

# The Art Of Tremolo

**Francisco Tarrega:** Recuerdos De La Alhambra



You wanted classical – you’ve got it! **Bridget Mermikides** is back with one of the finest guitar pieces ever, from the nylon strings of the great Francisco Tarrega...

## ABILITY RATING



**Advanced**

### Will improve your:

- ✓ Fingerpicking
- ✓ Chord knowledge
- ✓ Flashy solo guitar repertoire!

THE MOST FAMOUS and popular tremolo piece is Recuerdos De La Alhambra by the Spanish composer and guitarist, Francisco Tarrega (1852-1909). It is a masterpiece that reminisces about the magnificent ancient palace and fortress complex of the Moorish monarchs of Granada. It evokes a deeply soulful and sultry Spanish mood so touching, that many people have taken up the guitar just because of this piece of music.

Tarrega is considered to be the father of the classical guitar in that he laid the foundation of modern technique (including rest stroke), introduced the raising of the left leg to support the guitar and was a prolific



Tarrega using his recommended footstool

## PRO TIP

■ Playing classical guitar requires well manicured fingernails. Use fine emery board – the thicker, spongy type are great – and make sure the leading (picking) edge is smooth, with no swarf or roughness detectable round the edge or underneath. Some players also find that medium length nails are best, so that a certain amount of finger flesh can be brought to bear on the string for a fatter, rounder tone.

guitar composer and arranger. His compositions include mazurkas, preludes, studies and dozens of popular pieces, such as Danza Mora, Capricho Arabe, Lagrima (transcribed in GT in October 2002) and the haunting Adelita (April 2000).

If the man and his music still don't ring any bells then the famous Nokia mobile ringtone – which has been described as the most known piece of music

in the world due to the all-pervasive nature of this tiresome but indispensable invention – is an extract from Tarrega's masterpiece Gran Vals. Dave Kilminster covered this in GT back in July 1995 and it's a good party piece to impress with.

When learning to play Recuerdos it is best to break it down into sections and practise one section at a time, slowly with a metronome, like

a technical study or exercise. Quavers at 60bpm (two notes per click) is a good place to start. This way you can get to grips with combining fretting hand fingerings, some of which are awkward, with the feel of the tremolo. Tone, articulation, evenness of rhythm and a calm meditative mental attitude are crucial in your practice regime. Gradually increase the metronome speed, but remember that the picking hand needs to be drilled so thoroughly that tremolo eventually becomes a reflex muscle memory. For a respectable tremolo aim for speeds of four notes per click at 150bpm and above. This can take weeks or months, so patience and diligence are in order. The best advice is: slow practice, slow practice, slow practice...

Other popular tremolo pieces are Una Limosna Por El Amor De Dios and Un Sueno En La Floresta by Augustine Barrios, Reverie by Giulio Regondi and Campanas Del Alba by Eduardo Sans De La Maza. **GT**

## TRACK RECORD



■ Any guitarist could do worse than owning John Williams' Greatest hits,

which not only contained his version of Recuerdos De La Alhambra but also pieces by Vivaldi (Concerto In D Major), Scarlatti (Sonata In E Major), Bach (Gavotte – Lute Suite No 4) and of course Rodrigo (Fantasia Para Un Gentilhombre – Canarios) and more.

“The tremolo was to be evocative of the rippling of the water in the fountains in the gardens of the Alhambra” Sharon Isbin



## TECHNIQUE FOCUS TREMOLO TECHNIQUE

■ This feature is devoted to one of the most challenging classical guitar techniques: tremolo. When well executed, the tremolo technique creates an illusion of a continuous stream of notes and is used as a way of playing a sustained melody.

The standard pattern for tremolo is a group of four notes starting with the thumb (p) playing the bass note, then the third

(a), second (m) and first fingers (i) playing a repeated note on an upper string and the pattern then repeats continuously.

The secret to a good tremolo is controlling the evenness of articulation and tone, rather than pushing for breakneck speed all the time. The more precisely each note is played, the faster the tremolo will sound so strive for control and tone quality

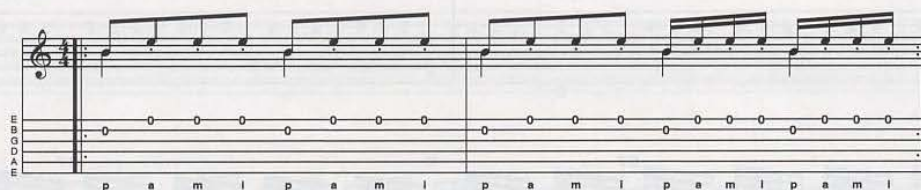
first, rather than speed, as this will come naturally later.

To maximise your tremolo development, make the metronome an integral part of each practice session, starting from a slow tempo. Once you're playing an exercise perfectly on each repeat; then increase the tempo, always paying attention to the quality of tone and attack.

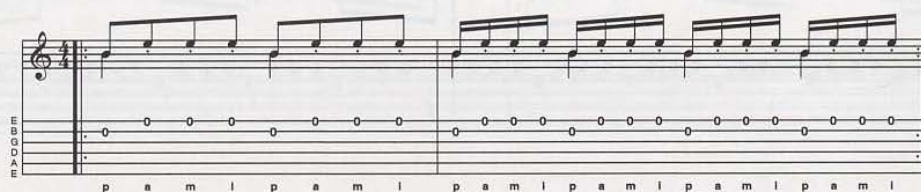
**EXERCISE 1** Practise this slowly and work on keeping each note the same tone and volume. Practising 'staccato' is widely recognised as very beneficial to building a good tremolo. 'Plant' each finger on the string for a brief moment and feel the string under the fingertip before plucking.



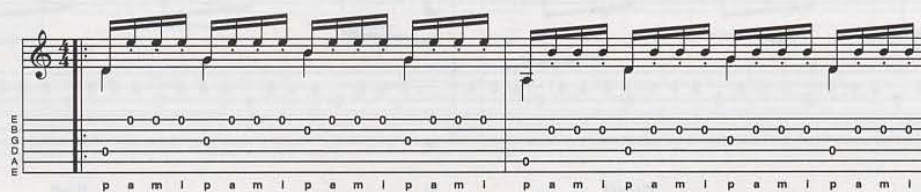
**EXERCISE 2** Once comfortable and in control of continuous quavers, we will introduce semi-quaver speed bursts. Repeat Exercise 2 over and over, ensuring that the speed burst on the last two beats feels as controlled and easy as the quavers.



**EXERCISE 3** This exercise doubles the length of the speed burst.



**EXERCISE 4** And this one involves an arpeggio thumb pattern and fingers switching across the top three strings. This exercise may also incorporate slower notes with speed bursts, so it should be adapted to suit necessary practice needs.





## FRANCISCO TARREGA RECUERDOS DE LA ALHAMBRA

▶ **PLAYING TIPS**

**[Bars 1-8]** This fingering features the opening Am melody on the second string for consistency of tone. An open first string in this section is an option and some may prefer it, as starting tremolo from cold on the second string can be precarious! However, 'saving' the first string for the F chord in bar 9 creates a moment of real beauty when the tone brightens up here.

**[Bars 9-10]** This is awkward in the fretting hand. The secret is to use a 'pivot' barre by fretting the melody B note on the edge of a backward extended first finger and pressing down close to the middle joint, while keeping the third finger intact on the fourth string. This also makes it easier to grab the F bass note at the 8th fret in bar 10 and minimises loss of tremolo flow.

**Am**  
 $\text{♩} = 75 +$   
 Let notes sustain where possible

**G7**

**C** **G7** **C** **G7**

**C**

**F** **Cviii** **Cmaj7** **'Pivot' - see text** **F** **Dm6**



**ON THE CD**  Tracks 11-12

**[Bars 13-15]** Place the fretting fingers down one at a time rather than trying to grab a whole chord shape in one go. This helps to avoid sudden jumps. Release the third finger from the C# bass note on beat two so it can hover behind the fourth finger on the third string ready to take the F on bar 14 beat three. The first finger stays in place on the A on the fourth string 7th fret until bar 15.

[illegible]



## FRANCISCO TARREGA RECUERDOS DE LA ALHAMBRA

**[Bars 41-72]** Much of this A major section takes the tremolo on the first string so the fretting hand fingering is not too difficult, making it more enjoyable and relaxing to play than the first section. Enjoy the slide up from the 2nd to 10th fret in bars 46 and 62 of this section and take the move slowly – it sounds better than rushing at it.

41,57

A E7 A CII- E7

43,59

A

45,61

D/A G/A D/A

47,63

A

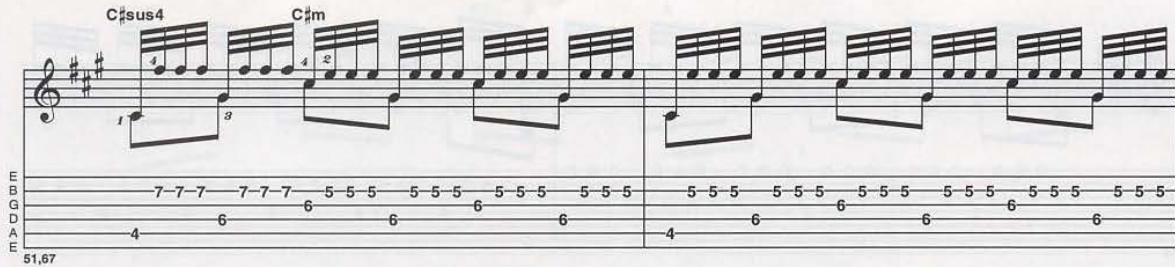
49,65

F#m CII- G#7 CIV-



**[Bar 53]** A little emphasis placed on the melodic bass line brings out the tender melancholy character here. It is the F natural (the flattened 6th from the parallel minor, Am) that harks back to the piece's opening sentiment in such an effective way.

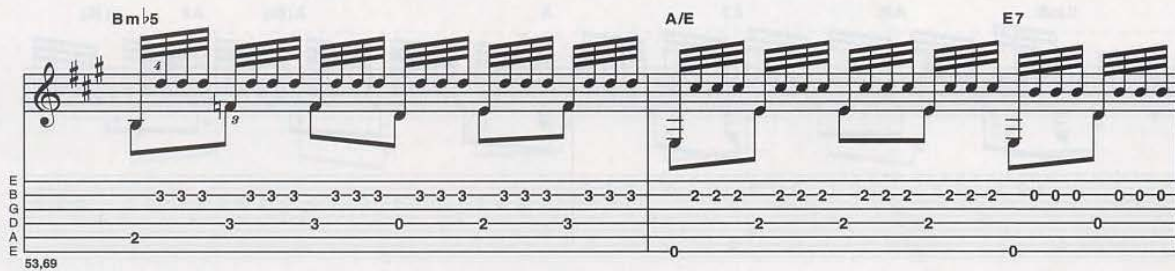
**C#sus4** **C#m**



E B G D A E

51,67

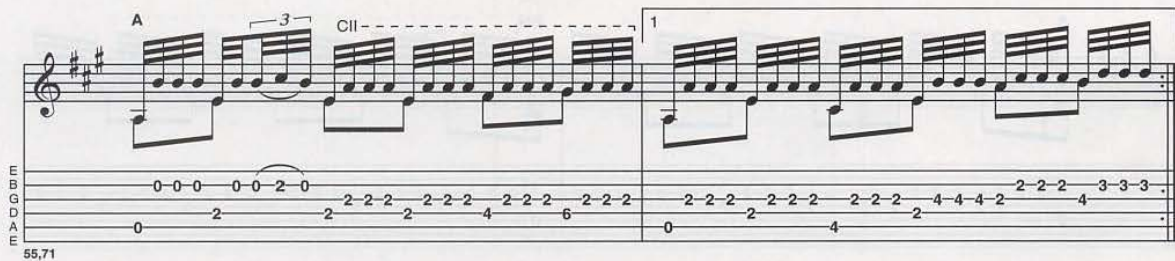
**Bm<sup>b5</sup>** **A/E** **E7**



E B G D A E

53,69

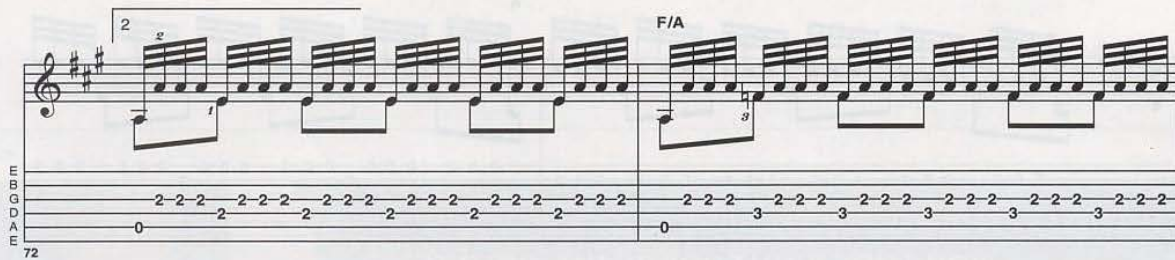
**A** **CII**



E B G D A E

55,71

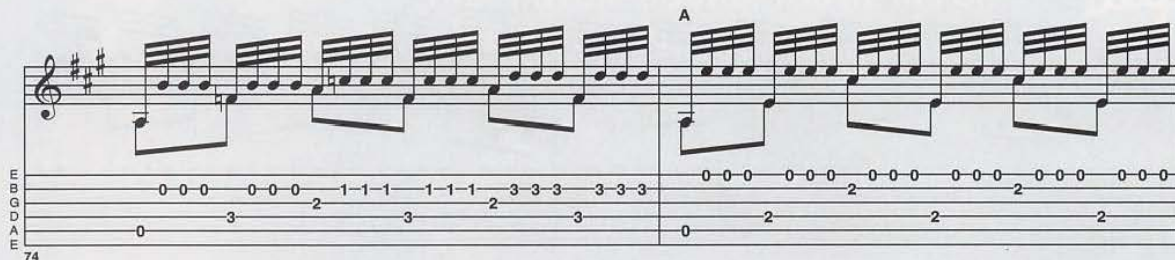
**2** **F/A**



E B G D A E

72

**A**



E B G D A E

74

**FRANCISCO TARREGA** RECUERDOS DE LA ALHAMBRA

Bm/E      A/E      E7      A      A(#5)      A6      A(#5)

3-3-3 3-3-3 2-2-2 2-2-2 0-0-0 0-0-0      2-2-2 2-2-2 2-2-2 3 2-2-2 4 2-2-2 3 2-2-2

0 4 2 2 0 0      0 2 2 2 3 4 3 2

0 0 0 0 0 0      0 2 2 2 3 4 3 2

[illegible]



**[Bars 89-end]** Pull back the tempo slightly from bar 89 onwards - but don't overdo it as the audience always claps before the last chord anyway!

**[Re: triplets]** The only places where the tremolo pattern is 'broken' is when the triplets occur. The last note of the group of four is omitted and the fretting hand plays the triplet as a hammer-on/pull-off. This is tricky and takes a lot of coordination so practise slowly.

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THE "TAYLOR" SOUND, YOU'RE IN FOR  
A BIG SURPRISE.



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