

Study in E Minor



Bridget Mermikides returns with a new classical guitar series, kicking off with Fernando Sor's Study in E Minor, Opus 31 no.6



Sharon Isbin:
founder of the
Juilliard Guitar
Department

lessons will include pieces by the guitar masters of the 18th and 19th centuries, and will demonstrate the most useful and common techniques of this style, with tips and practical advice along the way.

This month we'll start with a piece by the Spanish guitarist-composer Fernando Sor (1778-1839). Sor was the first great guitar virtuoso and composer of the classical era, and he performed his own music in concert halls throughout Europe. He lived in London and Paris, where a new generation of players was not only able to see a virtuoso close up but also benefit from him as a teacher. Sor wrote numerous studies for students at all levels and still in use today is his *Methode Pour La Guitare* covering all aspects of technique.

This simple study focuses on picking hand


'free stroke' technique and features an arpeggio pattern of p i m repeatedly through a changing harmonic structure. The term free stroke or 'tirando' is the technique of striking a string without allowing the finger (or thumb) to touch or rest upon an adjacent string after the pluck has been executed. Most notes are played this way in classical guitar music.

Quality of tone is a key ingredient to help the projection of sound and the picking hand

nails play a big part here. There is often confusion with how to file and care for the nails and the fact that they occur in countless variations of arch shape, condition and thickness doesn't help. Filing your nails in contour with the tip of the finger however is a good start, and when holding your hand up to eye level (palm facing you) you should be able to see about 2mm of nail protruding over the end of your fingertips. A lot of players like to shape the nail across a downward angle on the left side (palm now facing away) and the goal when plucking a string is that both the flesh and fingertip of the nail come into contact with the string simultaneously. The transition of the finger from flesh to nail when plucking should be seamless, so if the string gets caught under the nail and creates a 'click' sound, the angle of attack and shape of the nail will need to be addressed. Varying degrees of flesh and nail should be available to the player to enable tonal contrast. The flesh of the finger creates warmth and depth to the tone and the nails provide a clearly defined beginning to the note, helping to project the sound.

Before you start, make sure to do some warm-up exercises. Play p i m all free stroke throughout. Before you start, check i and m on the top two strings individually and aim to achieve the same volume and tone on each note. The angle of attack should be a push of the fingertip towards the underside of the hand in the direction of the elbow or upper arm - try not to pull or 'twang' the string outwards, and allow the remaining fingers to stay relaxed and 'open' - not curled up in a fist, which can restrict movement.

The thumb should stay quite straight, the plucking movement coming from its base joint. When looking down at the picking hand ensure the thumb plucks to the left of the fingers, not inside the hand, and allow it to move in a circular motion, returning to the next string it is due to play. The fourth exercise sees p and i played simultaneously with the third finger (a). This pattern occurs a couple of times in the piece.

Now grab your classical (or other) acoustic and try out the piece! 

“The flesh of the fingers creates warmth and depth to the tone while the nails provide a clearly defined beginning to each note”

ABILITY RATING



Moderate

INFO	WILL IMPROVE YOUR
KEY: Em	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Picking hand p i m freestroke
TEMPO: Free time	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Picking hand thumb accuracy
CD: TRACKS 46-49	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tonal quality

WELCOME TO THE first in a series of intermediate lessons exploring the music and technique of the classical guitar. These

TRACK RECORD Sharon Isbin is an American classical guitar virtuoso, performer and composer whose technique has been described as "sublime". As well as many CDs of her own work she has also recorded (along with Alexander Sergei Ramirez) *Guitar Essentials: The World's Greatest Guitar Music* which highlights the great works of composers including Albeniz, Bach, Tarrega and of course Fernando Sor.

EXAMPLE 1 OPEN STRING PICKING EXERCISE WITH CHANGING BASS NOTES

CD TRACK 47

Here are some simple exercises to warm you up for the main piece. Essentially we have a series of E minor arpeggios with alternative bass line approaches.

You find ideas like these in the main piece so it's really worth boning up on your p i m technique (and general tone) before diving in.

E B G D A E
 0 0 0 0 0 0
 0 0 0 0 0 0
 p i m p i m p i m p i m p i m p i m p

EXAMPLE 2 VARIATION 1

CD TRACK 47

E B G D A E
 0 0 0 0 0 0
 0 0 0 0 0 0
 p i m p i m p i m p i m p i m p i m p

EXAMPLE 3 VARIATION 2

CD TRACK 47

E B G D A E
 0 0 0 0 0 0
 0 0 0 0 0 0
 p i m p i m p i m p i m p i m p i m p

EXAMPLE 4 A FINGERPICKING EXERCISE THAT ALSO UTILISES THE THIRD FINGER

CD TRACK 47

E B G D A E
 0 0 0 0 0 0
 0 0 0 0 0 0
 p i m p i m p i m p i m p i m p i m p

LESSON: CLASSICAL

EXAMPLE FERNANDO SOR: STUDY IN E MINOR, OPUS 31, NO 6

CD TRACK 49

[General] Although this may at first appear to be a fairly simple piece, don't be surprised if some slow practice is required to keep a consistent tone, volume and evenly measured triplet rhythm. Slow, calm and focused practice is always beneficial and recommended. The fretting hand fingering should be followed

carefully as it is intended to help create a seamless transition from one harmony to the next. There are a number of 'anchor' fingers (fingers remaining on the string) to pay attention to, for example: the third finger on A (2nd fret third string) in bar 2 should remain in place until beat 3 of bar 4.

Em **Am7/E** **Am6/E** **B7/E**

Em **Am7/E** **D7** **Em**

Am/C **D7** **G**

D7sus4 **D7** **B7/D#** **B7/E** **Em** **A#dim** **Em/B** **B**

B7 **Em** **C** **Am6** **B7**

1 **4** **7** **10** **13**

p i m p i m p i m p i m etc

p i m p i m i m a p i m p i a p i m p i m i m p i m a p

EXAMPLE FERNANDO SOR: STUDY IN E MINOR, OPUS 31, NO 6 ...CONTINUED

CD TRACK 49

[Bar 10] Notice the switching of the fretting hand fingering from beat 2 to beat 3. This should be treated as a fretting hand position shift from 1st to 'half' position and done as neatly as possible to prepare for the B7/D# shape on beat 4 without a glitch.

[Bar 11] Give bass notes their correct duration by holding on to the fretting

hand finger for the correct number of beats, eg: the 1st note E in bar 11 and the 1st note B in bar 12 should be held for three beats each to provide the underlying pedal tone. These details may seem small but they help to create a flawless sounding performance - and also prepare your technique for more demanding pieces later on.

Em 3 3 3 3 C 3 3 3 3 Am6 3 3 3 3

B7 3 3 3 3 Em 3 3 3 3 C 3 3 3 3

Am6 3 3 3 3 B7 3 3 3 3 Em 3 3 3 3