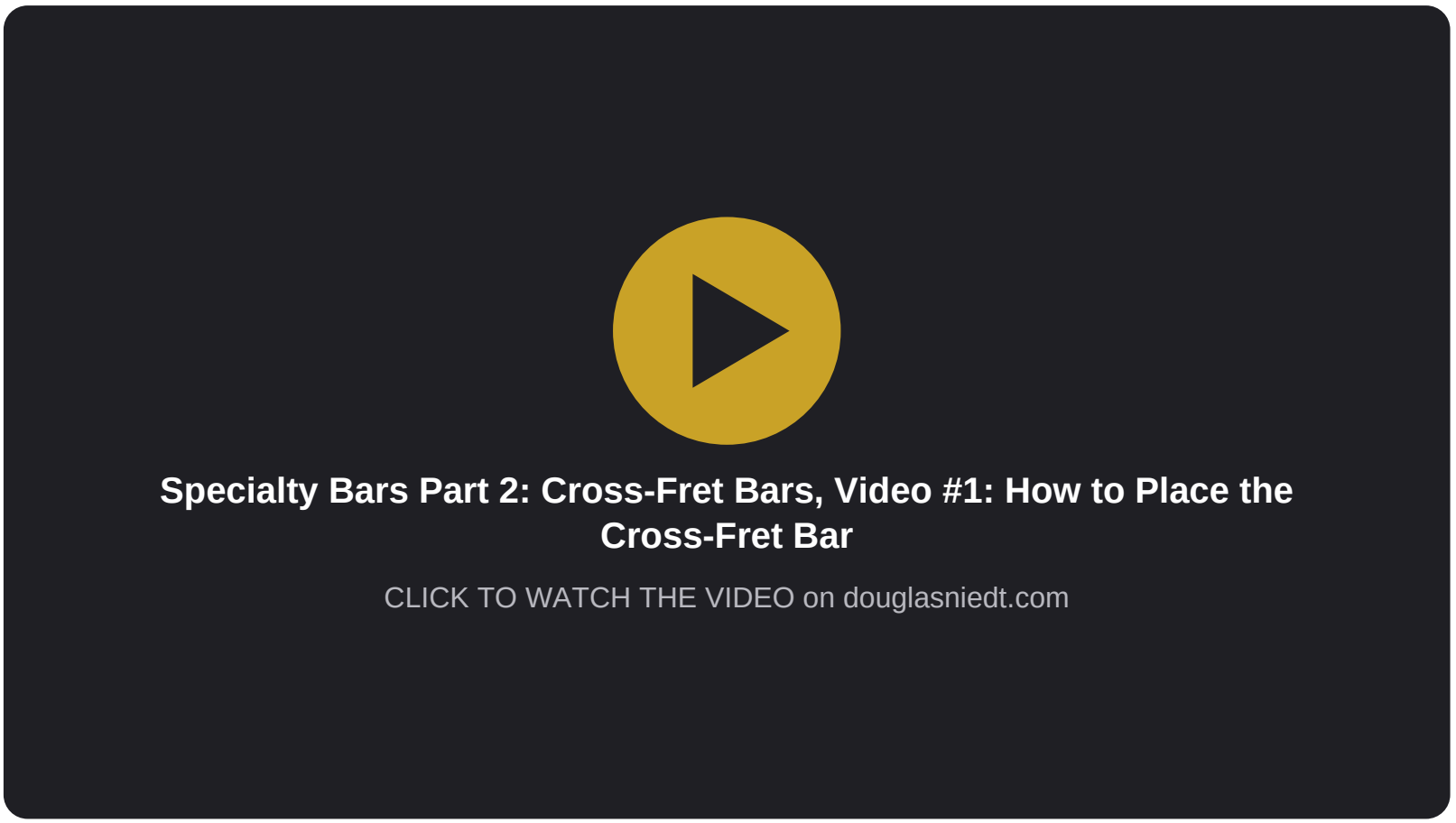
Specialty Bars Part 2: The Cross-Fret Bar

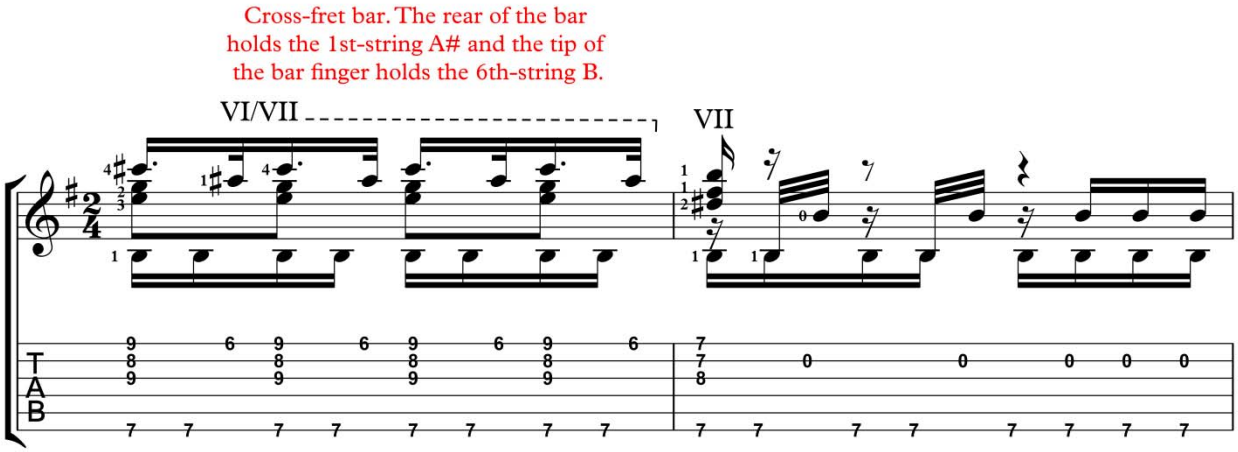
The cross-fret bar or split bar is the most rarely used of the specialty bars. The index finger bars across two consecutive frets simultaneously. Most commonly, the rear of the bar finger holds down the first string and the tip of the bar finger holds down the sixth or fifth string a fret higher.

The cross-fret bar doesn't require a lot of strength or force. You are usually only holding *two* strings. So it is a matter of focusing pressure on just those two notes.

Watch:



The cross-fret bar is by no means a recent innovation. Mauro Giuliani used it in his *Rossiniana No. 1, op. 119*:



The passage is not playable (with a musical result) with any other fingering or technique.

Watch:

Specialty Bars Part 2: Cross-Fret Bars, Video #2: Cross-Fret Bar on Rossiniana

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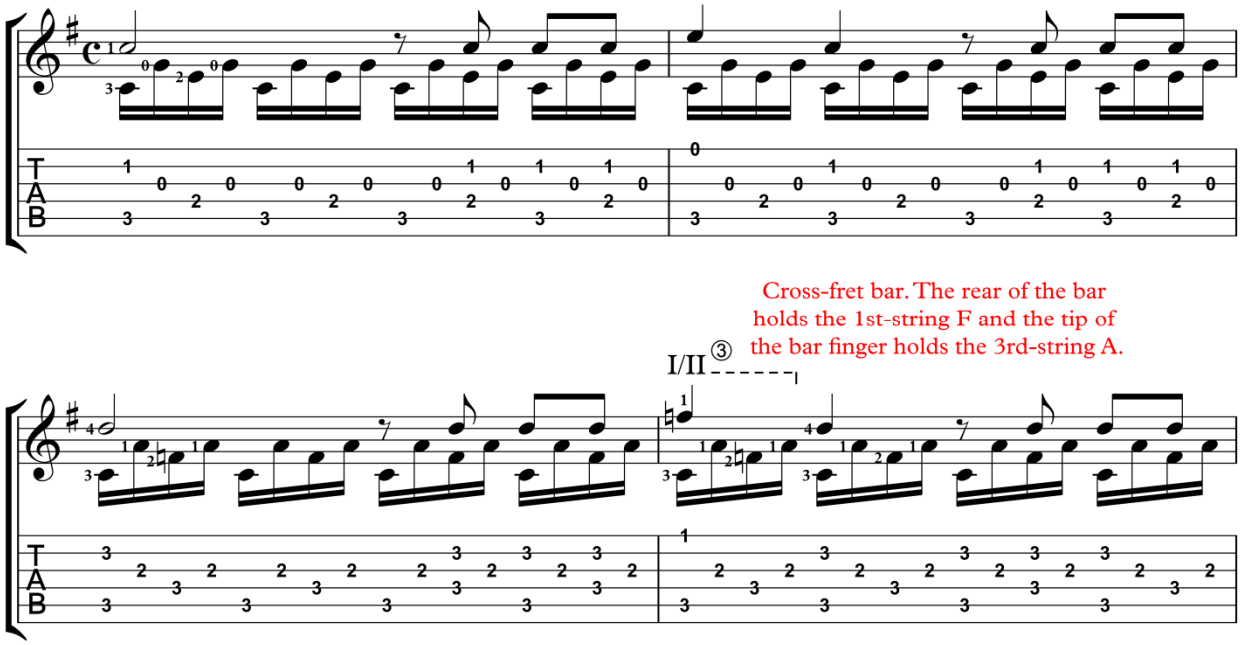
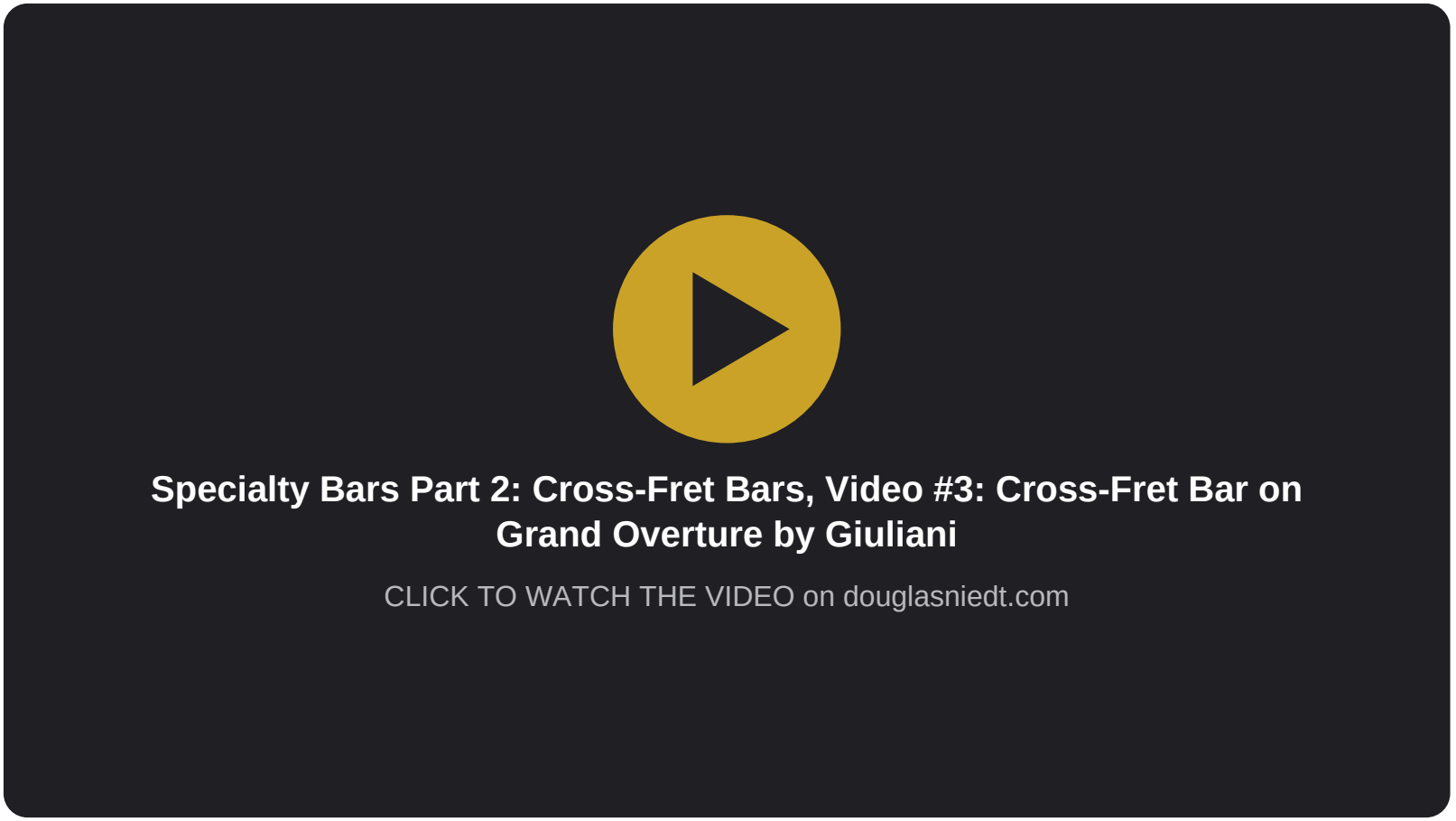
Usually, the rear of the cross-fret bar holds the first string. Occasionally it may hold the second string. The tip of the bar however, can hold the sixth string, fifth string, fourth string, third string, or even the second string. In this example from Giuliani's Grand *Overture*, the rear of the bar holds the first string as usual but the tip holds the third string:



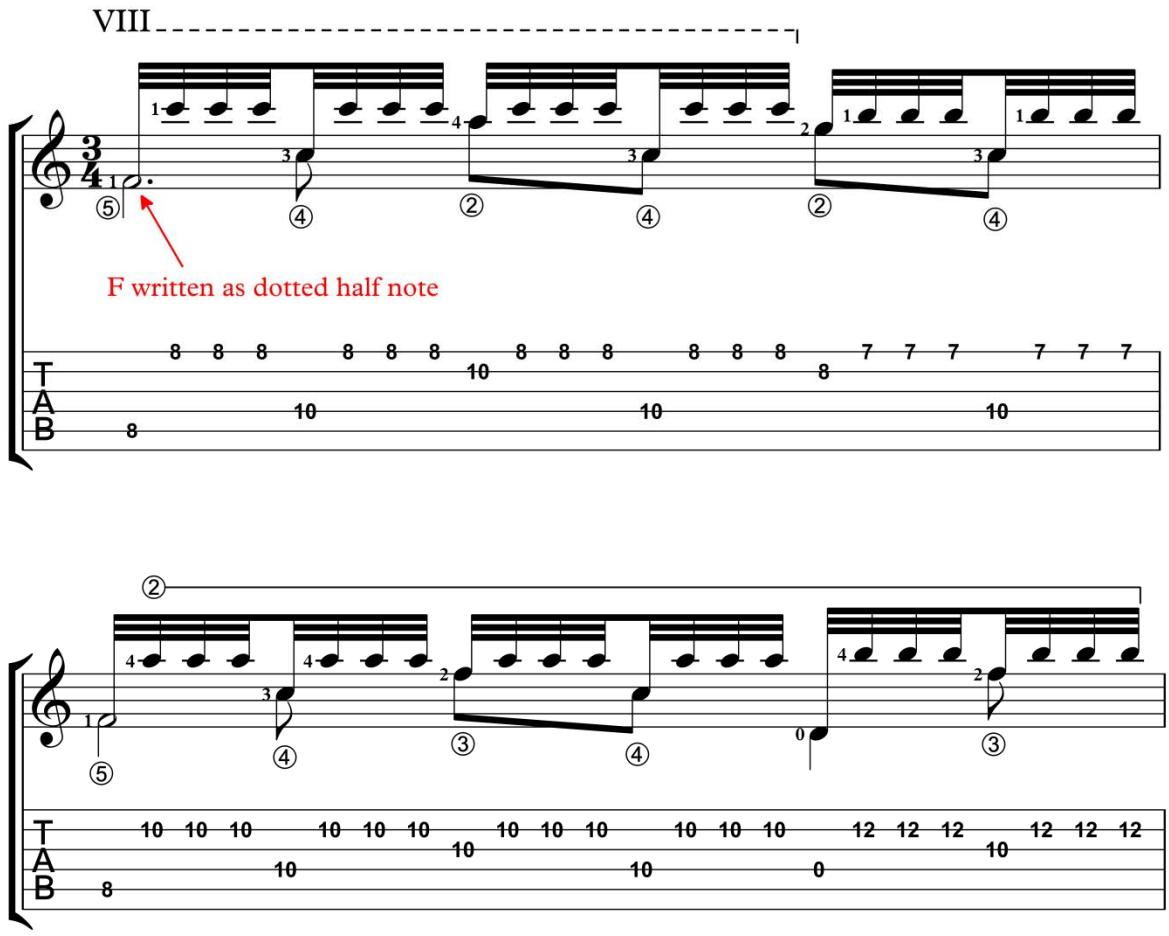
Again, there is no other fingering or technique that produces as musical a result in this passage as the cross-fret bar.

Watch:



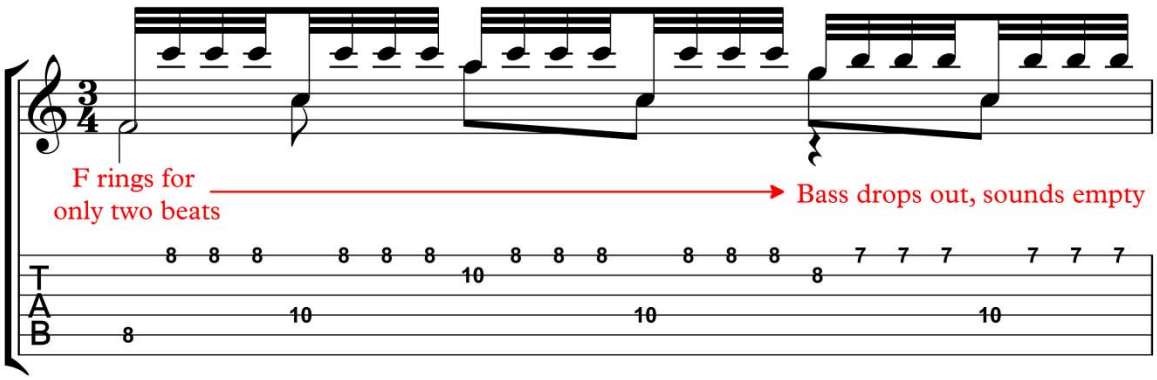
I even use the cross-fret bar in a measure of the classic *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* by Francisco Tárrega. He doesn't call for it but I think it adds a great musical touch to the measure. Tárrega notates measure #9 as follows:

Measure #9-10 as notated by Tárrega including his fingerings:



Note he specifies that the F in the bass is a dotted half note. As notated, that F should ring through the entire measure for three beats. But Tárrega notates that the bar at the eighth fret ends on the third beat. The F is therefore cut off and cannot ring through the measure. Therefore, what comes out of the guitar sounds like this:

Tárrega's fingering results in measure #9 sounding like this:



Watch:

Specialty Bars Part 2: Cross-Fret Bars, Video #4: Recuerdos de la Alhambra normal bar, measure 9

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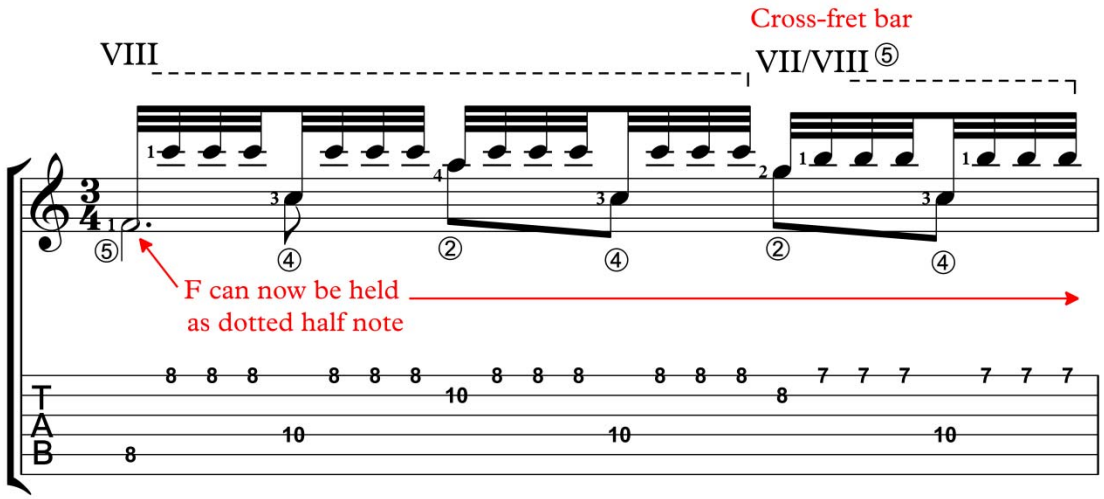
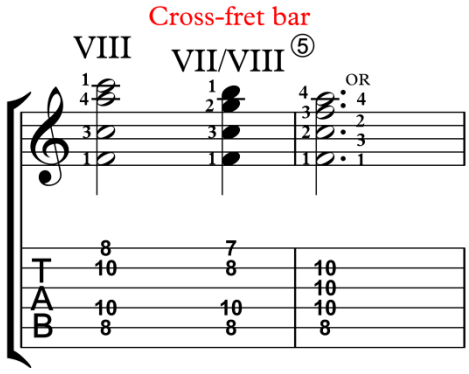
However, if a cross-fret bar is used, the F *can* be held through the measure and you hear the beautiful passing harmony of the third beat and the measure is filled with the sustain of the low F:

Measure #9 with cross-fret bar fingering:



When the cross-fret bar is employed, this is the harmony you hear:

This is the harmony you hear:



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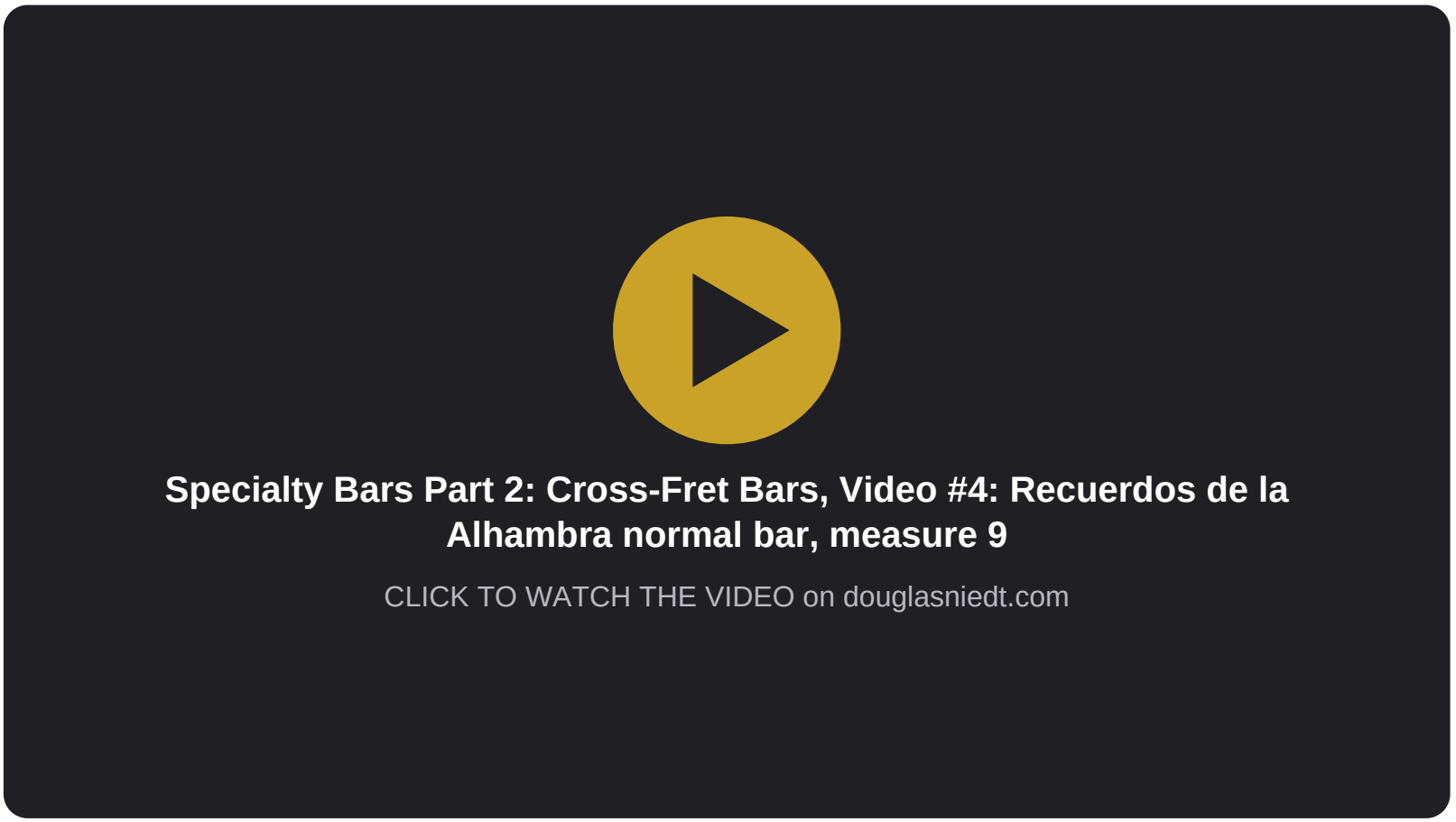
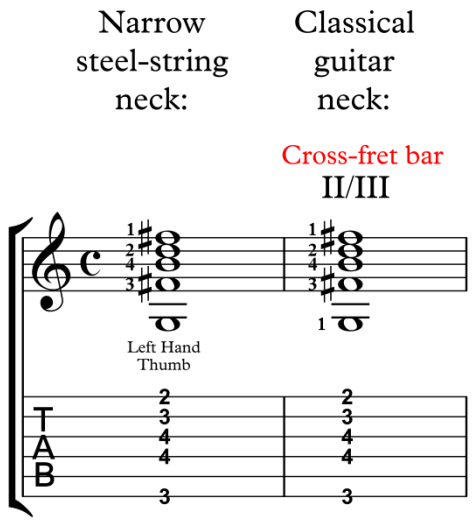


The cross-fret bar often can come to the rescue in these types of difficult situations. It's useful in a few dozen instances in the standard repertoire but even more so in contemporary music and "jazzy" arrangements. It enables one to play chord voicings that are normally not available to us in standard tuning using standard fingering and bar technique.

For example, a G major 7^{th} chord in the following voicing can be played on a steel-steel guitar's narrow neck by wrapping the left thumb around to hold the low G. On the classical guitar with its wide neck, wrapping the thumb is usually impractical. The best solution is the cross-fret bar:



Watch:

Specialty Bars Part 2: Cross-Fret Bars, Video #6: Cross-Fret Bar for Jazzy Chords

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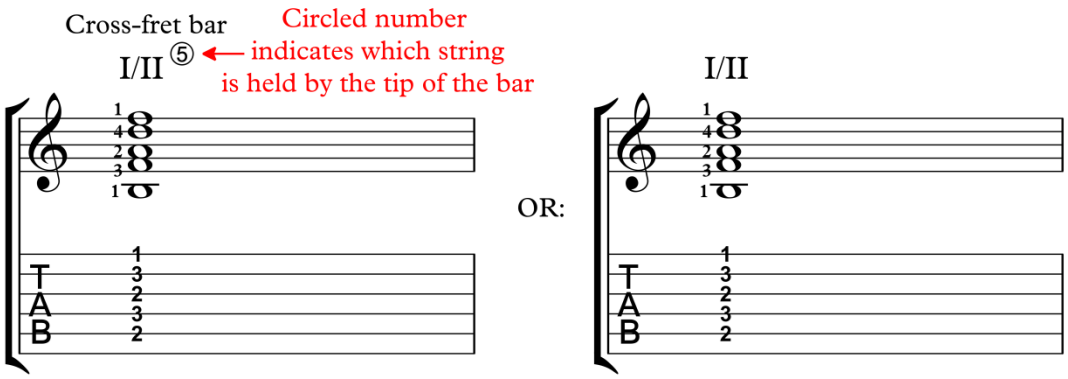
Notation of the Cross-Fret Bar

There is no standard notation for the cross-fret bar. My preference is to use two Roman numerals with a slash between them. I write “cross-fret bar” above for clarification. If the tip of the bar finger is holding the 6th string, I don’t add additional notation. If the tip of the finger is not holding the 6th string, I indicate which string it holds with a circled Arabic numeral. Others use only the Roman numerals:



More to Come

Next month, the stunning conclusion of this series on specialty bars: Partial Bars!