

27 REASONS TO PRACTICE THE CLASSICAL GUITAR WITH THE RIGHT HAND ALONE

Part 3

By Douglas Niedt

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10. Apply or improve changes of tone color.

Practice with the right hand alone to improve the changing of tone colors applies mostly to fast passages in the advanced repertoire. To change the tone color, we often displace the position of the right arm on the guitar. We move the hand closer to the bridge to get a brighter tone color and we move the hand closer to the fretboard to produce a darker tone color. The difficulty is that moving the arm and hand can cause a loss of control.

Here is a passage from Mauro Giuliani's Grande Ouverture, Op. 61. Not only is it fast (about MM=120 J), but in addition to the intended tone color changes, it requires some tricky hinge and standard bars, changes of dynamics, and two rest strokes thrown in for accents.

Example #1:

Example #1.

Grande Ouverture, Op. 61 (Mauro Giuliani), measures 76-81.

As revised and fingered by Julian Bream.

Tone color changes.

II

76

77

Hinge Bar IV IV Full Bar IV Hinge II II IV Hinge Bar IV Full Bar IV Hinge II II

mf

Suono naturale
normal color,
(play at bottom of soundhole)

Ponticello
(bright, play at the bridge)

rest stroke

79

f

mp

Sul tasto
(dark, play at fretboard
or over the soundhole)

f

Suono naturale
(normal color, play at bottom of soundhole)

Trying to learn the tricky left hand plus dealing with the challenges of the right-hand technique at the same time would be difficult and probably result in practicing mistakes. It is just too much to think about. Therefore, we extract the open strings from the passage. This example is different from all my previous examples because it includes slurs. Notice that the slurs are taken into account when I extract the open strings. Example #2:

Example #2.

Grande Ouverture, Op. 61 (Mauro Giuliani), measures 76-81.

The original in standard notation and tab, plus the rewritten version on open strings.

Original: II

76

Original:

Open strings:

Open strings:

Hinge Bar

IV IV Full Bar IV II II IV Hinge Bar IV Full Bar IV Hinge II II

a m i a m i a m i a m i a m i a m i a m i a m i

TAB
0 7 4 5 4 5 6 4 7 4 5 4 5 6 5 4 2 4 2
0 4 0 2 0 4 0 2

Open strings:

(Slur) (Slur) (Slur) (Slur)

TAB
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

The image displays a musical score for guitar, spanning measures 79 to 81. The score is divided into two systems, each with a right-hand (RH) and left-hand (LH) part. The right-hand part is written in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The left-hand part is written in bass clef. The RH part features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, accented with 'rest stroke' (indicated by a blue arrow and the text 'rest stroke' above the staff). The LH part consists of a bass line with fingerings (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 7) and a double bar line at the end of each system. The second system is marked with a red double bar line and the text 'Open strings:' in red. The RH part of the second system features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, accented with 'Slur' (indicated by a blue arrow and the text 'Slur' above the staff). The LH part of the second system consists of a bass line with fingerings (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 7) and a double bar line at the end of each system.

Without the distraction of the difficulties of the left hand, we can focus on the right hand alone to master the tone color changes, dynamics, and rest-stroke accents. Example #3:

Example #3.

Grande Ouverture, Op. 61 (Mauro Giuliani), measures 76-81.
Open strings extracted with tone color changes and dynamics.

76

77

mf

Suono naturale
normal color,
(play at bottom of soundhole)

Ponticello
(bright, play at the bridge)

79

f

mp

f

Sul tasto
(dark, play at fretboard
or over the soundhole)

Suono naturale
(normal color, play at bottom of soundhole)

rest stroke

rest stroke

When a passage is this complicated, practice the right hand alone extremely slowly at first. As you play the open strings, try to hear the music in your head. Sing the melody out loud.

Once the right-hand feels confident, add the left hand. Continue to play the passage slowly so that you don't practice mistakes. Go back and forth between right hand alone and both hands together. Learn to switch your mental focus from hand to hand as desired. Gradually work up the speed to your desired tempo.

On a difficult passage such as this, do not practice the entire section. Begin with a narrow focus—practice a part of one measure over and over, very slowly at first. Play slowly enough that you don't make any mistakes.

Once you've got it, expand your focus to include the entire measure. Do the same with the next measure. Then, combine the two measures as a chunk. Continue to combine small groups or chunks into larger groups until you can play the entire passage.

In Video #1, watch me demonstrate how I would learn this passage.

★ BE SURE TO WATCH ON FULL SCREEN. Click on the icon at the bottom on the far right:

Practice with the Right Hand Alone: Apply or Improve Changes of Tone Color



11. Master passages with difficult string crossings.

It can be challenging to keep track of what your right hand is doing when you are focusing on the difficulties of the left hand. Learning or correcting string crossings is particularly tricky.

Master string crossings in a difficult piece

Here is a scale passage from *Capricho Árabe* by Francisco Tárrega. There are many ways to finger the scale. I like the sound of this fingering because it stays on the bass strings and only has one bad string cross, but the practice strategy I am going to describe applies to any fingering you choose. Example #4:

Example #6.

Capricho Árabe (Francisco Tárrega), measures 11-12.

The fast scale on open strings.

⑥=D

11

i m i m i m i m i m i m i m i m

6 6

Good string cross

Good string crosses

Bad string cross

TAB

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Of course, practice very slowly at first. As you play the open strings, try to hear the music in your head. Sing the scale out loud.

On a difficult passage such as this, it is probably not a good idea to try to learn the complete scale at first. Begin with a narrow focus.

First, you might want to practice the second sextuplet to the first 32nd note of beat #3 with the right hand alone. We will call this Chunk #1. Example #7:

Example #7.

Capricho Árabe (Francisco Tárrega), measures 11-12.

⑥=D

**Practice Chunk #1,
right hand alone.**

[illegible]

Play it slowly until it feels secure. Then play it very fast as a speed burst. Alternate between playing slowly and playing it as a fast speed burst.

Once that feels secure, practice Chunk #1 with both hands together. Example 8:

Example #8.

Capricho Árabe (Francisco Tárrega), measures 11-12.

⑥=D

11

④

i m i m i m i m i m i m i

⑤

④ ⑤ ⑥

m i m i m i m

6

6

Good string cross

TAB

11—12—14—12—11—8—7—10—8—7—10—8—7—0—4—1—0—5—3—2—6—6—5

Play Chunk #1 slowly with both hands until it feels secure. Play it slowly enough that you don't make any mistakes. Then play it very fast as a speed burst. Alternate between playing slowly and playing it as a fast speed burst.

Then, alternate between practicing Chunk #1 with the right hand alone and both hands together. Practice slowly and with speed bursts.

Next, practice the first five 32nd notes as Chunk #2 with the right hand alone. Example 9:

[illegible]

Play Chunk #2 slowly until it feels secure. Play it slowly enough that you always play it correctly. No mistakes! Then play it very fast as a speed burst. Alternate between playing slowly and playing it as a fast speed burst.

Once that feels secure, practice Chunk #2 with both hands together. Example 10:

Example #12.

Capricho Árabe (Francisco Tárrega), measures 11-12.

[illegible]

Play Chunk #3 slowly with both hands until it feels secure. Practice it slowly enough that you play it flawlessly. Don't practice mistakes! Then play it very fast as a speed burst. Alternate between playing slowly and playing it as a fast speed burst.

Then, alternate between practicing Chunk #3 with the right hand alone and both hands together. Practice slowly and with speed bursts.

Then, combine chunks #2 and #3 together. First, practice with the right hand alone. Example #13:

Example #13.

Capricho Árabe (Francisco Tárrega), measures 11-12.

[illegible]

Play the combined Chunk #2 + Chuck #3 slowly until it feels secure. Remember, play it slowly enough that you don't make mistakes. Then play it very fast as a speed burst. Alternate between playing slowly and playing it as a fast speed burst.

Once that feels secure, practice Chunk #2 + Chunk #3 with both hands together. Example 14:

Example #14.

Capricho Árabe (Francisco Tárrega), measures 11-12.

[illegible]

Play the combined Chunk #2 + Chunk #3 slowly with both hands until it feels secure. Play it slowly enough that you play it correctly. Do not practice mistakes. Then play it very fast as a speed burst. Alternate between playing slowly and playing it as a fast speed burst.

Next, alternate between practicing Chunk #2 + Chunk #3 with the right hand alone and both hands together. Practice slowly and with speed bursts.

Then add Chunk #1, so you are playing Chunks #1-3 combined. Example #15:

Example #15.

Capricho Árabe (Francisco Tárrega), measures 11-12.

[illegible]

Play the combined Chunk #1 + Chunk #2 + Chuck #3 slowly until it feels secure. Remember, play it slowly enough that you play it flawlessly. Then play it very fast as a speed burst. Alternate between playing slowly and playing it as a fast speed burst.

Once that feels secure, practice Chunk #1 + Chunk #2 + Chunk #3 with both hands together. Example 16:

Example #16.

Capricho Árabe (Francisco Tárrega), measures 11-12.

Combine Chunks #1, #2, and #3, both hands together.

⑥=D

11

④

i m i m i m

6

⑤

i m i m i m i

④

⑤

i m i m i m i m

⑥

i m i m i m i m

6

Good string crosses

Bad string cross

TAB

11 12 14 12 11 8 7 10 8 7 10 8 7 0 4 1 0 5 3 2 6 6 5

Play the combined Chunks #1-3 slowly with both hands until this chunk feels secure. Do not practice mistakes! Play it slowly enough so that you play it flawlessly. Then play it very fast as a speed burst. Alternate between playing slowly and playing it as a fast speed burst.

Then, alternate between practicing the combined Chunks #1-3 with the right hand alone and both hands together. Practice slowly and with speed bursts.

Finally, add the first sextuplet, which gives you the complete scale. Practice the entire scale going back and forth between right hand alone and both hands together. Learn to switch your mental focus from hand to hand as desired. Occasionally, you may need to review specific chunks if you stumble. Break the scale down into smaller chunks and then reassemble it.

Mix it up:

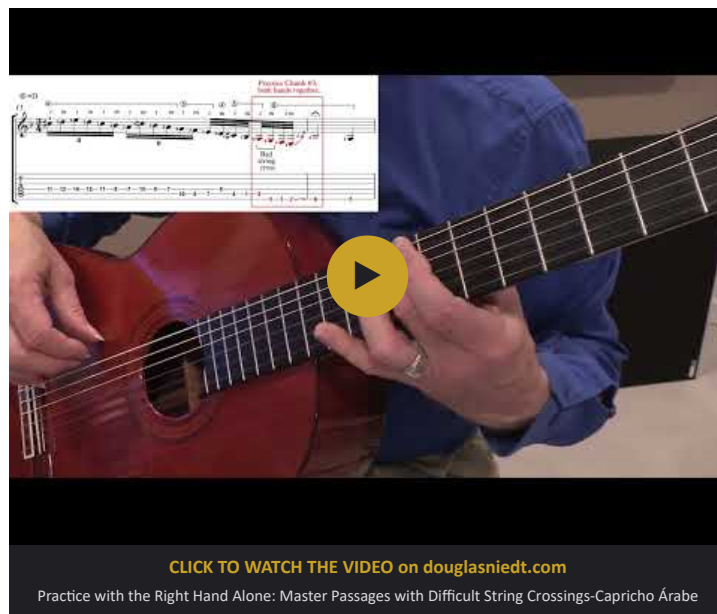
1. Practice some chunks right hand alone, slow.
2. Practice some chunks right hand alone, fast.
3. Practice the chunks both hands together, slow.
4. Practice the chunks both hands together, fast.
5. Tie a couple of chunks together right hand alone, hands together, slow then fast.
6. Play the entire scale right hand alone, hands together, slow then fast.
7. Break it back down into chunks. Practice hands separately, hands together, fast, and slow.
8. Put it back together. Practice hands separately, hands together, fast, and slow.

With this practice strategy, you can master the scale in one to two weeks.

Watch me demonstrate in Video #2.

★ BE SURE TO WATCH ON FULL SCREEN. Click on the icon at the bottom on the far right:

**Practice with the Right Hand Alone:
Master Passages with Difficult String Crossings-Capricho Árabe**



CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com

Practice with the Right Hand Alone: Master Passages with Difficult String Crossings-Capricho Árabe

Master string crossings in an easier piece

Following the fingerings and string crosses is no less important on a beginning piece. Here is *Study No. 2* from *Introduction to the Study of the Guitar, Op. 60* by Fernando Sor. Example #17:

Example 17.
Study No. 2 from Introduction to the Study of the Guitar, Op. 60 (Fernando Sor), measures 1-9.

1

p
m
i
m
i
m
i
p
m
i
m
i
m
i

Good string cross
 Good string cross
 Bad string cross

T 0 1 1 0 1 3 0 1 3 3 1 3 0
 A
 B

5

p
i
m
i
m
i
m
i
p
m
i
m
i
m
i
p

Good string cross
 Good string cross
 Good string cross
 Good string cross

T 0 1 0 3 1 3 0 1 0 2 3 1 0 2 0 //
 A
 B

For the beginning guitarist, that is too much information to keep track of. It would be a great idea to extract the open strings from any problematic measures to practice the right hand alone. Example #18:

Example 18.

Study No. 2 from Introduction to the Study of the Guitar, Op. 60 (Fernando Sor), measures 1-9.
The original in standard notation and tab, plus the rewritten version on open strings.

1 **Original:**

Original:

Open strings:

5

Open strings:

Now, the guitarist can focus on the right hand for the entire passage or one or two difficult measures. Example #19:

Example 19.

Study No. 2 from *Introduction to the Study of the Guitar, Op. 60* (Fernando Sor), measures 1-9.
The passage on open strings.

1 *p* *m* *i* *m* *i* *m* *i* *p* *m* *i* *m* *i* *m* *i*

Good string cross Good string cross Bad string cross

5 *p* *i* *m* *i* *m* *i* *m* *i* *p* *m* *i* *m* *i* *m* *i* *p*

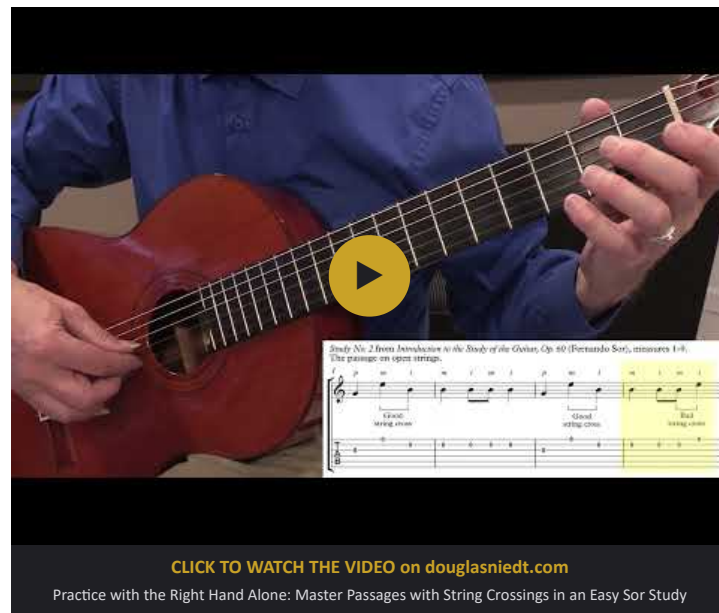
Good string cross Good string cross Good string cross Good string cross

Watch me demonstrate the learning process in Video #3.

★ BE SURE TO WATCH ON FULL SCREEN. Click on the icon at the bottom on the far right:

Practice with the Right Hand Alone:

Master Passages with String Crossings in an Easy Sor Study



Study No. 2 from Introduction to the Study of the Guitar, Op. 80 (Fernando Sor), measures 1-8.
This passage on open strings.

CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com

Practice with the Right Hand Alone: Master Passages with String Crossings in an Easy Sor Study

12. Master complex rhythms.

Practicing with the right hand alone can often give clarity to complex rhythms that may be difficult to learn when practicing with both hands together. Often, left-hand movements such as shifts and difficult stretches will interfere with the rhythms plucked by the right hand. Complex rhythms occur most frequently in modern classical music, jazz, and some popular music.

Let's look at a passage from "Restless", the third movement of *Nocturnal* by Benjamin Britten. In measures #21-28, we have a tricky 4:3 (four-against-three) rhythm. There are four evenly spaced notes in the upper voice but three evenly-spaced intervals or chords in the lower voice. Example #20:

Example 20.

Restless from *Nocturnal* (Benjamin Britten), measures 21-28.
4 against 3 rhythm.

The slurs are phrasing marks, not hammer-ons or pull-offs.

21

2 1 2 1 2

0 2 0 4 0 5 0 5 2 5 4 6 0 8 0 5 8 5 8 7

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

25

2 3 1 3 1 4 1 4 1 4 1 4 1 4 1 4 1 4

9 10 8 10 11 8 9 6 7 4 5 2 3

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

The passage is full of shifts and a few stretches that will throw off the right hand's execution of the 4:3 (four-against-three) rhythms. Let's extract the open strings. Example #21:

Example 21.

Restless from Nocturnal (Benjamin Britten), measures 21-28.

The original in standard notation and tab, plus the rewritten version on open strings.

Original:

Open strings:

Open strings:

Open strings:

Open strings:

Now, we have the right hand alone and can decipher the rhythm more efficiently. Example #22:

Example 24.

Restless from *Nocturnal* (Benjamin Britten), measures 26-27.
Subdivide the rhythm of the upper voice.

Musical notation for Example 24, measures 26-27. The upper voice part is in 3/4 time. The melody consists of eighth notes with dotted rhythms. The lower voice part consists of whole notes. The upper voice part is divided into two measures, each containing three eighth notes. The lower voice part consists of two whole notes. The upper voice part is divided into two measures, each containing three eighth notes. The lower voice part consists of two whole notes.

Finally, we put the two parts back together, still with our 16th-note subdivisions. We pluck the notes on each of the red numbers and syllables. Example #25:

Example 25.

Restless from *Nocturnal* (Benjamin Britten), measures 26-27.
Put the voices together, and count the subdivisions.

Musical notation for Example 25, measures 26-27. The upper voice part is in 3/4 time. The melody consists of eighth notes with dotted rhythms. The lower voice part consists of whole notes. The upper voice part is divided into two measures, each containing three eighth notes. The lower voice part consists of two whole notes. The upper voice part is divided into two measures, each containing three eighth notes. The lower voice part consists of two whole notes.

Practice playing and counting until you can play the rhythm accurately on the open strings.

Then, add the left hand. Play the notes and chords on the red syllables. The puzzle is solved! Example #26:

Example 26.

Restless from *Nocturnal* (Benjamin Britten), measures 26-27.

The puzzle is solved. Pluck the notes and chords on the red syllables.

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a

26

11 8 9 6 7 4 5 2 3

T 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

A 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

B 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Finally, apply this same practice strategy to the rest of the passage.

Another method of learning the 4:3 rhythms is with a fun auditory-mnemonic trick that doesn't require advanced math skills! Teachers and students have come up with several catchy phrases to solve the 4:3 rhythmic puzzle, some of which are X-rated. Here are some family-friendly examples:

1. Pass, the stink-ing but-ter.
2. Eat, the yuck-y spin-ach.
3. Pass, the gosh-darn but-ter.
4. What, atro-cious weath-er.

Recite the mnemonic phrase as you play the open-string excerpt. Example #27:

Example 27.

Restless from *Nocturnal* (Benjamin Britten), measures 26-27.

"Pass, the stink-ing but-ter" on the open strings.

26

Pass the stink-ing but - ter Pass the stink-ing but - ter

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a

11 8 9 6 7 4 5 2

T 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

A 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

B 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Then, add the left hand and recite the mnemonic phrase. Example #28:

Example 28.

Restless from *Nocturnal* (Benjamin Britten), measures 26-27.
 "Pass, the stink—ing but-ter" with both hands together.

Finally, apply the mnemonic phrase to the rest of the passage.

Watch me demonstrate this process in Video #4.

★ BE SURE TO WATCH ON FULL SCREEN. Click on the icon at the bottom on the far right:

Practice with the Right Hand Alone:

Master Complex Rhythms (*Nocturnal* by Benjamin Britten)

Remember, the point is to decipher and learn passages that have complicated rhythms on open strings first. Mnemonic phrases may or may not be applicable. It is the practice with the right hand alone that makes it easier to learn complex rhythms.

13. Increase the speed of a piece or passage

Whether you are trying to increase the speed of the arpeggio passages in Albeniz's *Leyenda*, Villa-Lobos' *Etude #1*, Fernando Sor's *Grand Solo*, Giuliani's *Grande Ouverture* or countless other pieces, practicing with the right hand alone is invaluable. It allows you to focus on building your right-hand speed without having to hold bar chords, awkward left-hand positions, difficult stretches, or play difficult shifts. All the emphasis is on raw right-hand speed and technique.

As with arpeggios, if you want to develop speed on your tremolo, you must practice with the right hand alone. In the early stages of development, you cannot focus on the technique of your right hand and the speed and evenness of the tremolo if you are constantly distracted by things going on with the left hand.

Tom Hess, both a master electric guitar teacher and performer, has a very interesting take on another aspect of speed development. In a master class with an electric guitarist playing with a pick, Hess explains the importance of practicing with the right hand alone to play faster.

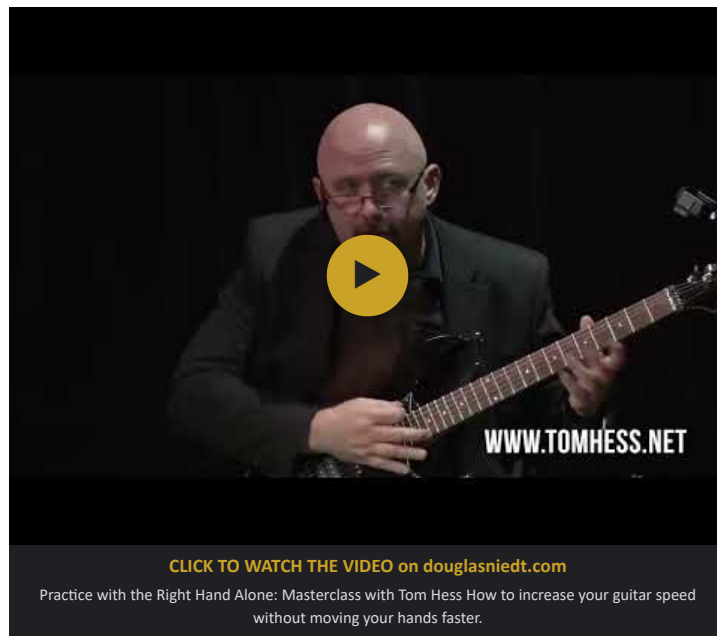
Watch this segment of the master class in Video #5.

★ BE SURE TO WATCH ON FULL SCREEN. Click on the icon at the bottom on the far right:

Practice with the Right Hand Alone:

Masterclass with Tom Hess

How to increase your guitar speed without moving your hands faster.



14. Improve the rhythmic evenness of arpeggios and tremolos

Similarly, to #13 above, practicing with the right hand alone is very useful in cultivating even arpeggios and tremolos. Sometimes it can be helpful to mute the strings with the left hand to listen to the percussive pop of each plucked note to judge whether you are playing the passage evenly or not.

Unfortunately, the following scenario will often occur. You will practice with the right hand alone and play a passage with excellent control and evenness. But then, when you add the left hand, you lose some control of the right hand, and the notes become rhythmically uneven. In other words, the left hand is throwing off the right hand.

Therefore, you must alternate between practicing with the right hand alone and playing both hands together. Alternating between the two will help you feel how and precisely where the left hand is affecting the right hand so you can take corrective steps. These steps may include altering the left-hand fingering, especially eliminating shifts or changing the location of the shifts. Or, it may be a matter of using less finger pressure on the left hand or reducing left arm, left shoulder, or left-hand tension in general. If you don't practice with the right hand alone, it can be challenging to diagnose the problem. And if you can't diagnose the problem, you can't fix it!

You have learned 14 reasons to practice the right hand alone. We have 13 to go. See you next month with Part 4.