

Classical Guitar Technique

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

By Douglas Niedt

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PRE-PLANT THE LEFT-HAND FINGERS AT THE BEGINNING OF A PIECE

Before you play one note of any piece, always pre-plant as many left-hand fingers as possible. This will provide confidence, security, and stability. Pre-planting greatly reduces the possibility of something going wrong when you begin playing the piece.

In our *Vivace* we could plant the 1st, 2nd, and 4th fingers. Example #16:

Example #16

The musical notation for Example #16 is in 4/4 time. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The first measure contains a whole rest for the treble staff and a whole note for the bass staff, marked with a forte 'f' dynamic. Above the first measure, the text 'Pre-plant 1st, 2nd, and 4th fingers' is written. The second measure starts with a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '1' above it. The third measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '2' above it. The fourth measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '4' above it. The fifth measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '1' above it. The sixth measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '2' above it. The seventh measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '4' above it. The eighth measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '1' above it. The ninth measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '2' above it. The tenth measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '4' above it. The eleventh measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '1' above it. The twelfth measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '2' above it. The thirteenth measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '4' above it. The fourteenth measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '1' above it. The fifteenth measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '2' above it. The sixteenth measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '4' above it. The notation includes red dots and numbers indicating finger placement on the strings.

However, because of the independence of the lower voice (as explained in Part 1) some players may want to only plant 1 and 4. Example #17:

Example #17

The musical notation for Example #17 is in 4/4 time. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The first measure contains a whole rest for the treble staff and a whole note for the bass staff, marked with a forte 'f' dynamic. Above the first measure, the text 'Or, pre-plant only the 1st and 4th fingers' is written. The second measure starts with a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '1' above it. The third measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '4' above it. The fourth measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '1' above it. The fifth measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '4' above it. The sixth measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '1' above it. The seventh measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '4' above it. The eighth measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '1' above it. The ninth measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '4' above it. The tenth measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '1' above it. The eleventh measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '4' above it. The twelfth measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '1' above it. The thirteenth measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '4' above it. The fourteenth measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '1' above it. The fifteenth measure has a quarter rest in the treble staff and a quarter note in the bass staff, marked with a '4' above it. The notation includes red dots and numbers indicating finger placement on the strings.

The Takeaway

The principle of pre-planting fingers before you begin playing a piece can be applied to every piece you play!

LEFT-HAND FINGER PREPARATION

Giuliani's *Vivace* presents us with situations where we must prepare fingers to successfully execute chord changes, barres, and hinge barres. Finger preparation is a key ingredient to playing accurately. Finger preparation also reduces stress on the hand.

Preparing fingers for chord changes

Giuliani shows us the importance of left-hand finger preparation for chord changes in measure #2-3. At the end of measure #2 the 4th finger is on the 2nd-string D. The finger must lift for the chord change at measure #3. If it remains hovering above the 1st or 2nd string (which it will naturally do) it will be ill-prepared to reach the C# on the 5th string at the 4th fret. It will likely miss the note, or the string will buzz from improper finger placement.

The solution is to prepare the finger. Lift the 4th finger from the final D in measure #2 and immediately push it across the fretboard to the 5th string. You must also change the hand position. For the Dm chord the hand will be in a slanted position. For the A chord, the little-finger side of the hand must be brought close into the neck to help the 4th finger reach the 5th-string C#. Example #18:

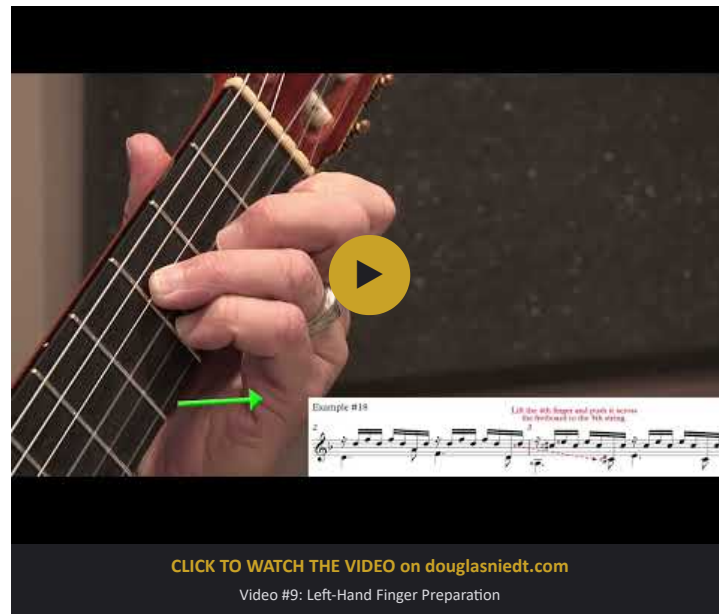
Example #18

Lift the 4th finger and push it across the fretboard to the 5th string.

Watch me demonstrate this left-hand finger preparation. Video #9:

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

Video #9: Left-Hand Finger Preparation



Preparing barre chords

Giuliani also teaches us the importance of finger preparation to play barre chords and hinge barres. In measure #14 the 1st finger plays a Bb on the 5th string and then lifts to play an open A. The finger's natural tendency will be to return to the treble-string side of the fretboard, especially as the 3rd finger plays the low G on the 6th string. Example #19:

Example #19

1st finger lifts to play the open 5th-string A and wants to return to the treble side of the fretboard.

But the downbeat of measure #15 requires a full barre. The player must make a conscious effort to extend the 1st finger across the fretboard to prepare for the barre. Example #20:

Example #20

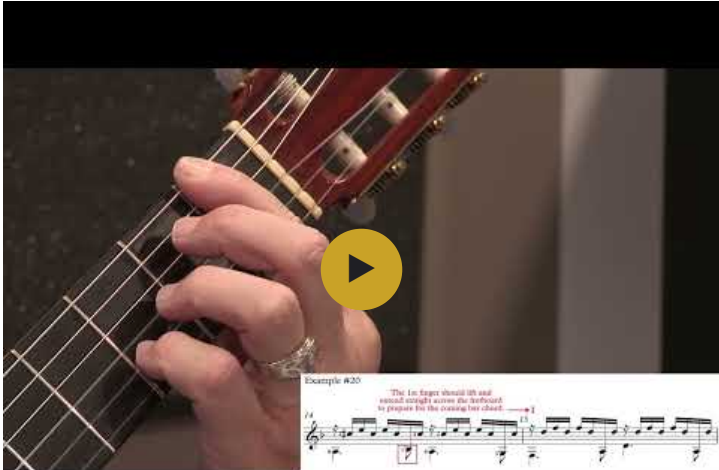
The 1st finger should lift and extend straight across the fretboard to prepare for the coming bar chord. → I



Watch me demonstrate how to prepare the barre. Video #10:

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

Video 10: Preparing Barre Chords



CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com

Video 10: Preparing Barre Chords

Preparing hinge barres

The beginning of measure #22 requires the use of a hinge barre. Therefore, at the end of measure #21 when we lift the 1st finger as we play the 5th-string open A, the 1st finger must be extended across the fretboard, so it is ready to execute the hinge barre. Example #21:

Example #21

The 1st finger should lift and extend across the fretboard to prepare for the coming hinge bar. → I hinge bar

21 22

1st finger lifts here

f

Watch me demonstrate how to prepare a hinge bar. Video #11:

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

Video 11: *Preparing Hinge Barres*

CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com

Video 11: Preparing Hinge Barres

The Takeaway

The principle of finger preparation for chord changes and all types of barres should be applied to all the pieces you play. Preparing fingers in advance promotes far more accurate playing and fewer problems with barre chords.

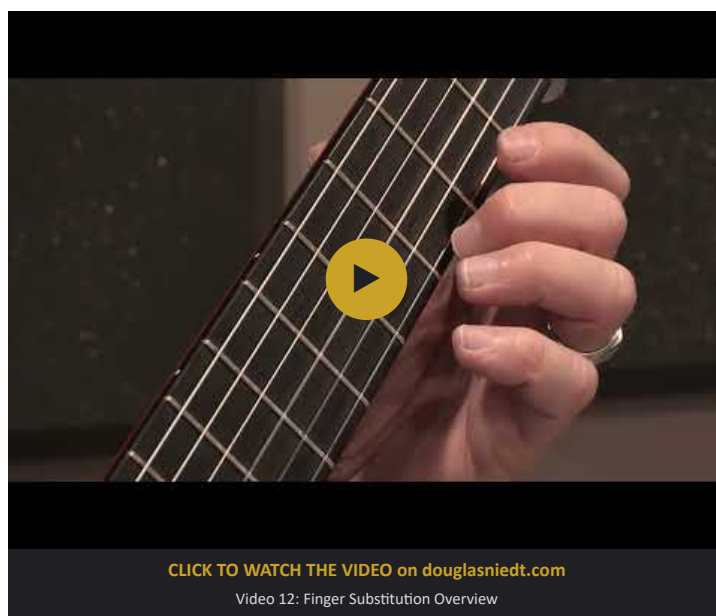
FINGER SUBSTITUTION

The technique of finger substitution is used in playing the organ, piano, and bowed string instruments as well as the guitar.

Watch me demonstrate the concept of finger substitution. Video #12:

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

Video 12: *Finger Substitution Overview*



Giuliani shows us how to use the technique in measure #10-11 in our *Vivace*. At first glance, most guitarists would finger the C major chord in measure #10 with standard fingering. Unfortunately, that results in a choppy chord change going into measure #11. The 1st finger must jump from the 2nd string to the 5th string. Example #22:

Example #22

Jumping the 1st finger from the 2nd string to the 5th string is terrible fingering.

That fingering produces a very choppy chord change. Both the 2nd-string C and the 5th-string C will be cut short in the effort to move the 1st finger quickly to the 5th-string Bb. At high speeds the guitarist might lift the 1st finger so early that they may not even pluck the final 2nd-string C or even worse, might even play an open B.

Remember, never use the same finger to play two consecutive notes that fall on two different strings. The first note will always get clipped short in the effort to jump to the next string. If you want to play staccato, it may be okay. Otherwise, avoid it.

In this case we can solve the fingering problem with the technique of finger substitution. **When working out the fingering for a passage, it is helpful to work backwards from the problem spot.**

Because of the formation of the chord and where we are going next, we must use this fingering for measure #11. Example #23:

Example #23

10 Fingering ?? 11 This is the fingering we must use for measure #11:

Let's look at the fingering possibilities for the 2nd-string C at the end of measure #10. As shown in Example #22, we know we cannot use the 1st finger. The 4th finger is not a candidate. The 3rd finger would require one to use the 4th finger on the preceding low C which is not practical. Example #24:

Example #24

10 Bad finger jump 11 Bad stretch

But what about the 2nd finger? YES. It will be no problem connecting the 2nd finger on the 2nd-string C to the 1st finger on the 5th-string Bb. With this fingering we must use the 4th finger on the preceding 5th-string C. It is a stretch, but very doable. Example #25:

Example #25

10 Must use 4th finger 11 Smooth connection

If we continue to work backwards, we see that we can continue using the 2nd finger on the 2nd-string C's but we must use the 3rd finger to play the 4th-string E. This all works very well. Example #26:

Example #26

Working backwards

Must use 3rd finger

Must use 4th finger

Smooth connection

However, if we look at the beginning of measure 10 we have a problem. Because of what precedes it, the C chord at the beginning of measure #10 must be played with the 1st finger on the 2nd-string C and the 3rd finger on the 5th-string C. But we want to use our 2nd finger on the 2nd-string C. Now what do we do? Example #27:

Example #27

Must use this fingering

Must use 3rd finger

Must use 4th finger

Smooth connection

The answer is to use finger substitution. The 3rd finger is lifted off the 5th-string C as the open G is played (to preserve the melodic line as explained in Part 1). This gives us the mobility to easily replace the 1st finger with the 2nd finger on the C that immediately follows that open G. From there, everything falls into place. Example #28:

Example #28

Finger Substitution

This is now a smooth and effortless chord change.

Be sure to prepare the 1st finger above the 5th string.

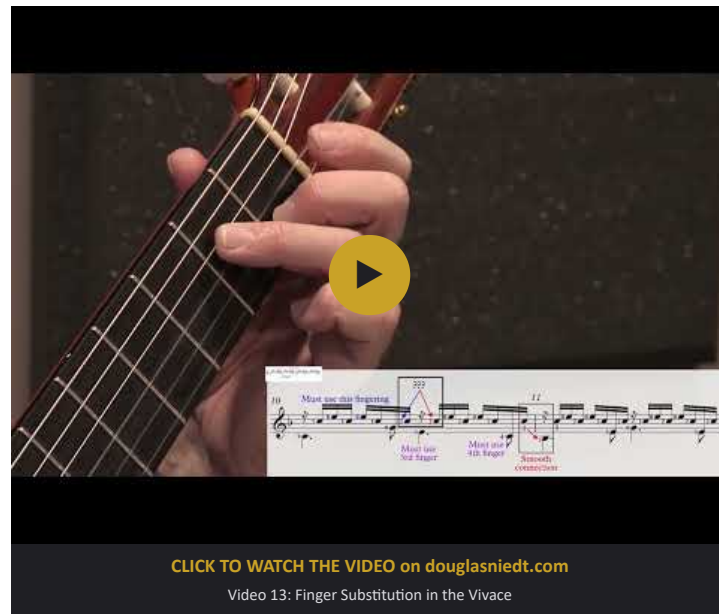
Lift 3rd finger here.

If done adroitly, the repeated 2nd-string C's can be kept ringing with no interruption.

Watch me demonstrate how to apply these finger substitution techniques in our *Vivace*. Video #13:

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

Video 13: *Finger Substitution in the Vivace*



The Takeaway

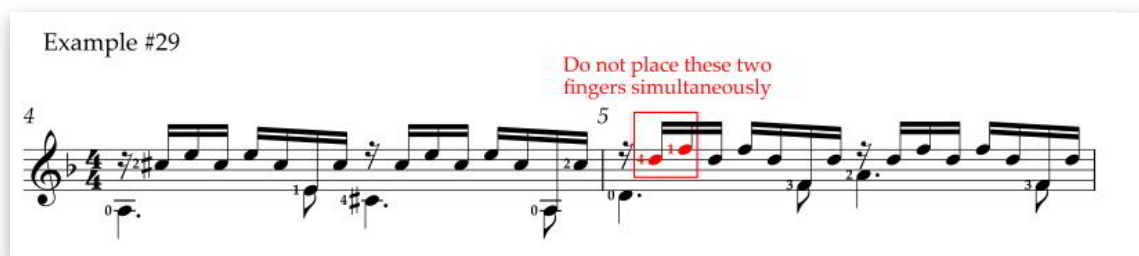
Giuliani shows us how finger substitution can be used to connect a disjointed chord change. It is not a frequently used technique, but under the right circumstances it can be a simple solution to connecting a chord change that would otherwise be an insurmountable problem.

THE SUBTLETIES OF LEFT-HAND FINGER MOVEMENTS IN ARPEGGIATED CHORD CHANGES

A general rule in guitar playing

When playing chord changes in arpeggios, it is almost always a good idea to **place one finger at a time in the order in which it is needed**. In the chord change from measure #4 to measure #5, do not place the 1st and 4th fingers together. Yes, it is a D minor chord. Some players may be tempted to place the entire D minor chord at once on the downbeat of measure #5. Don't do it! Example #29:

Example #29



Instead, place the 4th finger first because that is the note that will be plucked first. THEN place the 1st finger. Example #30:

Example #30



Or, let's look at the chord change from measure #8 to measure #9. Measure #8 is a G7 chord. Measure #9 is a C chord. Example 30a:

Example #30a



Many guitarists (especially if they played pop styles of guitar before classical) will tend to plop down the entire C chord on the downbeat of measure #9. Don't do it! Instead, place one finger at a time in the order in which the notes are plucked by the right hand. Example #30b:



When one finger is placed at a time, less stress is placed on the hand. This is true even for the seemingly simplest chord changes. It is easier in all respects to place one finger at a time rather than two, three, or four fingers all at once. Placing one finger at a time also results in far better accuracy and precision of finger placement. The brain only has to process the placement of one finger at a time. Plus, as each finger is placed, it provides a spatial reference point for the next finger to find its string and fret. A final benefit is that extraneous finger and string noises are often eliminated with this method of finger placement.

"Melting" chord changes together

The principle of placing one finger at a time on arpeggio chord changes can be taken a step further to seamlessly "melt" changes of harmony (chord changes) together. This may not be a desirable sound in every arpeggio passage you play, but I think it sounds good in the *Vivace*. I like it especially as a contrast to the purely linear sound of the melody in the bass voice.

We learned in Part 1 that the 16th-note rests in our *Vivace* are not to be played literally. When the thumb plucks on the 1st and 3rd beats of each measure, the sound should not be cut off with right-hand planting.

Not only that, but if we decide to melt the harmonies together, we do not want to do the conventional thing and lift fingers at the bar line, i.e. on the 1st beat of the measure. Example #31:

Example #31

Do not lift the 2nd finger here

Instead, we carry the sound across the bar lines and over the rests at the chord changes to melt the harmonies together. Example #32:

Example #32

Hold the C# across the bar line so the harmonies "melt" together

Lift the 2nd finger HERE

Watch me demonstrate the subtleties of executing this chord change. Video #14:

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

Video 14: *Melting chord changes together*



Hold the C# across the bar line so the harmonies "melt" together. Lift the 3rd finger HERE.



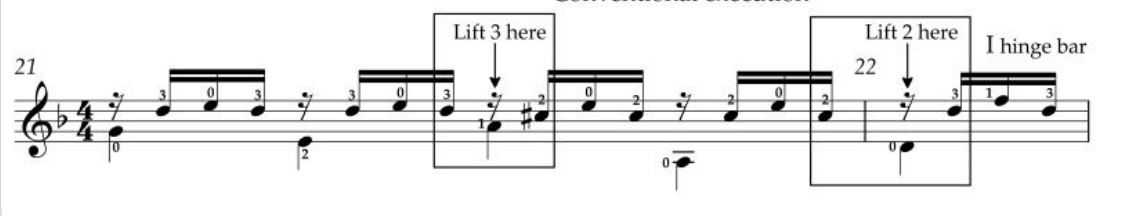
CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com

Video 14: Melting chord changes together

Similar examples occur throughout the piece. For example, in measure #21-22 the conventional execution is to lift the fingers at the rests. This produces a clean break between the changes of harmony (which you may prefer in some pieces). Example #33:

Example #33

Conventional execution



But to melt the harmonies together, the changes are played like this. Example #34:

Example #34

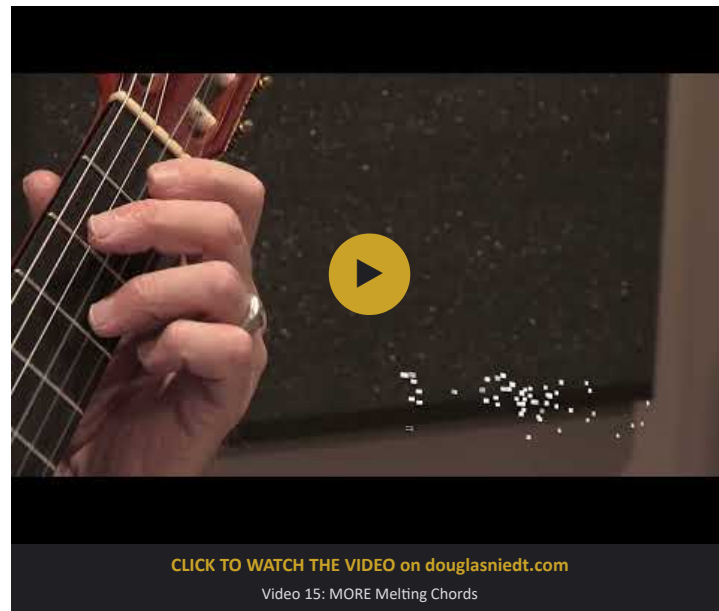
Melting the changes together



Watch me demonstrate the difference between conventional execution and melting the chord together. Video #15:

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

Video 15: *MORE Melting Chords*



In the change from measure #12 to measure #13 we have a different situation. In measure #12, the 2nd finger is on the 2nd-string C natural at the first fret and then must slide up to the 2nd fret in measure #13. Many players would slide up on the downbeat of measure #13. But this would produce an unwanted glissando. Others might release the pressure from the string. Example #35:

Example #35

Conventional execution
Slide up the 2nd finger here
(not a good idea) or
release the pressure from the string

Releasing the pressure off the string is fine if you want a clean break between the two harmonies. But if you want to melt them together, slide the 2nd finger to the 2nd fret AFTER plucking the low A bass note. Example #36:

Example #37

But it is played like this. The chord changes melt together as a result of the three individual voices (red, blue, and green) being played as independent legato lines. Example #38:

Example #38

If you missed it or don't remember it from Part I, here is an explanation of how the piece is in three parts and a demonstration of these three measures. Video #6 from Part 1:

★ 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



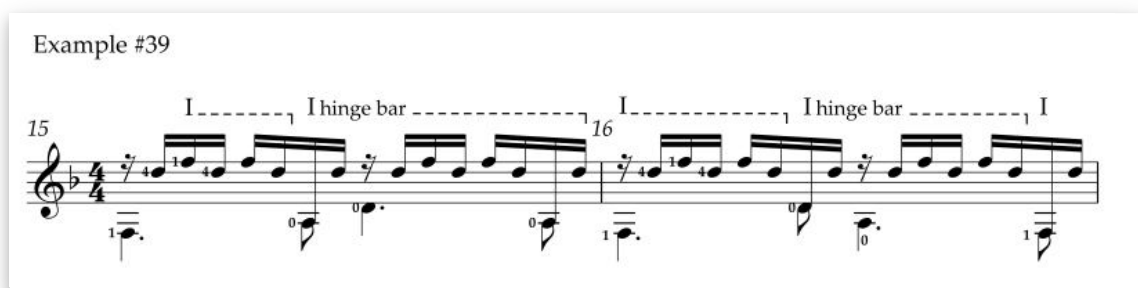
The Takeaway

You have the CHOICE of how to execute chord changes in arpeggios. You can lift the notes of chord X as the bass note of chord Y is plucked (and perhaps damp any open strings) which produces a clean break between the harmonies. Or, using the techniques I have described, you can allow the harmonies to melt together. You choose, you are the master. These choices and techniques can usually be employed on any arpeggio passage in any piece you play.

BARRE CHORDS AND HINGE BARRES

In measure #15 and measure #16, Giuliani provides us the opportunity to practice our barre and hinge barre technique. Example #39:

Example #39



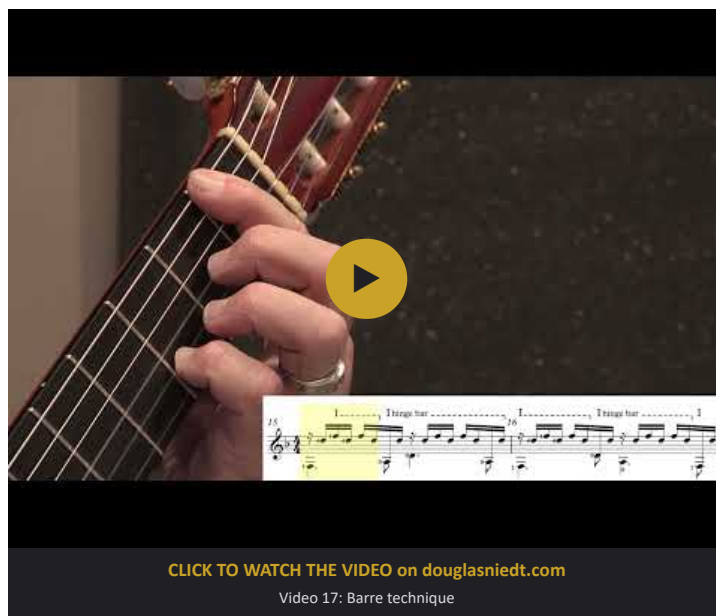
He requires us to alternate between using a barre to hold the low F's on the 6th string and then lifting the tip of the barre (producing a hinge barre) to play open strings. [You can learn all about hinge barres in this technique tip.](#) The hinge barres are necessary to keep the 1st-string F's ringing without interruption. Once again, we ignore the 16th-note rests.

An important lesson Giuliani teaches us in this passage is that when we play the full barres to hold the low F's, we do not have to exert excessive pressure to hold down all six strings. Although the barre finger extends all the way across the fretboard, we are only plucking the 1st and 6th strings. Therefore, we should apply pressure to only those two strings. *The barre finger should assume a mechanically efficient arched shape rather than lie flat across the fretboard.*

Watch me demonstrate these barre techniques. Video #17:

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

Video 17: Barre technique



The Takeaway

Always analyze a passage containing a barre. Determine exactly which strings the barre finger is required to hold. Focus the barre finger pressure on only those strings. The barre will be easier to hold and sound clearer. That means less stress on your hand. Hinge barres are useful and necessary in many pieces. They are easy to execute and make passages easier to play and more musical.

LEFT-HAND FINGERING CHOICES

In measures #15 through measure #19 we have two general schemas of left-hand fingering we could use.

The first, uses the 3rd finger to play the 2nd-string D's starting in measure #15. Everything falls neatly into place from there. Example #40:

Example #40

We must use this fingering for measure #14.

If we use the 3rd finger on the 2nd-string D's, it stays down from measure #15 through most of measure #19. The fingering for all the other notes falls neatly into place.

However, at the beginning of measure #15, some may find it difficult to use the 3rd finger on the 2nd-string D and then have to place the full barre. Example #41:

Example #41

The combination of using the 3rd finger on the D with the full bar may be difficult for some players.

For them, it might be easier to use the 4th finger on the 2nd-string D instead. Example #42:

Example #42

The combination of using the 4th finger on the D with the full bar may be easier for some players.

However, if the 4th finger is used on the D's, we are faced with a wide stretch at measure #17 and measure #19. We must also use a cross-fingering at measure #18 and measure #19. Example #43:

Example #43

If we use the 4th finger on the 2nd-string D's, it stays down from measure #15 through most of measure #18.

Potential Problems

If these potential difficult spots are not a problem, by all means use the 4th finger on the 2nd-string D's as your fingering solution.

But if you like using the 4th finger at measure #15 to make it easier to grab the barre but do NOT like the wide stretches and cross fingerings that follow, then for you, finger substitution might be an answer. Begin with the 4th finger in measure #15 and then apply finger substitution in measure #16. Example #44:

Example #44

14

15 I hinge bar

16 I hinge bar

17 Easier stretch

18 (or lift bar) I hinge bar optional

19 Easier stretch

4th finger may make placement of bar easier

Substitute 3rd finger here

Standard fingering

Standard fingering

This will eliminate the wide stretches and cross fingerings in measure #17-19.

The same fingering choices and solutions may be used for measure #22-24.

Measures #20-21 also present us with multiple schemas of left-hand fingering. Here are two schemas each with additional options.
Example #45:

Example #45

Schema A: 3rd finger on the D's

20 or 4 ---> then: 2

21

Or, Schema B: 4th finger on the D's

20 or 3 ---> then: 2

21 or 1 ---> then: 2 3

Finally, at the end of the piece, we have two good fingering choices. Example #46:

Example #46

Schema A:

4th finger on the D's and 3rd finger on the C#'s:



Or, Schema B:

3rd finger on the D's *and* the C#'s:



IMPORTANT: A final thought on fingering choices is to be sure to test all fingerings at the final tempo of the piece. You do not want to waste time practicing a fingering for several days or weeks only to find that it does not work at the actual tempo of the piece. Test it with speed bursts or reflex practice. Learn more about [speed burst practice here](#) and [here](#).

So, we see that our *Vivace* has passages for which several fingerings are possible. During the course of the piece, Giuliani illustrates several principles of fingering. His music challenges us to use those principles and analyze the passages to learn which fingering is best for each player.

The Takeaway

When fingering any passage, do not use the first schema of fingering that comes to mind. Do not automatically use a fingering specified by an editor. Examine the possibilities and choose a fingering that works best for you but is also musical: no notes chopped off, smooth chord changes, and a tone quality that complements the passage. Be sure to test it at the ultimate tempo of the piece.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As I stated at the beginning of this technique tip in Part 1, I am amazed at the incredible number of technical topics, musical concepts, and challenges that Giuliani covers in this short piece. It took me 40 pages of text, 46 written musical examples, and 17 videos to explain what he teaches us in only 26 measures of music that only fills up one page!

And, it is not only about technique. He also teaches us how the music is put together. He shows us how to combine our knowledge of the music with technique to make the music come alive. It no longer sounds like just another etude.

These are techniques and ways of thinking that you want to bring to every piece you play. The improvement in your playing will be very noticeable, and you can thank Mauro Giuliani for that.