

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

Part 4

By Douglas Niedt

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15. If your left hand is temporarily injured, you can still practice the right hand

It is inevitable that, at some point, you will sustain injuries to the left-hand fingers, arm, or shoulder. It will seldom be from playing the guitar. You will probably get cuts, skin cracks, strained muscles, and irritated tendons from countless physical activities.

Your first thought will be to stop practicing the guitar. Let the injury subside or heal. But why not practice with the right-hand alone? It is a perfect opportunity. I know that many guitarists will not take the time to practice with the right-hand alone because they don't realize its value. Or, it may never occur to them to do so. But when your left hand is temporarily disabled, use that time as an opportunity to improve your right-hand technique.

16. Master passages that contain complicated right-hand configurations

Most of the examples I gave in Parts 1-3 and those I give in Part 4 and Part 5, fall into the "complicated" category. Although you can probably untangle the problems by practicing both hands together, it is usually more efficient to practice the right-hand alone. Attempting to master the complexities of both hands at the same time is often frustrating. It is just too much to think about in a complicated passage.

By extracting the right-hand's part and practicing it separately, the hand will gain confidence and stability because it will know its part independently of the left hand.

17. Master passages that require the use of the thumb playing rest stroke

In Heitor Villa-Lobos' *Prelude No. 1*, there is a fast section in the middle of the piece. Example #1.

Example 1.

Prelude No. 1 (Heitor Villa-Lobos), measures 53-55.

❁ = Metronome tick. Play the red notes on the ticks.

52

1 & 2 & 3 &

Very important: This open B must be precisely on the tick because it is the 2nd beat of the measure.

Notice that the FIRST note of the ornaments should be on the tick.

53

1 & 2 & 3 &

54

1 & 2 & 3 &

Make sure "i" and "m" STICK ON THEIR STRINGS

PLANT "im"

Notice that the FIRST note of the ornaments should be on the tick.

55

1 & 2 & 3 &

By the way, this passage definitely falls into the "complicated right-hand configurations" category in Reason #16!

As you see, there is a lot of information for the hands to absorb in this passage. It is best to extract the open strings and practice the right-hand alone to master the passage. Notice that the grace notes are taken into account when I extract the open strings. In other words, I delete the ornaments. Example #2:

Example 2.

Prelude No. 1 (Heitor Villa-Lobos), measures 53-55.

The original (no slurs) in standard notation and tab, plus the rewritten version on open strings.

52

Original:

Original:

Open strings:

Open strings:

Detailed description: This block contains the musical notation and guitar tablature for measure 52. It is divided into two main sections: 'Original' and 'Open strings'. Each section has a standard musical staff and a corresponding guitar tablature staff. The 'Original' section shows the original notation with red highlighting on the notes and a complex fretting pattern in the tab (e.g., 0, 4, 7, 7, 5-7-5, 4, 0, 4, 2-4-2). The 'Open strings' section shows the same measure rewritten to use only open strings (0) on the guitar, with a simplified tablature.

54

Original:

Original:

Open strings:

Open strings:

Detailed description: This block contains the musical notation and guitar tablature for measure 54. It is divided into two main sections: 'Original' and 'Open strings'. Each section has a standard musical staff and a corresponding guitar tablature staff. The 'Original' section shows the original notation with red highlighting on the notes and a complex fretting pattern in the tab (e.g., 0, 4, 7, 7, 5-7-5, 4, 0, 4, 2-4-2). The 'Open strings' section shows the same measure rewritten to use only open strings (0) on the guitar, with a simplified tablature.

If you play the passage WITH slurs, we eliminate those and the ornaments when we extract the open strings. Example #3:

Example 3.

Prelude No. 1 (Heitor Villa-Lobos), measures 53-55.
The original (WITH slurs) in standard notation and tab, plus the rewritten version on open strings.

The image displays a musical score for Example 3, which consists of two systems of music. Each system contains a standard notation staff and a guitar tablature staff. The first system is labeled 'Original:' in red text. The second system is labeled 'Open strings:' in red text. The score is for measures 53-55 of Heitor Villa-Lobos' Prelude No. 1. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 2/4. The original notation includes slurs and ornaments. The open string version shows the same notes but without slurs and ornaments, indicating that the notes are played on open strings. The tablature for the original version includes fingerings (1, 2, 4, 7, 5, 4, 2) and natural signs. The tablature for the open string version shows all notes as '0', indicating they are played on open strings.

52

Original:

Original:

Open strings:

Open strings:

54

Original:

The image displays a musical score for measure 54, divided into two systems. Each system contains a right-hand melody and a left-hand accompaniment. The first system is labeled 'Original:' and the second system is labeled 'Open strings:'. The right-hand part is in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 2/4 time signature. The left-hand part is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. The 'Original' system shows a complex left-hand part with many accidentals and fingerings. The 'Open strings' system shows a simplified left-hand part with only natural notes and no accidentals, indicating that the strings are open.

Original:

Open strings:

Without the distraction of the difficulties of the left hand, we can focus on the right-hand alone to master the thumb rest stroke and planting techniques we must use to play the passage with stability at a fast tempo *and in rhythm*. For measures 52 and 53, here is what we need to practice. Example #4:

Example 4.

Prelude No. 1 (Heitor Villa-Lobos), measures 52-53.

The open strings extracted. Note the use of planting and rest strokes with the thumb.

* = metronome tick

1 * & *
2 * & * 1 * & 2 * & 3 *

THUMB REST STROKE

52

p p p i

m a i

i i i

p p p

Make sure "i" "m" and "a" STICK ON THEIR STRINGS

PLANT "ima"

Very important: This open B must be precisely on the tick because it is the 2nd beat of the measure.

Don't pluck if you are playing the slur

Strumming the 1st and 2nd strings with the thumb is optional. Or, pluck with "p" and "m".

Don't pluck if you are playing the slur

Don't pluck if you are playing the slur

TAB

Due to the complexity of measure #52, you will probably want to break down each element. For instance, practice only the plant and the first three thumb rest strokes. Then, go on from there to the next difficulty you have. Once the right-hand feels confident, add the left hand. Example #1a:

Example 1a.

Prelude No. 1 (Heitor Villa-Lobos), measures 52-53.

✱ = Metronome tick. Play the red notes on the ticks.

Very important:
This open B must
be precisely on the tick
because it is the 2nd beat
of the measure.

Notice that the FIRST note of the
ornaments should be on the tick.

TAB

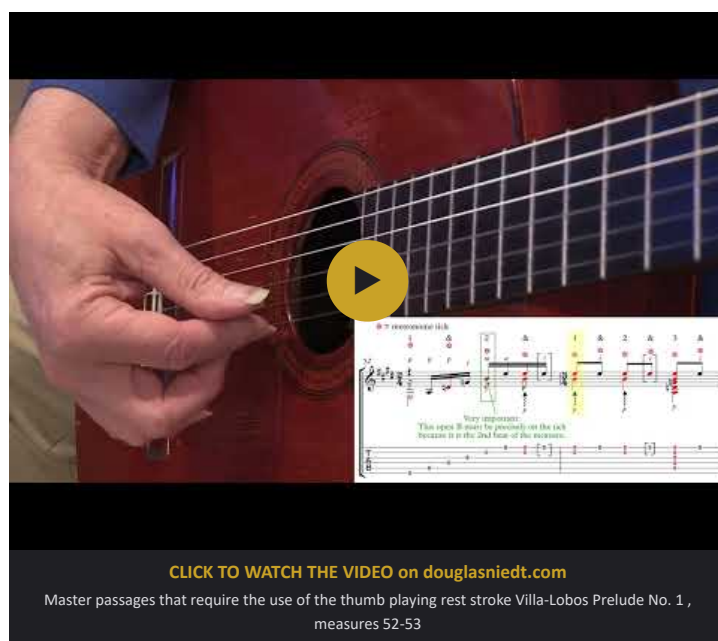
Continue to play the passage slowly so that you don't practice mistakes. Go back and forth between the right-hand alone and both hands together. Learn to switch your mental focus from hand to hand as desired. Gradually work up the speed to your desired tempo.

I know this is very complicated. But it will be much easier to understand if you watch Video #1, in which I demonstrate how to learn this passage step-by-step by practicing the right-hand alone, and then both hands together.

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

Master passages that require the use of the thumb playing rest stroke

Villa-Lobos *Prelude No. 1*, measures 52-53



CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com

Master passages that require the use of the thumb playing rest stroke Villa-Lobos Prelude No. 1, measures 52-53

It gets even more complicated in measures 54 and 55 because, on the first beat, we must play the 1st-string open E free stroke with the "a" finger at the same time we play the 6th string open E rest stroke with the thumb. Example #5:

Example 5.

Prelude No. 1 (Heitor Villa-Lobos), measures 54-55.

The open strings extracted.

On the first beat, play the 1st-string open E free stroke and the 6th-string open E with rest stroke.

* = metronome tick

1 * &

Make sure "i" and "m"
STICK ON THEIR STRINGS
"a" FREE STROKE

54

THUMB REST STROKE
PLANT "im"

2 * &

Don't pluck if you
are playing the slur

1 * &

2 * &

3 * &

Don't pluck if you
are playing the slur

Strumming the 1st and 2nd strings with the thumb
is optional.
Or, pluck with "p" and "m".

Very important:
This open B must
be precisely on the tick
because it is the 2nd beat
of the measure.

Don't pluck if you
are playing the slur

Don't pluck if you
are playing the slur

That is difficult to do. To master that spot, we need to practice three additional exercises. First, learn to play the octave E's using the "a" finger free stroke on the high E and the thumb rest stroke on the low E. Example #6:

Example 6.

Practice the 1st string with "a" free stroke and the 6th string with "p" REST STROKE.

The two notes must be plucked simultaneously.

a free stroke

a

a

a

p rest stroke

p

p

p

Plus, we must plant "im" on the 3rd and 2nd strings at the same time we pluck the octave E's. First, learn the technique by pre-planting "im." Example #7:

Example 7.

Same as preceding exercise, but keep "i" planted on the 3rd string and "m" planted on the 2nd string throughout the exercise. Don't lift them off their strings.

Pre-plant "i" and "m"
on their strings.
Do not lift "im"
off their strings.

a free stroke
p rest stroke

T
A
B

Finally, play the octave E's without pre-planting. Instead, plant "im" at the same time you pluck the octave E's. Remember, play the high E with free stroke and the low E with rest stroke. Example #8:

Example 8.

Similar to preceding, but this time, don't pre-plant "im".
Plant "im" AT THE SAME TIME you pluck "pa".
Remember, "p" is rest stroke, "a" is free stroke.

a free stroke
p rest stroke

Lift "im" off their strings

Plant "im" at the same time that "pa" pluck.

T
A
B

Now, apply these techniques to the extracted open-string arpeggio of *Prelude No. 1*. Example #9:

Example 9.

Apply the techniques to the extracted open strings of *Prelude No. 1*.

Then, go back and incorporate this chunk into the extracted open strings in measures #54-55. Example #5:

Example 5.

Prelude No. 1 (Heitor Villa-Lobos), measures 54-55.

The open strings extracted.

On the first beat, play the 1st-string open E free stroke and the 6th-string open E with rest stroke.

* = metronome tick

Very important:
This open B must
be precisely on the tick
because it is the 2nd beat
of the measure.

Once the right-hand feels confident, add the left hand. Example #10:

Example 10.

54

1 & 2 & 1 & 2 & 3 &

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

Make sure "i" and "m" STICK ON THEIR STRINGS

PLANT "im"

Thumb-strum Optional

Thumb-strum Optional

Slide-slur Optional

Thumb-strum Optional

Notice that the FIRST note of the ornaments should be on the tick.

T 0 1 0 4 7 7 0 5 7 5 4 0 4 2 2 2 2

A 2 2 1 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

B 0 2 2 1 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Continue to play measures 54-55 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.

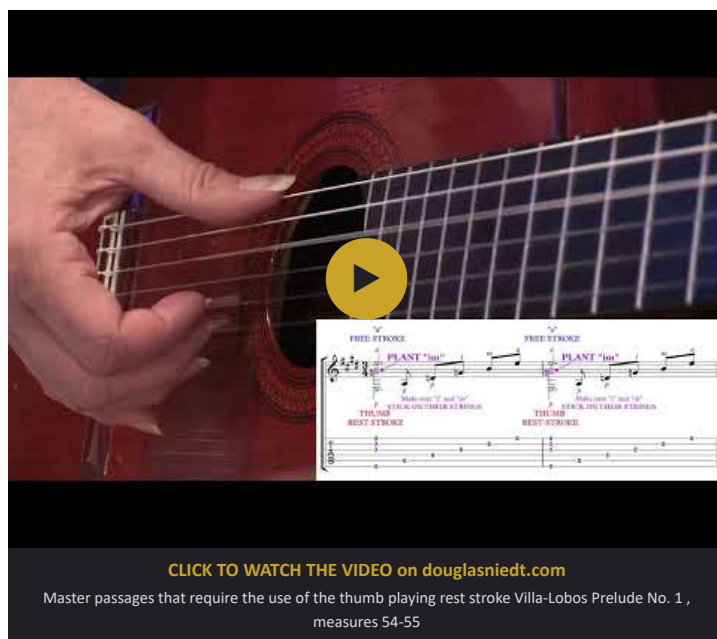
Finally, add measures 52-53 and put the entire passage together. Again, practice with the right-hand alone and both hands together.

Again, I know that this probably looks impossibly complicated to the beginning or intermediate player. But it will be much easier to understand if you watch Video #2, in which I demonstrate how to learn measures 54-55.

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

Master passages that require the use of the thumb playing rest stroke

Villa-Lobos *Prelude No. 1*, measures 54-55



CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com

Master passages that require the use of the thumb playing rest stroke Villa-Lobos Prelude No. 1, measures 54-55

Master passages that combine the use of rest stroke and free stroke in arpeggios.

The perfect example of this is in Fernando Sor's famous *Study No. 5 in B minor*. It is actually *Exercise No. 22* in Sor's *Twenty-Four Very Easy Exercises*, Op. 35. But Andrés Segovia renamed and renumbered it in his *20 Studies for the Guitar by Fernando Sor* as *Study No. 5*.

Rather than repeat the information here, see my technique tip, [How to Use Rest Stroke with the Fingers to Bring Out a Melody within an Arpeggio, Part 1](#), and also [Part 2](#). It takes you step-by-step through the technique with some great videos. It is a comprehensive and fantastic tip, if I do say so myself!

Master passages that use rest and free stroke together in non-arpeggio textures.

Some passages benefit by playing the melody with the fingers rest stroke and the accompaniment with the thumb and fingers free stroke. Rest stroke makes the melody stand out by making it louder, fuller, and giving it its own distinctive tone quality. It is especially useful in pieces from the Romantic era where the melody is king.

For instance, we have this opening melodic passage in *Spanish Dance No. 5 (Danza Española No. 5)* by Enrique Granados as transcribed from the piano by Miguel Llobet. The melody notes are in red. Example #11:

Example 11.

Danza Española No. 5 (Enrique Granados), measures 3-6.
Melody notes in red.

The musical score for Example 11 shows measures 3-6 of *Danza Española No. 5* by Enrique Granados. The melody notes are highlighted in red. The score includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 6/8 time signature. The guitar part is shown with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bass part is shown with a bass clef. The score includes fingerings, a capo position (IX), and a detailed fretboard diagram below the staff.

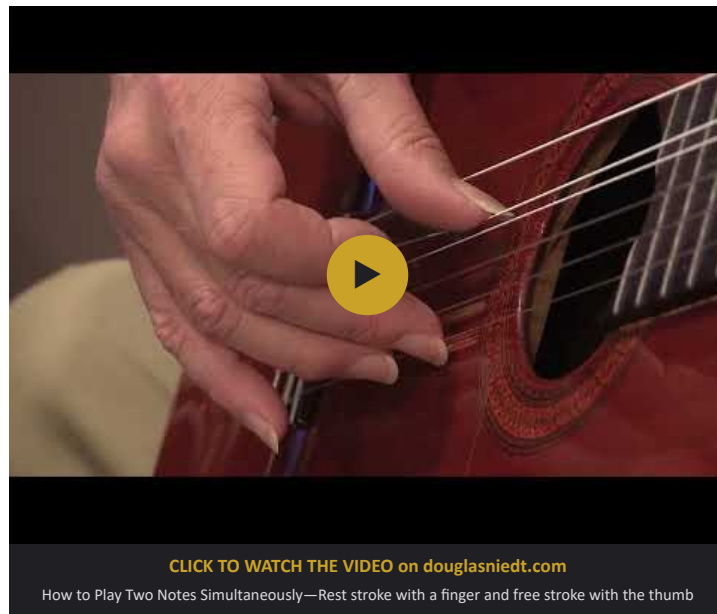
The fretboard diagram shows the following fret numbers for the strings (from top to bottom):

- String 1 (Treble): 0, 0, 0, 5, 7, 8, 12, 12, 9, 12, 9, 10, 12, 9, 10, 9, 10
- String 2: 0, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 0, 10, 9, 9, 10, 9, 10, 9, 10
- String 3: 0, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 0, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 0, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2
- String 4: 0, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 0, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 0, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2
- String 5: 0, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 0, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 0, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2
- String 6 (Bass): 0, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 0, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 0, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2

By the way, if you are among the many players who have difficulty playing two notes simultaneously, the upper note plucked with a finger rest stroke, and the lower note plucked with the thumb free stroke, watch the next video. (The video is from my technique tip, [How to Use Rest Stroke with the Fingers to Bring Out a Melody within an Arpeggio, Part 2](#), and is numbered in the tip as Video #10.) Please watch Video #3:

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

How to Play Two Notes Simultaneously—Rest stroke with a finger and free stroke with the thumb



Many guitarists choose to play the passage with all free strokes, being careful to play the melody loud and keeping the accompaniment notes in the background. But I think it sounds better to apply rest stroke to the melody notes even though that makes it more challenging to learn. Plus, because we can play the melody louder with rest stroke, we can expand our dynamic range for this and similar phrases that follow.

As in previous examples, we could learn the passage by practicing both hands together. But because of the complexity (we are playing three parts at once—melody, accompaniment, and bass), I would begin learning the passage by extracting the open strings and practicing with the right-hand alone. Example #12:

Example 12.

Danza Española No. 5 (Enrique Granados), measures 3-6.

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

3

Original:

Original:

Open strings:

Open strings:

The image displays musical notation and fretboard diagrams for measures 3-6 of 'Danza Española No. 5' by Enrique Granados. It is divided into two main sections: 'Original' and 'Open strings'. Each section contains a musical score in 6/8 time and a corresponding fretboard diagram for the guitar. The 'Original' section shows the standard notation with various chords and melodic lines, and the fretboard diagram with fingerings (0, 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12). The 'Open strings' section shows the same measures rewritten to utilize open strings, with the fretboard diagram indicating zero fret positions (0) and specific frets (0, 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12) for the strings. A double bar line is present between the two sections.

Original:

Original:

Open strings:

Open strings:

In our new version on the open strings, it is much easier for the right hand to understand what it is supposed to do. I will show you two schemas of right-hand fingering. Play the melody notes that are in red with rest stroke. Here is *Right-Hand Fingering Schema #1*. Example #13:

Example 13.

Danza Española No. 5 (Enrique Granados), measures 3-6. The open strings extracted.
Play the melody (red notes) with rest stroke.
Right-hand fingering schema #1.

3

6/8

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

p p p p p p p p p p p p

TAB

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

5

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

p p p p p p p p p p p p

TAB

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

And here is Right-Hand Fingering Schema #2. Example #14:

Example 14.

Danza Española No. 5 (Enrique Granados), measures 3-6. The open strings extracted.
 Play the melody (red notes) with rest stroke.
 Right-hand fingering schema #2.

The musical score for Example 14 consists of two systems, measures 3-4 and 5-6. The right-hand part (RH) is in 6/8 time and G major. The melody is written in treble clef with red notes and fingering (i, m). The left-hand part (LH) is in bass clef and consists of open strings (0) and rest strokes. The RH part is marked with 'p' (piano) and 'p' (piano). The LH part is marked with 'p' (piano) and 'p' (piano). The score is divided into two systems, measures 3-4 and 5-6.

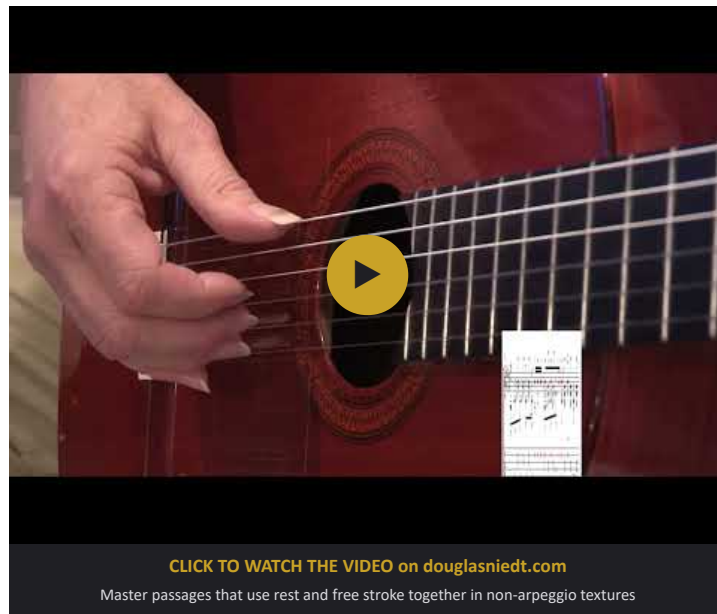
At first, you may want to focus on one or two measures, or even part of a measure. Gradually expand your focus, combining small chunks into larger chunks. Practice with the right hand alone until the rest strokes feel secure, and you are keeping the accompaniment notes quiet in the background.

Then, add the left hand. Alternate back and forth between the right-hand alone and both hands together. As always, practice slowly enough that you do not practice mistakes. When you add the left hand, try to focus on the right hand to be certain you are not deviating from your fingering schema and that you are plucking every melody note with rest stroke.

Watch me demonstrate how to practice the passage from *Spanish Dance No. 5*. Video #4.

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

Master passages that use rest and free stroke together in non-arpeggio textures



Increase the speed of arpeggiated passages.

Many guitarists who try to master *Leyenda* by Isaac Albéniz, have difficulty increasing the speed of Part 1 (measures 1-62) to the tempo they desire. The first 16 measures are relatively easy to play at a fast tempo. But then, many players hit a wall when the arpeggio section begins at measure #17, which is much more difficult to play fast. The best way to get past speed barriers such as this, is to practice with the right-hand alone. It is essential to learn the technique and build the raw speed of the arpeggio first, before adding the difficulties and distractions of the left hand. In this passage, we also have to deal with the complexity of the double thumb stroke. I will cover how to practice the double-thumb stroke with the right-hand alone in Part 5 of this technique tip.

Here is the arpeggio pattern in measures 17 and 18. Example #15:

Example 15.

Leyenda (Isaac Albéniz), measures 17-18, with a common left-hand fingering.

The basic right-hand pattern for measures 17-24 of *Leyenda* is *pim pim pim* etc.

The thumb plays a note of the bass part. Then, *i* plays the 2nd string and then *m* plays the 1st string.

The musical score for Example 15 shows measures 17 and 18 of *Leyenda*. The right hand part is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. It features a complex arpeggio pattern with triplets and sixteenth notes. The left hand part is written in bass clef and includes open strings (0) and fretted notes (4, 5, 7). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 and letters p, i, m.

Unlike previous examples where we extracted the open strings from the passage, for many players, it would be a good idea to practice the basic arpeggio pattern on open strings first. Example #16:

Example 16.

The basic right-hand pattern for measures 17-24 of *Leyenda* is *pim pim pim* etc.

The thumb plays a note of the bass part. Then, *i* plays the 2nd string and then *m* plays the 1st string.

Practice the following open-string exercise to learn the arpeggio pattern for m17-24.

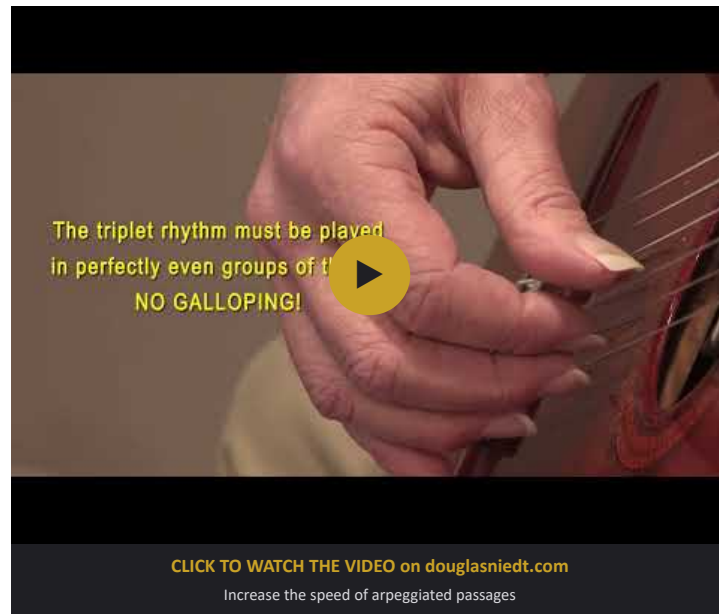
As you practice, be sure to master the nine techniques explained in the video.

1. Set metronome at 50=eighth note. (Metronome tick on each thumb stroke).
2. TAP RIGHT FOOT on each metronome tick.
3. The goal is to play at 130-176 or faster for an eighth note. (Metronome tick on each thumb stroke).

Watch this video explaining how to master the basic arpeggio. (The video is from my instructional package, [Play It Like a Pro™: Leyenda](#), and is numbered in the tutorial as Video #12). Please watch Video #5.

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

Increase the speed of arpeggiated passages



In the actual arpeggio in measure 17-18, the thumb must jump from the 5th to the 3rd string and then from the 3rd string to the 6th string. Example #17:

Example 17.

Leyenda (Isaac Albéniz), measures 17-18. The thumb must jump from the 5th to the 3rd string and then from the 3rd string to the 6th string.

The notation shows measures 17 and 18. The melody is written in treble clef with a 3/4 time signature. The bass line is written in bass clef with fret numbers. Red arrows labeled 'Jump' indicate the thumb moving from the 5th string to the 3rd string and then from the 3rd string to the 6th string.

The thumb jumps can be an obstacle to mastering the section at a fast tempo. Therefore, isolate the thumb jumps and practice them on open strings with the right hand alone. Example #18:

Example 18.

Isolate the thumb-jumps and practice them on open strings:

The thumb should come to rest on the 4th string after each double-thumb stroke and then lift off as "i" plucks.

Then, extract the open strings from measure 17-18 and practice with the right hand alone. Example #19:

You have learned 20 reasons to practice the right hand alone. We only have 7 to go. See you next month with Part 5 (the conclusion).