



# GUITAR

## Chasing the Right Hand Round the Strings

by Jason Vanselow

Arpeggio etudes have been a staple of etude writing for hundreds of years. The method books of Dionisio Aguado, Fernando Carulli, Julio Sagreras and many others feature pieces that feature arpeggios prominently. These etudes still challenge students and resonate in a musical way while aiding in a developing students' technique and many of them are worth using or adapting for the classroom and lesson studio. But it's also worth taking a closer look at the purpose for them and even try your hand at writing your own.

Arpeggio etudes have several benefits for students of all levels. For instance, for students who are still new to the guitar, the chord shapes themselves might still be challenging and an arpeggio etude can both reinforce the basic chord shapes as well as springboard those shapes into a musical context.

These students also get the benefit of hearing the notes one at a time rather than all at once as you would when strumming the chords. This approach requires the student to make sure that the fretboard hand is providing enough pressure for each note in the chord as well as making sure that the hand is positioned correctly. It also helps the student's ear identify the sound of each note in the chord and its relationship to the other notes. And even if you have not introduced the concept of I, IV, V per se, a good arpeggio piece can be crafted for the student to start listening for those larger key relationships.

If your students are studying classical guitar or any type of standard notation, reading this type of piece can also help the student identify chords in notation. This can aid the student later on to recognize chord shapes in more complicated textures and dramatically shorten the learning curve for pieces in general.

Here are some hints for composing your own piece. Choose a

key in which the chord shapes that you use work well for the level of student that you're writing for. For instance, the keys of A major and D major work well because the I, IV and V chords are generally chords that are learned early in a student's journey and are common in many pieces of guitar music over many genres. The downside to these keys of course, is the extensive use of sharps in the notation, which can be a challenge. The flipside to this is, though is the key of C major, which is easy to read, but because of the F major chord, which tends to need a barre, is difficult to play. I tend to avoid C major until students are already comfortable with barre chords.

Write a piece that works both for students who fingerpick and students who use a flat pick. Many times, this means not writing more than one note at a time. Two notes at a time is a good skill for an advanced beginner to start to learn, but for students who use a flat pick, this is a much more complicated motion. One note at a time, however can build dexterity for both types of students. Fingerpickers can solidify patterns that are used in accompanying in other songs or in more advanced pieces. Flat pickers can get used to making their pick motion more accurate and fluid.

To demonstrate these concepts, I offer the following short etude. Note that throughout the piece, the first note in each measure is considered the melody note. This gives the piece a little more of the feel of a "song" rather than simply an etude.

If your students are fingerpicking, the first eight bars of the piece use the descending right hand fingering m, i, p (middle finger, index finger, thumb). The middle and index fingers play the first and second string for the first four bars and the second and third strings for measures 5 through 8. The motion between the two fingers is consistent in all eight measures but the challenge is moving the fingers from one set of strings to the next in bar 5.

In bars 9 through 16 the pattern is ascending. Index finger consistently plays third string and middle plays the first string in bars 9 and 10, and the second string in measures 11 and 12. The bass notes range throughout all three bass strings throughout the piece. I did this in this piece to keep the chords in root position. Having the thumb roam like this is pretty common in lots of guitar music and I also like to emphasize the concept of root position with my students.

While I did set this piece in the key of A major, I didn't use a key signature. This is mostly because I would use this piece before I spent any time on key signatures.

Arpeggio pieces have a great deal of worth as pedagogical pieces. They can encourage flexibility and stability in the picking hands in both fingerpicking and flatpicking players. As mentioned, there are many pieces that have been written throughout the history of guitar pedagogy that can work for you, but it's always worthwhile to put your own spin on it, and of course, you're welcome to use the piece that I've provided here. Until next time!

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### Chasing Dumplings with Chopstix

Jason Vanselow

The musical score is written in treble clef with a 3/4 time signature. It consists of 16 measures. The first four measures (1-4) are marked with a chord of A and dynamics 'm', 'i', 'p'. The next four measures (5-8) are marked with a chord of D and dynamics 'i', 'p'. The next four measures (9-12) are marked with a chord of E and dynamics 'i', 'm'. The final four measures (13-16) are marked with a chord of E7 and dynamics '4', 'p'. The piece ends with the instruction 'D.C. al Fine'.