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“Six Silver Moonbeams: Composing Idiomatically for Guitar”

1. The Basics

a) Tuning: standard and scordatura.

- Sounds an octave lower than written
- Common types of scordatura
- Scordatura considerations for recording projects vs. concert performance

b) Notes on the fretboard in standard tuning (of course, scordatura would change these.)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
E	F	F/Gb	G	G/Ab	A	A/Bb	B	C	C/Db	D	D/Eb	E	F	F/Gb	G	G/Ab	A	A/Bb	B	C	C/Db
B	C	C/Db	D	D/Eb	E	F	F/Gb	G	G/Ab	A	A/Bb	B	C	C/Db	D	D/Eb	E	F	F/Gb	G	G/Ab
G	G/Ab	A	A/Bb	B	C	C/Db	D	D/Eb	E	F	F/Gb	G	G/Ab	A	A/Bb	B	C	C/Db	D	D/Eb	E
D	D/Eb	E	F	F/Gb	G	G/Ab	A	A/Bb	B	C	C/Db	D	D/Eb	E	F	F/Gb	G	G/Ab	A	A/Bb	B
A	A/Bb	B	C	C/Db	D	D/Eb	E	F	F/Gb	G	G/Ab	A	A/Bb	B	C	C/Db	D	D/Eb	E	F	F/Gb
E	F	F/Gb	G	G/Ab	A	A/Bb	B	C	C/Db	D	D/Eb	E	F	F/Gb	G	G/Ab	A	A/Bb	B	C	C/Db

Open Strings

Octave

E String

B String

G String

D String

A String

E String

As you see, for most notes on the guitar there are multiple locations where these notes can be played (a blessing and a curse for composers and performers). Each of these locations will have a distinct timbre.

c) Left hand technique.

- 1-4
- Stretch
- Barre chords
- Slurs
- Positions

d) Right hand technique

- PIMA(E)
- Block chords vs. strummed or rolled chords
- Arpeggio
- Alternation

2. Key considerations

- Most guitar-friendly keys, in order:
 - 1) E Phrygian, Em, Am, Dm
 - 2) A, D, G, Bm, A Phrygian
 - 3) F#m, Cm, C, Gm, E
- Try to use the natural resonance of the instrument to your advantage: open strings are your (and your performer's) friends! Avoid keys in which neither tonic, subdominant, or dominant are available as open strings. If in doubt, favor sharp keys. Remember about sympathetic vibrations.

3. Texture considerations

- Harmonic instrument!
- 2-voice polyphonic texture works well
- 3- or more voice polyphony is more difficult
- Melody with bass and harmony is standard, but:

Textbook voice-leading principles are not always feasible (no doubling rules apply strictly—considerations of idiomatic execution always trump theory!)

4. Volume considerations

- Plus: very intimate instrument, capable of great expressive nuance
- Minus: very soft compared with orchestral instruments
- Without amplification, pairs well with: other guitars, harp, a woodwind instrument (only one), a string instrument (only one), voice; beyond that, needs amplification if it is to be heard (one exception is strummed texture—guitar can only be said to be “loud” when strummed).
- Amplification needs to be done expertly if it is to preserve the subtlety of touch and timbre.

5. Things that the guitar does well

- Arpeggios
- Block chords
- Melody with accompaniment
- Chords (continuo)
- Speed bursts
- Campanella fingerings
- Timbre changes: very colorful instrument! Most common:
 - 1) ponticello
 - 2) sul tasto
- Extended techniques
- Harmonics

6. Things that are generally more difficult

- Very fast scales, or long stretches of scales
- Very thick textures
- Unidiomatic keys
- Many shifts
- Many stretches
- Many barre chords (often necessitated by unidiomatic keys)

7. Notation

- Because of the multiple possible locations for most notes on the guitar, the following are desirable in the score whenever possible (unless there is only one way to play a certain passage):
 - 1) Left hand fingerings
 - 2) String and/or position indication
 - 3) Barre and half-barre
- Voices must be indicated with up- and down-stems, and clearly separated.
- As always, include plenty of dynamic shaping, expressive and timbral markings, and articulations.

8. Great guitar composers to study

- Fernando Sor (Classical)
- Mauro Giuliani (Classical)
- Johann Kaspar Mertz (Romantic)
- Francisco Tarrega (Romantic)
- Heitor Villa-Lobos (20th c.)
- Agustin Barrios (20th c.)
- Miguel Llobet (20th c.)
- Roland Dyens (Contemporary)
- Leo Brouwer (Contemporary)

9. Other advice

- Know your performers: their performance level and time constraints. Allow plenty of time for the guitarist to learn the music. Guitar is one of the (if not THE) most difficult instruments to sight-read on. It is a difficult instrument to play well, and we usually need to “live” with pieces for a little while to feel fully comfortable with them.
- Write for guitar ensemble! New repertoire is much needed, and some of the difficulty of writing solo music can be avoided this way.
- If you want many people to play your music, make it technically accessible.
- Take a beginning classical guitar class to learn basic technique and “get a feel” for the instrument—it will go a long way in helping you write idiomatically!

10. Examples from Literature

LECCION 70

Musical score for Lección 70, measures 1-13. The piece is in 2/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation includes treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a 2/4 time signature. The music features a series of chords and melodic lines with various fingerings (1, 2, 3, 4) and dynamics (p). The word "simile" is written above the staff in measure 4. The score is divided into four systems: measures 1-4, 5-8, 9-12, and 13.

LECCION 71

Musical score for Lección 71, measures 1-12. The piece is in 3/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation includes treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a 3/4 time signature. The music features a series of chords and melodic lines with various fingerings (1, 2, 3, 4) and dynamics (p). The score is divided into three systems: measures 1-5, 6-11, and 12.

Téngase presente en este estudio, hacer bien efectivas las acentuaciones marcadas y tener cuidado de hacer resaltar el canto, que es todas aquellas notas que tienen palito hacia arriba y en cambio, debe restarse fuerza al acompañamiento que no lleva nota de canto, como por ejemplo el do-mi, último golpe del cuarto compás: los dos golpes do-mi, del octavo compás, etc.

Follow the marked accents carefully and bring out the melody effectively of all those notes with stems up.

Subdue also the sound of the accompanying notes which have nothing to do with the melody; for example C and E on the last beat of bar 4, and the two beats C and E in bar 8 and so on.

Tiempo de Zamba

LECCION 3

LECCION 82

OMAGGIO

PER CHITARRA (Miguel Llobet)

Scritto per LE TOMBEAU de DEBUSSY

Mesto e calmo (♩ = 60)

The musical score consists of six staves of music in 2/4 time. The tempo is marked 'Mesto e calmo' with a quarter note equal to 60 beats per minute. The score is heavily annotated with performance instructions and technical markings. Dynamics range from *pp* to *f*. Performance directions include 'poco affrett.', 'a tempo', 'affrett.', 'legg. affrett.', and 'molto ritmico'. Technical markings include fingerings (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5), breath marks (V), and a 'segno x' symbol indicating notes to be accented and slightly ritardated. The score is divided into sections labeled I, II, III, and IV, with some sections marked 'ar. 12'. Handwritten notes like 'legg. il basso' and 'come prima' are present. The piece concludes with a 'pp' dynamic and a '4 12' marking.

(*) Le note marcate con il segno x devono essere accentuate e assai poco ritenute.

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RISTAMPA 1972

Les techniques généralement employées par le compositeur sont répertoriées ci-dessous avec les symboles graphiques correspondants que l'on peut rencontrer dans l'une ou l'autre de ses partitions. Cette liste, bien que n'étant pas exhaustive, prend en compte certaines techniques qui ne sont pas nécessaires pour la présente partition.



Stopper toute résonance dès l'émission de la note ou de l'accord suivants.

(*)

Rappel ou facultatif.



Cordes impérativement à vide.



Distorsion de la note.



(de l'anglais "taping"). Jouer les notes en les percutant sur la touche avec l'index de la main droite.



Jouer les cordes au niveau de la tête de la guitare avec l'index (ou le pouce) de la main droite.



Faire onduler les sons harmoniques en éloignant la guitare du corps dans un mouvement de balancier lent et régulier.



Extinction progressive du son obtenue en posant le tranchant de la main droite sur la "gouttière" du chevalet, puis en la couchant très lentement sur les six cordes.



Notes jouées à la main gauche seule.



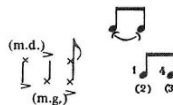
pizz. Bartok: Prendre et soulever la corde entre pouce et index puis la relâcher sèchement en la faisant claquer *fff*.



Conserver les notes posées le plus longtemps possible afin d'offrir une résonance maximale à l'arpège ou à la suite de notes.



Portamento: Glissement rapide et discret exécuté immédiatement avant l'attaque de la seconde note.



Liaison facultative.

Autres propositions de doigtés.



Percussion sur la table avec la main droite, la main gauche ou les deux ensemble.



Effet obtenu par la percussion du poing fermé sur les cordes au niveau de la

The techniques usually employed by the composer are listed below together with the corresponding graphic symbols used in their various scores. This list, though not exhaustive, includes some techniques that are not needed for the present score.

Damp the resonance as soon as the following note ou chord is played.

Recall or optional.

Open strings obligatory.

Distorted note.

Tap the strings with the right index finger.

Play the strings with the right hand index finger (or thumb) near the head of the guitar.

Let the harmonics undulate by moving the guitar away from the body in a slow, regular swaying movement.

'Halogene' dampening: gradual dampening of the sound by placing the side of the right hand on the 'fore-edge' of the bridge and then laying it down very slowly on all six chords.

Notes played by the left hand only.

Bartok pizz.: pull the string with the thumb and index finger then release it abruptly, letting it slap *fff* against the fingerboard.

Hold down the notes for as long as possible so as to give maximum resonance to the arpeggio or sequence of notes.

Portamento: Rapid, delicately played slide just before the attack of the second note.

Tie ad lib.

Alternative fingerings.

Percussion on the sound board with the right or left hand, or both together.

Hit the strings over the soundhole with the closed fist.

⑤ = B
Si

Roland DYENS

Libre comme une improvisation (poco metal.) (sim.) (son ord.)
mf *(mf)* *(molto regolare)*

poco allarg. CII a tempo (poco metal.)
poco *dolcissimo* *(mf)*

(poco metal.) a tempo molto vib.
(ord.) *8a* *(1)*
(4) *(3)* XXI
VII VII
mp (chiaro. clair) (pont.)

(sim.) (vib.) Poco lento (♩ = ca. 60)
p (eco) *p* (dolce)

(molto legato) (II)
p sub.

poco pesante rit. poco a tempo (legatissimo)
pp (eco) *poco* *mp* *mf* (marcato) *ppp* *mp* *ppp* *mp*

CII poco allarg. a tempo Animando poco allarg.
m *m* *i* *i* *m-f*

POUR GUITARE

LEO BROUWER
(1981)

I. La Harpe du Guerrier
EL ARPA DEL GUERRERO

(♩ = 70)
(in 1)

f *p* *p* *p* *p* *p* *p* *cresc.*

p *p* *p* *p* *p* *p* *p* *cresc.*

f *mp* *sub. cresc.* *f marcato* *p* *mp*

legato *p* *i m a i m a* *i*

pp *legato* *cresc.* *poco len.* *poco*

Cedendo *Un poco sostenuto lirico (lyrique)*

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TOUS DROITS RÉSERVÉS
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II. La Fuite des Amants par la Vallée des Échos

LA HUIDA DE LOS AMANTES POR EL VALLE DE LOS ECOS

LEO BROUWER
(1981)

A Declamato pesante

B Presage

C Primer Galope de los Amantes

Poco a poco accel. - - -

E.M.T. 1704

f *marcato* *p sub.* (5) (6) XII VII

I Epilogo (lentamente)

breve *mf* *d. vibrar* (laissez vibrer) *mp* *p* *Rall.* *d. vibrar* (4) *pp*

III. Ballade de la Demoiselle Amoureuse
BALLADA DE LA DONCELLA ENAMORADA

LEO BROUWER
 (1981)

Moderato *p i* *sempre lirico* *Rall.* *Rit.*

E.M.T.17 04