

REPERTOIRE

ISAAC BUSTOS

Prelude No. 3 (Villa-Lobos)



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“WHEN WE GO THROUGH EXTREME PAIN, THERE’S A POINT WHERE WE FINALLY COME TO TERMS WITH THE PAIN. THE COMPOSER HAS GIVEN YOU THE OPPORTUNITY TO REPRESENT THIS IN YOUR PLAYING.”

LESSON DESCRIPTION



In this lesson, Isaac Bustos analyzes, in detail, Prelude No. 3 by Heitor Villa-Lobos, providing insight into the historical context of the piece, as well as what qualifies it as Impressionistic. Isaac goes on to explain the key characteristics of each movement, and what techniques are necessary to play them correctly. Isaac breaks down the A Section, characterized by beautiful open chords, and shares how to get as many strings to ring as possible while maintaining good technique.

For the B Section, Isaac stresses how the quality of the sound can enhance emotional expression, as well as the necessary technique to achieve the desired result. Many other topics are covered, from wide shifts and how to reduce string squeaks, to left hand shape and optimal methods of practicing. Hopefully, by the end of the lesson you will feel confident and inspired as you work towards technical mastery and greater self-expression.



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".

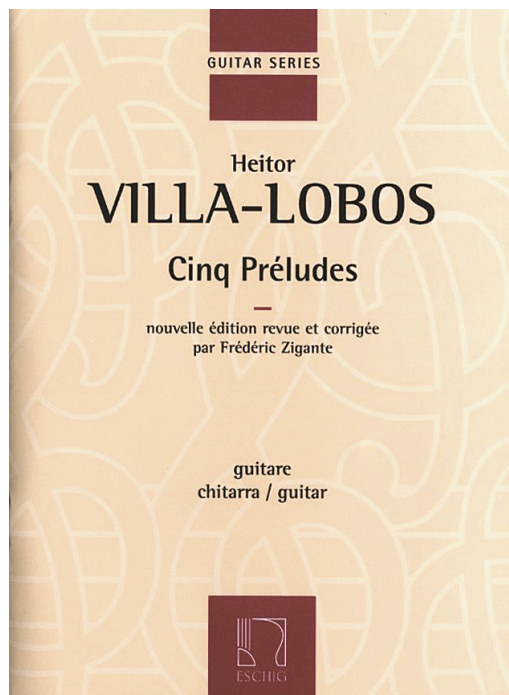
Since 2005, Dr. Bustos has served on the faculty at Texas A&M University Department of Performance Studies where he is head of guitar studies and artistic director of the Texas A&M International Guitar Symposium and Competition.

OUTLINE

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INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, Isaac Bustos dives deep into Heitor Villa-Lobos's Prelude No. 3, a staple in the guitar repertoire. Villa-Lobos was a Brazilian composer who combined Afro-Brazilian and native Brazilian elements with Western Romanticism and Impressionism, using a very nationalistic approach. Villa-Lobos wrote many pieces influenced by his friendship with Andres Segovia.



His preludes, first written in 1940, were published as a set by Eschig in 1954. This is the edition that most guitarists have worked with for many years. In 2007, Eschig published a reissue, edited by the great Italian guitarist Frederic Zigante, that contains more detailed fingerings and interesting background information on the works themselves. Bustos uses this edition in this lesson, and is available on the tonebase website.



Andres Segovia and Heitor Villa-Lobos

HISTORICAL CONTEXT



Preludes in music have traditionally been used in different ways. In the Baroque Period, the prelude defined the key and emotional character of a larger piece. They were often meant to be improvisatory, and were usually played with a fugue or as part of a suite, rather than as a stand-alone composition. Villa-Lobos wrote this Prelude as an exploration of the expressive capabilities of the guitar. This is why Prelude No. 3 is so great for students to practice and so exciting for an audience! What makes this prelude so unique and distinctive is its use of open strings and Villa-Lobos's ability to craft a short piece without sacrificing any of his compositional brilliance. The level of information it contains makes this prelude truly exciting, unique, and ultimately, very effective.

Prelude No. 3 contains two sections- an Impressionistic and Romantic A section with lots of beautiful chords, and a B section that functions as an homage to Bach, with a texture comprised of many sequences. The B section alone is a well-known and iconic piece of guitar repertoire. We're very excited that you're beginning to work on this piece, so let's get to it!



IMPRESSIONISM



The A section, full of the resonance created by open strings, is the most Impressionistic of the two movements. Especially in relation to other repertoire from the same time period, it has a highly unique sound. The key element in a successful performance of this piece is allowing the strings to ring as *long* as possible. Make sure you're not cutting any notes prematurely. The term 'Impressionism' is usually associated with nineteenth century artists who tried to evoke a hazy or dream-like impression of nature. Painters like Monet, Cezanne, and Renoir made art where the distance from which you view it impacts the interpretation. Up close these works may seem fuzzy or unclear, but, when looked at from a distance, the image is clear as can be.



For Impressionists, microscopic clarity wasn't necessary, so it wasn't well-pronounced. In turn, composers translated these elements into music by blurring and obscuring harmony and rhythm. In this lesson you'll learn when to play rhythms precisely and when to play them rubato, as well as how your fingerings can create more resonance on the instrument.

ASCENDING LINE

Let's begin by looking at measures one through six. Here you see ascending passages based on minor second dyads (sets of two notes). The challenge is to find ways to create the most Impressionistic texture with your hands.

The musical score consists of two staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a 2/4 time signature, and a dynamic marking of *mf*. It is marked *Andante* and contains measures 1 through 3. Measure 1 features six open strings in sequence. Measures 2 and 3 show ascending passages of minor second dyads. A *rall.* (ritardando) marking is placed above the staff at the start of measure 4. The staff then changes to a 3/4 time signature and is marked *A tempo*. It contains measures 4 through 6, continuing the ascending line with various fingerings and articulations. The second staff continues the piece with measures 7 through 11. It features a *rit.* marking above the staff and a repeat sign (II) at the end of measure 11. The score includes various fingerings, such as 3, 2, 3, 2, 3, 2, 0, 0, 3, 2, 4, and 4, 3, 2, 1, 3, 1, 3, 1, 4, 2, 4, 2.

In measure one, the bass line is essentially the six open strings played in sequence. You should always hear the resonance of those open strings. You can finger this entire measure using only P and M in the right hand. Practice the two voices together by playing two open strings at a time, sixth and fifth up to second and first. For the top two strings, play with M and A, instead of P and M. This way, your thumb is free to move quickly to the fifth string on the chord in the second bar, and you avoid creating a break in the music.

Once this is clean, you can add in your left hand to the pattern.



This same concept applies to measure six. Play M and A on the top two strings to free up the thumb to play the next F# major chord. The earlier you can start rolling the chord with the thumb, the better the impressionistic mood comes across. Connection between notes and chords is essential in this piece.

Consider the rhythm of this passage. The first two sixteenth notes in both of these passages are pickup notes, not downbeats. This means that the first few notes should feel like upbeats. Play these notes a bit softer, and you'll have a lot more forward momentum. Most players don't emphasize this difference enough.

3 and 1 rit. II

ARPEGGIOS

Some of the more challenging passages in the A section are the slurred arpeggios, particularly the ones in measures three, eight, and eighteen. Throughout these measures, you can experiment with a few different techniques to achieve the colors and sustain that you want.

P I M P I M M

P P

For Isaac, the easiest way to finger these measures is with variations of PPPIMA. Be careful not to mute any strings in between.

You may notice that there's no slur between B and C in the published score, but Isaac likes to add one to keep his right hand stable. He provides two different fingering options for those two notes.

The first option is to play B on the open second string and slur to C on the first fret, as is written. You can also play a cross-string motion, with B on the third string and C on the second string, as pictured on the right. With the second method, be careful that the left hand doesn't mute any strings prematurely. Both have a nice sound, so it ultimately depends on what is easiest and sounds the most pleasing for you.



Let's look next at the eighth measure. It's a bit more difficult to find ways to let the notes ring here, since almost all the notes are fretted, except for the open E. To overcome this, use the open E as a spot to shift your hand.



C# - before the shift



F# - after the shift



This will simulate the effect of the notes being sustained throughout the entire phrase, a bit like a magician.

Practice the measure very slowly, softly, and carefully, without accenting any notes unnecessarily. To sustain a legato feeling, make sure that both hands land together. Keep the chords and fingerings in this measure exactly as they are on the score. Be extra careful of one small detail. Each note should ring over the next one just slightly. Make sure that F# rings over A#, and that C# rings over E, etc., before you release them.

It's important that you don't overplay the instrument at first. Leave a bit of room to crescendo through the arpeggio, growing from nothing into the volume you want for the entire section.

9 11

[le même doigté]

11th 8th 5th 4th 6th 7th 9th 6th 3rd 1st 3rd 4th

-3 -3 -1 +2 +1 +2 -3 -3 -2 +2 +1

Play through this sequence *very slowly* to help visualize the relationship between the chords.

Most chords in this etude have at least one note contained in the bass strings, so it's completely normal to hear that squeaky sound that results from fingers rubbing on strings. To minimize the squeak, Isaac lifts the bass string finger before he shifts the others. Practice, of course, very slowly! Always control the speed of the passage, and keep the notes as connected as possible.



No Squeak



Squeak

String squeaks happen anytime you release the finger *sideways*. Lift the finger straight up off the string, rather than to the side, before shifting. Don't worry yet about being completely in time when practicing slowly- just focus on smooth legato. Start to add the proper rhythm a bit later.

Always keep at least one string ringing. It can either be the melody note or the top two. This will make sure that you're always connecting notes with one another.

Make sure your left hand is in a more “left-leaning position”. Avoid taking a central position where your palm is parallel to the fingerboard. A central position would be better for melodic playing, and a right-leaning position would work for chords with a stretch in the pinky or the third finger. Since, for this position, you need three fingers on the same fret, tilt the left hand to the left, and raise the elbow up to keep balance in the body. Do not try to squish your fingers by jamming your elbow in your ribs.



To make sure you're comfortable, try placing your thumb slightly higher on the back of the fingerboard- it really helps with tight fingerings like these. Experiment yourself with getting a more stable hold on the fingerboard by bringing up the thumb. Keeping the thumb too low will almost certainly lead to squeaks.

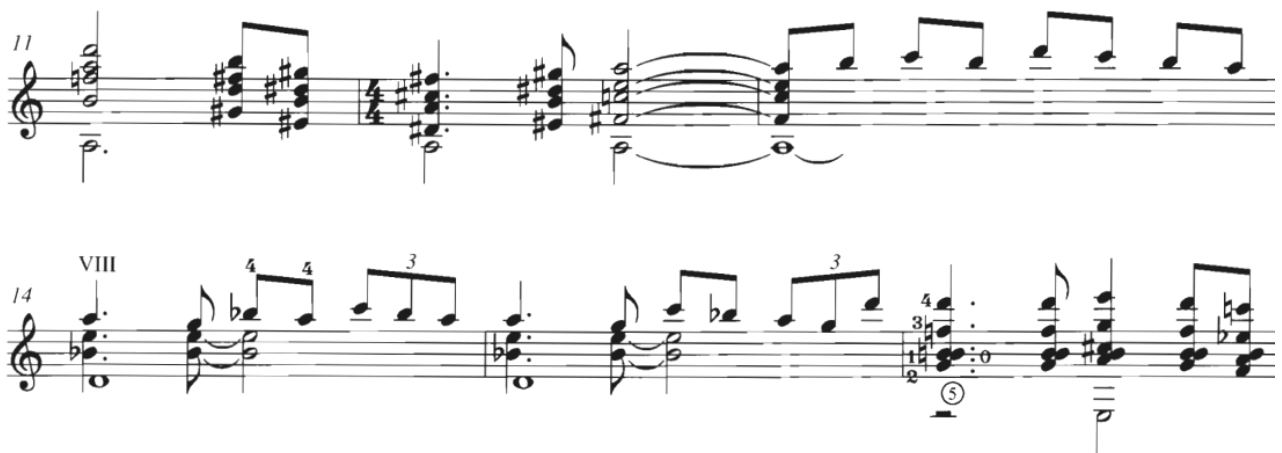


MELODIES



Next, let's look through the melodic passage starting in measure 13. Here, Villa Lobos writes a melody all by itself, so you have the chance to showcase your expressive and legato playing.

In measure 14, Zigante takes a phrase usually played in third position and brings it to eighth position. He is trying to make it easier for the player to hold the chord as long as possible underneath the melody, but, in Isaac's view, the melody should take more precedence. In eighth position, it's not a very easy fingering to execute, and it somewhat distracts from the open-string sound that Villa-Lobos is trying to evoke in the piece. In fact, it's even fine to let go of the chord completely on the last beat and allow the melody to be the only thing you hear. The low D on the downbeat of measures 14 and 15 will naturally ring out.



Whenever you connect one idea to another on guitar, it's impossible to hold every single note. Instead, guitarists always aim to hold at least one note- usually, either the melody or bass. This successfully creates the illusion of connection. Use Villa-Lobos's original 5th position fingering in this measure, which you can watch Isaac play in the video lesson.

There are still unique difficulties with this fingering, particularly moving backwards from B to A in measure 13. To keep the notes connected, try to get to the string at the same time with both hands. Practice moving between the notes B and A over and over, with as little a delay between notes as possible.



Avoid squishing or forcing your hand to do the shift- stay as relaxed as possible. It's ok if there's a bit of a break in the sound a first. Practice one element at a time- first releasing your fingers and then moving to the next hand position. This may take a lot of time, but don't stop trying! Teach yourself the patience to move your hand very slowly.

It's also all right to experiment with different ways to phrase the melody in measure 13. First, play the melody in time, so you know what the written rhythm is. Then, try putting emphasis or adding length to different notes. As long as your fingering is well thought-out and allows you to be flexible, you can be as expressive as your imagination allows.

KEY TAKEAWAY

When it's the melody's time to shine, it's ok to let go of the chords completely. Practice difficult shifts between melody notes *very slowly*, until they sound legato and relaxed. Don't forget to be expressive!

IMPLIED POLYPHONY



In the B Section, Villa-Lobos provides a lot of instruction to the player. “**Molto adagio e dolorido**” translates to “**very slowly and painful**”, yet also forte and espressivo (with expression).

Molto adagio e dolorido

23 *f* espressivo

The challenge with phrasing this movement is that it is built using what is called “implied polyphony”. Looking at the passage, it appears to be a single line, but a closer study reveals two *combined* lines- a moving line and a pedal. In measure 23, the D# starts the moving line and the E on every other note is the pedal.

Not all notes have equal importance, so be careful not to play the whole line static. The most important notes are the ones in the moving line, that jut out below the pedal. To ensure that your audience also perceives it that way, practice with an exaggerated accent on the important notes. Then, balance your dynamics based on how loud you want to get by the end of the phrase and how loud the top note should be. Be very clear, no matter what, that the two lines have a different character and importance.

Each time Villa-Lobos finishes a line he moves to a chord- usually approached by a glissando. The fingering contained on the score makes it challenging to hear the glissando. Isaac likes to move to first position for the chords themselves, since that gives him the chance to make a loud and dramatic slide up the neck. When done with intention, this slide can be a very evocative demonstration of pain and suffering.

INTERPRETATION



It's interesting to consider how you can modify your interpretation of the chords in the second movement. As an exercise, forget the melodic line exists, and focus on the whole world of emotion and feeling contained within every chord.

Since every group of notes is different, don't approach each chord with equal volume, dynamic, or color. Experiment with all your interpretive tools to find intention with each chord. There are infinite options to be as inventive and imaginative as you want!



It's an added bonus that you will get to repeat each of these sections, and there are different things you can do to keep the audience interested, that you'll read about in a few pages. The repetition can also function as a way to express the feeling of coming to terms and learning to deal with pain.

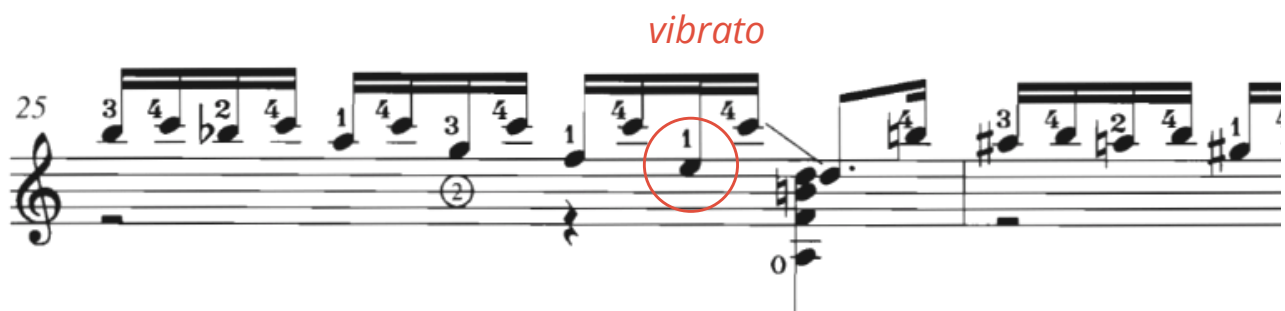
Watch the video lesson to see all the fingerings Isaac uses in the opening of the B section. Think about the extension of the hand and leading finger that brings you to the chords.

Isaac modified the fingering over the third chord. He puts his first finger on D, third finger on B, and second finger on F. In this position he can get an audible glissando from E down to D, a subtle, yet very powerful effect.



Lead every glissando with the first finger, so that it lifts and touches down before the other fingers.

Isaac tends to use a lot of vibrato, a very helpful device when trying to be expressive. Vibrato also naturally highlights certain notes, such as the final descending note before each chord (example circled below).



KEY TAKEAWAY

The second movement is most effective when each chord is played with expression and intention. Use the glissando and vibrato to add to the emotional weight of the passage.

REPEATS AND CONCLUSION



A final thing to think about in this piece is that you can repeat all of it! As mentioned before, make it your goal to do something different the second time. Not only have you changed over time as an artist while playing it, your audience has changed while listening to it. Playing it the same way is a loss of an opportunity to capture a new moment and a new body of experiences. While some don't repeat it, if you choose to, there are so many different things to try! Do you play strictly in time or with rubato? Or flip it around and do rubato the first time and less the second time?

It's common to go through the second time a little faster, with less rubato, and to play more on the forte side. However, maybe you feel like playing piano and espressivo the second time! All interpretations are valid, so long as they are thought out.

Work on combining everything you learned in this lesson and using your new skills as tools for communicating expression. Good luck on this Prelude, and we hope this video was a helpful resource for you!



RESOURCES



More lessons on the music of Heitor Villa-Lobos

We love Villa-Lobos's music so much we created a whole Collection of lessons on his compositions – taught by artists including Eliot Fisk, Rafael Aguirre, Tal Hurwitz, and more!

Isaac Bustos's lesson on Un Dia De Noviembre (Brouwer)

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!



