

Francisco Tarrega

Study In E Minor



Continuing her classical technique and performance series **Bridget Mermikides** looks at a Tarrega piece that brings out the melody in a sequence of arpeggios...



Tarrega: one of classical guitar's most important figures ever...


WELCOME TO THE fifth in our series of lessons exploring the music and technique of the classical guitar. This month's article features the Spanish guitarist and composer Francisco Tarrega (1852-1909). Tarrega's legacy is almost impossible to overplay, given that he helped to create and define the modern classical guitar style of the 20th century. Some of his most popular pieces include *Lagrima*, *Danza Mora*, *Capricho Arabe* and the famous tremolo piece: *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* (featured in GT 135).

In addition to his own compositions, Tarrega significantly expanded the classical guitar's repertoire by transcribing and arranging music by other composers including JS Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Haydn, Mozart, Schubert and many more. Going even further, some of his most successful and popular transcriptions are from the piano music of Albeniz (*Asturias* appeared in GT 149).

Tarrega's *Study In E Minor* this month is a

rest stroke technique, combined with the thumb playing free stroke. Rest stroke, which has the capacity to produce a stronger, fuller tone than free stroke, is where the finger pushes inwards on the string and lands on the next adjacent lower string after plucking. The finger should be a little straighter than when playing free stroke and the movement (or push) comes from the large knuckle joint of the hand. To execute a rest stroke with the finger simultaneously with the thumb playing free stroke requires some focus and coordination, especially at first. But it is a common technique in classical guitar music and should be mastered. Exercises 1 & 2 explain this finger and thumb combination in detail, so make sure you've mastered or at least understood it before moving on to the main piece itself.

The goal of this lesson is to master the technique of making melody notes stand out from an arpeggio pattern using rest strokes on the melody using the annular finger, and free strokes on the accompaniment notes in order to raise the 'tune' away from the 'backing' as it were. The whole piece should be practised this way to develop the technique. A balance between the melody and accompaniment should be the aim (louder on the melody and softer on the accompaniment).

Although the technique presented here might seem relatively simple, it is absolutely fundamental to the important skill of simultaneously playing an expressive melody with accompaniment. The correct and proficient execution of these exercises and study will open the door to a huge range of inspiring guitar music. So be patient and, above all, enjoy! 

ABILITY RATING



Moderate

INFO	WILL IMPROVE YOUR
KEY: E minor	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Picking hand technique
TEMPO: 55 bpm	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Melodies within arpeggios
CD: TRACKS 48-51	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dynamics and rubato

simple but beautiful and rather charming piece in the Romantic style. The main technical elements consist of a repeated picking hand arpeggio pattern with emphasis given to the third or annular finger (written in the notation as 'a') in order for the melody to stand out. To achieve this effect the annular finger is played using the

“ Tarrega significantly expanded the guitar's repertoire by transcribing and arranging music by other composers ”



TRACK RECORD Hailed as one of the most crucial figures in the development of classical guitar technique and repertoire Francisco Tarrega's pieces have proved ideal for teaching and learning the instrument alike. David Russell's *Tarrega: Integral De Guitarra* is a two-CD set containing all his most famous pieces and studies and would be a great Tarrega collection for any serious student.

EXERCISE 1 REST AND FREE STROKES

CD TRACK 49

The purpose of Exercise 1 is to initially isolate the two types of strokes (rest and free). Begin by planting p and a on the sixth and first strings as indicated then simply play as written: free stroke thumb followed by rest stroke finger

followed by planting back down on the strings again. Then on bars 3 and 4 the object is to execute the two strokes simultaneously. Some students find this awkward at first but it does not usually take long to master.

♩ = 55

Plant p & a together on strings 6 & 1 at points indicated by arrows, then play "p" free stroke followed by "a" rest stroke

Plant p & a together again on strings 6 & 1 but this time play "p" free stroke "a" rest stroke simultaneously

E
B
B
D
A
E

p a p a a p a p

EXERCISE 2 SIMULTANEOUS REST AND FREE STROKES

CD TRACK 49

Here we reinforce the technique described above through continuous repetition of the two types of strokes played simultaneously. Allow the rest stroke finger to 'spring' back off the second string shortly after it has landed

there, in order to ready it for playing its next note. In addition to p and a it is recommended to practise this technique with p and m, and p and i for overall technical development.

♩ = 55

Free stroke

Rest stroke

E
B
B
D
A
E

a p a p a p a p a p a p

EXERCISE 3 REST AND FREE STROKE ARPEGGIOS

CD TRACK 50

Here we fill in the remaining arpeggio pattern in preparation for the study. This should be practiced as indicated: rest stroke 'a' is played simultaneously with free stroke 'p' on the first of each triplet, followed by a lighter sounding free stroke m plus i. Aim to avoid any excess movement or pulling back of the

right forearm when playing the rest stroke 'a' finger as this can disrupt the picking hand position. Instead, always push inwards with the fingertip from the knuckle joint. Aim to keep the volume of m and i a little softer than 'a' as this will be the melody note.

♩ = 55

Rest stroke

Free stroke

3

Free stroke

E
B
B
D
A
E

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

LESSON: CLASSICAL

EXAMPLE TARREGA: STUDY IN E MINOR

CD TRACK 51

One component that can be incorporated into a piece of this nature is rubato. 'Tempo rubato' literally means 'stolen time' and it refers to the rhythmic flexibility of tempo applied by classical musicians in order to create emotional expression. It is only occasionally indicated in a score and is somewhat difficult

to describe but it can be heard (and felt) for example when a melody note is held for longer than its actual time (stolen time) and then the tempo may push forward in order to catch up and keep a relative pulse going. The slight speeding up or slowing down of the rhythm happens instinctively with a »

$\text{♩} = 77 \text{ approx}$

The score is divided into four systems, each containing four measures. The first system begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 77 \text{ approx}$. The first measure of the first system is marked with a *mf* dynamic. The guitar staff below the treble staff uses a simplified notation with numbers 0-7 for frets and letters E, B, G, D, A, E for open strings. The second system begins with a *p* dynamic. The third system begins with a *mp* dynamic. The fourth system begins with a *mf* dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and accents.

EXAMPLE PIECE: TARREGA STUDY IN E MINOR ...CONTINUED

CD TRACK 51

» naturally musical performer, like a 'breathing' effect. We should be careful however not to overdo the rubato as repeated stretching and speeding up

of phrases can start to sound predictable and detract from a tasteful and musical effect. Subtlety is always preferable to going at it like a bull at a gate!

The musical score continues from page 16, showing measures 17 through 32. It features a mix of chords including Amadd9, Am, D7, D7sus4, Gadd9, G, Em, Am7, Am6, B7, and B7#5. The notation includes triplets, slurs, and natural harmonics. Dynamics such as *mp*, *mf*, and *f* are indicated. The guitar staff uses a simplified notation with numbers 0-7 for frets and 'x' for natural harmonics. The systems are numbered 17, 21, 25, and 29 on the left margin.