Hemiolas are Everywhere

The hemiola effect is present in much of Hispanic music. That includes music from Spain, Latin America, the Caribbean, and music from any other country or composer influenced by Hispanic music. It is also present in the music of Africa and the Middle East. It is found in many types of music: classical, pop, folk, and flamenco. If you play music by Albéniz, Granados, Brouwer, Villa-Lobos, Torroba, Turina, Morel, Lauro, Sanz, or many others, you will encounter passages of hemiola.

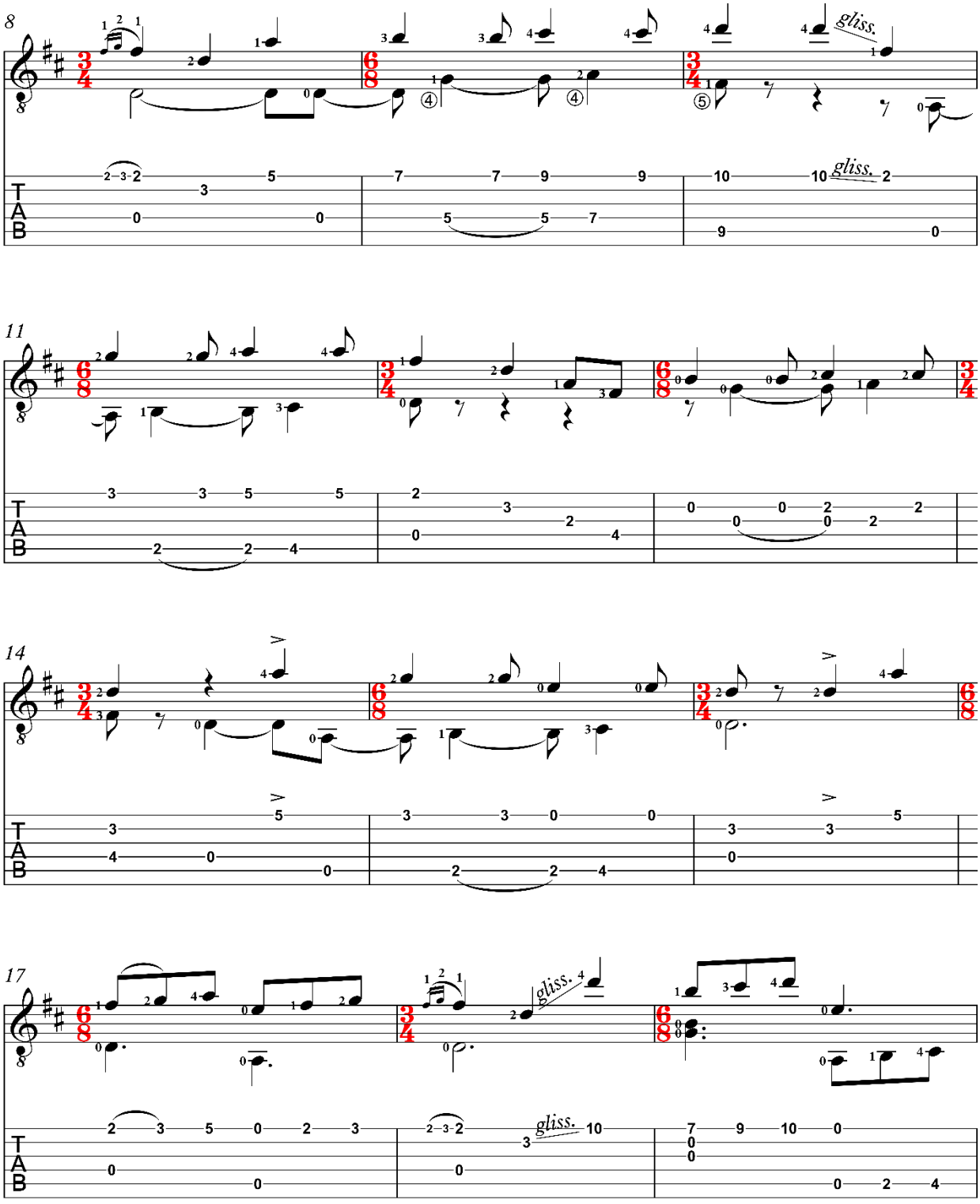
But it isn't limited to "Spanishy" music. It is also found in Renaissance music, Bach, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Ravel, Chabrier and other "serious" music.

Canarios by Gaspar Sanz: The "Mother" of Hemiola

Canarios by Gaspar Sanz is probably the most often-played example of hemiola in the guitar repertoire. It also gives countless guitarists nightmares when they try to learn it. Playing the notes is not the problem. With a fair amount of practice, most intermediate guitarists can play the notes accurately. The biggest problem is counting the rhythm correctly.

Canarios is a great piece on which to learn the hemiola effect because it is filled with so many changes of meter. For example, the meter changes every measure from measure #8 through measure #19 (Example #8):

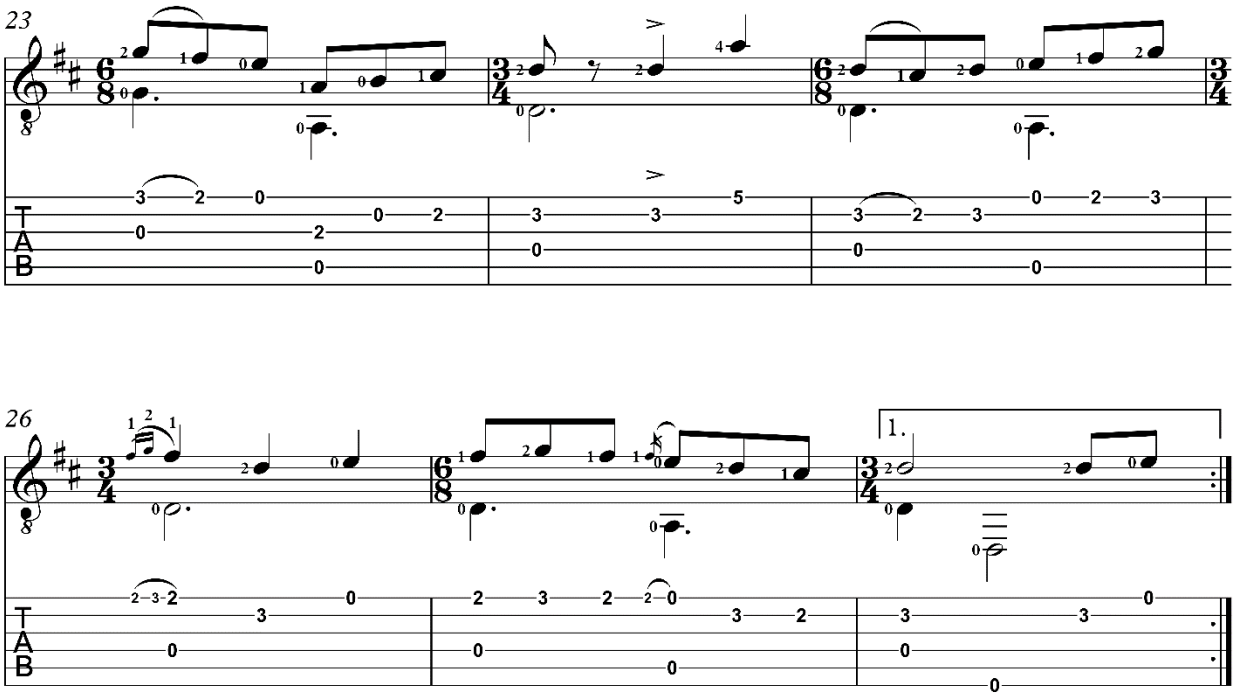
Example #8. *Canarios* (Gaspar Sanz) arr. John Williams, measures 8-19



Watch me play it in Video #4:

Because it is a little easier to play, I am going to use the section from measures #23 through #28 to help you understand the rhythm and show you a few options on how to count the hemiola effect (Example #9):

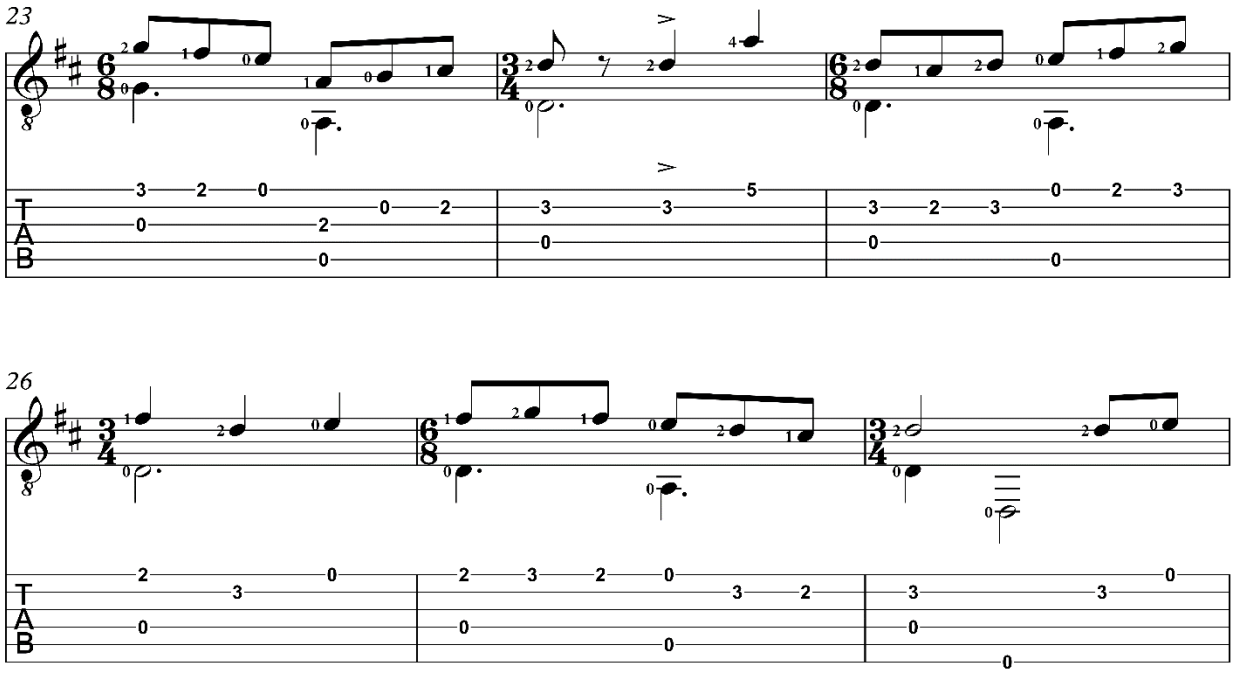
Example #9. *Canarios* (Gaspar Sanz) arr. John Williams, measures 23-28



Rule of Life: Whenever you must learn a complex or difficult rhythm, always omit ornaments and slurs. They usually confuse and obfuscate the learning process.

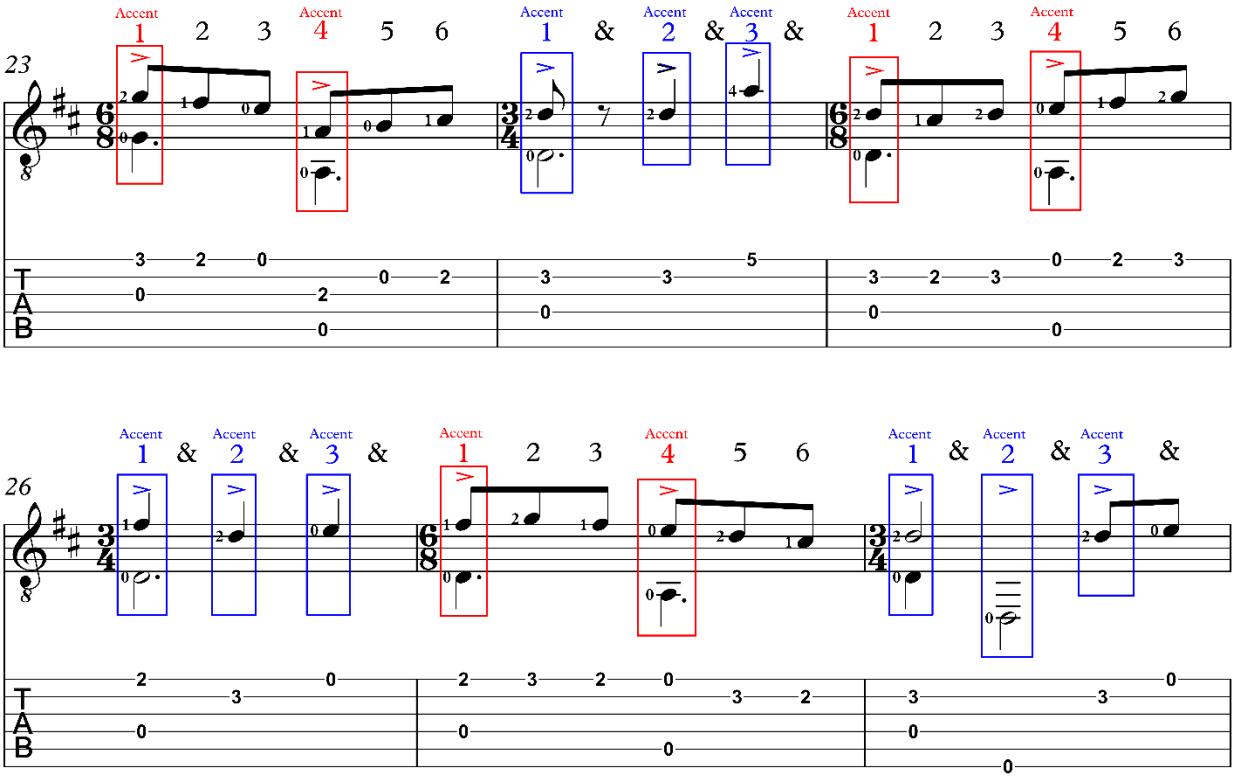
Therefore, here is our updated working example of measures #23-28 (Example #10):

Example #10. *Canarios* (Gaspar Sanz) arr. John Williams.
Measures 23-28 without slurs and ornaments.



Next, we write in the counting and accents (Example #11):

Example #11. *Canarios* (Gaspar Sanz) arr. John Williams.
Measures 23-28 without slurs and ornaments.



YOU MUST COUNT!

Count OUT LOUD

The most important requirement to playing a hemiola rhythm accurately is to count OUT LOUD. It doesn't matter whether you count the traditional way or one of the other options. But you must count out loud. If you count to yourself, it is almost certain you will not count accurately. When you count out loud you will immediately know if you leave out a number, say the wrong number, or slur your speech. *When any of those happens, it is a dead giveaway that you are playing that spot incorrectly and that it needs to be carefully fixed.*

The Speed of the 8th Notes (Quavers) Stays the Same

1. Set your metronome at 144 bpm (beats per minute). Each tick is an eighth note (quaver). Without the guitar, count the 6/8 to 3/4 rhythm out loud over and over: ***1*** 2 3 ***4*** 5 6 ***1*** & ***2*** & ***3*** &… You should speak a syllable on each metronome tick.

2. Keep the metronome at 144. Count out loud: ***1*** 2 3 ***4*** 5 6 ***1*** & ***2*** & ***3*** & and then begin playing example #11 above and keep counting as you play. You may need to work out a measure at a time. Or you may need to slow down the metronome. Work up to 200 bpm.

3. It is difficult to keep track of metronome ticks past 200 bpm. Continue to speed up without the metronome but keep counting out loud.

Watch me demonstrate in Video 5: