

Tone Color, Part 2

By Douglas Niedt

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Special Tools

In some situations, right arm and wrist movements can be added to whatever finger movements you have chosen to use to further alter the attack and quality of the sound.

Arm and hand “slice” gestures

Sometimes, players use what Charles Duncan in *The Art of Classical Guitar Playing* describes as:

“a slight propulsive gesture of the hand or forearm. When exaggerated, the result is a slice across the strings. With less propulsion, it is felt more as an emphasis of the nails to the right or left. Emphasis (or slice) to the right takes the hand momentarily away from the line of the forearm (somewhat as if screwing the cap onto a large jar, although the movement is tiny by comparison. It focuses the tone for maximum clarity by increasing the resistance of the nails. Emphasis to the left is akin to the motion of flicking lint off one’s coat and takes a small rotary movement of the forearm. The single-edge, line-of-force nail contact minimizes resistance to create a thick, mellow tone.”

Of the two directions, the slice to the left produces a fuller, sweeter, darker sonority. But as Duncan points out, you don’t necessarily want sweet all the time. The natural complement to that sweetness is the piquant or spicy, brighter sound which adds variety.

Video #9. Watch me demonstrate.

Be sure to watch on full screen. Click in video area to activate video. Then right-click and select “Full Screen Multimedia”. To return to normal size, right-click on video and select “End Full Screen Multimedia” or, press the escape key on your keyboard.



Video 9 Arm and hand slice gestures

Pushing the arm down towards the floor or pulling out/up with the arm and wrist

These two techniques are best done in slower passages.

1. Pushing downward: At the same time you pluck a string or chord, push down slightly toward the floor with the arm and wrist. In effect, you are taking power away from the fingers. You are pushing down with the arm as you are pulling up with the fingers. This softens the articulation and adds a certain hazy quality to the sonority.
2. Pulling out/up: Pull the arm and/or wrist outward and upward at the same time you pluck the strings. This produces a harsh, aggressive attack and brighter tone quality.

Video #10. Watch me demonstrate these lesser-known techniques.

Be sure to watch on full screen. Click in video area to activate video. Then right-click and select “Full Screen Multimedia”. To return to normal size, right-click on video and select “End Full Screen Multimedia” or, press the escape key on your keyboard.



Video 10 Pushing arm down or up

Each String Has Its Own Tone Color

Another characteristic that sets the guitar apart from many other instruments, is that most notes can be played on more than one string. Each string has its own unique color due to its thickness and the material the string is made of. The tone quality of both the open strings and the notes fretted within the first four frets is brighter than when the same notes are fretted from the fifth fret on up:

Example #1

① ② ③

0 1 3 1 0 5 6 8 6 5 9 10 12 10 9

Plus, there is a large difference in tone color between the first three treble strings and the metal-wound bass strings.

Example #2

③ ④ ⑤

0 2 3 2 0 5 7 8 7 5 10 12 13 12 10

Video #11. Watch me demonstrate the tone colors of different strings.

Be sure to watch on full screen. Click in video area to activate video. Then right-click and select “Full Screen Multimedia”. To return to normal size, right-click on video and select “End Full Screen Multimedia” or, press the escape key on your keyboard.



Tone Color
The difference in tone color is even greater
between the treble strings and bass strings

Video 11 Each string has its own color

We can exploit the tonal characteristics of the strings by choosing fingerings that produce a desired color:

Example #3

Spanish Dance No. 5 (Enrique Granados)

Melody fingered on bright 1st string

①

33

②

Melody fingered on darker 2nd string

⑤

II ⑤

0 2 4 7 7 5 7 0 2 4 5 5 4 2 4 5 7

5 5 5 5 2 2 4 4 4 5 7

6 6 4 6 4 4 2 2

37

②

⑤

④

9 9 7 9 2 4 5 0 7 5 0

8 6 6 6 6 8 8 7 7 8 5

7 7 6 7 7 7 6 6

Video #12. Watch me play this excerpt.

Be sure to watch on full screen. Click in video area to activate video. Then right-click and select “Full Screen Multimedia”. To return to normal size, right-click on video and select “End Full Screen Multimedia” or, press the escape key on your keyboard.



Video 12 Spanish Dance 5

We can play a repeated motif or even an entire section on different strings for contrast:

Example #4

La Frescobalda (Girolamo Frescobaldi)

Bright fingering for opening measures:

Dark fingering for opening measures:

Video #13. Watch this great example of a dramatic change of color on the repeat of a section of music.

Be sure to watch on full screen. Click in video area to activate video. Then right-click and select “Full Screen Multimedia”. To return to normal size, right-click on video and select “End Full Screen Multimedia” or, press the escape key on your keyboard.



Tone Color Video 13 Changing the fingering on repeated sections for color contrast La Frescobalda

Here, a short motif is repeated immediately, inviting a change of tone color:

Example #5

Leyenda (Isaac Albéniz)

106

Brighter

Darker

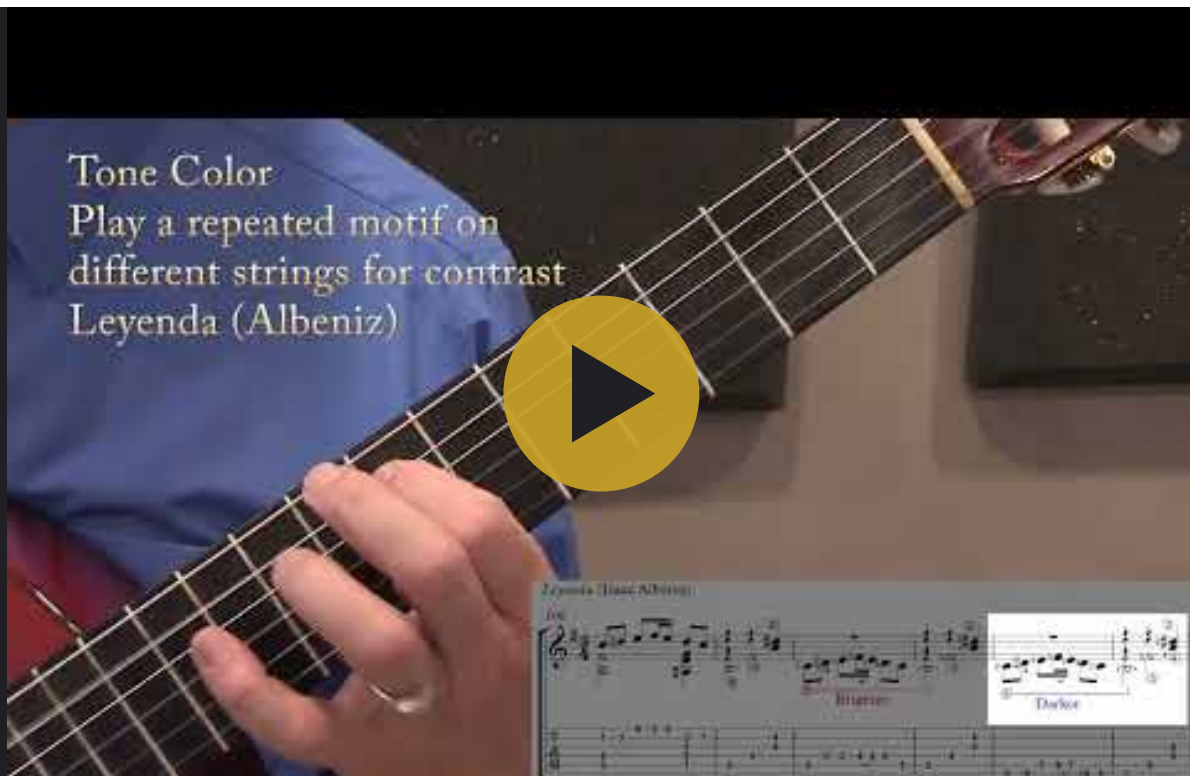
T 1 3 0 2 0 3 1 4 4 4 4 8

A 4 0 2 4 2 0 3 2 4 4 9

B 0 1 2 3 0 2 3 2 4 8 7 9

Video #14. Watch me play this section of *Leyenda*, changing the tone color on the repeat of the motif.

Be sure to watch on full screen. Click in video area to activate video. Then right-click and select “Full Screen Multimedia”. To return to normal size, right-click on video and select “End Full Screen Multimedia” or, press the escape key on your keyboard.



Video 14 Leyenda m106

In the next example, the entire theme is repeated. The first statement of the theme can be fingered with the melody on the first string. Then, the repeat is fingered with the melody on the second string, producing a very beautiful contrast.

Example #6

Vaghe belleze et bionde trecce d'oro vedi che per ti moro (Anonymous, transcribed by Oscar Chilesotti)
From *Six Lute Pieces of the Renaissance*, No. 1

⑥ = D First phrase played with bright fingering

①

1

TAB

Repeat of phrase played with darker fingering

②

8

TAB

Video #15. Watch me demonstrate how a change of fingering on a repeated theme can produce a very pleasing contrast.

Be sure to watch on full screen. Click in video area to activate video. Then right-click and select “Full Screen Multimedia”. To return to normal size, right-click on video and select “End Full Screen Multimedia” or, press the escape key on your keyboard.



Video 15 Lute Piece 1

When fingering a piece, always ask yourself what sound you are after. Then, find the different areas on the fretboard where a passage can be played. Playing a passage on different strings can greatly change its mood. For example, the first eight measures of the coda of *Leyenda* could be fingered in two very different ways:

Example #7

Leyenda (Isaac Albéniz)

Coda

Fingered in 1st position for brighter sound

I ②

0 0 0 1 1 1 0 0

0 2 0 2 2 2 2 2

3 3 0 4 2 2 2 2

Same passage fingered mostly in upper positions for dark sound.

Harder to play and difficult to play legato, but very effective use of color.

V ② V ② V ③

5 4 5 0 6 6 5 5

9 5 7 2 5 6 5 8

8 7 5 2 7 8 7 7

Video #16. Watch me play it both ways.

Be sure to watch on full screen. Click in video area to activate video. Then right-click and select “Full Screen Multimedia”. To return to normal size, right-click on video and select “End Full Screen Multimedia” or, press the escape key on your keyboard.



Video 16 Leyenda Coda and

The contrasting tone colors of the strings can also lead to problems. Players of other instruments sometimes ask guitarists, “When you play that melody, the tone color changes. Why don’t you play the notes on one string so it sounds more even?” Or, “Those open strings in the middle of that melody sound out-of-place.” Artistic players are very careful how they finger melodic passages to minimize switching from one string to another in the same phrase.

END PART 2