

Arpeggio Exercises—There's A Better Way

By Douglas Niedt

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Want to DRAMATICALLY improve your right-hand arpeggio technique? Forget the Giuliani 120 studies or the Carlevaro 230—they're for people who enjoy root canals and filling out income tax forms. There is a much better way.

Now don't get riled out there. There is nothing wrong with practicing the Giuliani or Carlevaro right-hand arpeggio studies. Of the two, I think the Carlevaro is far better because it is more thorough. The downside of the Giuliani and Carlevaro books is that they require a tremendous amount of time to practice properly.

But if you develop speed and evenness with just the four patterns illustrated here (instead of all 230 Carlevaro patterns), you will be able to play almost any arpeggio pattern with great precision and speed. There are only about twenty additional patterns in the Carlevaro book that you will need to master separately from these four to have a complete, well-developed right-hand arpeggio technique.

The four patterns may be practiced on open strings as shown here, on any chord progression of your choice, or for a little more fun, on a piece titled *El Abejorro (The Bumblebee)* by Emilio Pujol.



[Listen to me play *El Abejorro*.](#)

Start everyday at an easy, relaxed speed at which you can play all four patterns absolutely evenly and effortlessly. There should be no tension in the right hand. If you begin at too fast a tempo tension will be

triggered in the right hand. As you try to speed up, the tension will increase. This will prevent you from reaching your top speeds. So *start slowly*.

Using a metronome, increase your speed notch by notch (or by five's if your metronome "dial" is digital) over a thirty-minute period. Play each pattern at least ten to twenty seconds and play all four patterns at each speed setting. **Pay particular attention to the two patterns using *m* and *a*. The natural lack of independence between those two fingers is the major cause of uneven arpeggios and arpeggios that fail at high speed.**

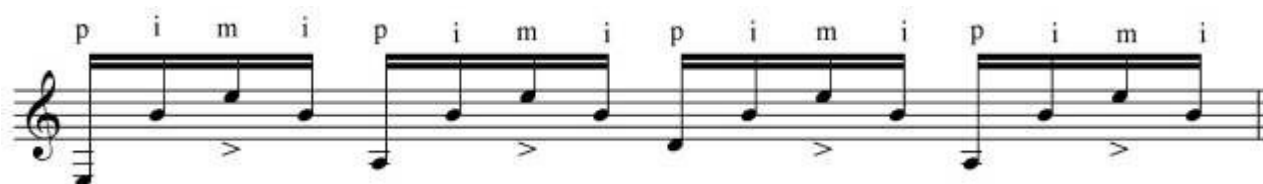
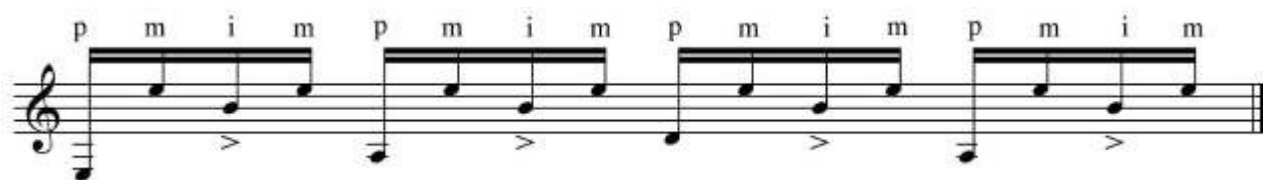
Play at varying volume levels especially very quiet and very loud. **Be sure to accent the third note of each pattern.** This helps keep the arpeggio rhythmically even. If the downbeat and upbeat are placed rhythmically precisely, the entire arpeggio will usually be even. Think of the thumb as the downbeat and the accented note as the upbeat. Instead of having the metronome only tick on the thumb strokes, you may want to have it tick on the thumb *and* the accented note.

I also recommend that you practice the patterns in the order given. Practicing the *im* patterns between the *ma* patterns helps the *m* and *a* fingers to "recover," preventing any kind of overuse problems.

As your top speed increases over time, increase your starting speed so you are not practicing more than thirty minutes on these arpeggios. Keep track of your speeds each day. Write them down! I start at MM=100 every day (tick on each thumb stroke). My top speed is MM=192 for all four patterns.

Here are the four "magical" patterns:





As you can see, there is nothing magical about them! They are very basic. But that is why they are effective. These are the movements that are used in one way or another in almost any other arpeggio pattern except for some patterns where a finger plucks simultaneously with the thumb.

If you practice *El Abejorro* with these patterns, note that *you must change the order* of the written notes for the *pama* and *pmim* patterns:

Original Pattern:

OR: *p m a m p m a m*

Reverse Pattern

OR: *p a m a p a m a*

Although *El Abejorro* (*The Bumblebee*) takes the drudgery out of practicing these patterns, it also can be used as a fun concert piece or encore. The pattern I use for performance is *piam*.

 [Listen to it again.](#)

Have fun with this. This is another one of those exercises that needs to be practiced absolutely every day for three to six weeks to see results. Stick with it and soon your arpeggio speed, evenness, control, and right-hand finger independence will increase dramatically.