

REPertoire

ISAAC BUSTOS

Prelude BWV 999 (J.S.
Bach)



WATCH THE LESSON
AT [TONEBASE.CO](https://tonebase.co)



"THIS IS THE GENIUS OF BACH- HOW A SIMPLE REPETITIVE PATTERN CAN CREATE A TREMENDOUSLY EXPRESSIVE TEXTURE".

LESSON DESCRIPTION



In this lesson on J.S. Bach's Prelude BWV 999, Isaac Bustos both performs and explains his approach to the piece. Full of insight and helpful tips for beginners and advanced players alike, Isaac opens the lesson with his thoughts on the music of Bach.

Then, he asks students to play the chords alone to focus on developing emotional nuance through the harmonic progression. In addition to musicality, Isaac shares his thoughts on fingerings, thumb dampenings, slurs, and more.

By the end of this lesson you'll have the tools you need to practice and prepare this concert-worthy piece.





ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR



Isaac Bustos holds an impressive number of top prizes in over 12 major international competitions, 7 of which are first prizes.

Bustos is a featured artist for the Vgo Recordings label and has just released his second album titled "Canciones a mi Madre".

Since 2005, Dr. Bustos has served on the faculty at Texas A&M University Department of Performance Studies where he is head of guitar studies and artistic director of the Texas A&M International Guitar Symposium and Competition.

OUTLINE

1. Introduction
2. Play the Harmony
3. Arpeggio Fingerings
4. Thumb Damping
5. Musicality
6. F Major Chord
7. Fingering Options
8. Slurring
9. Guide Finger
10. Summary



INTRODUCTION



BWV 999 is among Bach's most famous pieces for guitar. It's one of the few Bach pieces originally written for lute. In Isaac's opinion, Bach is one of the greatest composers of all time. His music is full of passion, intellect, and extreme expression. Perhaps his greatest achievement is his ability to represent human emotion in such a relatable way.

If this is the first Bach piece you've played, enjoy this first look into the mind of one of history's greats! This piece is also great for developing the hands, and perhaps, later on, serving as excellent concert repertoire.

"Bach's music is very touching and relatable, whether or not you like classical music!"

PLAY THE HARMONY



The best way for Isaac to approach the piece is by dividing it up and simplifying the challenges one by one.

When Isaac first learned this piece, he didn't jump straight to the fingerings. He instead learned the chords of the piece.



The whole piece is, in fact arpeggiated chords. The most effective (and musical) way to learn this piece is by studying the chords alone. Even if you already know the music, take some time to learn the harmony itself. Harmony is a major use of expressing emotion for all composers, especially Bach.



The first few chords of the piece (up to measure 8) are:

D minor, G minor, a dissonant C# diminished chord over D, then back to D minor.

Play these chords by themselves, slowly, a few times each. You'll notice a new perspective into the emotional meaning of the piece. Play each chord at different dynamic level, searching for how best to be expressive.

Play through these chords imagining that they ARE the piece. Imagine your job is to simply interpret this sequence of chords, and each chord is its own harmonic world. There's a lot you can already do with those pieces alone. Once you've put the arpeggios in, you can use some of the same dynamic motions to create an emotional effect.

Go through the whole piece this way, just the chords- two, three, or four times each. Use your imagination. How does this affect the way you perceive the piece? Look for how each chord contributes to the meaning of the whole piece.



We can use the first finger as a “guide” over the first few chords. We'll look at a few other guide fingers throughout the piece, where we can connect more easily between chords.

ARPEGGIO FINGERINGS



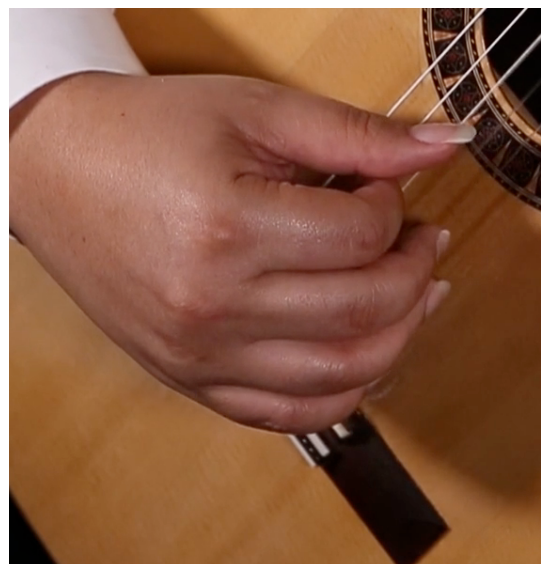
Once you've done this, you're ready to move on to arpeggios. The arpeggios are the most salient element of this piece. We have the chance to practice full planting, sequential planting, and alternation between p and i.

Each measure contains a three beat pattern, and the fingering repeats each measure. The first beat uses full planting- all four fingers are set before you start and plucked in sequence: pima.



Practice that motion alone on open strings. Make sure all notes are even in rhythm and sound quality. This fingering is more common with ascending arpeggios.

The second beat uses sequential planting- it's an alternation between the second and third string with fingers m and i. It's more common to see with a descending arpeggio. Practice this beat alone: mimi. Tackle these all very slowly and isolate one element at a time.



The next challenge is combining the beats- try to prepare m immediately after the first beat: pimam. Master this before adding another finger, and continue until you've mastered the first two beats: pima mimi.

The third beat alternates between p and i, but the first p is on the 4th string, and the second p is on the 5th string. Imagine that the i stroke pushes the thumb back up the guitar. Isolate this beat alone before moving on.



The whole cycle is now complete: pima mimi pipi. Practice the whole cycle slowly. Plant for pima after the cycle finishes (full plant), second two beats are sequential planting.

THUMB DAMPING

There's one more movement to add once you're very comfortable on the above pattern.

The score calls for a rest on the second beat, so your thumb has to mute the first string. This is called thumb damping (or p damping).



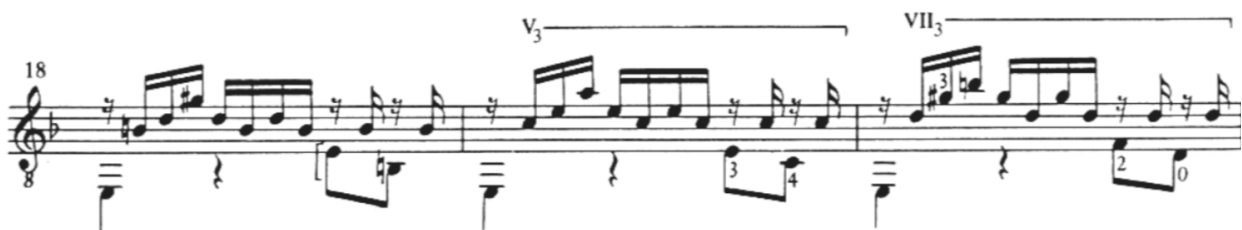
When you pluck the m in the second beat, plant your thumb on that fourth string to mute the bottom note! Do the two movements at simultaneously.

This gives a lot of clarity to the piece. Work on the motions very slowly to develop the timing of the movements. It is confusing at first, so take your time to avoid developing too much tension.

You can mute the strings if you'd like to hear the percussive attack on your right hand more. Practice repeating that pattern over and over again at a slow tempo.



This pattern starts to change slightly as you move through the piece. In some passages, as in bar 19 through 22, the bass note on the first downbeat is on the 6th string.



We still have to stop this note on the second beat. To stop this sixth string, plant your thumb in between the 6th and 5th strings- this will set up your thumb to play the p on the third beat.



MUSICALITY

Now that the chords, arpeggios, and dampening are in place, let's talk musically about what's happening.



Bach is creating a conversation between bass and treble voices. An arpeggio comes on top for two beats and then a response comes on the third beat from the bass. Muting the bass helps a lot to clarify the 3rd beat. Be playful in your interpretation once the technique is solid- mess with dynamics.

You can develop a sense of line and direction this way. Forward motion comes from the bass on the third beat and helps to lead to the following downbeat. Elements leading to a downbeat are strong features of Bach's music. Have fun playing this, and explore lots of expressive possibilities.

F MAJOR CHORD

In measure 15, there's an F major seventh chord that can be quite difficult to play if your hands are small or inflexible.

The arpeggio requires stretching from the first fret with your first finger to the fifth fret and barring with your pinkie. Set your pinkie down sideways on the string, otherwise it's very uncomfortable. Transfer the weight of your arm to your pinkie to make it happen. Really grab the third string with force.



Your first finger will be just fine without any extra weight transferred to it. Isaac pulls on his elbow a bit to make sure barre is secure. If the fingers aren't quite strong enough yet, there is another solution.

An alternate way to play this chord is in 5th position, with the F on the eighth fret of the fifth string. It will sound on octave higher, but it works quite nicely in the phrasing of the piece.



The choice is yours- it entirely depends on what's comfortable for you to execute at this stage of development. Don't worry if you have to choose the alternate options. Putting the extra tension on your hands before you're ready may be detrimental.

Be just as careful if you decide to go up the octave, however. The A from the previous measure is still ringing, so capture the fifth string in a way that it doesn't buzz. This usually means to hit the string softly. Luckily, this spot is a deceptive cadence, so it also makes sense musically to get soft here!

FINGERING OPTIONS

Isaac offers some a few fingering options in measures 23 and 25. The printed fingerings force you to shift in between the 2nd and 3rd beats, an awkward movement.

The image shows a musical score for guitar in 8/8 time. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system contains measures 21 and 23. Measure 21 has a 3/4 fingering. Measure 23 has a 1/2 fingering. Two orange circles are drawn around the bass notes on the third beat of measure 23. Above measure 23 are the chord symbols IX₄ and *VII₄. The second system contains measures 24 and 25. Measure 24 has a 1/2 fingering. Above measure 24 is the chord symbol V₄.

In measure 23, Isaac suggests playing the bass notes on the third beat using the pinkie. Use the fingering 5 2 on those two notes. He suggests the same fingering on the third beat in measure 25.

It's a bit of a stretch for the fingers, which makes it a little more challenging than the notated fingering, but it allows you to be more smooth.

Use the open string on the downbeat of the following measures to shift your fingers. This will give you a much better chance to connect the chord changes.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Shift fingers on the open strings whenever possible, and play the third beat of 23 and 25 with the pinkie.

SLURRING

In measures 31 through 34, Isaac likes to modify the fingerings by adding a slur between the second and third sixteenth notes in the first beat.

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled '30' and the bottom staff is labeled '33'. Both staves are in 7/8 time. In measure 30, the first beat contains two sixteenth notes, the second and third of which are slurred together. Above these notes are circled fingerings '4' and '3'. In measure 33, the first beat also contains two slurred sixteenth notes, with fingerings '1' and '3' above them. A fermata is placed over the second measure of the bottom staff.

Pluck the note you're slurring from softly. This would be the first m in the pattern:

pimma mimi pipi

If you pluck it too loud, the note you're slurring too (the a) won't be strong enough. You want to try to equalize the sound between the two notes.

Practice this modified fingering and use the weight of your left hand wrist to help you get as much power and accuracy as you can on the second note. This helps make the music more seamless and expressive, plus it's easier to play! Work on consistency and evenness of the slurs.

GUIDE FINGER

In the final two measures of the piece, use a guide finger to achieve maximum legato and stability. Leave your third finger down when the other fingers leave the fretboard. Remove it only after you strike the final fermata. Strike the bass note first, and then the upper A triad.



SUMMARY

This piece has a lot to teach about technique- from developing arpeggios with the right hand and dampening with the thumb, to being clear with textures.

The entire piece is so based on harmony that thumb dampening is essential to the clarity of the piece. Don't let extra notes ring when unnecessary.

Bach's use of simple arpeggios is so effective for two different reasons. They spell out a beautiful movement of harmony, of course, but they are also built in call and response. The upper line makes a simple statement which is answered by the bass line on beat three. Even with such simplicity, Bach is able to create a whole world of emotional expression. Have fun with this piece, and best of luck working on it!



RESOURCES



More lessons on the music of J.S. Bach

For all of the Bach fans out there, we have a whole Collection of lessons on his music waiting for you – taught by artists including Judicael Perroy, Petrit Ceku, Carlo Marchione, and more!

Isaac Bustos's lesson Un Dia De Noviembre

Did you enjoy Isaac's teaching style as much as we do? Then it's time for lesson two – Un Dia De Noviembre by Leo Brouwer!



