

The Guitarist's Studio (BCGS Newsletter)

"Practicing Efficiently: Developing a Daily Workout" by J. Scott Matejicka

As guitarists, many of the pieces we encounter put extremely high demands on our muscles. In most cases, it isn't strength we should be concerned with, but control of fine muscle movements. Efficiency of motion is the key. Through slow, precise practice, you will discover how to engage the muscles you need and allow all other muscles to relax. The guitarist must take an athletic approach to practicing. To be prepared technically and more importantly to avoid injury, you should begin to develop a daily workout. Choose exercises that are specific to the development of a particular hand movement. When working on a left hand exercise, be sure that the movement in the right hand is simple. When working on the development of the right hand, you should consider starting off by executing the movement on open strings. Once the new movement of the hand has been committed to a muscle memory, begin to involve the less active hand on a higher level. You ultimately never want to lose sight of the movement of either hand especially during the development stage.

Your daily workout should consist of exercises that alternate between your left and right hands. Be sure to use a metronome. It not only helps you develop steady rhythm, but it is a good way to grade your progress. I prefer to leave scales that are one octave and longer for the end of the workout. Here are a few exercises to get you started.

Left Hand:

In order to ease your left hand into a stage of higher development, I recommend starting most left hand exercises in the VII position. Many left hand exercise will work from the first string across the fretboard to the sixth string. Once you reach the sixth string shift down a position (VI) and work back across the fretboard to the first string. Continue this pathway snaking down the fretboard to the first position.

The chromatic exercise

This exercise mainly focuses on the left hand, but will utilize a strict alternation of I & M in the right hand. I like to start the day off with this exercise due to its extremely idiomatic nature to the guitar. The exercise consists of the finger pattern 1, 2, 3, 4 on frets 7, 8, 9 & 10 respectively. Follow the pathway described above. Begin with a very slow tempo and pay attention to the attitude of your fingers and left-hand posture:

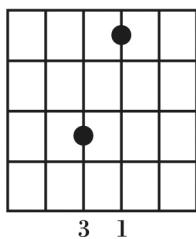
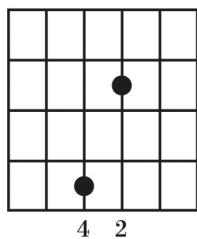
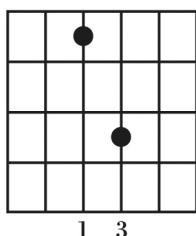
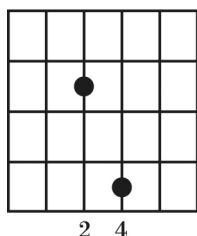
- place your fingertip just behind the fretwire
- do not collapse the tip joint
- use a mid-range bend in the wrist
- allow the thumb to freely move along the back of the neck as the fingers require.

Finger independence exercises

One of the best finger independence exercises I've ever encountered is an exercise by Aaron Shearer. A published version of the exercise can be found in Aaron Shearer's *Classic Guitar Technique Supp. I*. It is located in the book under "Group I" exercises. A former teacher of mine dubbed this exercise "the crab" due to the movement created by the fingers as you move up and down the neck. I've modified the exercise a little by beginning in the IX position and working my way down

through a hybrid of Aaron Shearer's original fingering. The notes should be played as harmonic intervals. Strive for legato connection. Once you've played the four intervals in the IX position, use guide fingers to move down to the VIII position and play the intervals in the opposite order.

IX



Slurs

From an interpretive point of view, the slur has served different functions throughout music history. During the Renaissance and Baroque periods, the slur was often used to expose the dichotomy between strong and weak beats; however, we as modern guitarists, must develop a slur technique that matches the volume and presence of a plucked note. In modern repertoire, you will find that the slur is often used to facilitate movement. You must develop the ability to conceal the variance in articulation. The ascending slur should capitalize on the power of the primary (or big) knuckle, and the fingertip should land at the top of the fret. Through its movement, the finger should possess the same curvature as it would if it were fretting a note. The descending slur, although the exact opposite musical gesture, is not the exact opposite physical gesture. The slurring finger will utilize the secondary knuckle to pull the fingertip off of the string. A slight release of pressure will allow the string to roll smoothly out from under the fingertip. The slurring finger should move directly toward the upper adjacent string. This "rest slur" will resemble the movement of a rest stroke in the right hand. Here are a few slur exercises you should try:

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1-2,1-3,1-4
1-2,2-3,3-4
1-3,2-4
4-1,3-1,2-1
4-3,3-2,2-1
4-2,3-1
1-2-1, 1-3-1, 1-4-1
1-2-1, 2-3-2, 3-4-3

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The Bar

Moderation is key when working on bar exercises. Begin by barring only four strings and progressing down three or four frets at a time. Unlike any other exercise, this one really builds muscle. Once you are ready, progress from barring four strings to five and ultimately to six strings. To make sure all of the barred notes are clearly sounded, a simple PIMA arpeggio will suffice. As you build your endurance, explore more advanced arpeggio formulas. In order to develop a good bar technique, keep the following things in mind:

- lower the thumb on the back of the neck
- extend the bar from the primary knuckle
- place the bar parallel to the fretwire
- roll the bar to the outside of the finger
- use the weight of the arm and hand

Right Hand

As with the left hand, in order to ease into higher stages of development, begin the right hand exercises in a position where the fingers are relaxed and close to each other (adjacent strings). Make sure you are aware of the curvature of your wrist, attitude of your fingers and placement of your fingertips at all times. In order to focus exclusively on the movements of the right hand, start each new exercise by only articulating open strings.

Right hand arpeggios:

Most arpeggio formulas you encounter will use various combinations of P, I, M & A. There are two areas of study to focus on in terms of right hand arpeggio development: thumb extension & position shifts.

-thumb extension:

- I, M & A play strings ③, ② & ① respectively
- P works from string ④ to ⑤ to ⑥ and back

-right hand shifts

- PIMA plays strings ④, ③, ②, ① respectively
- PIMA plays strings ⑤, ④, ③, ② respectively
- PIMA plays strings ⑥, ⑤, ④, ③ respectively and back

If you are new to right hand arpeggios, modify the above approach to the following formulas (PIM, PMI, PIMI, PMIM).

Tremolo:

Tremolo often intimidates musicians new to the guitar. However, if approached slowly and methodically, your tremolo technique will reach an impressive level in no time. Tremolo is the epitome of right hand fluid motion. Like all other right hand exercises, begin on open strings. The tremolo will stay on the ② string (A,M,I) while P extends from the ③ string through to the ⑥ string and back. After your hand recognizes the sympathetic motion needed to achieve the seamless effect of the tremolo gesture, you should add a simple left hand movement such as a

chromatic scale. The thumb articulates a descending chromatic scale beginning on the third string fourth fret (B), working down to the open sixth string and then returning. Adding this scale will assist you in building your tremolo endurance. Have the thumb articulate the bass note four times before moving to the next note of the scale. Once you fully descend and ascend, then do two articulations per note and then ultimately one articulation. This entire exercise should be done without stopping.

Rasqueado:

Since the majority of guitar playing requires your muscles to flex, some solid rasqueado practice will develop the return gesture by working your extensor muscles. With E, A, M & I fully flexed inside of the palm, plant P on the ③ string and strike strings ② & ① together by extending E then A then M and finally I. Proceed by planting P on lower strings, in turn exposing more open strings. The guitarist must first work on finger independence to ultimately arrive at the cascading, sympathetic motion of an effective rasqueado technique.

Scales

Once your hands are sufficiently warmed up, have your daily workout culminate in scale practice. There are various ways to approach scales. 1) If you are new to scale practice, I recommend beginning with the exploration of what I dub the "guitar friendly" scales: CM/am, GM/em, DM/bm, AM, EM, FM/dm. Most guitar music you encounter will be in one of these keys. As a starting point, become familiar with these keys in first position. 2) As a musician, you will ultimately want to possess knowledge of all twenty-four possible keys. To do this, become familiar with a comfortable fingering for the two-octave major scale, as well as the melodic minor scale. Play scales around the circle of fifths on the fifth string as well as the sixth string. As you play each scale, be aware of its key signature as well as where each tonal center falls on the fretboard. 3) You can use scales to build velocity. Choose one scale and play it with the following rhythmic sub-divisions using a metronome: quarter note, quarter note triplet, eighth note, eighth note triplet, sixteenth notes (I & M tremolo, one beat burst, two beat burst, etc.)

Your daily workout will undoubtedly take on various forms. Because the full daily workout takes a bit of time to get through, you should also create an abridged version this way you can spend the majority of your practice time working on your music. It is also a good idea to select two or three exercises to limber your hands just before performances.

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