SPECIALTY BARS Part 3: Partial Bars

By Douglas Niedt

How to Use This Document

Note: You must have Adobe Reader version 10 or later installed on your computer to play the videos embedded in the PDFs.

To download go to: ***http://www.adobe.com/products/reader.html***

Sizing the Videos

Click on the video. Within 10 seconds it will begin playing. Or, right-click on the video then click "Enable Content". The video will begin playing.

Right-click on the video again. You will be given the option of "Full Screen Multimedia" or "View in Floating Window". Choose either one .

When you want to return to normal size, right-click on the video again. If you are watching full screen, choose "End Full Screen Multimedia" or hit the "Esc" (escape) key on your keyboard. If you are watching a floating window, choose "Close Floating Window".

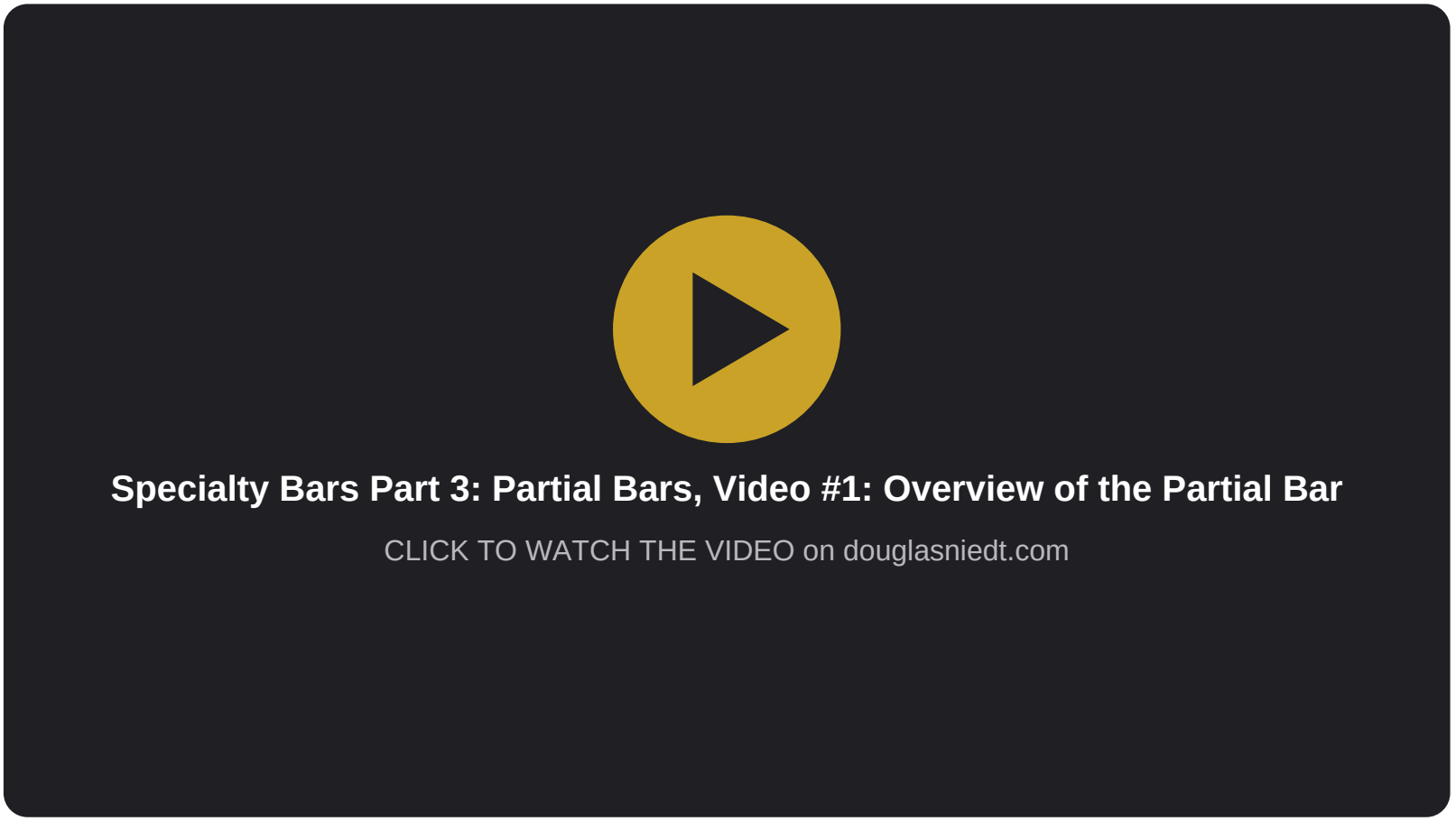
Floating Window

If you are watching the floating window, you can drag it where you want to position it by left-clicking the *very edge* of the window (cursor will change from white to black), holding your mouse button and dragging the window wherever you want it. To resize the window, left-click the *lower right-hand corner* and drag to the size you desire.

What is a Partial Bar?

Some guitarists use the term partial bar to refer to a bar of 2, 3, 4, or 5 strings. That makes sense. But when I speak about a partial bar as a specialty bar, I'm talking about a different animal. My definition of a partial bar is when a finger bars two or three adjacent strings NOT including the first string. The partial bar is done most often with the first finger. But if your joints are limber enough and strong enough, the partial bar can also be done with the 2nd, 3rd, or 4th finger.

A video is worth a thousand words. Watch:

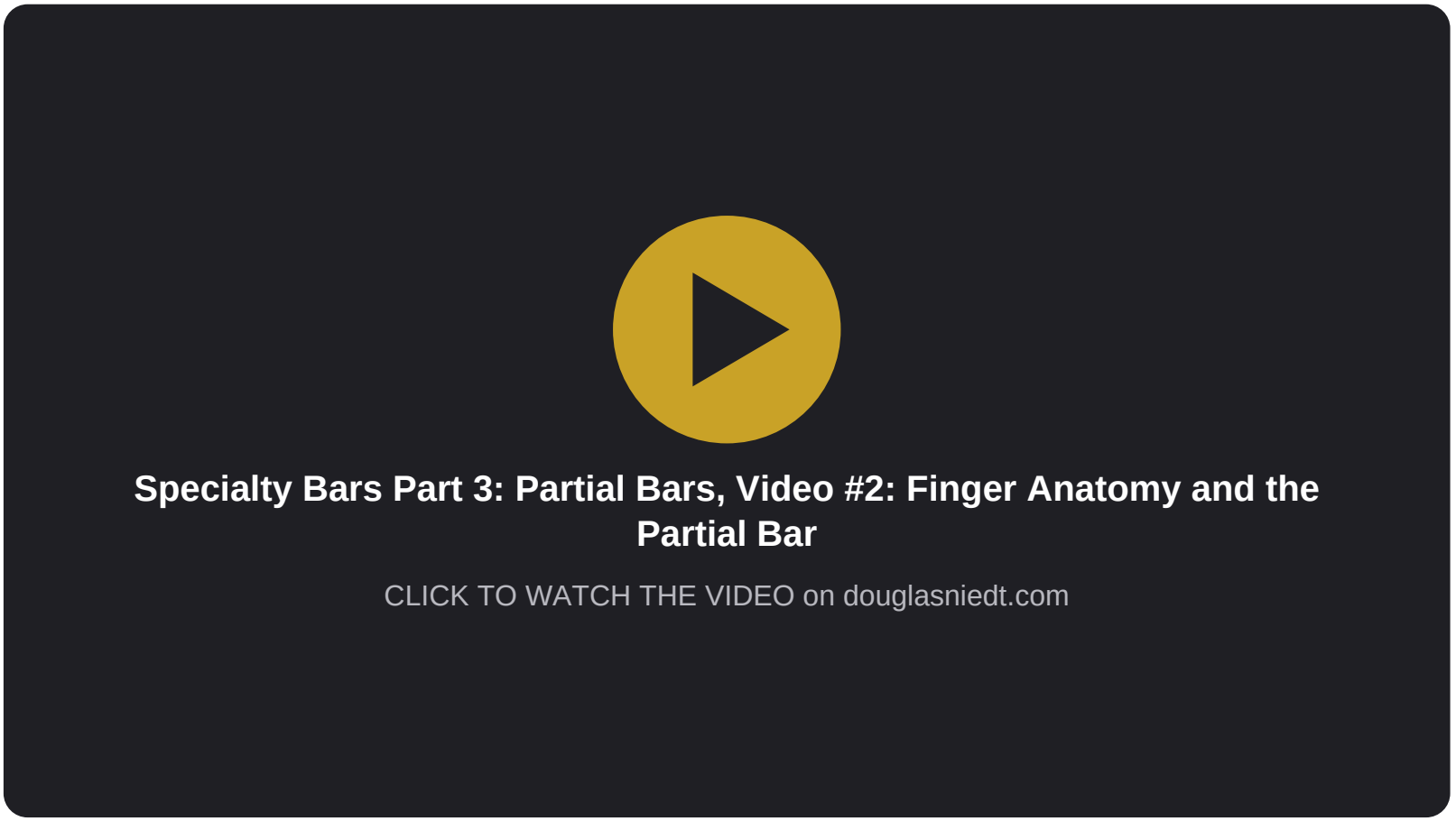


Genetic Factors

As you will see in the next video, the successful execution of a partial bar is dependent upon some genetic physical traits of your fingers:

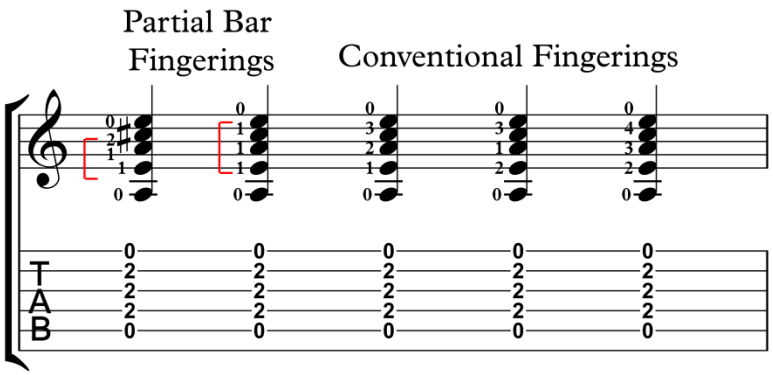
1. The tip segment of your finger must be able to collapse or bend backward (hyperextend) quite a bit at the tip joint.
2. The tip joint must be long enough to bar three strings—but not more than that.
3. The partial bar requires independence of control between the tip and middle joints. You must be able to *keep the middle joint bent* while collapsing or bending backward (hyperextending) the tip joint. You may not be able to hold a partial bar if a finger or fingers exhibit the trait shown in the photo (hypermobility or “double-jointedness”):

Watch this video on how to hold a partial bar:

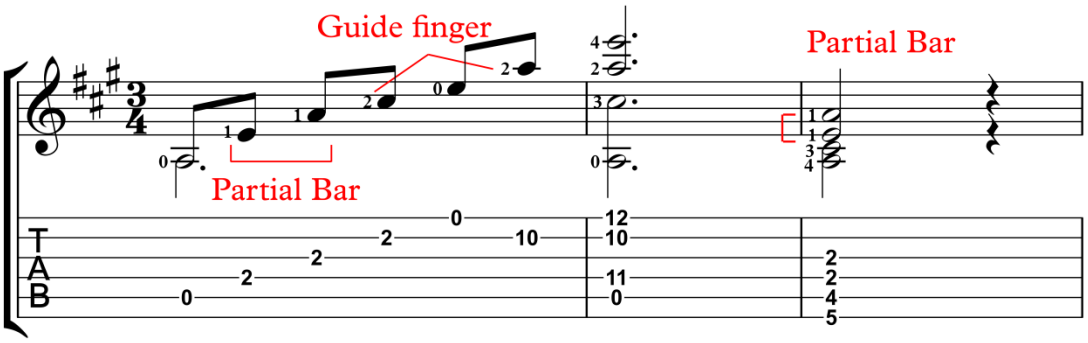


A Common Partial Bar

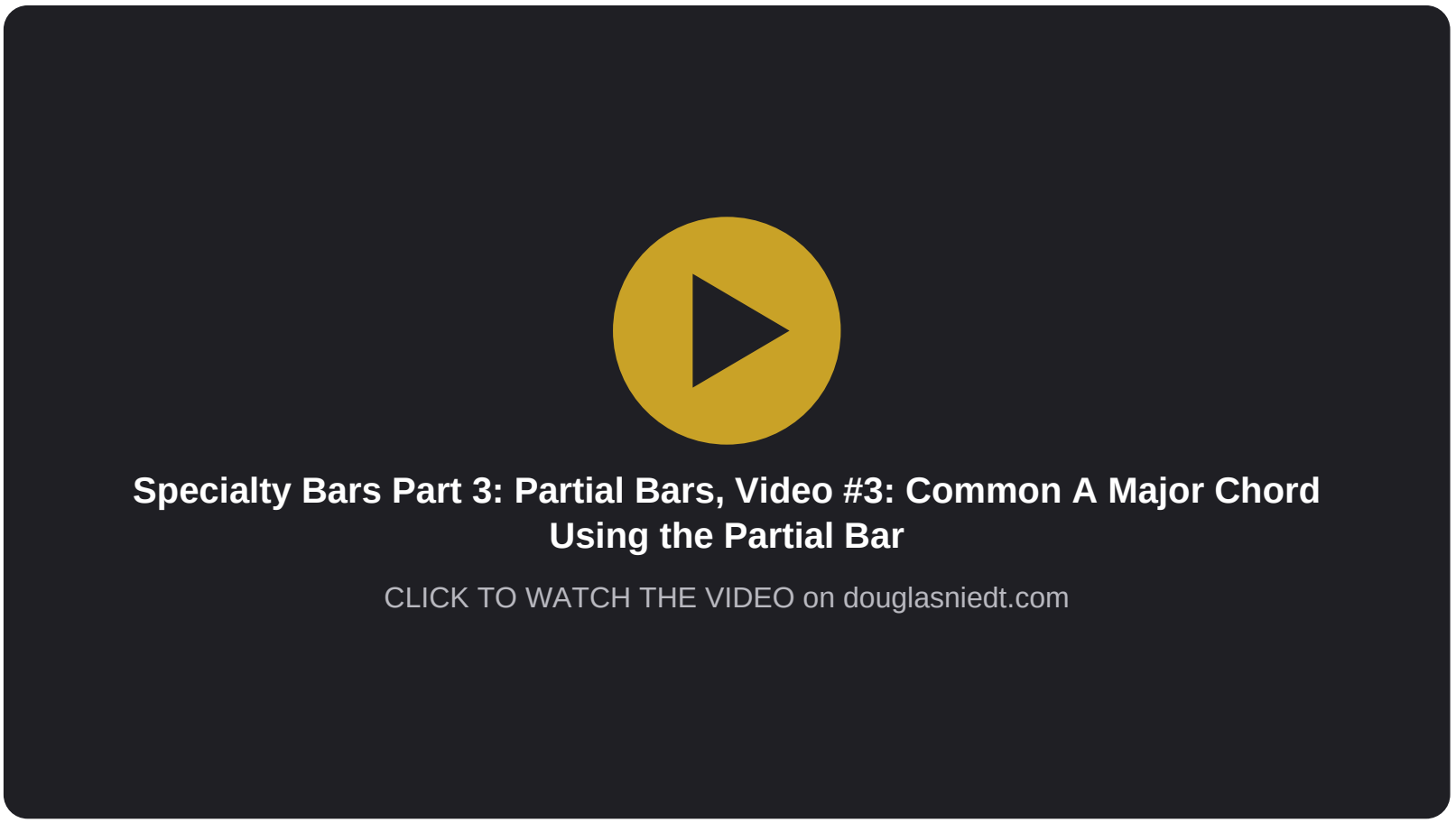
The A major chord in first position is probably the chord that is most often played with a partial bar fingering:



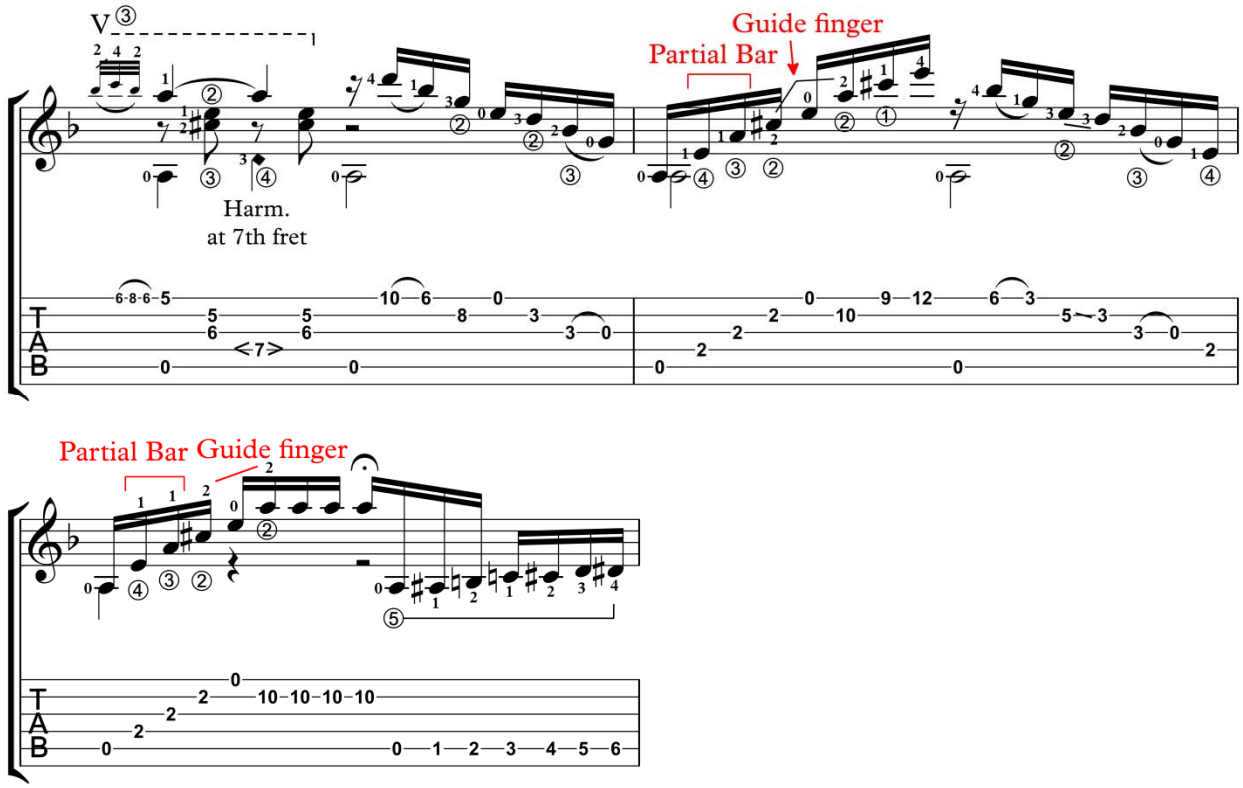
The A-major chord using the partial bar fingering can be found frequently in the common classical guitar repertoire. Note that the chord can be played with other fingerings without using the partial bar. But the partial bar fingering greatly facilitates the execution of many passages. It is found at the end of *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* by Francisco Tárrega:



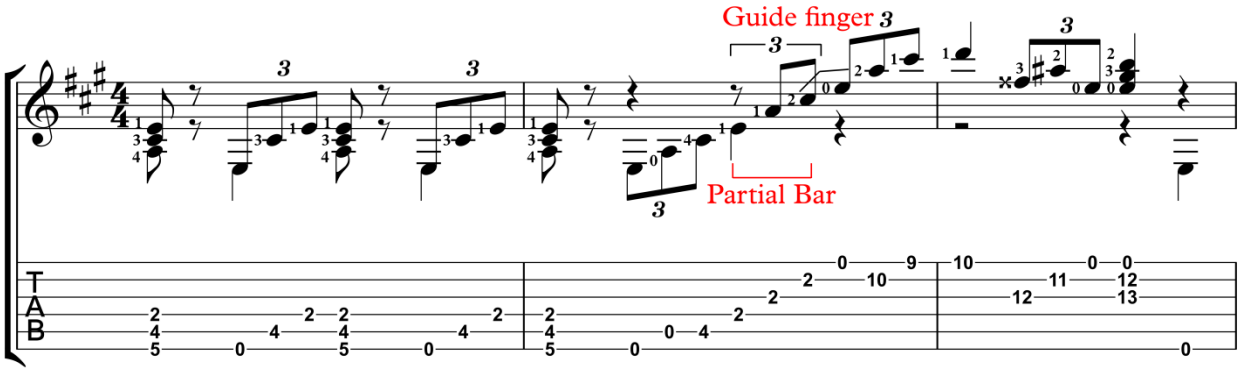
Watch this video:



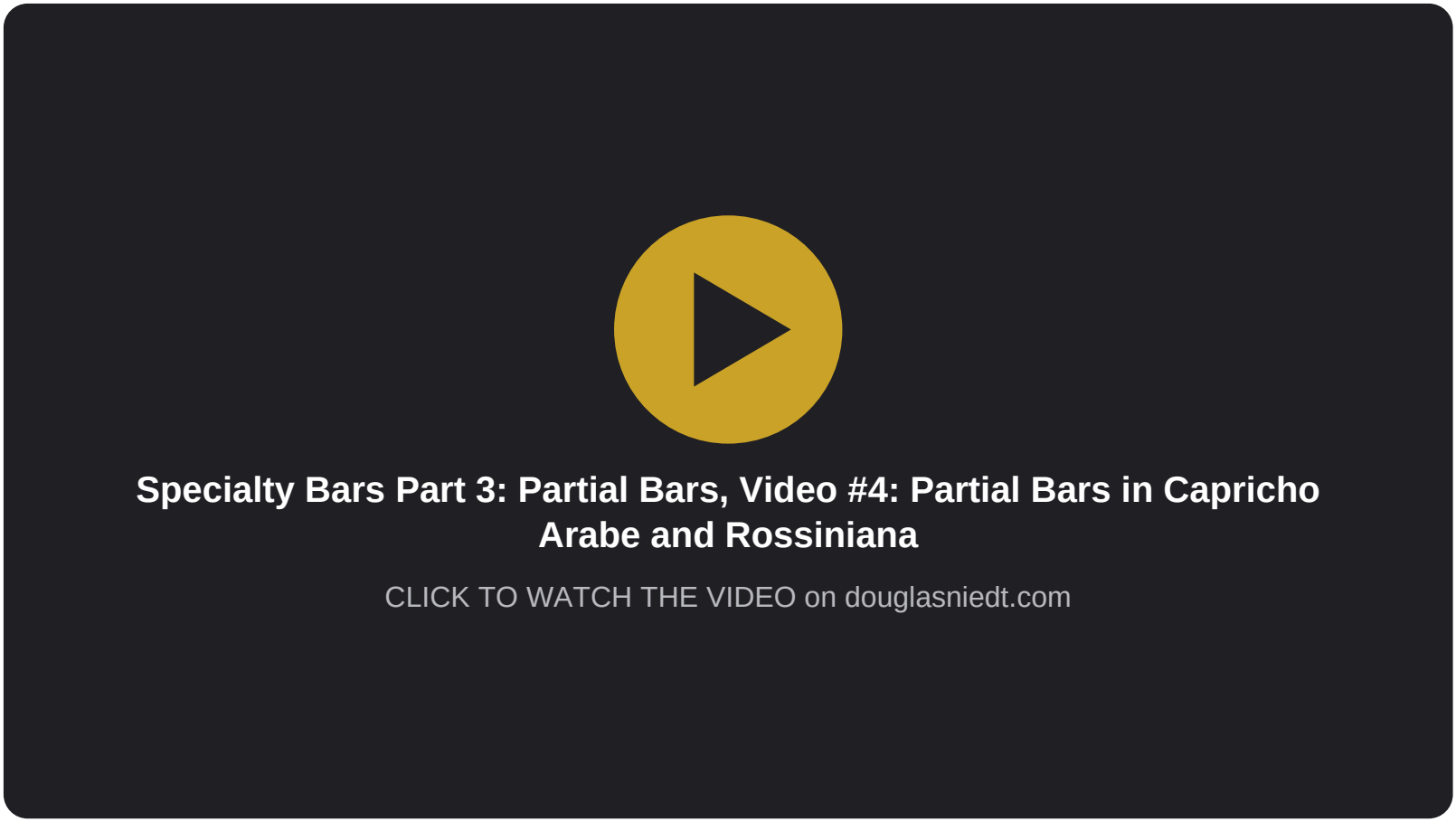
The same notes and fingering for the A major chord are found twice in this passage from Tárrega's *Capricho Árabe*:



Likewise, the same notes and fingering for the A major chord are found in many pieces by Mauro Giuliani including the *Rossiniana* op. 121:



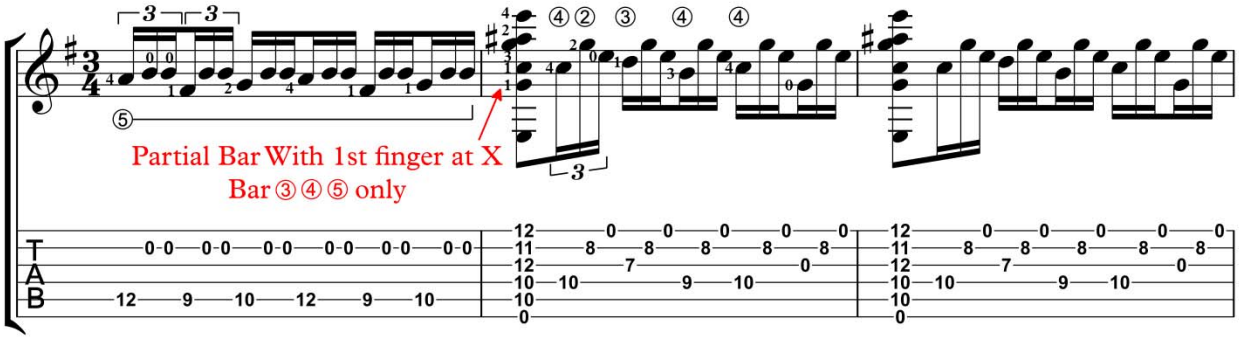
Watch this video illustrating these passages from *Capricho Árabe* and *La Rossiniana*:



Some partial bars require less hyperextension

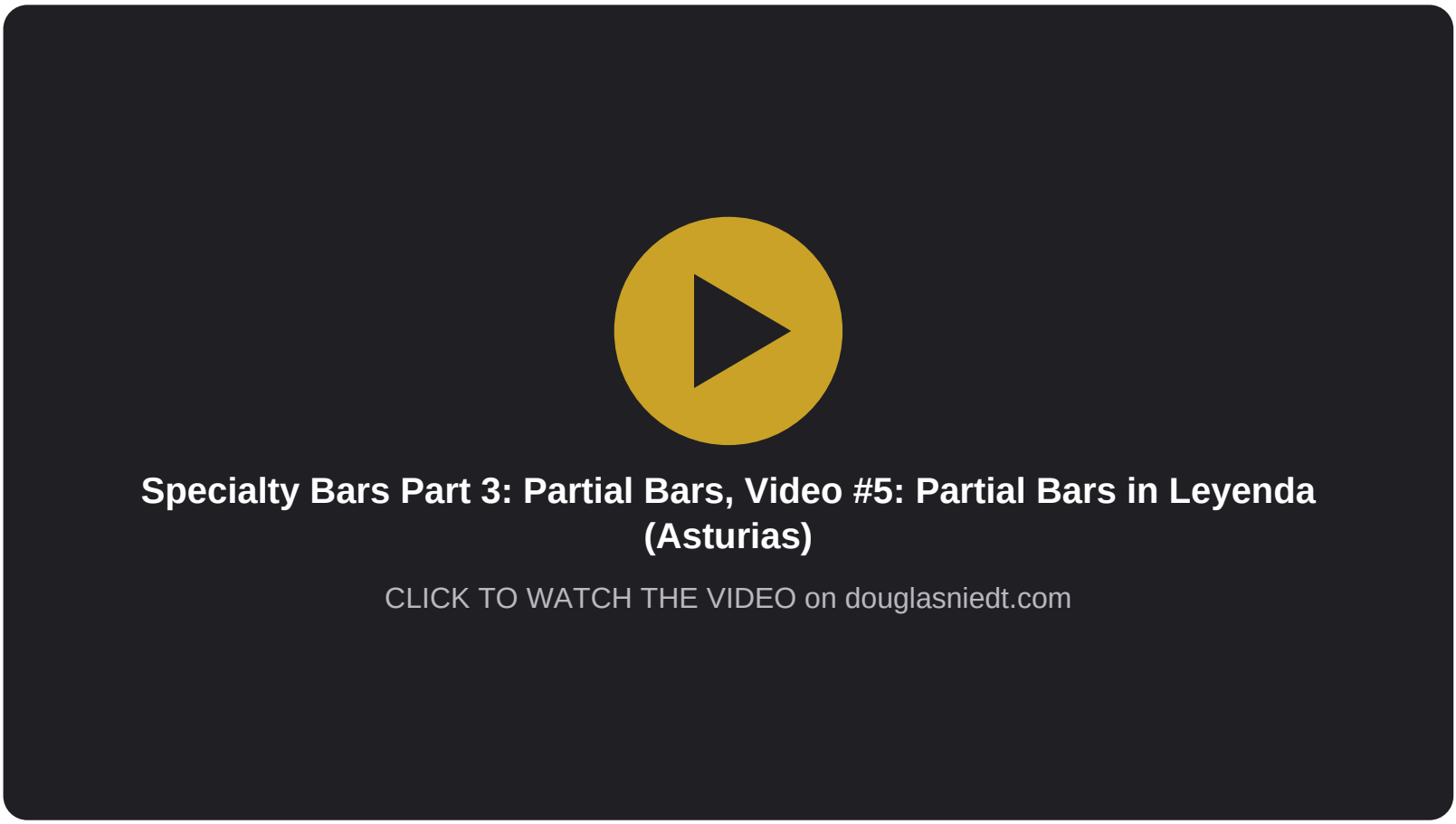
When the A major chord is played in second position with a partial bar, many times the index finger must bend backward enough to clear the first string open E. But that is not always the case. And, in other chords, the finger must bend backward only enough to bar two strings without having to clear the immediately adjacent string. Therefore the partial bar fingering can still be useable and useful for those whose fingers don't hyperextend very much.

In John Williams' transcription of *Leyenda* by Isaac Albéniz we have this passage:



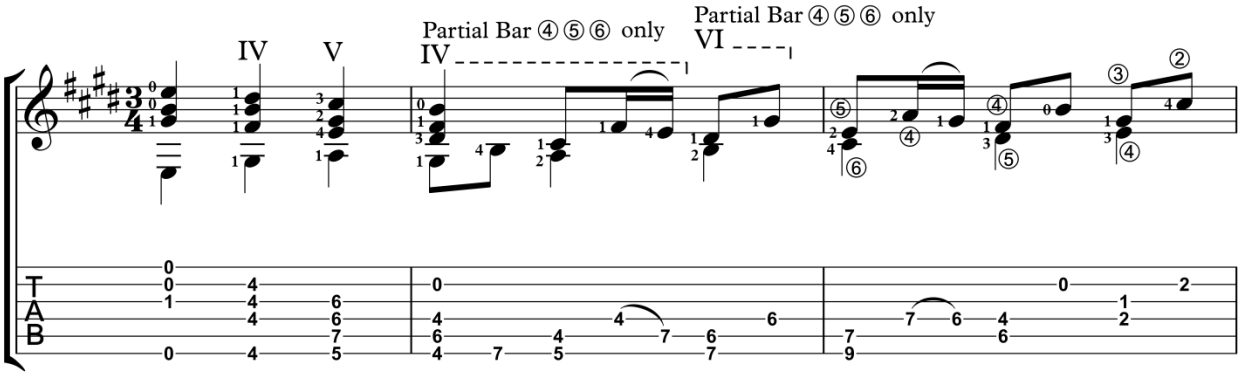
Although the chord could be played with a normal flat bar, for me the partial bar makes it easier to shift from the chord to the arpeggio. In this case the partial bar must bar the 4th and 5th strings but doesn't have to clear any open strings behind it. So, this is an example of where a partial bar is useful even if your finger hyperextends very little.

Watch me demonstrate in this video:



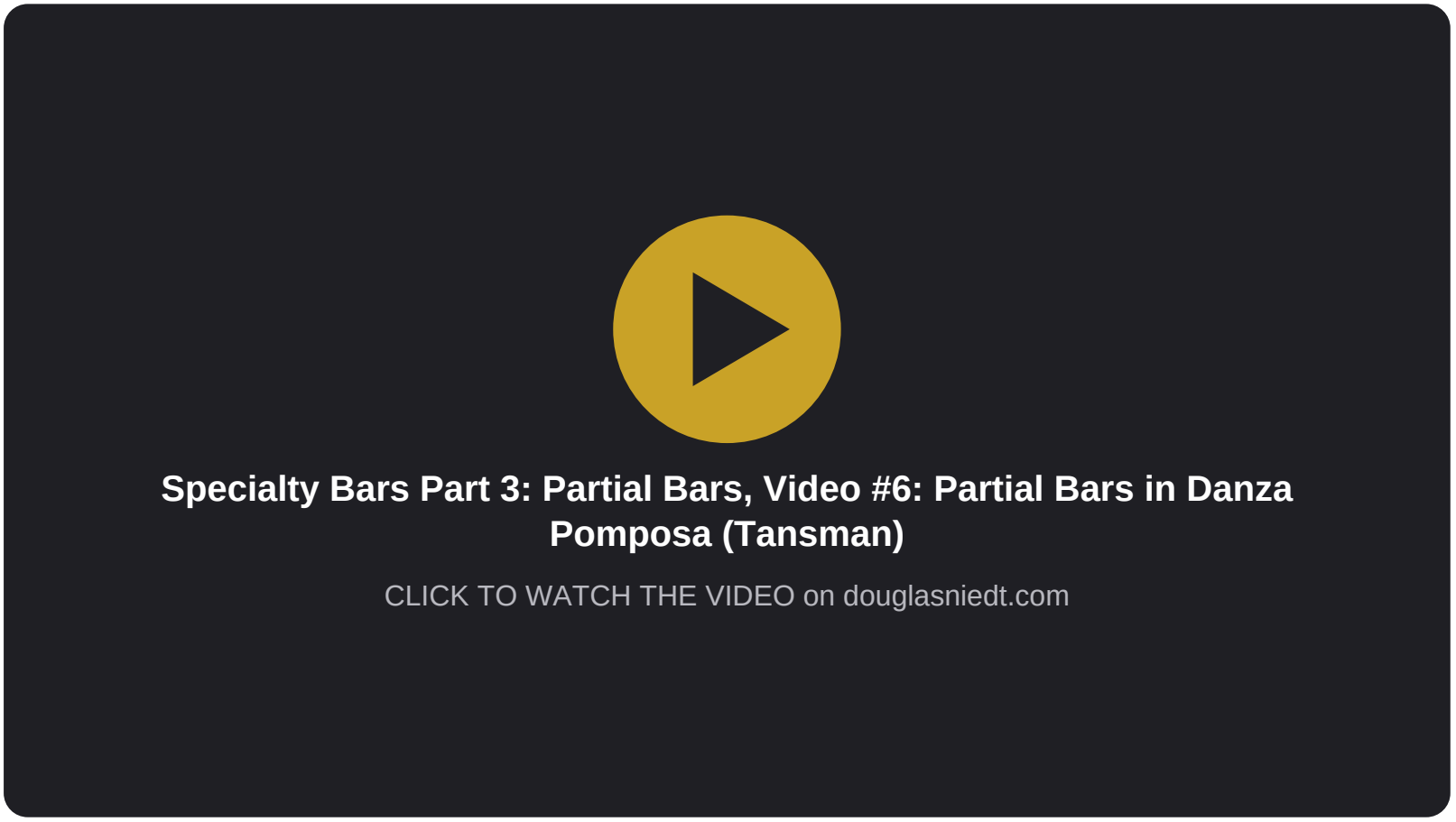
Genetics and partial bars that require a bar of three strings

In *Danza Pomposa* by Alexandre Tansman as fingered by Segovia we have this passage:



Here the partial bar must bar three strings. In this situation genetics come into play once again. The finger's tip joint must be long enough to cover three strings. For some, the joint may not be long enough. Nothing can be done about that.

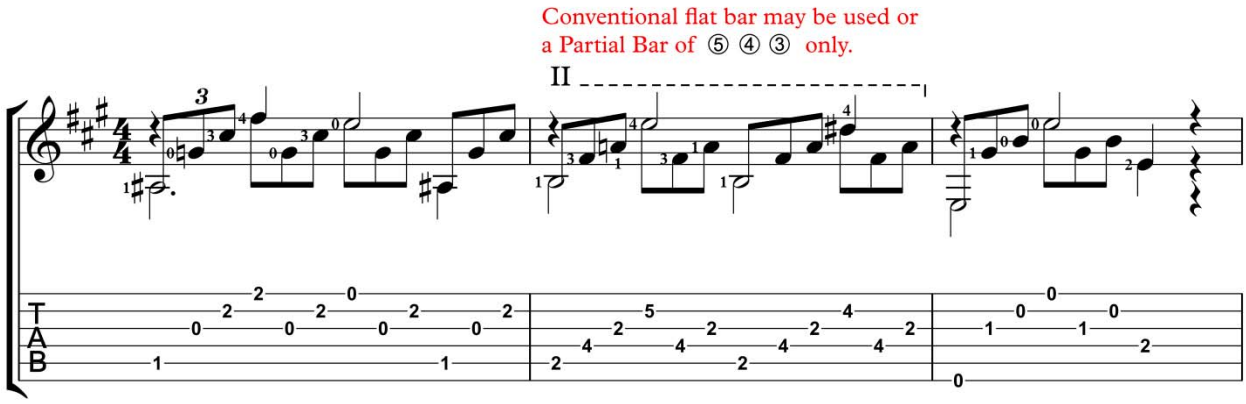
Watch me demonstrate *Danza Pomposa*:



However, I should point out that the tip joint may not be long enough to bar three strings because the guitar is too large for the player. I see this in cases where a child is playing a regular size guitar when they should be playing a ¾ or even ½ size guitar. It also happens with adults with shorter fingers playing a guitar with too wide of spacing between the strings.

Partial bars can be easier to play than standard bars

Sometimes the partial bar is mechanically more efficient than a standard flat bar. In Matteo Carcassi's *Study No. 3* we have this passage:



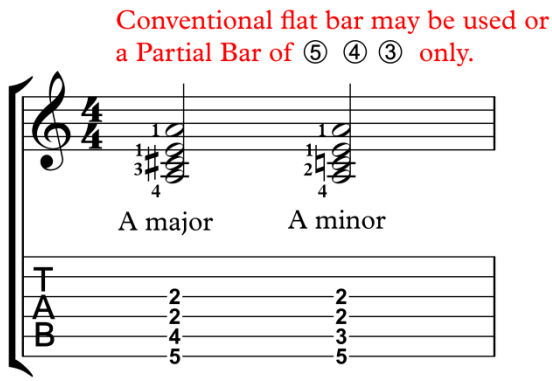
The B sus 4 chord could be played with a normal flat bar. But for many, a partial bar with the first finger barring only the 3rd, 4th, and 5th strings requires less strength and effort. The partial bar also requires less change in the wrist and arm position from the chord before and after.

Watch me demonstrate the efficiency of the partial bar:

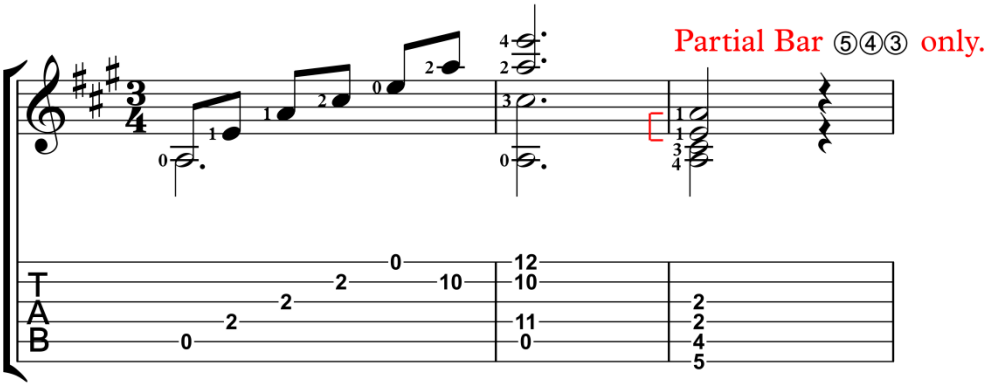
Specialty Bars Part 3: Partial Bars, Video #7: Partial Bars in Study #3, Op. 60 (Carcassi)

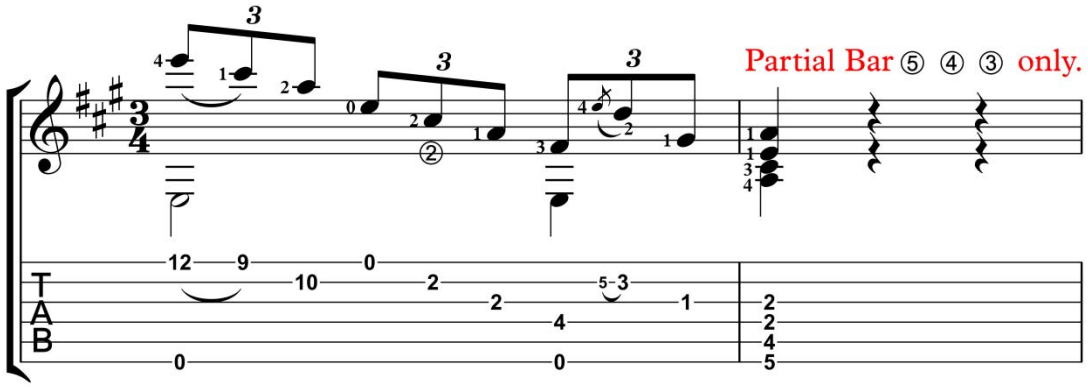
CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com

A common A-major or A-minor chord on the lower strings in second position can also be easily played with a partial bar:

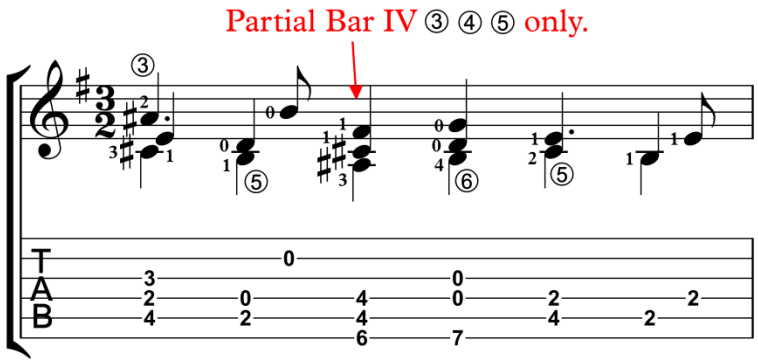


It is found at the end of Tárrega's *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* and his *Marieta*:



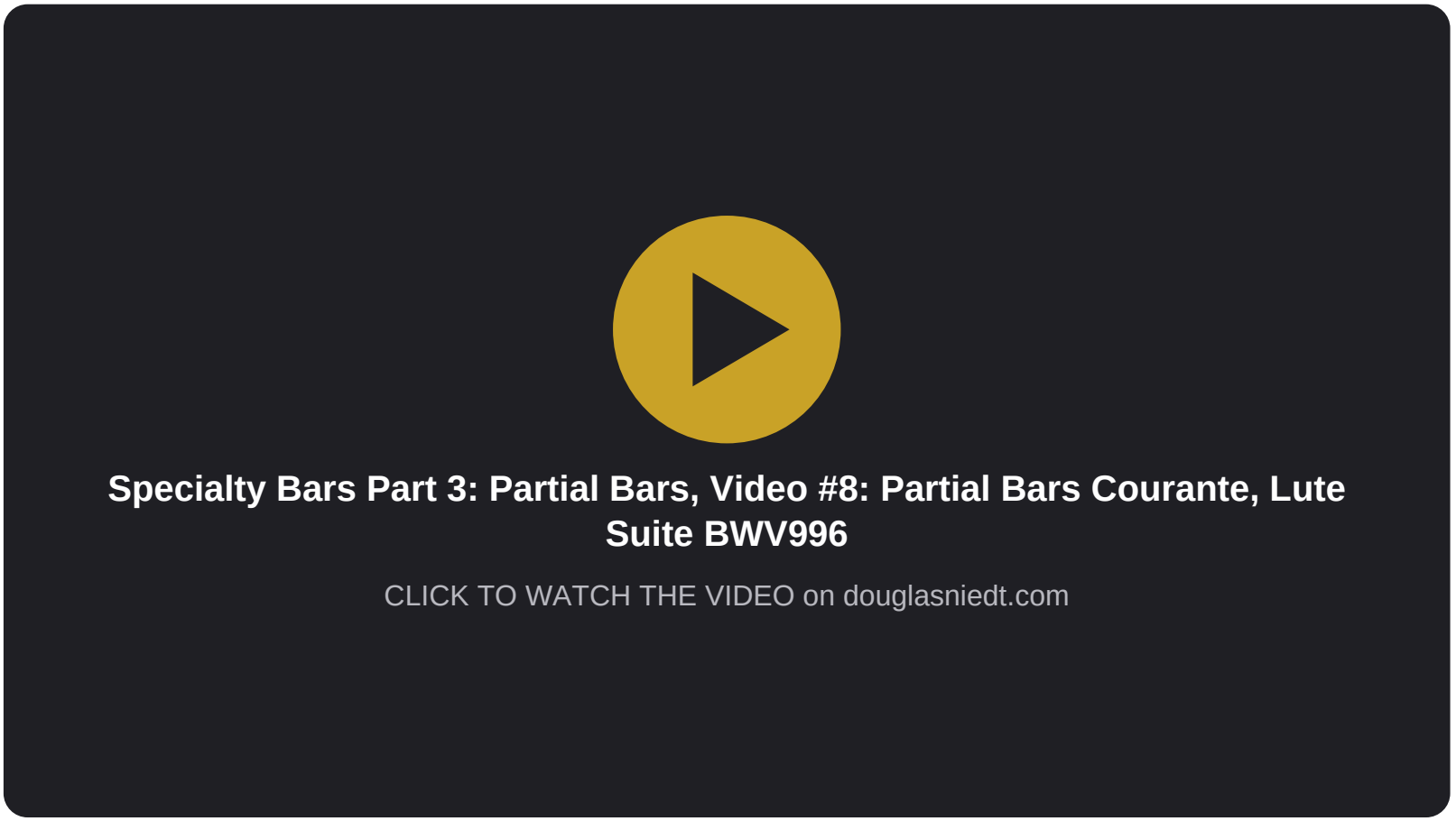


In Julian Bream's edition of the *Courante* from *Lute Suite 1* (BWV 996) Bream indicates a partial bar in this passage:

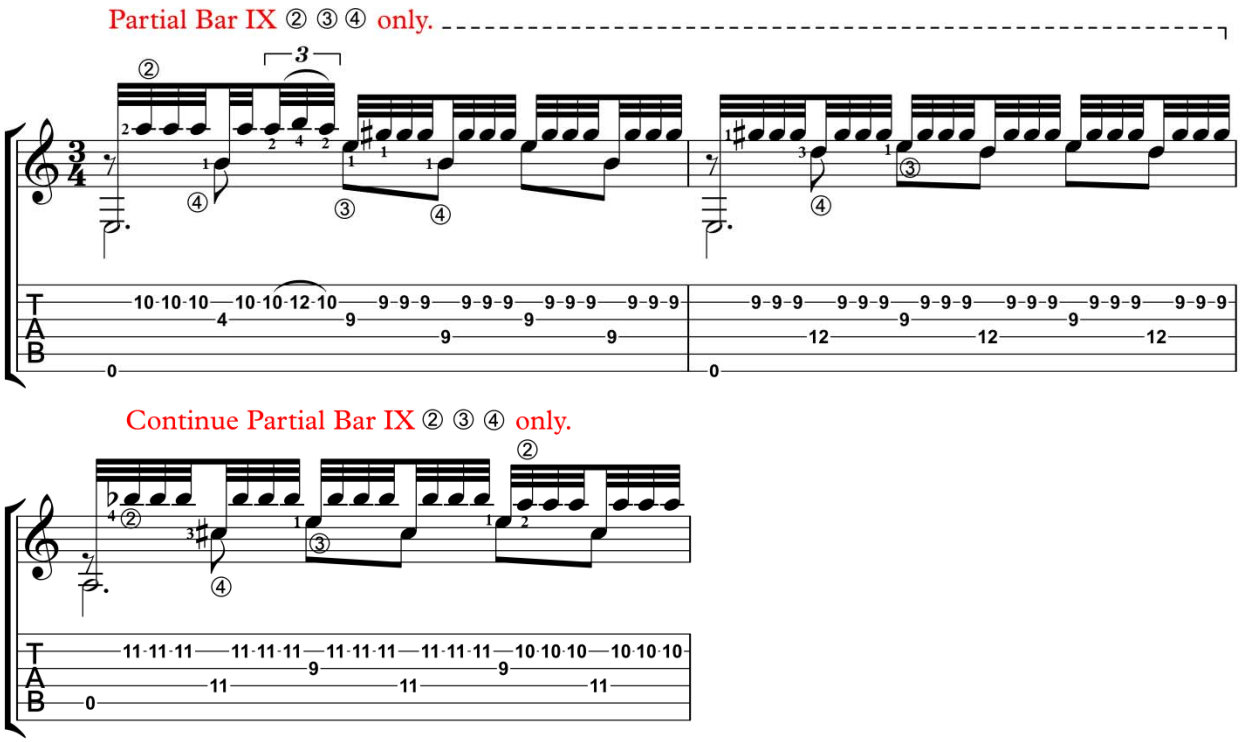


True, the chord could be played with a standard flat bar. But for most players, the chord can be played with less effort with a partial bar. Also, the partial bar enables the left hand to stay in almost the same position before and after the chord. The standard flat bar requires a substantial change of hand and wrist position.

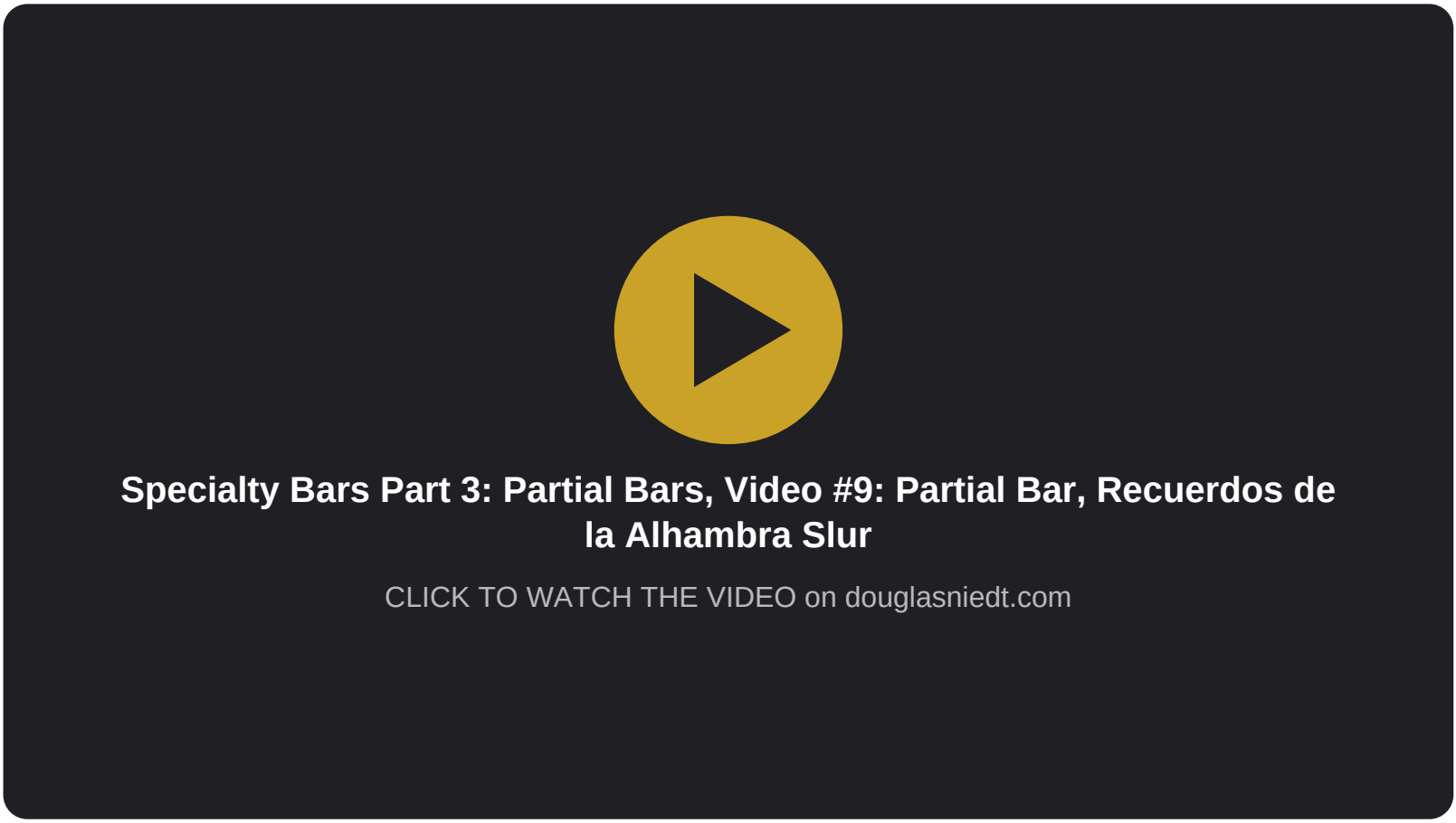
Watch:


Specialty Bars Part 3: Partial Bars, Video #8: Partial Bars Courante, Lute Suite BWV996
CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com

The partial bar comes in very handy for several reasons in another passage from Tárrega's *Recuerdos de la Alhambra*:



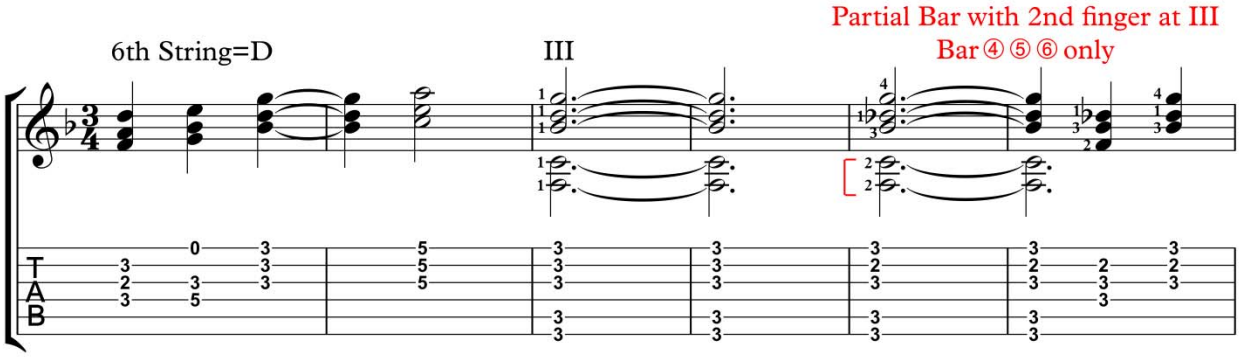
Watch me explain and demonstrate this passage with and without the partial bar:



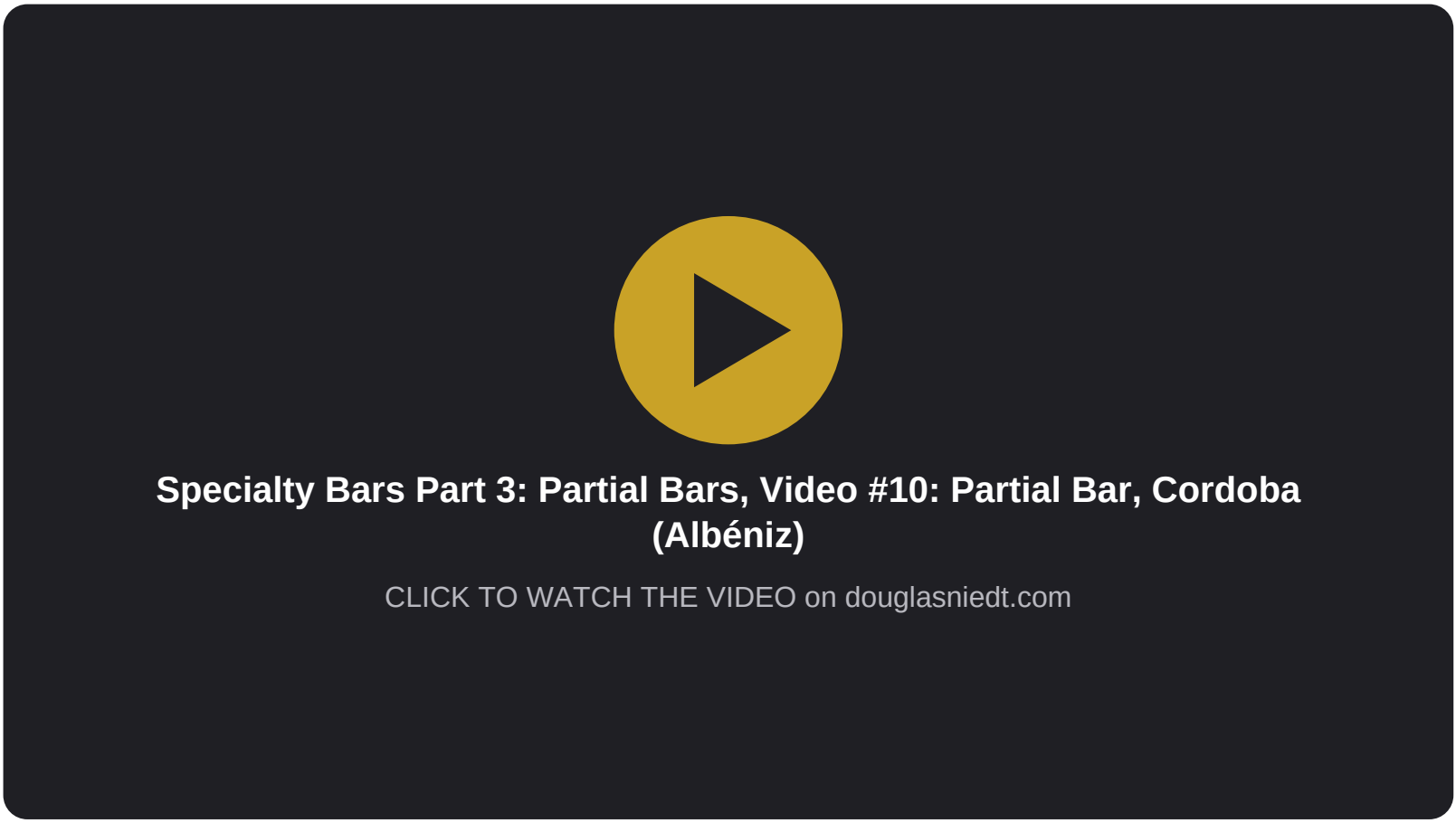
Partial Bars With the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Fingers.
And, Why I'm Indebted to the Rolling Stones.

Partial bars are usually done with the 1st finger. But they can be done with any finger. However, once again genetics can be a factor. Even if the 1st finger is limber enough to hold a partial bar, the other fingers may not be. But, if your fingers are cooperative, partial bars with the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th fingers can be very useful.

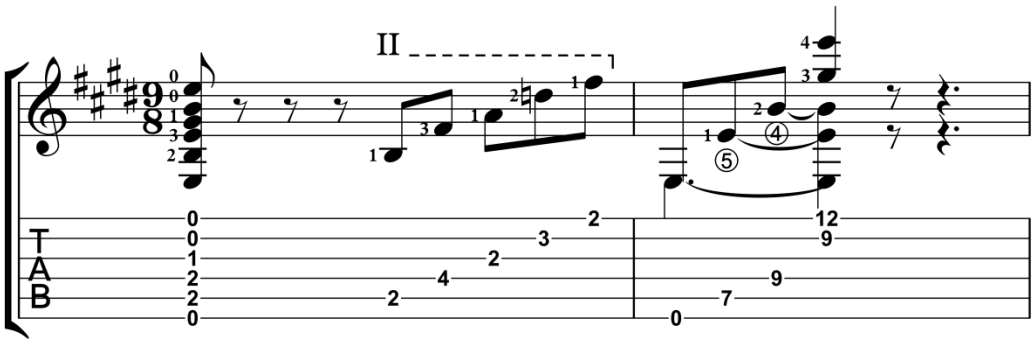
In *Córdoba* by Isaac Albéniz, John Williams specifies a partial bar with the 2nd finger:



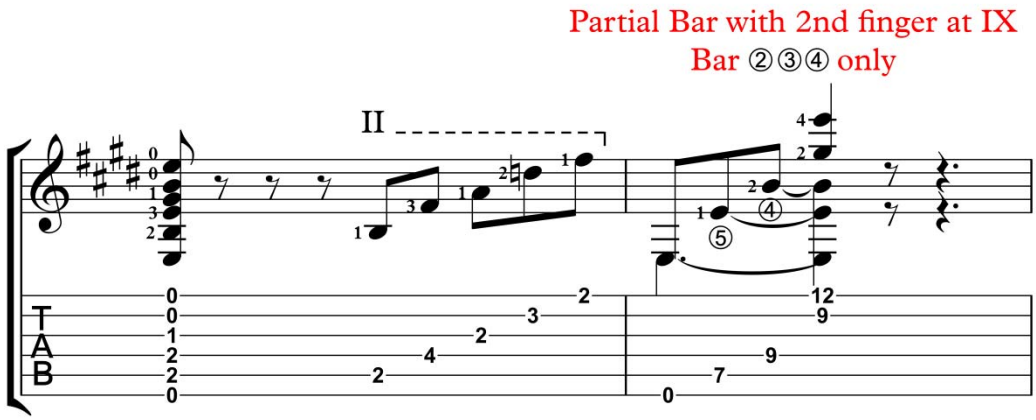
Watch me demonstrate the passage in this video:



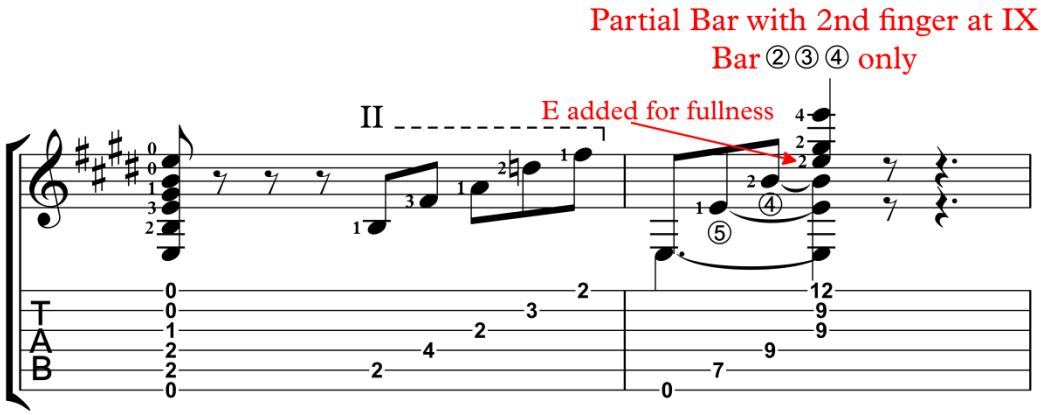
Partial bars with the 2nd, 3rd, or 4th fingers are often a better solution to a more difficult conventional fingering. At the end of the third movement of John Duarte's *English Suite*, we are given this conventional fingering:



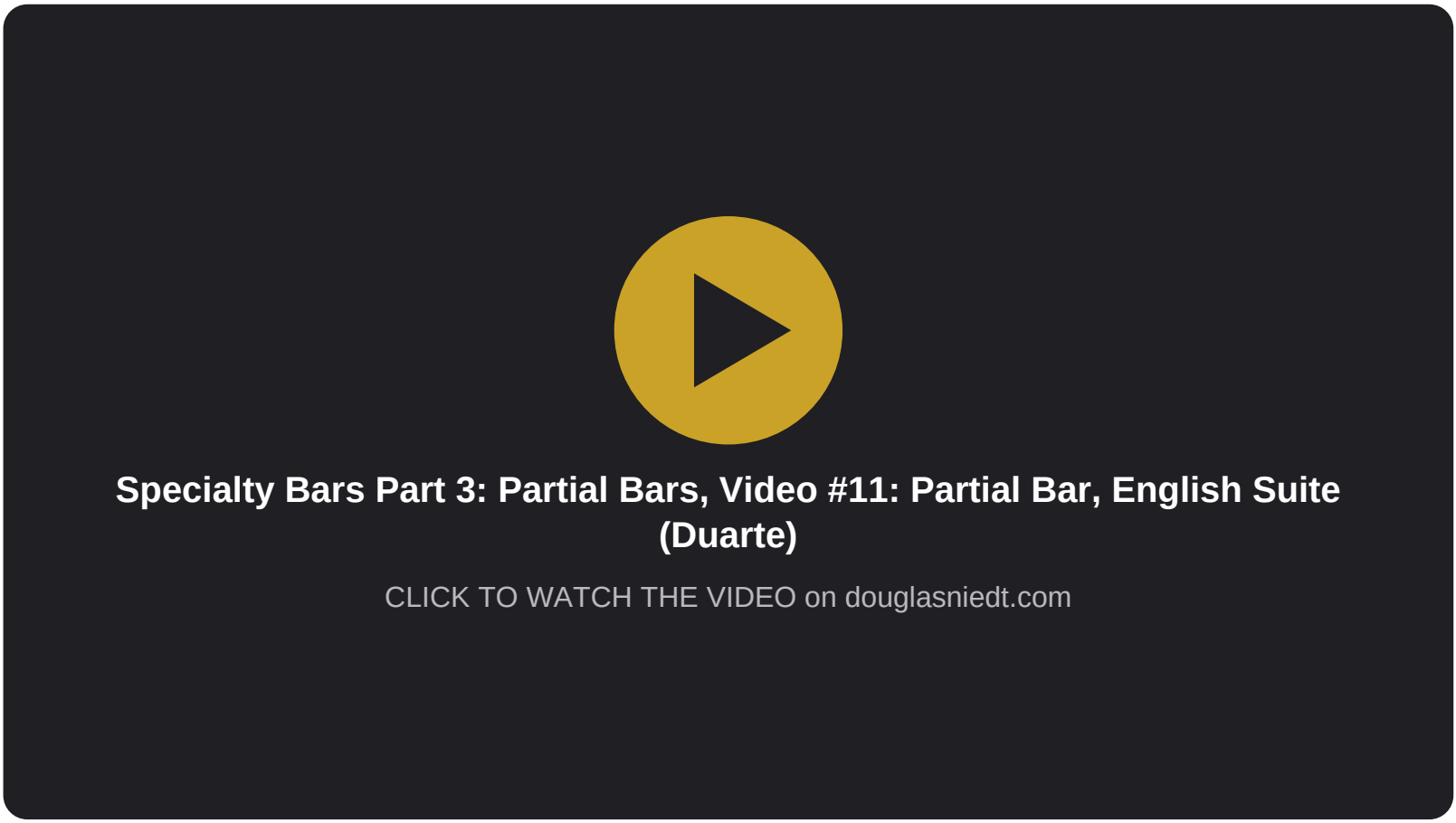
But I find it much easier to use a partial bar with the 2nd finger at the ninth fret instead:



Furthermore, with the partial bar fingering we could add an extra E on the third string and strum the final chord making the ending far more powerful:

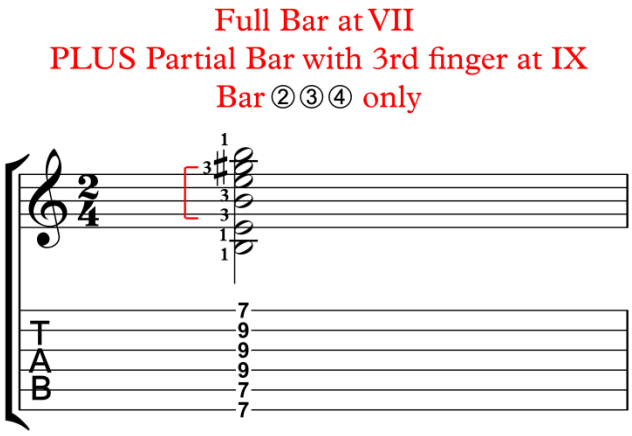


Watch me demonstrate these fingerings and concepts in this video:



A Valuable Lesson from the Rolling Stones

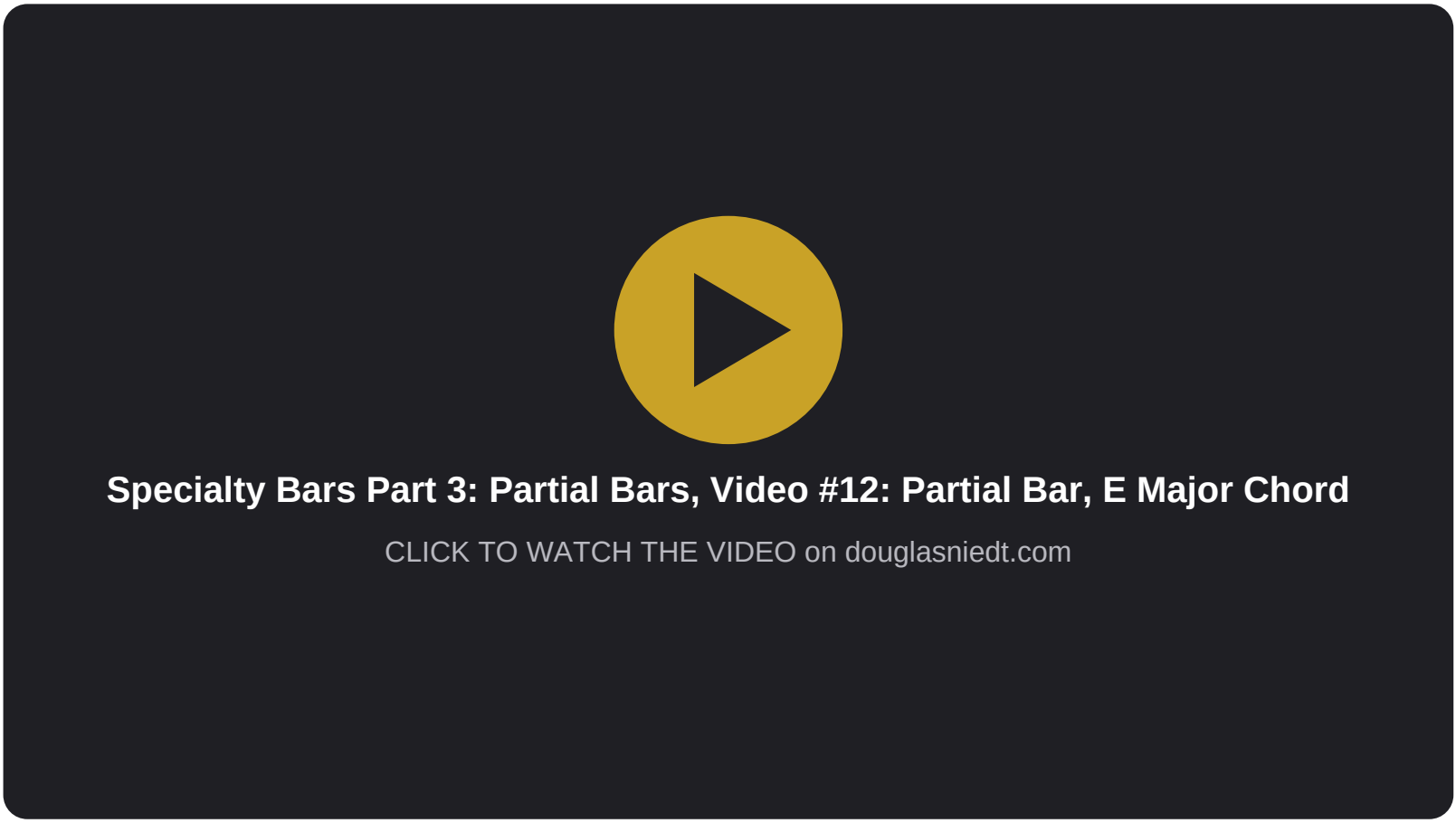
When I was a kid, one of my teachers taught me to play the rhythm guitar part of *Satisfaction,* as performed by the Rolling Stones. He taught me to play an E-major chord using a full bar at the 7th fret PLUS a partial bar with the third finger at the 9th fret:



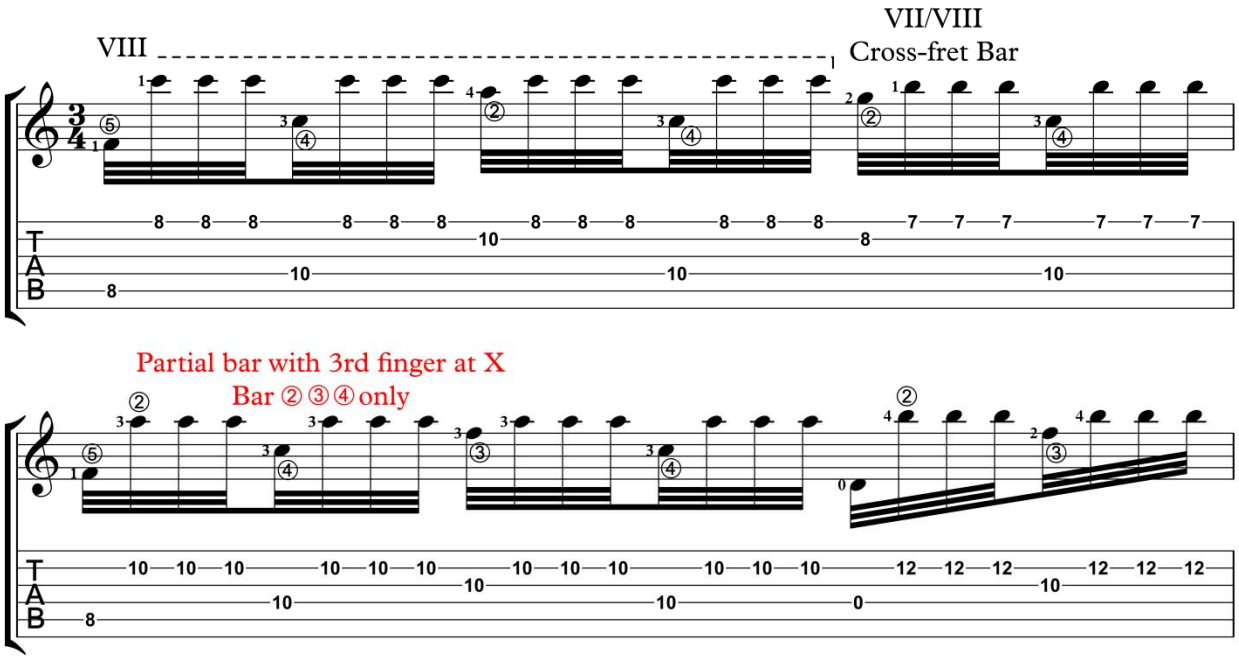
It was hard enough to hold down the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th strings with the 3rd finger. But he also insisted that the 1st string behind the partial bar had to come out clearly. At first, the tip of my 3rd finger didn't bend back enough to clear the 1st string. But I was young and my joints still malleable. After a few weeks of diligent (and painful) practice, the joint became more pliable and I was finally able to get the 1st string to come out clearly. This type of bar is more difficult to learn as an adult because our joints become less pliable as we age. To this day, whenever I come across a situation where I need to use the 3rd finger as a partial bar, I thank the Rolling Stones.

Some guitarists look askance at partial bars with fingers other than the 1st finger. I was once admonished by the great Andrés Segovia himself not to use "those jazz fingerings". He obviously had never played any music by the Rolling Stones. HaHa.

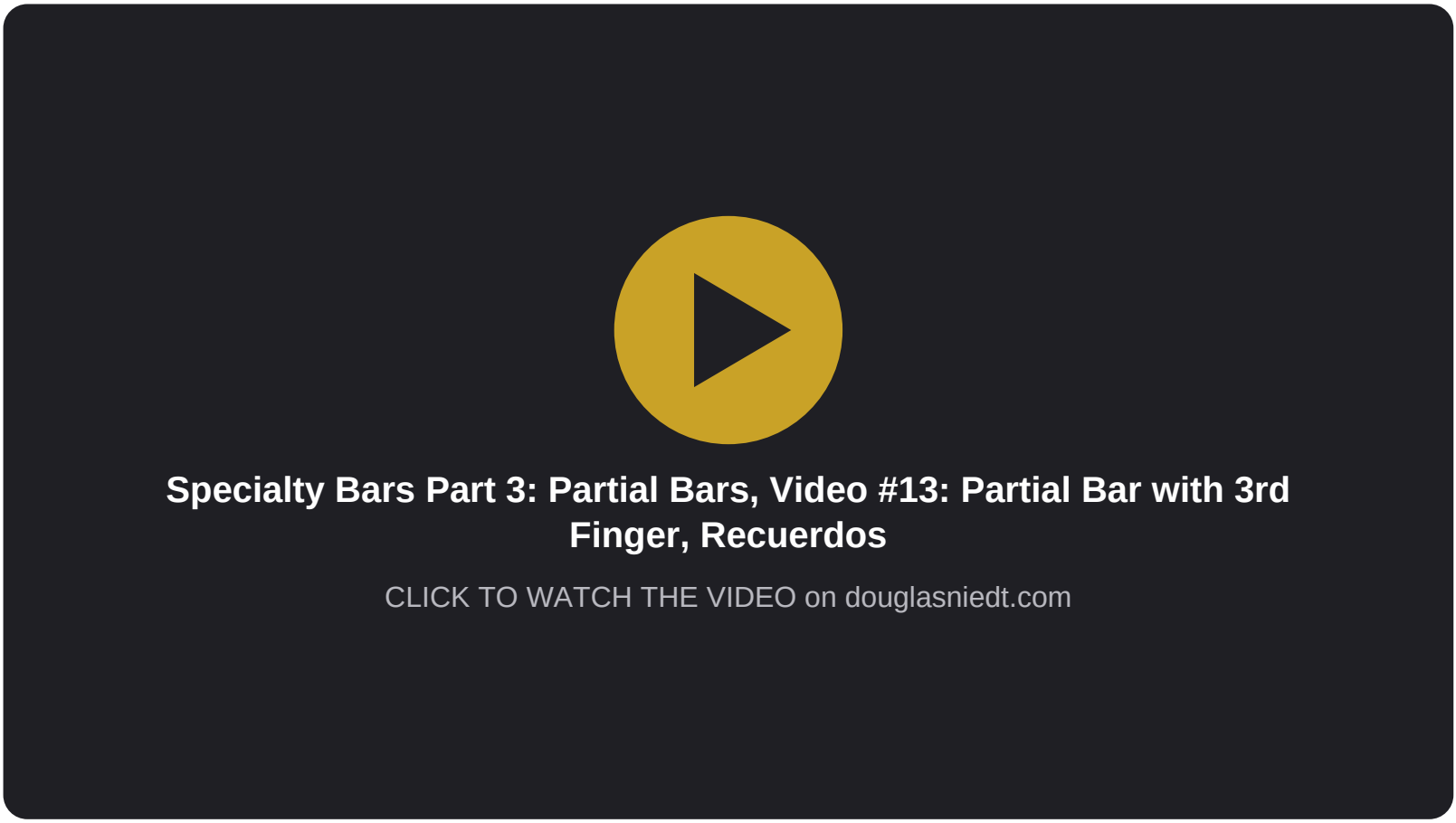
Watch me demonstrate this chord with the partial bar fingering:



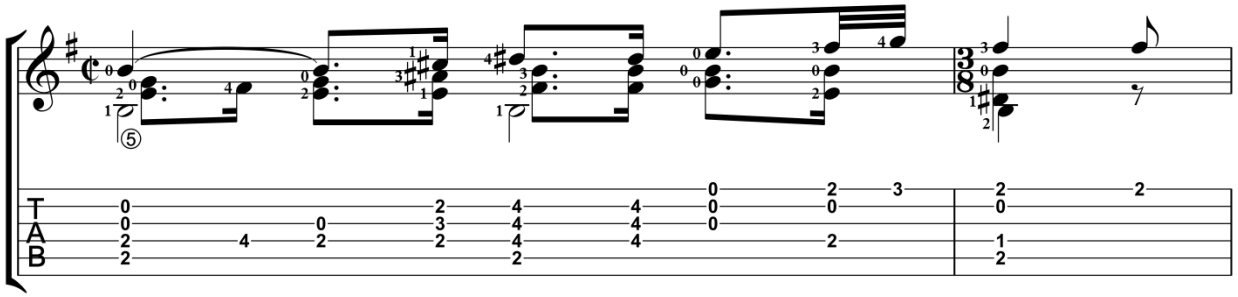
I find that a Rolling Stones-style partial bar with the 3rd finger is very convenient in this passage from Francisco Tárrega's *Recuerdos de la Alhambra*:



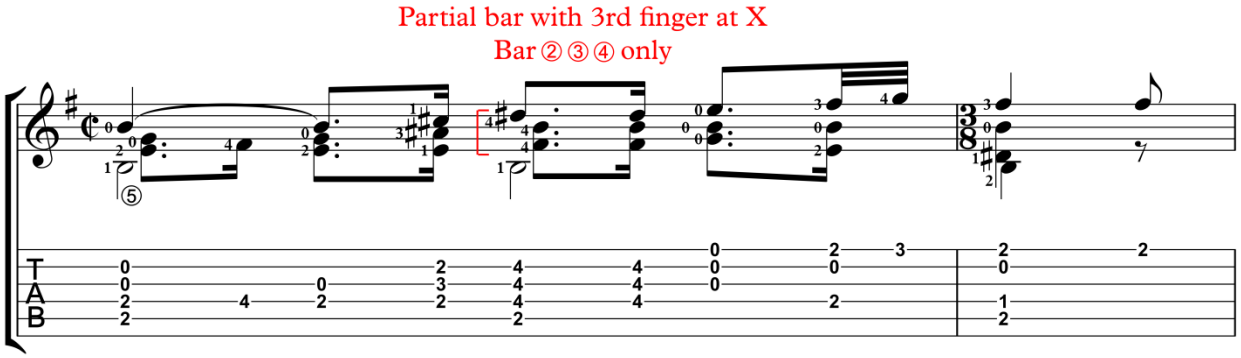
Watch me demonstrate:



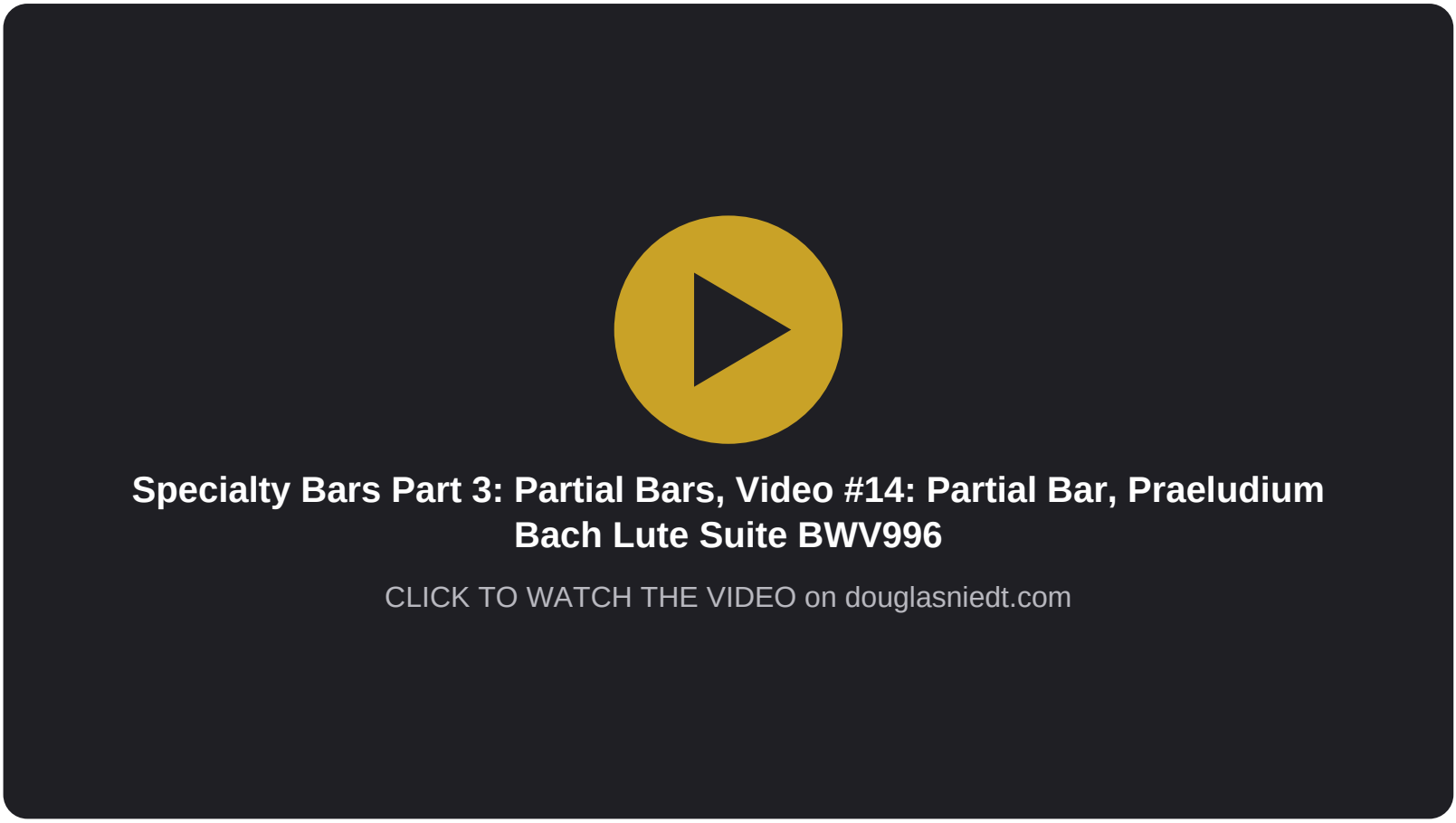
In Julian Bream's edition of the *Präludium* from Bach's *Lute Suite No. 1* (BWV 996) we have this passage:



The conventional fingering of the B-major chord is fine—especially because the 3rd finger holding the A# on the chord before is a guide finger into the B major chord. But I find it much easier to use my 4th finger as a partial bar:



Watch as I demonstrate both fingerings:



Final Thoughts

Partial bars with the 1st finger are a useful and common technique in the repertoire. Partial bars with other fingers are less common but can be useful (more secure and easier to play) in many situations. Unfortunately, for some players genetics can be a limiting factor. The tip joints of your fingers may not bend backward enough to hold the strings down. However, conventional fingerings can usually be used instead. But if your joints are cooperative, the partial bar is often more secure and requires less effort than a conventional fingering.