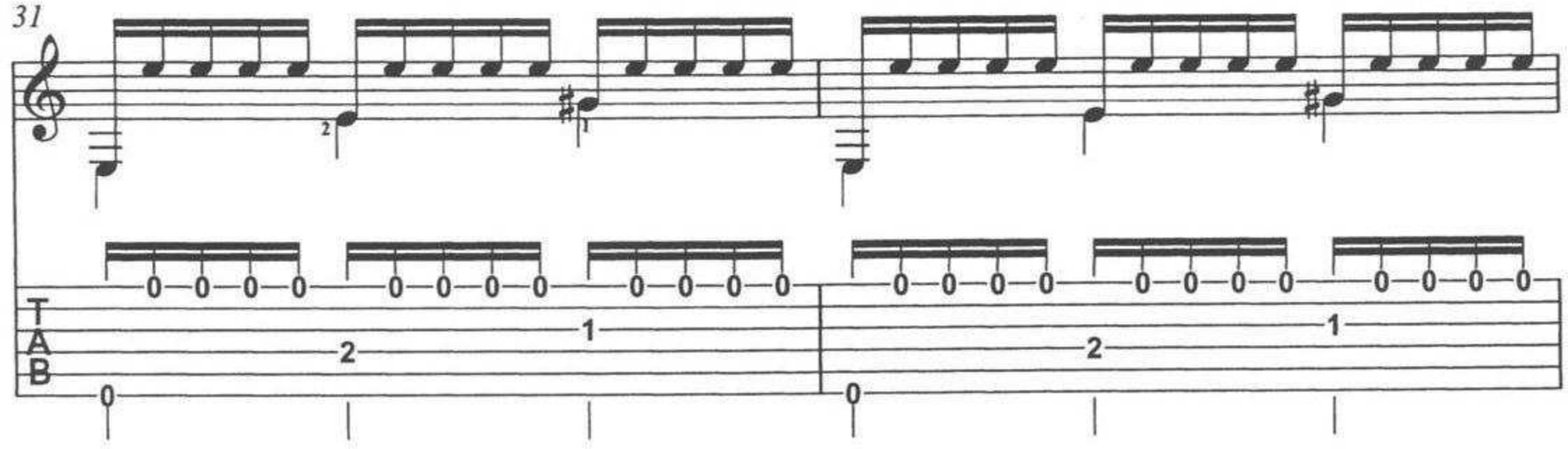
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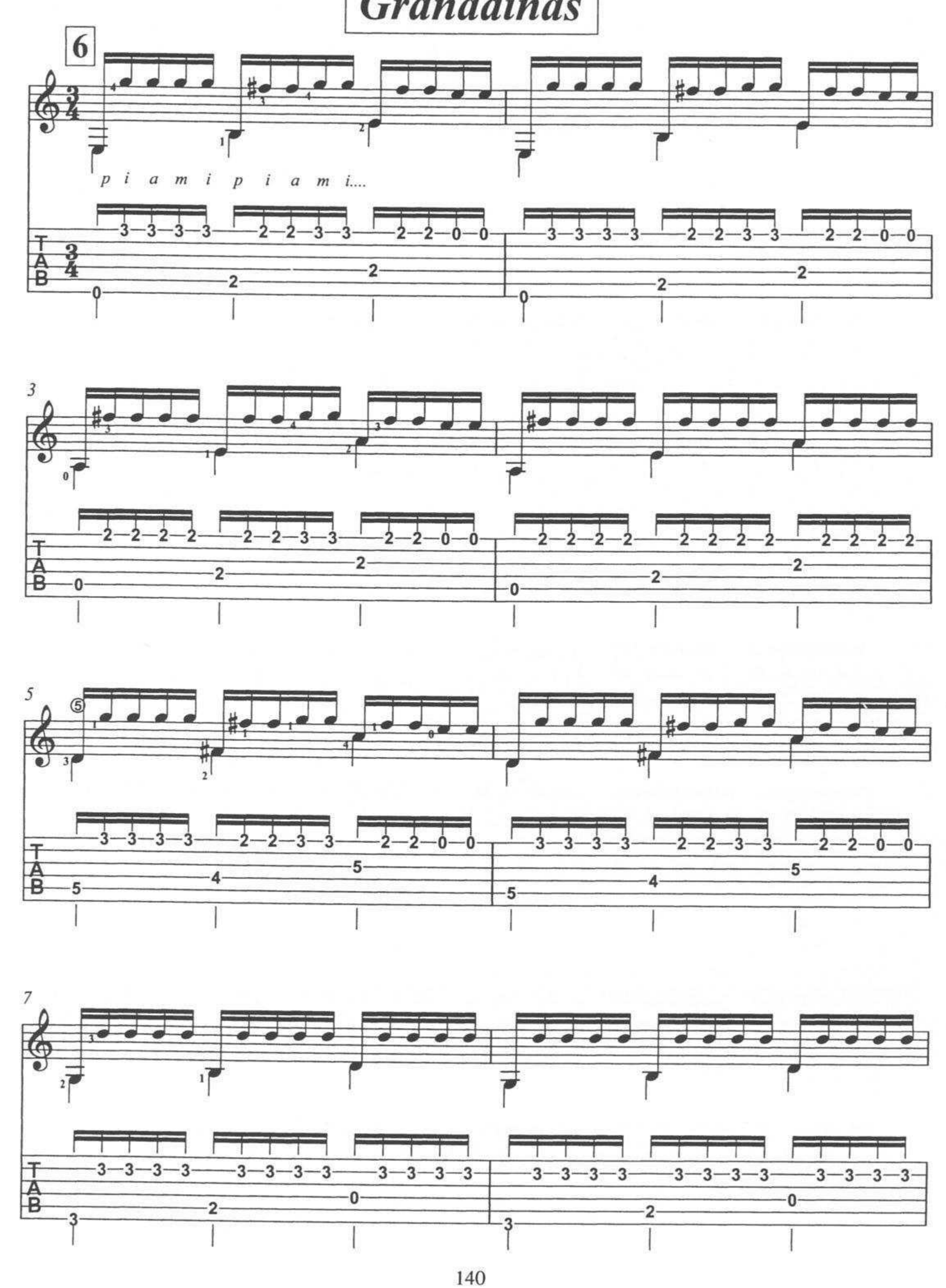

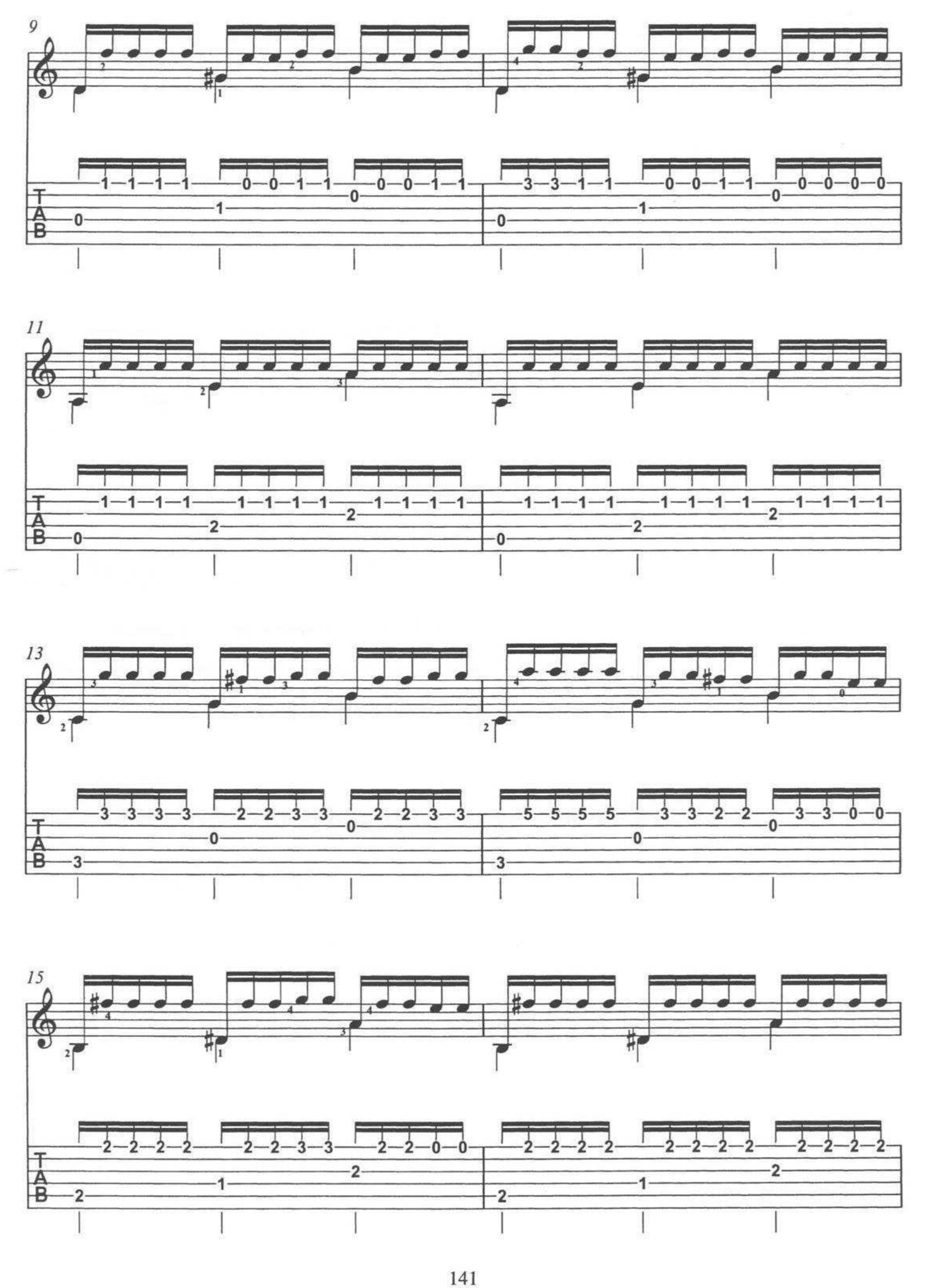
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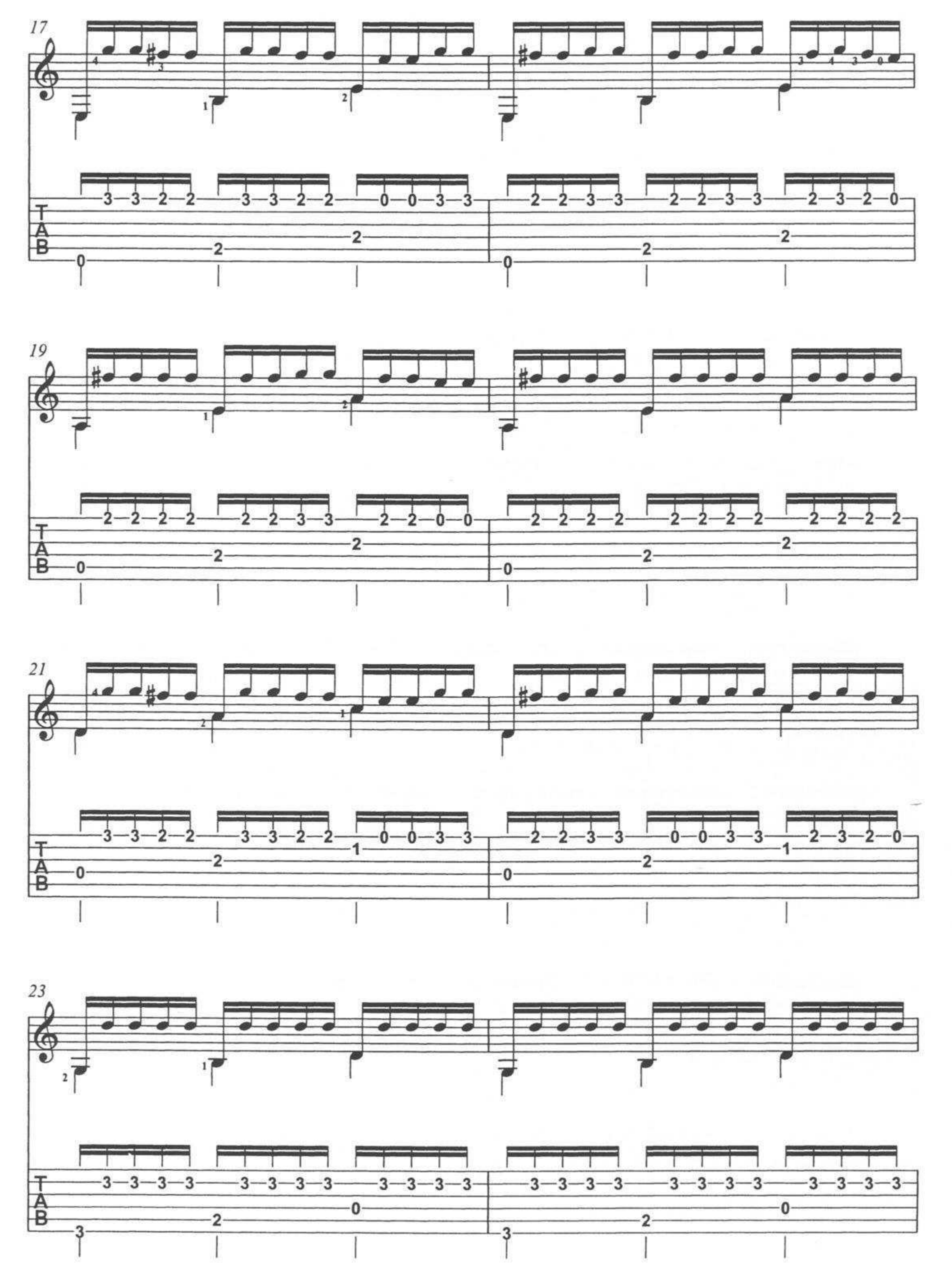
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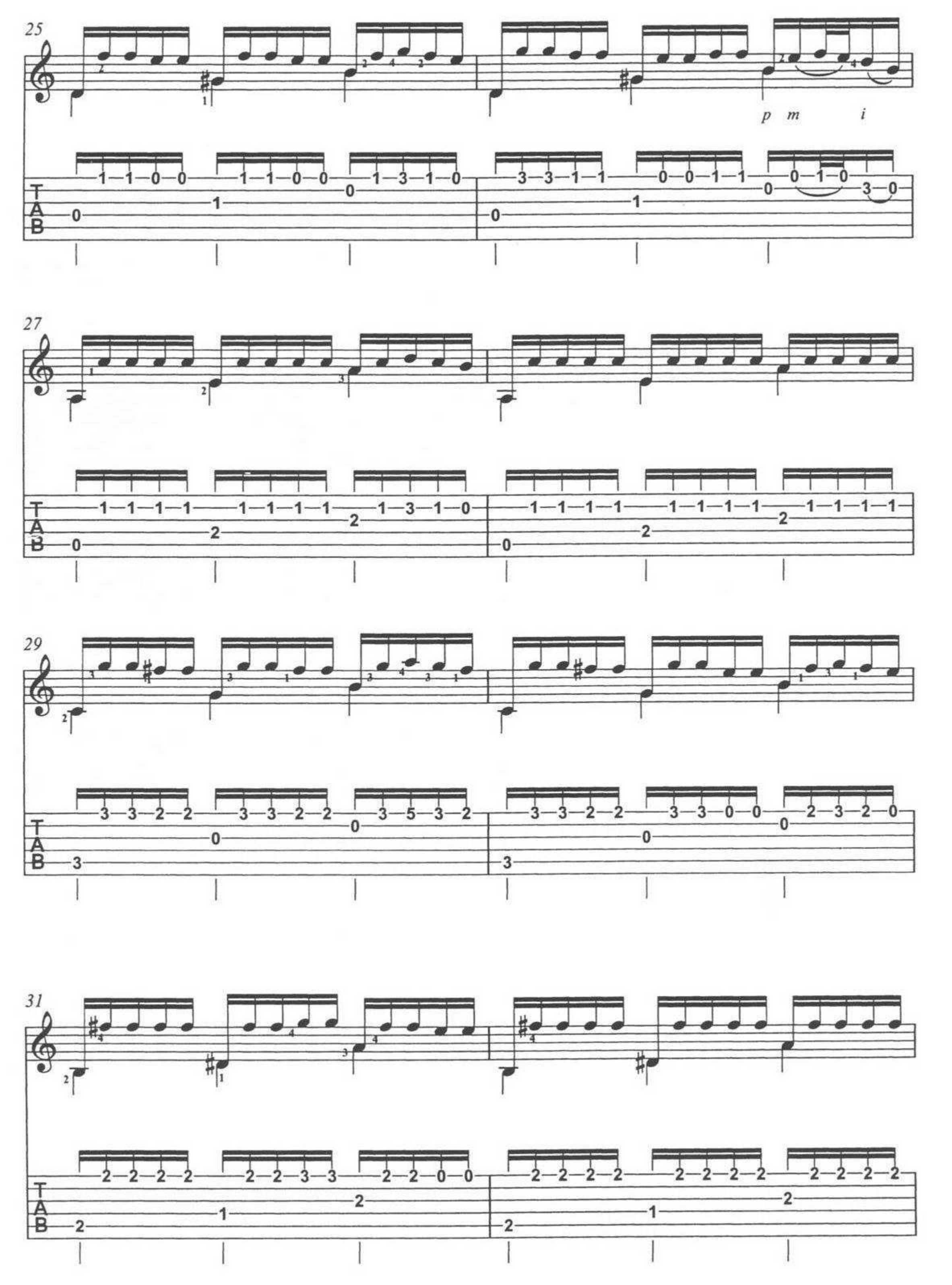
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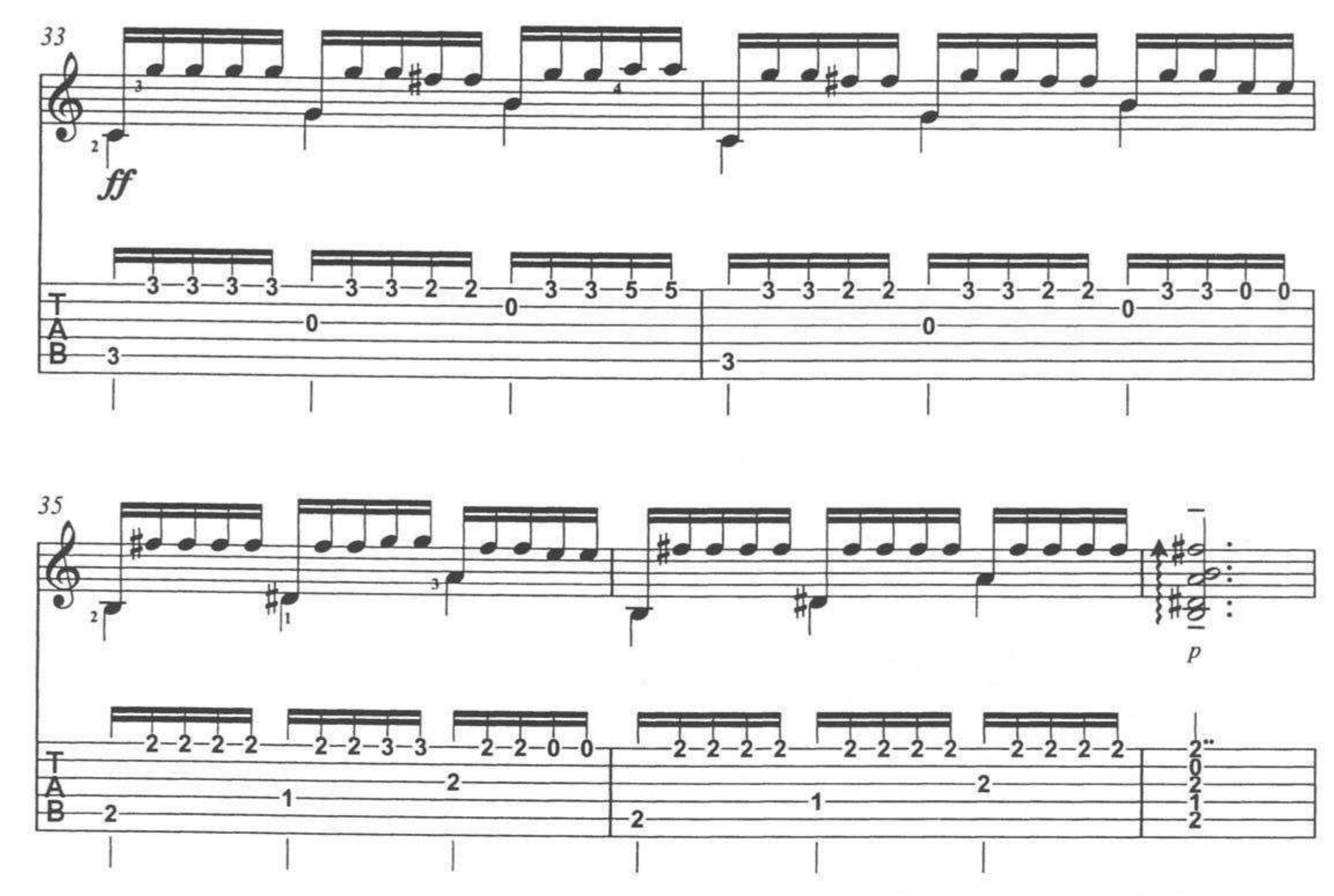
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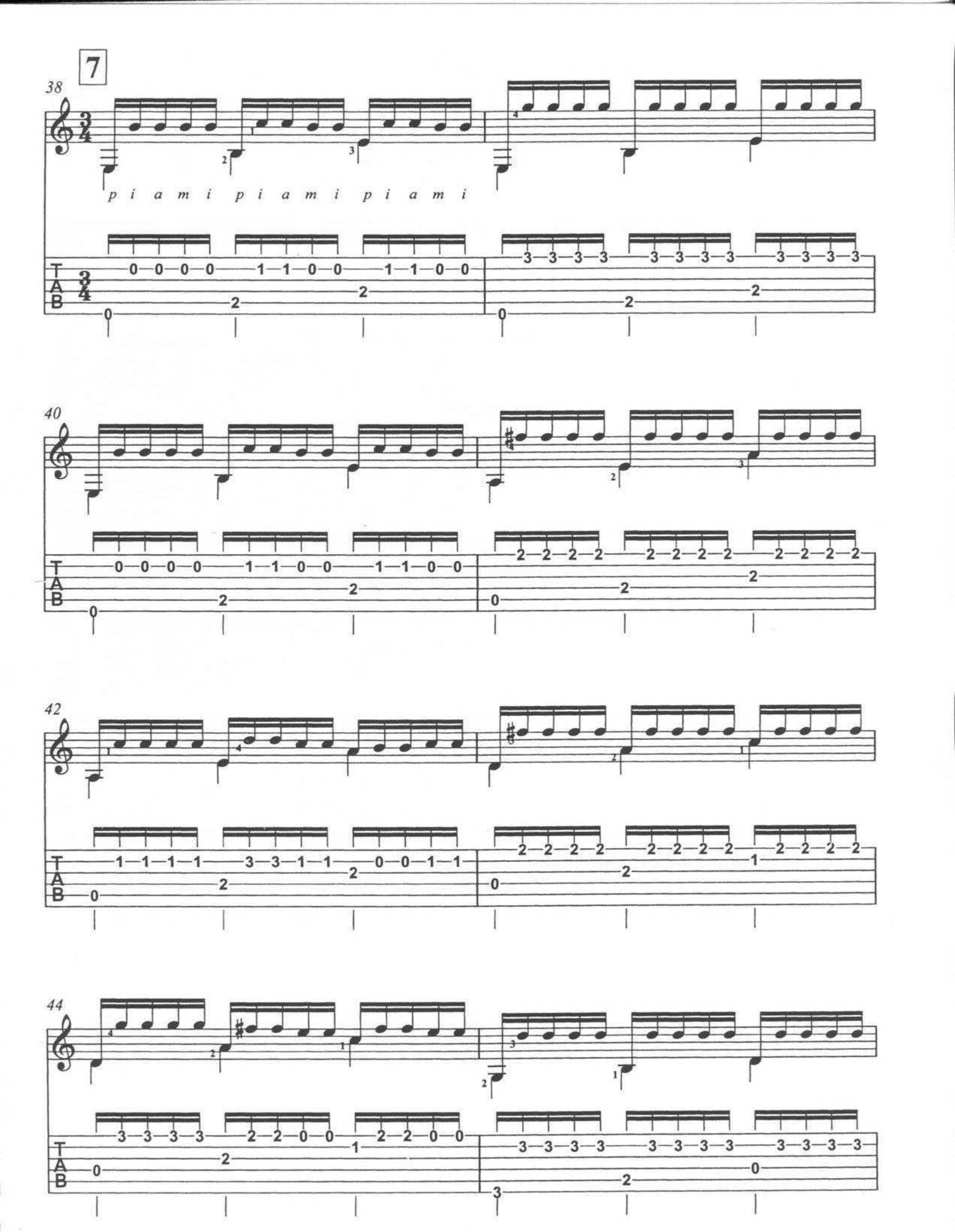
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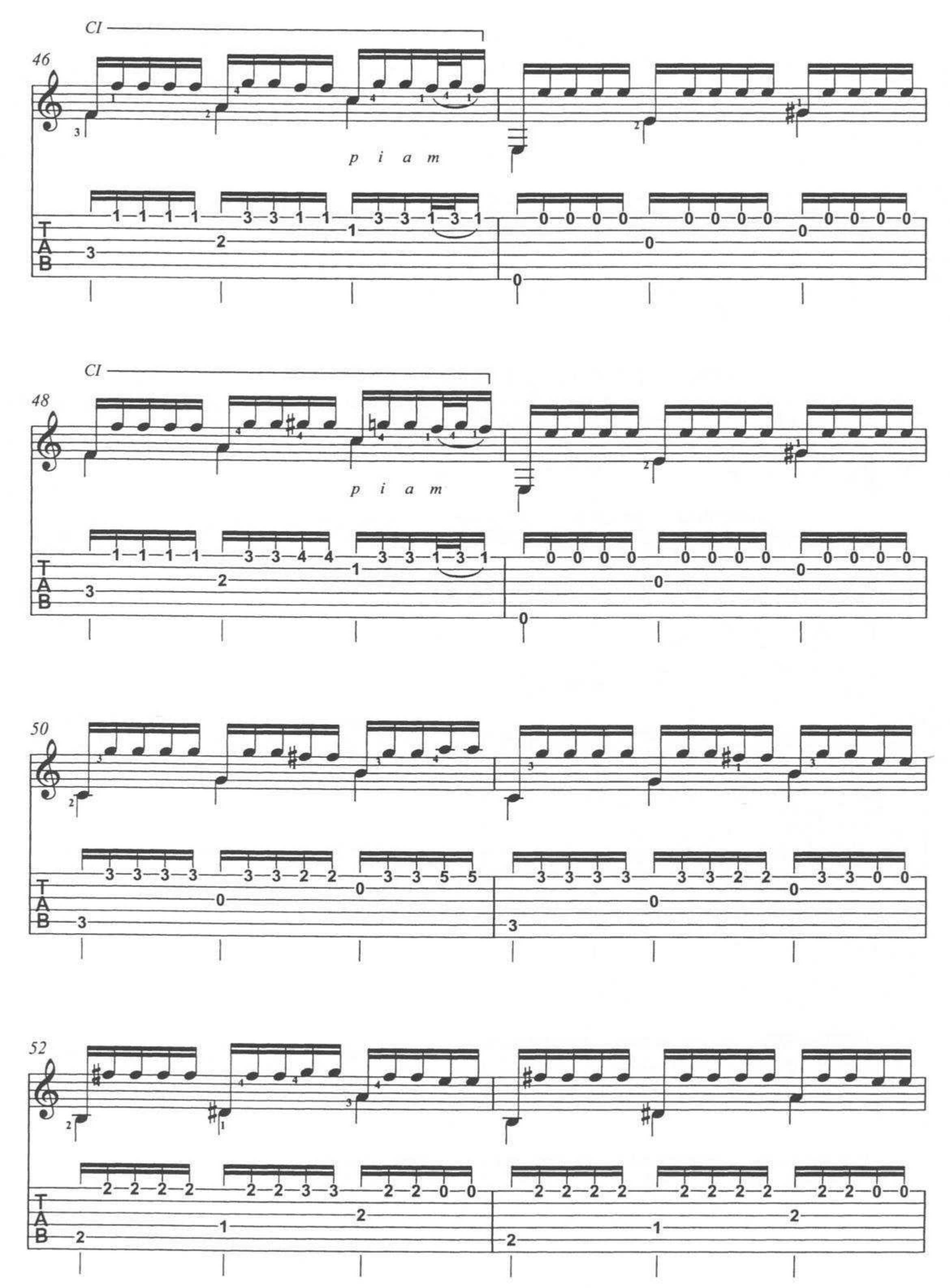
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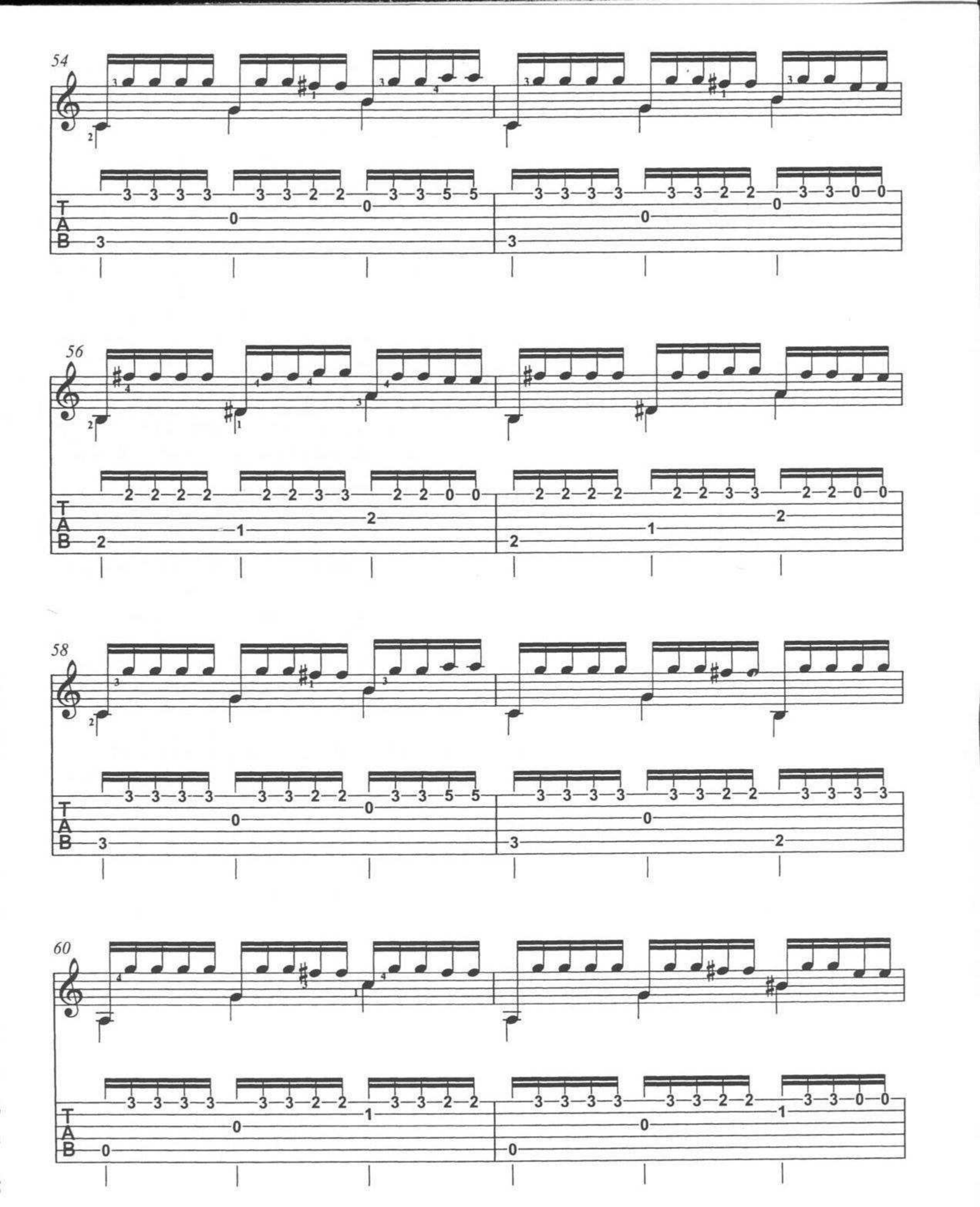
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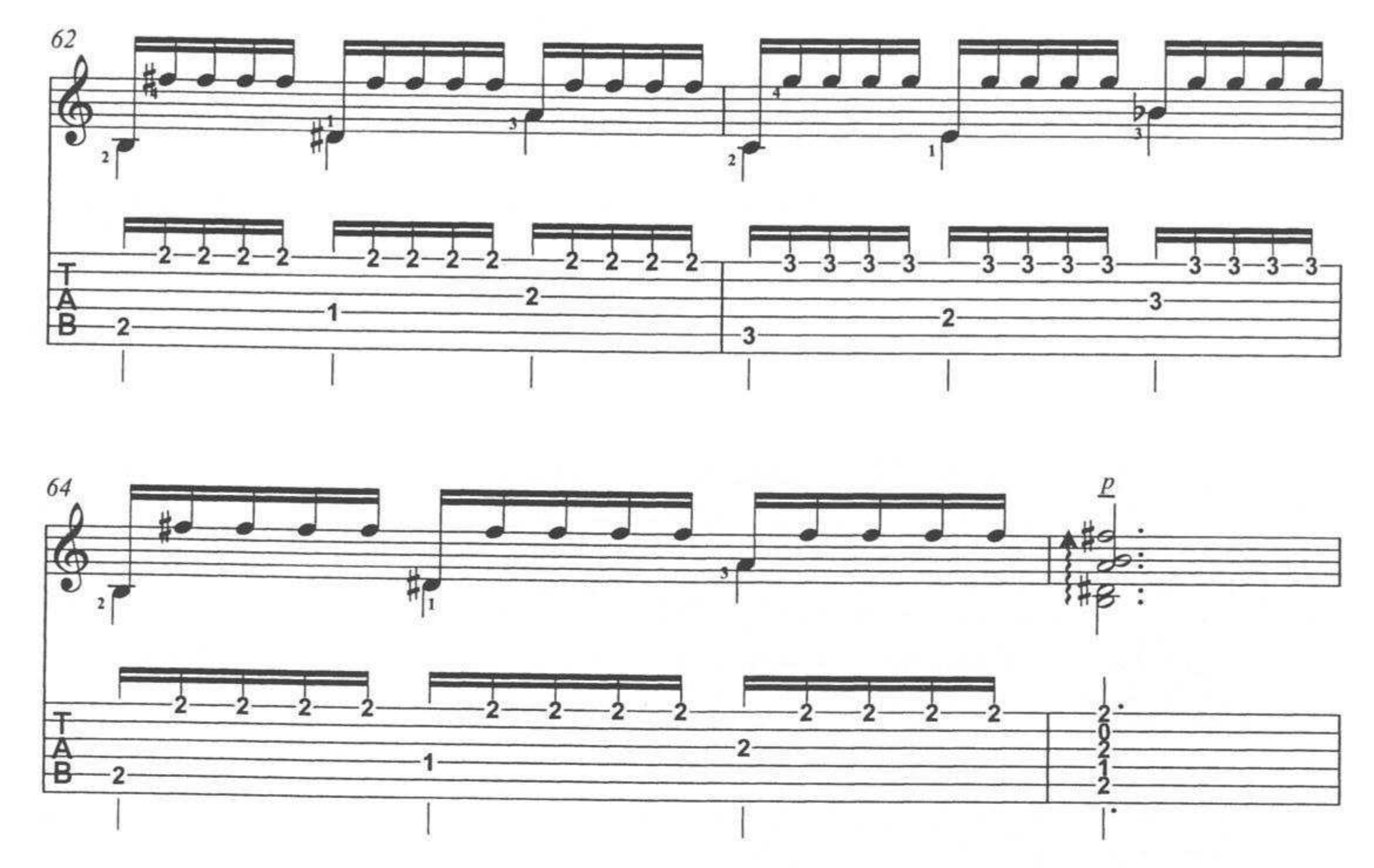
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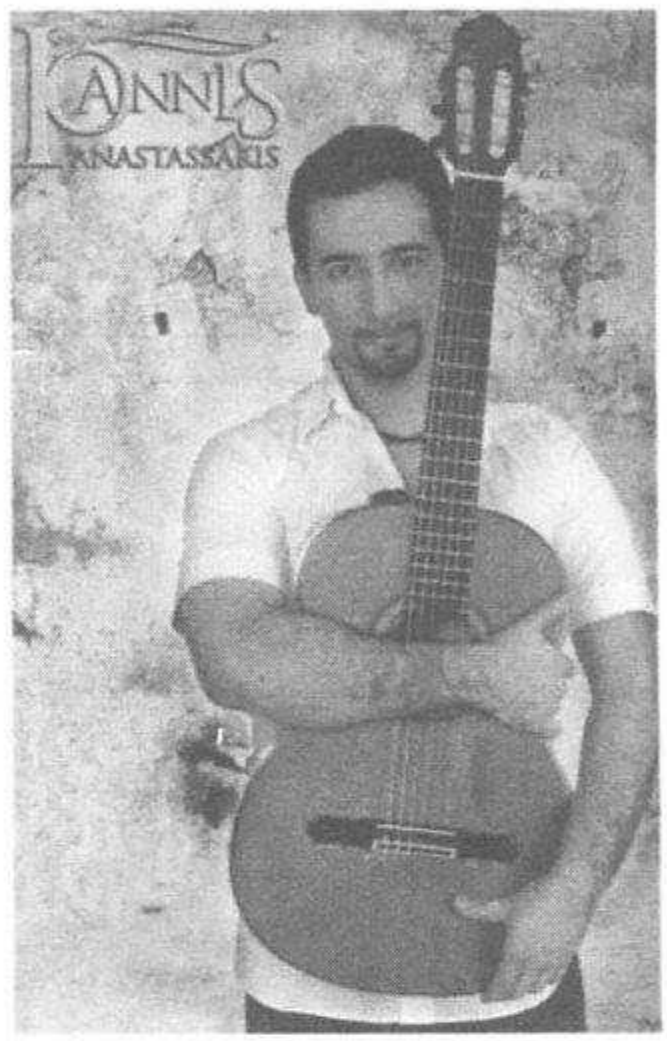
About the Author

Born in the Greek island of Crete, Ioannis Anastassakis studied at the Greek National Conservatory and the Nakas Conservatory in Athens. He completed his Bachelor's degree at the American College of Greece, and subsequently studied at the distinguished Musicians Institute (GIT), where he was hired as an instructor, after graduating at the top 1% of his class. He continued his graduate studies in music, specializing in Solo Flamenco Guitar, under the tutelage of Juan Serrano at the California State University, completing an MA in Guitar Performance, graduating *Magna cum Laude*.

Ioannis studied for several years with Juan Serrano. In addition, he has studied with flamenco guitar legends Manolo Sanlucar, Juan Martín, Paco Serrano, José Antonio Rodriguez and Manolo Franco.



Ioannis teachers in electric guitar are no less impressive; the list reads like a "Who's Who" of contemporary electric guitar legends: Steve Vai (*Whitesnake*), Vinnie Moore (*UFO*), Marty Friedman (*Megadeth*), John Petrucci (*Dream Theater*), Frank Gambale (*Chick Corea*), Paul Gilbert (*Mr.Big*), Richie Kotzen, Brett Garsed, Joey Tafolla, Scott Henderson, Mike Stern, Jean Marc Belkadi, Darren Householder, Tommy Tedesco, Ted Greene, Ron Eschete, Sid Jacobs and Joe Diorio.

Ioannis has also performed and/or recorded in various settings with band members of *Whitesnake, Dio, Deep Purple, Ozzy Osbourne, Elton John, Santana, Celine Dion, Sara Vaughan, Tito Puente, Julio Iglesias, Tower of Power, Chick Corea Electric Band, Jeff Beck, Steve Vai Band, Badlands, Santana, Tribal Tech, Natalie Cole, Joe Cocker, Cher, Blood Sweat & Tears* and more.

Ioannis has presented over 350 solo recitals in Europe and the United States and has been a guest lecturer at several American colleges and Universities (*University of Southern California, California State University Northridge, California State University Fresno, California State University Fullerton, Musicians Institute, Fresno City College, American College of Greece*). In addition, he has won classical and flamenco guitar competitions and has been featured numerous times on European and American TV. In December 2000, he was the first guitarist ever to present a solo guitar recital at the Greek National Opera House.

In Greece, Ioannis has served as principal instructor at the most prominent International Guitar Festival, including those in Hermoupolis, Volos, Patras, Paros, and Porto Heli. Ioannis is also a registered guitar instructor with the London College of Music and Thames Valley University, as well as LA's Guitar Institute of Technology (GIT).

Ioannis' first solo flamenco guitar CD, *Flamenco Live at Ioannina*, was released by MP3.com on August 2000 and immediately entered the company's flamenco category Top 10 chart, eventually reaching the #1 place worldwide on October 2002. The CD was re-mastered and re-released by Wild Rose Angel Productions in 2004. Ioannis' second and third solo flamenco guitar CDs, *Traditional Flamenco Guitar Selections, Vol.1* and *Vol.2* are scheduled to be released by Wild Rose Angel Productions in 2007 and 2008 respectively.

Ioannis' first instrumental rock/fusion electric guitar CD, *Suspension of Disbelief*, was released by Wild Rose Angel Productions in 2007. Within 3 weeks its worldwide sales soared to the top 5 on the highly regarded *Guitar9.com* website!!

Ioannis' instructional materials are published and distributed worldwide by Mel Bay Publications. His instructional books *The Art of Rasgueado* and the instructional book/DVD *Flamenco Journal* both achieved best-seller status within months of their initial publication date.

He is also a regular columnist in Mel Bay's *Guitar Sessions* magazine, specializing in articles on flamenco guitar technique and advanced modern electric guitar technique.

Ioannis is currently (2008) sponsored by La Bella Flamenco Guitar Strings, ELIXIR Electric Guitar Strings, Carvin Custom Shop Guitars, T-rex Effect pedals and GeorgeL studio cables.

Presently, Ioannis Anastassakis teaches music at the American College of Greece and maintains a busy private teaching schedule. Furthermore, he divides his time between recording, writing instructional materials for guitar, conducting clinics and seminars and presenting flamenco guitar recitals around the world. He is currently recording his second solo flamenco guitar CD and his second instrumental rock/fusion electric guitar CD and preparing an extensive series of instructional materials for Mel Bay Publications.

For the latest up-to-date information about Ioannis Anastassakis, as well as an always-expanding selection of audio clips, video files, book samples, instructional materials, latest news and much more, please visit the Official Ioannis Anastassakis WWW site at www.ioannis.org and the Ioannis Anastassakis Myspace Profile at www.myspace.com/ioannisanastassakis

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