

A Segovian Study

Heitor Villa-Lobos, **Etude No 1**



Continuing her occasional look at great classical pieces, **Bridget Mermikides** guides you through one of the finest studies of them all, from Brazilian master Heitor Villa-Lobos...

ABILITY RATING



Moderate/Advanced

Will improve your:

- ✓ Arpeggio playing
- ✓ Classical fingerpicking
- ✓ Chord development

HEITOR VILLA-LOBOS (1887-1959) is the most celebrated of all Brazilian classical composers. He boasts a prolific output of over 2000 compositions and his guitar music occupies an important position in the classical guitarist's repertoire as it has been studied and recorded more than any other 20th century guitar pieces.

Villa-Lobos was a conductor and instrumentalist as well as a composer who played the cello, guitar, clarinet and piano. His first important set of guitar pieces is the Suite Populaire Bresilienne. In 1923 he moved to Paris where he was accepted and recognised in the innermost French music circle. He became a professor of composition at the International Conservatory of Music and also met the famous and influential Spanish guitarist Andrés Segovia, who encouraged him to write more for the guitar. The

TECHNIQUE FOCUS

CLEAN AND EVEN PICKING

■ It's a good idea to learn the picking hand pattern first on open strings (learn bar 1 without any fretting). Start slow and steady and gradually increase the speed, repeating the exercise continually to build stamina. Take care to keep the semi-quavers even in rhythm and clear in tone.

Accenting each digit in turn is a useful practice approach for picking hand development.

For example, start by emphasising just the thumb (p) throughout, while playing the fingers at a modest volume. Next, accent just the first finger (i) throughout, then just the second (m) and so on. This helps the technique by strengthening the independence of each finger in turn; the ultimate goal being to play all the notes equally in both tone and volume.

composer came up with the 12 studies (Douze Etudes); Segovia compared them to the studies of Chopin and Scarlatti for their success in combining poetic content with didactic purpose.

Other works written for Segovia are the Five Preludes (1940) and the Guitar Concerto (1951). Other guitar pieces include Mazurka In D, Panqueca, Valsa Brilhante, Fantasia, Brazilian Song, Dobrado Pitoresco, Quadrilha, Choro No 1, Modinha, Aria From Bachiana brasileiras No 5 and Distribution Of Flowers.

The Etudes of Villa-Lobos are a hugely important set of pieces in the classical guitar repertoire. Villa-Lobos' own playing experience combined with compositional artistry and stylistic authenticity helps to

create a series of works that are both idiomatic and technically instructive, as well as musically satisfying works in their own right. Although titled 'Etude' (or 'Study' – work that focuses on a particular technique rather than overall musical depth) these are weighty performance pieces, not just training tools.

Most of the Etudes focus clearly on one particular technique. For example, arpeggios in Nos 1 and 2, fretting-hand slurs in Nos 3 and 10, repeated chords in No 4, ostinato in No 5, scale technique in No 7 and percussive techniques in No 12. Despite their technical practicality they encompass a huge range of stylistic influences ranging from Portuguese fado, Brazilian folk and dance forms (including the Toada and embolada), plus guitar composers such as Matteo Carcassi and Dionisio Aguado – even the music of Chopin and Bach. As such, they represent a fusion of Brazilian folklore, guitar pedagogy and high-art music.

Etude No 1 involves a repeated picking hand arpeggiated pattern almost throughout, while the fretting

hand provides the harmonic changes. The relentlessly repeating rhythmic pattern and evolving harmony are reminiscent of Bach and Chopin. But this is unquestionably a guitar work, which exploits the peculiarities of the fretboard to create its engaging textures and chord voicings. Although it almost exclusively comprises a single pattern, the use of open strings, doubled notes, voice-leading and dramatic harmony create a spell-binding atmosphere.

See you soon with another great classical piece. **GT**

TRACK RECORD



■ The 12 Etudes are diverse and interesting pieces. They have been recorded by many important classical guitarists throughout the ages including Andrés Segovia, Julian Bream, Norbert Kraft. The Complete Solo Guitar Music, Heitor Villa-Lobos by the brilliant Brazilian guitarist Fabio Zanon is an album well worth owning as it contains the complete solo works of Villa-Lobos and has been honoured by a review as "the definitive recording"!

GET THE TONE

■ It is vital to have good picking hand nail shape and quality in order to give all the notes precision and definition. As a good general guide, your picking hand fingernails should be just visible when you look at your hand straight on with the palm facing you. Each nail should be polished to a smooth finish with a nail file. Go to your local chemist and in your most macho voice ask for the smoothest nail file (or 'buffer') they have. This consideration will make a huge difference to your technique and tone, so ignore it at your peril!

“Etude No 1 is a guitar work that exploits the peculiarities of the fretboard to create its engaging textures and chord voicings”



Heitor Villa-Lobos:
composed many
pieces for Segovia

VILLA-LOBOS ETUDE No 1

PLAYING TIPS

[Bar 1 onwards] The picking pattern in bar 1 is almost constant throughout, relying mostly on p and i with m and a being used on the upper strings. Aim for consistent volume throughout the pattern.

[Bars 24-25] This is the first chord using diminished 7th shape and the two outer strings left open. Enjoy as you've 20 bars of it chromatically descending.

$\text{♩} = 130 \text{ approx}$

The score is written for guitar in E major, 4/4 time. It consists of 26 bars. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a tempo marking of 130 approx. The score is divided into systems, with bar numbers 1, 7, 14, 20, and 26 indicated. Chords are indicated above the staff, and picking patterns (p, i, m, a) are indicated below the staff. The score includes various chord shapes and techniques, such as diminished 7th chords and chromatic descending lines.

Chords and Techniques:

- Bar 1:** Em
- Bar 2:** F#m7 b5/E
- Bar 3:** Em
- Bar 4:** B7/F#
- Bar 5:** Em/G
- Bar 6:** E/G#
- Bar 7:** Am
- Bar 8:** Gm6/Bb
- Bar 9:** Em/B
- Bar 10:** Bsus2/B
- Bar 11:** B7
- Bar 12:** E7 b9
- Bar 13:** Gdim7/E
- Bar 14:** F#dim7/E
- Bar 15:** Fdim7/E

Picking Pattern: p i p i p m i a m i p i continues

VI — Edim7 V — D[♯]dim7/E IV — Ddim7/E

III — C[♯]dim7/E II — Cdim7/E I — Bdim7/E

Bdim7/E Em VII — — —

II — F[♯]7 Em ⁶/G F[♯]dim7

VII — B7 Em C7addmaj7/E

Em 8va — — — Am7 E6