Classical Guitar Technique

THE MANY AMAZING THINGS WE CAN LEARN FROM MAURO GIULIANI, Part 1 of 2

By Douglas Niedt

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Most classical guitarists encounter the music of Mauro Giuliani early on. As beginners, we learn many of his easy beginning studies. And of course, there are the *120 Studies for the Right Hand* that almost every classical guitarist on earth has attempted to master at one time or another. One of the many wonderful things about his music is that he had the ability to write relatively simple pieces that sounded complicated, advanced, and even virtuosic.

A student recently requested a live online video lesson in which he wanted to work on a Giuliani study that at first glance seemed relatively easy, say late beginner or early intermediate level. As I always do before a lesson, I spent some time reviewing the music. Since I had played the study before and taught it to a few students many years ago, I figured it would take me about 10 minutes to breeze through it to re-familiarize myself with it.

The most amazing thing happened. As I delved into the piece, I realized that in this short piece Giuliani covers an incredible number of technical topics, musical concepts, and challenges. He teaches us the importance of using technique to unlock the secrets to making a piece come alive with clarity. He teaches us how music is made up of independent voices and what that means in order to play the piece correctly. And he teaches us how to bring this knowledge together, so the piece sounds musical, rather than sounding like just another etude.

Watch me pay the *Vivace* all the way through. Video #1:

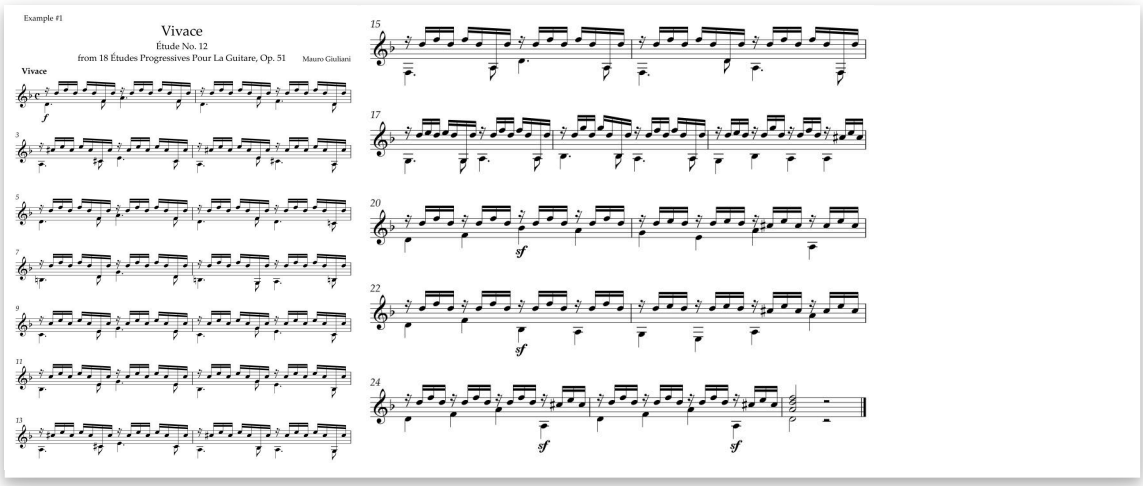
★ Be sure to watch on full screen. In the lower right corner of the video, click the full-screen icon:

Video #1: *Vivace, Étude No. 12 from 18 Études Progressives Pour La Guitare, Op. 51*

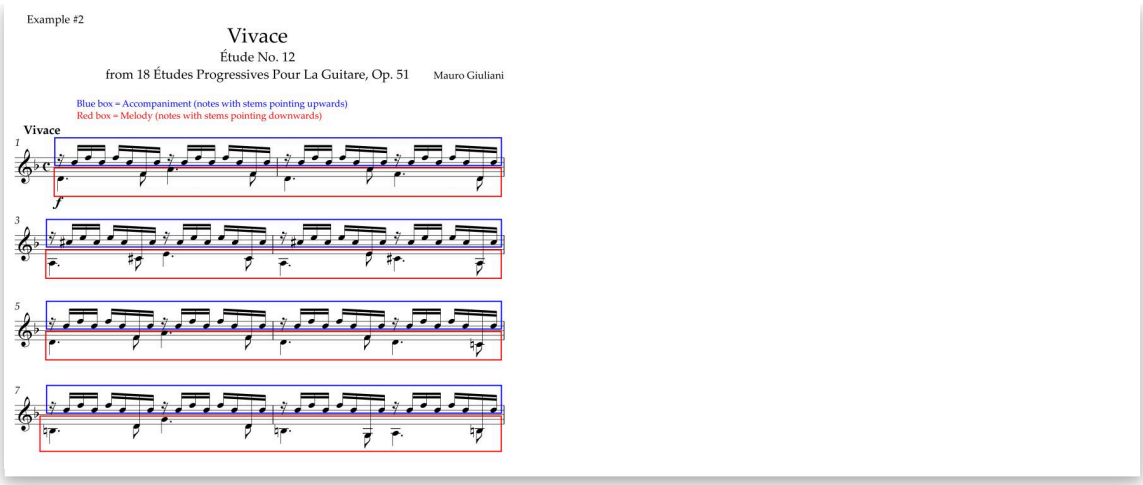
Video 1: The Many Amazing Things We Can Learn from Mauro Giuliani—The Vivace

GIULIANI TEACHES US THAT PIECES ARE COMPRISED OF VOICES OR PARTS

On paper, it looks like the piece is made up of two parts or voices: the bass part which is the melody, and an arpeggio pattern above it that forms the accompaniment. Example #1:



If we look at the piece as if it is in two voices, we see that Giuliani gives us the opportunity to learn a valuable lesson of how to play the thumb loud to bring out the melody and play the fingers quietly to keep the accompaniment in the background. At first glance, here is what seems to be the structure of the piece. Example #2:



Watch me demonstrate how the volume of the two parts should be balanced—the melody loud and the accompaniment quiet. Video 2:

★ Be sure to watch on full screen. In the lower right corner of the video, click the full-screen icon:

Video #2: *VIVACE: Balance Between the Parts*

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Video 2: The Many Amazing Things We Can Learn from Mauro Giuliani—Balance of the Parts

THE MELODY IS IN THE BASS VOICE

Giuliani Tells Us to Work on Our Thumb Tone

The thumb plays the melody in the bass part. Giuliani wants that bass voice to be strong and full. How do I know that? Because it is the MELODY! He is an Italian. Think Italian opera. Think great Italian singers. Melody is king! Giuliani is telling us to work on the beauty and consistency of our thumb tone. For consistency, the melody notes should all be played free stroke. I have explained how to produce a

beautiful tone with the thumb in a previous technique tip. You can review it here. So by all means, use this piece as a study to improve your thumb tone.

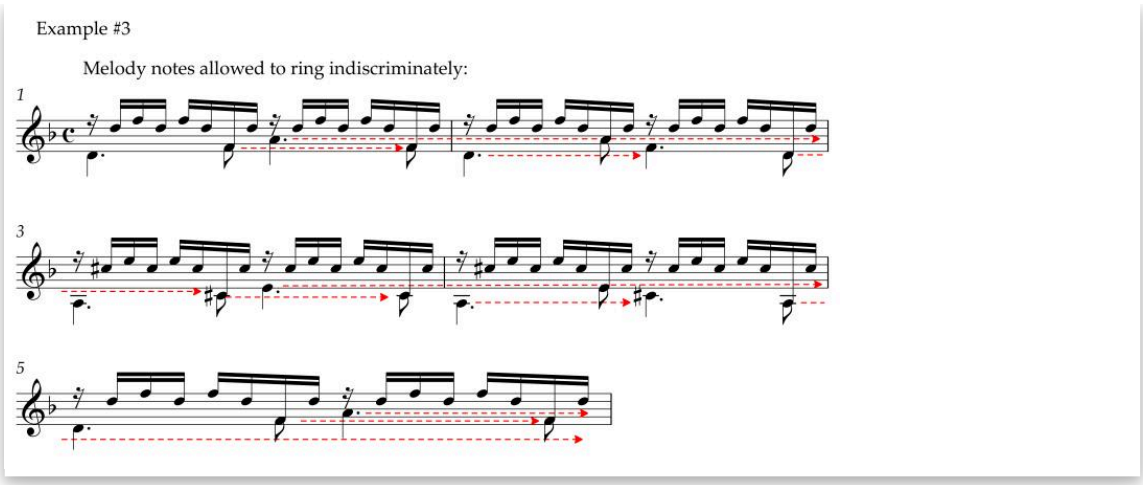
Giuliani Tells Us to Emphasize the Melody and Make it Clean and Clear

Remember, in this piece the melody is king. Therefore, on the most basic level, play the thumb loud and the fingers quietly—the melody loud and the accompaniment soft.

In addition, to make the melody sound clean and to help it stand out from everything behind it, it is important to play the bass voice as a true melody or melody line. That means *allowing only one note to ring at any given moment*. Giuliani does not want us to allow random open strings to ring freely. How do I know this? Because it is a melody! Again, think about how you sing a tune. When you sing, you sing one note at a time. You cannot sing a note while holding another note. Well, unless you are proficient in Tuvan Sygyt polyphonic overtone singing. Check it out as demonstrated here by Anna-Maria Hefele:

Anna-Maria Hefele demonstrates polyphonic overtone singing

Okay, back to business. On the classical guitar in this Giuliani piece, allowing random open strings to ring freely and holding multiple notes down together sounds confused and wrong. Example #3:



Watch and listen to the difference between playing the melody as a clean line and letting the notes ring together indiscriminately. Video 3:

★ Be sure to watch on full screen. In the lower right corner of the video, click the full-screen icon:

Video #3: ***VIVACE: Playing the melody as a LINE. The difference between playing the melody as a clean line and letting the notes ring together indiscriminately***

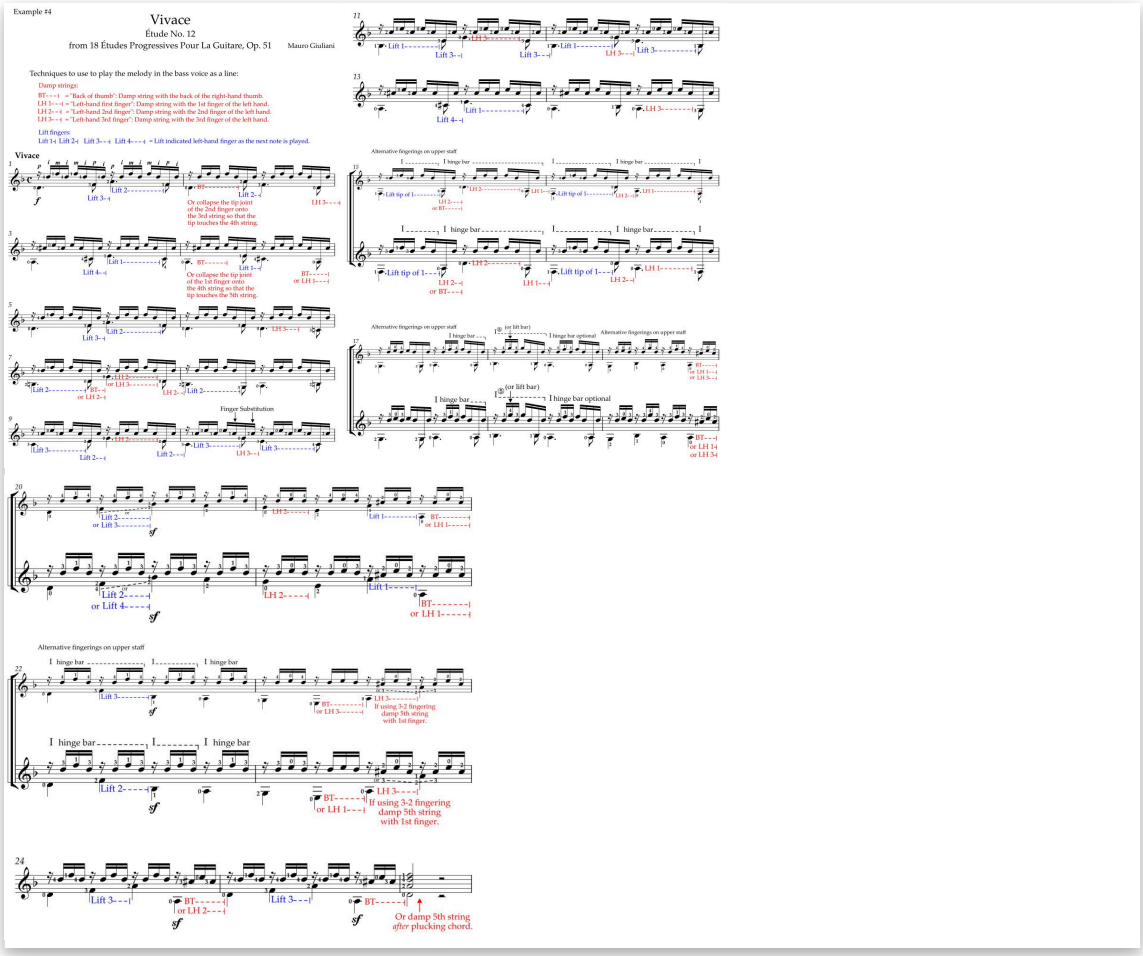
Again, the melody should be *played as a line* with one note sounding at a time. However, the notes in the arpeggio accompaniment are held down and will ring together as chords or harmonies. If we allow the accompaniment notes to ring together but play the melody as a clean line, the two parts will sound very different, emphasizing their independence and helping the melody stand out.

Giuliani Teaches Us a Multitude of String Damping Techniques

To play the bass voice as a true melody line, you must lift finger "X" as you place finger "Y". And, you will stop open strings from ringing wildly by using a multitude of damping techniques.

Honestly, in my early years of teaching (when I was 14 years old) I considered these techniques to be rather advanced. But I soon realized that Giuliani, Sor, Carcassi, and others considered string damping to be a rather basic technique. Why? Because many of their beginning and intermediate studies require copious string damping to sound good. Without damping, the pieces become a mishmash of notes, obscuring the clarity of the voices. Plus, it is pedagogically sound to learn the techniques on easier pieces rather than trying to learn them on advanced repertoire.

Here is the piece marked with all the lifting and damping techniques needed to play the bass voice as a clean melodic line. I demonstrate all of them in the next video. Example #4:



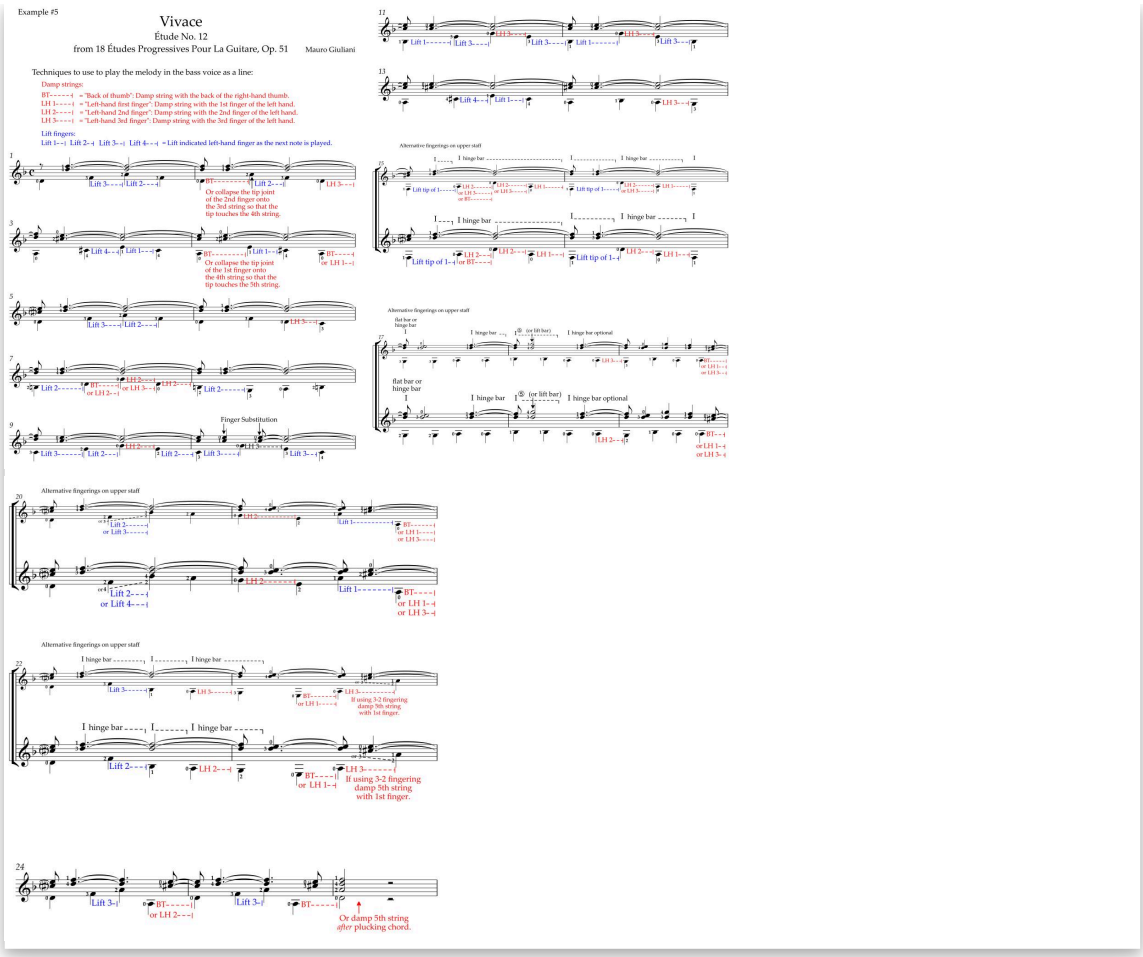
In this next video, I will take you through the piece measure by measure to demonstrate these techniques. Video 4:

★ Be sure to watch on full screen. In the lower right corner of the video, click the full-screen icon:

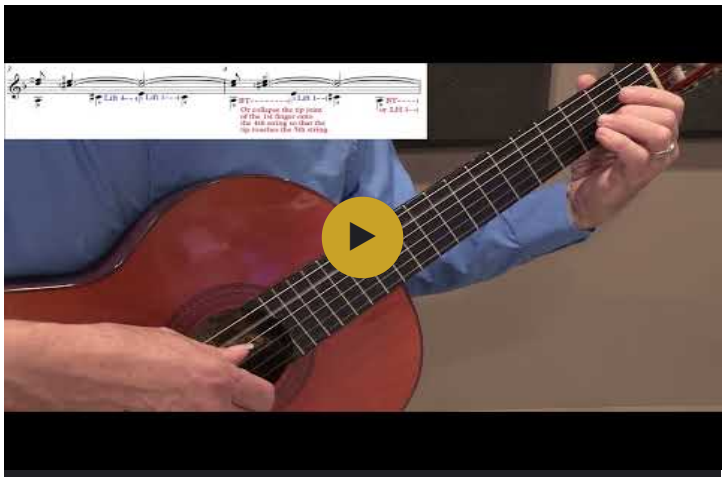
Video #4: *VIVACE: Damping and Lifting the Fingers*

If you are learning/playing the Vivace as you read this technique tip, here is a list of measure numbers and timestamps to which you can refer:

- Measure 1—00:05
- Measure 2—00:50
- Measure 3—04:45
- Measure 4—05:09
- Measure 5—08:35
- Measure 6—08:47
- Measure 7—09:10
- Measure 8—11:05
- Measure 9—11:12
- Measure 10—11:29
- Measure 11—11:46
- Measure 12—12:02
- Measure 13—12:12
- Measure 14—12:19
- Measure 15—12:30
- Measure 16—13:43
- Measure 17—14:30
- Measure 18—14:35
- Measure 19—14:38
- Measure 20—15:22
- Measure 21—15:40
- Measure 22—16:04
- Measure 23—16:50
- Measure 24—17:36
- Measure 25—17:49
- Measure 25 and 26—17:55

And here is an alternative practice version. The accompaniment is played as chord formations instead of as arpeggios. This makes it easier to focus on and hear the string damping and lifting of the fingers in the melody part. I explain how it is used in the following video. Example #5:

Watch me show you how to practice using this version. Video 5:

★ Be sure to watch on full screen. In the lower right corner of the video, click the full-screen icon:

Video #5: *VIVACE: An Alternative Exercise to Learn String Damping*

CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com

Video 5: The Many Amazing Things We Can Learn from Mauro Giuliani—Alternative Exercise to Learn String Damping

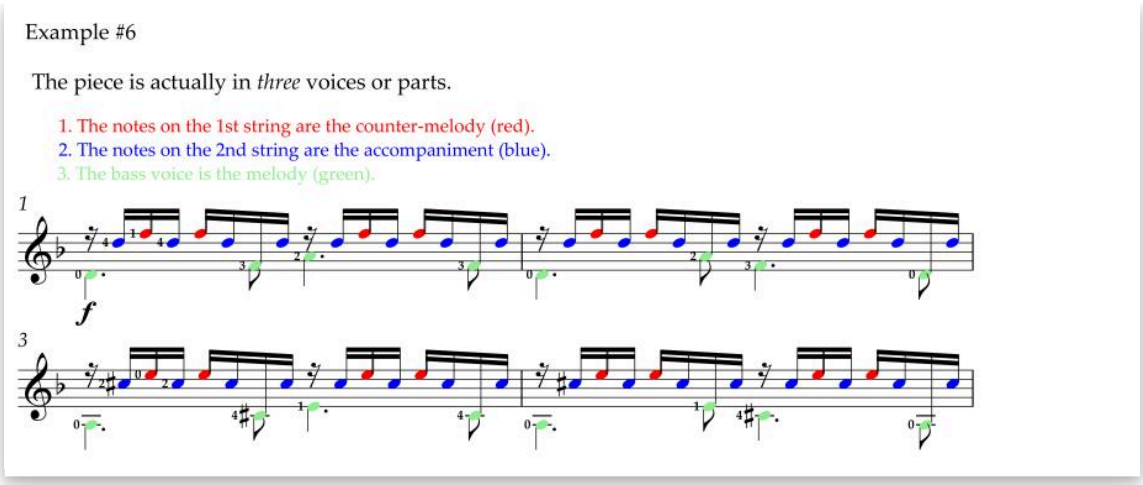
A REVELATION: THE PIECE IS IN THREE PARTS, NOT TWO! A HIDDEN COUNTERMELODY IS CONTAINED WITHIN THE ARPEGGIO

As shown above, at first glance the piece appears to be in two parts—the bass voice on the bottom which carries the melody and the arpeggio accompaniment above. **But closer inspection tells us the piece is in THREE parts**.

1. The melody in the bass voice
2. "Filler" accompaniment notes on the 2nd string (contained within the arpeggio).
3. *Plus, a hidden countermelody on the 1st string* (contained within the arpeggio).

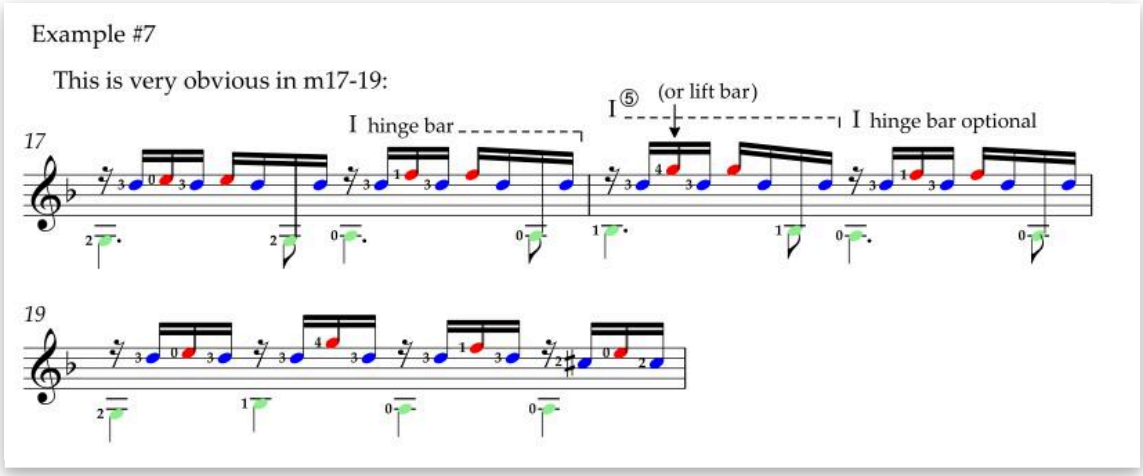
As you will see, this revelation introduces huge ramifications for our left-hand fingering, right-hand technique, and how we move from chord to chord.

I have color-coded the voices in the first four measures so you can see the melody in the bass voice (green), the "filler" accompaniment notes (contained within the arpeggio) that fall on the 2nd string (blue), and the countermelody (also contained within the arpeggio) that falls on the 1st string (red). Example #6:



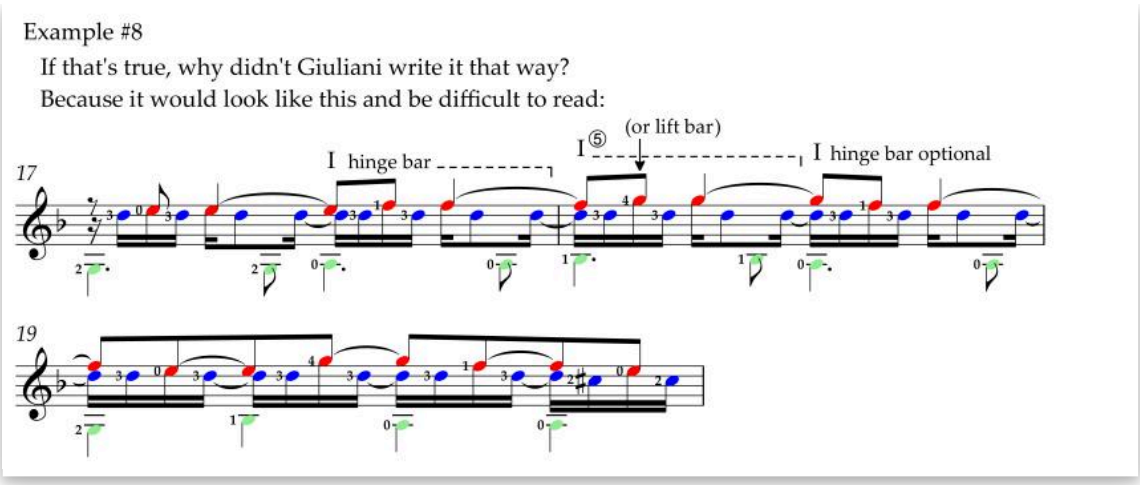
If we accent the "m" finger we can clearly hear the countermelody on the first string.

It is really obvious in measures 17-19. Example #7:



The inquisitive guitarist might ask, "If that is what Giuliani wanted, why didn't he write it that way?"

The answer is because it would look like this, which is difficult to read. Example #8:



Watch me demonstrate and you will hear how Giuliani has written the piece in three voices or parts. Video 6:

★ Be sure to watch on full screen. In the lower right corner of the video, click the full-screen icon:

Video #6: *VIVACE: Revelation—The Piece is in THREE Voices*

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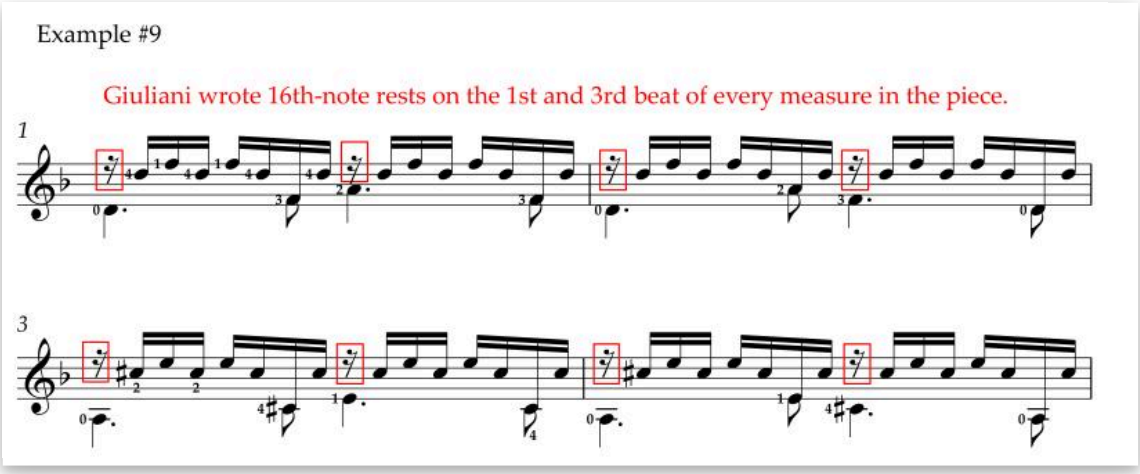
Video 6: The Many Amazing Things We Can Learn from Mauro Giuliani—Revelation The Piece is in THREE Voices

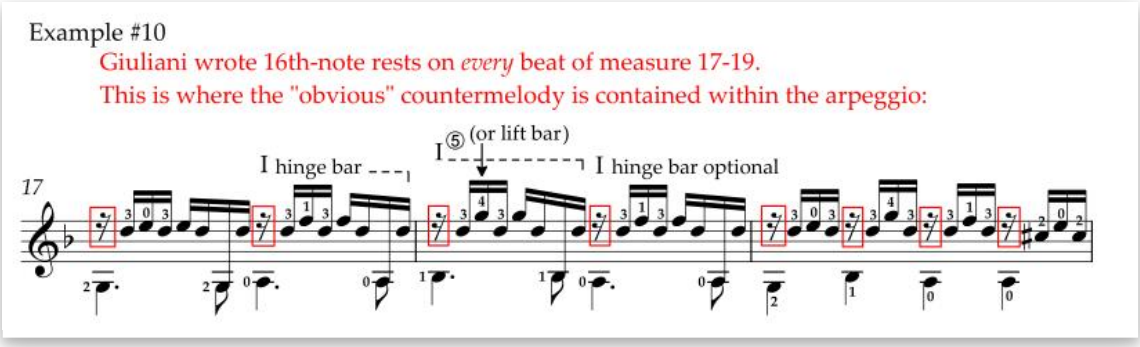
Guitar composers often write their pieces in somewhat of a shorthand style to make it easier to read. They assume that when you begin to learn the piece, you will hear the different parts. Once you hear the parts, the composer assumes you will finger and play it so that the independence of the parts is maintained. Or as one of my students less charitably put it, "Well yeah, the composer doesn't need to write down every detail because any idiot knows how it should sound."

What About Right-Hand Planting?

The keen-eyed reader might ask, "What about all those 16th-note rests I see on the 1st and 3rd beats of every measure? Don't they indicate to plant the "i" and "m" fingers at the same time the thumb plucks which would cut off the notes on the 1st and 2nd strings?" Example #9:



"And in measure 17-19, where you said the countermelody is really obvious, there is a 16-note rest on every beat. Isn't that where you would plant "im"? That would chop off your so-called countermelody notes. Isn't that what Giuliani is indicating?" Example #10:



The answer is that those rests do NOT indicate planting. Before I go on to explain why, let me say that the *Vivace* can absolutely be used as an exercise for right-hand planting. But I do not recommend playing it that way if you want the piece to sound its best musically.

Watch me demonstrate the planting technique on our *Vivace*. Video 7:

★ Be sure to watch on full screen. In the lower right corner of the video, click the full-screen icon:

Video #7: *VIVACE: Right-Hand Planting*

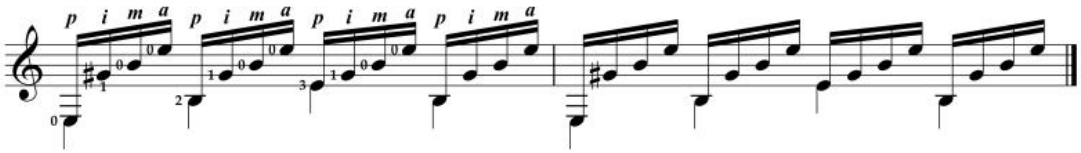
CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com

Video 7: The Many Amazing Things We Can Learn from Mauro Giuliani—Right Hand Planting

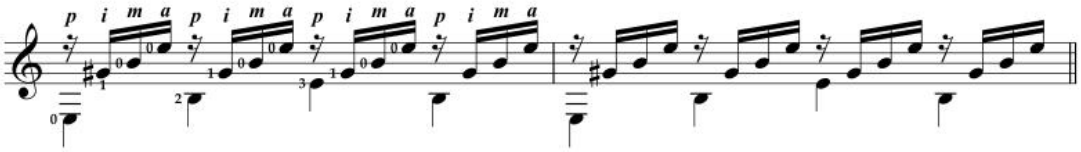
Now that you understand the basics of planting, let me continue to explain why the rests in Giuliani's and many others' music are not to be interpreted literally.

Look at these examples of two ways to notate a basic E major arpeggio passage. First, a commonly used style of notation. Example #11:

Example #11

A common style of notation for a basic E major arpeggio.
Note that the bass notes are stemmed downwards and upwards.

And then here is the same arpeggio as notated by Giuliani. Example #12:

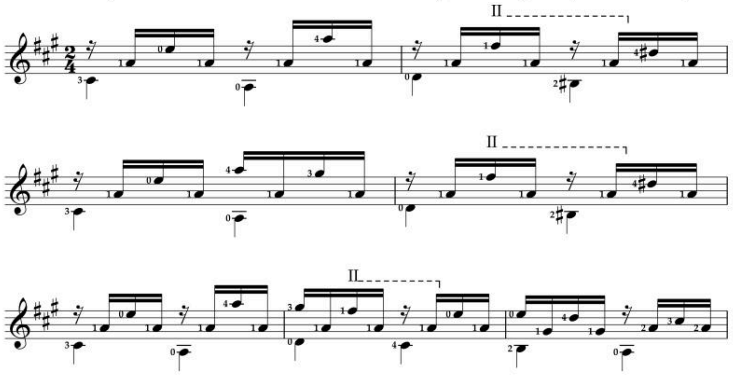
Example #12

The same arpeggio as it would be notated by Giuliani.
Note the usage of 16th note rests.
And note that the bass notes are only stemmed downwards, not upwards.

In arpeggio passages, Giuliani only stems his bass notes downward and places a rest in the upper voice above the bass note. He does not stem them both directions. Both styles of notation indicate that two parts or voices are present. But using the 16th-note rests makes it even clearer and more obvious. But the rests have nothing to do with planting. You can easily hear in many of his pieces that the rests should be ignored (no planting) to allow melodies in the upper voice to sound legato and musical. This is true not only in his easier etudes but in his most advanced pieces as well.

For example, here is a passage from his *Variations on a Theme by Handel, Op. 107* in which he uses this style of notation. Example #13:

Example #13

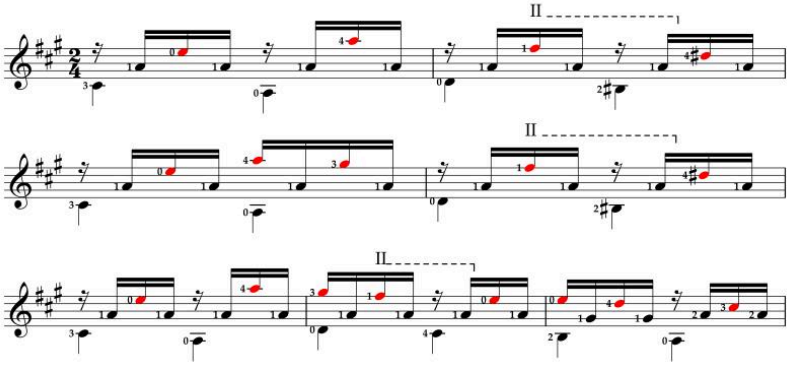
Excerpt from Variation #6 of *Variations on a Theme by Handel*, Op. 107 (Mauro Giuliani)



In this passage, Handel's melody is contained within the arpeggio (as is our hidden countermelody in our *Vivace*) and is clearly meant to be played legato as an independent voice. Example #14:

Example #14

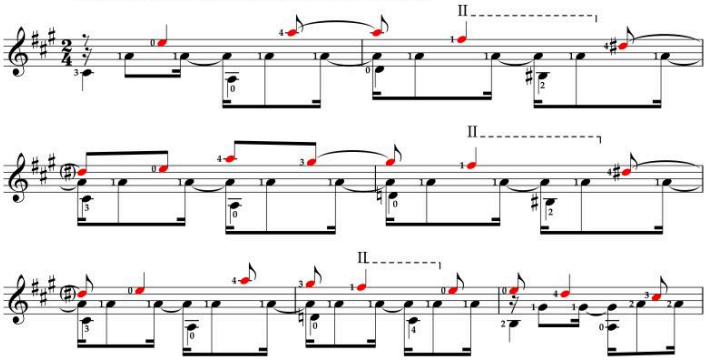
The melody (red notes) is a third voice contained within the arpeggio figure:



This is how it would be notated and what it would actually sound like when the melody notes are sustained and connected as a melody line. Example #15:

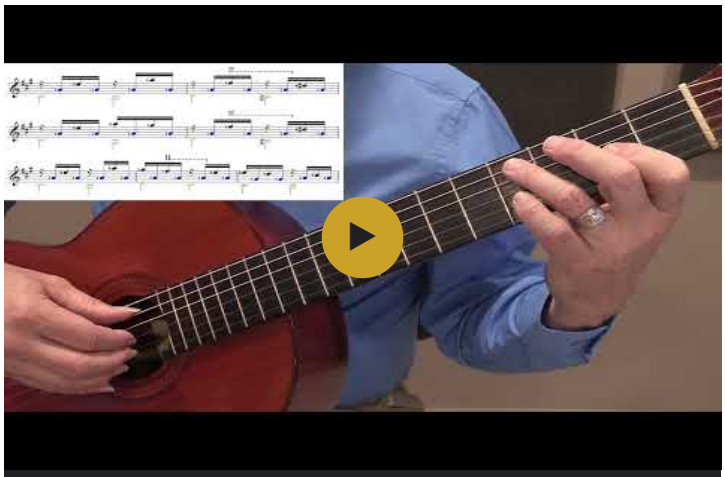
Example #15

This is what the passage sounds like when the melody notes are sustained and connected as a third voice:



Listen to me play the excerpt. I sustain and connect the melody notes to produce the effect of three voices as Giuliani intended. Video 8:

★ Be sure to watch on full screen. In the lower right corner of the video, click the full-screen icon:

Video #8: *Giuliani's Variations on a Theme by Handel and the Vivace*

CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com

Video 8: The Many Amazing Things We Can Learn from Mauro Giuliani—The Handel Variations and the Vivace

In our *Vivace*, the *Variations on a Theme by Handel*, and other pieces by Giuliani (and other guitarist-composers) the rests are in plain sight, but they are there for notational clarity. As you can hear, they are not to be interpreted literally and are NOT a command to plant the fingers.

In other words, in the music of Giuliani (and many other guitarist-composers), *rests in arpeggio passages are not automatic signals that the guitarist is to use planting*. The decision to plant or not to plant should be made at the performer's discretion for *musical reasons*—what sounds best in that particular instance—not as a habit or default method of playing arpeggios.

In our *Vivace*, the guitarist could certainly choose to plant "im" at the 16th rests. As I pointed out earlier, one could use the piece as an exercise to learn how to plant. But, if the guitarist understands the structure of the piece, understands that it is indeed in three parts and understands that a hidden countermelody is present, he would make the musical choice to not plant.

These Amazing Things are Useful Everywhere

The wonderful thing is that the many amazing things we learn from Mauro Giuliani in his beginning and intermediate pieces such as the *Vivace*, are directly applicable to his advanced pieces (such as the Handel Variations) as well. Not only that, but the techniques and concepts are applicable to most of the repertoire of the Renaissance, Baroque, and Classical periods! Does that mean if you can play the *Vivace* you can play the Bach *Chaconne*? Well not necessarily. But learning the basic concepts Giuliani teaches us in the *Vivace* will certainly give us a strong head start to the mastery of more difficult and complex pieces.

Next month we will look at the many amazing things Giuliani teaches us in our *Vivace* about the LEFT hand.