

Nailing Harmonics Past the 19th Fret

By Douglas Niedt

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This month's tip is a simple but very useful little trick. Have you ever come across a right-hand harmonic that had to be plucked past the 19th fret? Two of the more famous and dreaded stratospheric harmonics in the guitar literature occur at the end of the second movement of Joaquin Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez*. Many guitarists don't play the notes as harmonics or choose to play other pitches out of fear of missing the harmonics at this very delicate and exposed moment in the piece. But there is a simple and obvious way to overcome "harmonic acrophobia."

For instance, say you are holding a D# on the first string at the 11th fret that you need to play as an artificial harmonic. You have to hold that D# with the left hand, and then with the right hand, touch the first string lightly at the 23rd fret with the index ("i") finger and pluck the string with the "a" finger or with the thumb. But where the heck is the 23rd fret? Will you be able to find it accurately all the time? What about the pressure of a public performance--will you "nail it?"

All you have to do, is find the exact point on the first string that you need to touch to get a clear harmonic, and then mark that spot on the string with a pen such as the Sharpie Permanent Marker (not the ultra-fine point model though). Rotate the string to be sure you mark it all around the string's diameter. Let the ink dry for a minute and you are all set (the ink will wear off in time, so you will need to remark it occasionally). You will confidently touch the precise spot on the string every time.

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