

REPertoire

# RAFAEL AGUIRRE

## Grand Ouverture (Giuliani)



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*"WE HAVE TO BE LIKE ACTORS. THE FIRST WORD THAT COMES TO MIND.. IS THEATRE!"*

## LESSON DESCRIPTION

In this dramatic and exceptionally thoughtful lesson, Rafael Aguirre dives into the challenging Grand Overture, by Mauro Giuliani. Full of insightful comparisons, analogies to the art of Italian opera, and homages to classical composers, Aguirre emphasizes the importance of conveying drama, excitement, and theatrics throughout this piece.

Each section of the piece conveys a specific mood, and Rafael talks about the many facets of technique to consider to make that mood clear. These range from dynamics, stopping notes, and accents, to phrasing, fingerings, and hand positions. Rafael also goes deep into use of colors, balance, and using the imagination to sound like various orchestral textures. By the end of the lesson, you'll have your work cut out for you, but will certainly be inspired to tackle one of the Classical Era's most thrilling works for the guitar!





# ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Rafael Aguirre is an internationally acclaimed musician whose deep understanding of music, dazzling virtuosity and immensely diverse repertoire has taken him to 33 countries. The beginning of his extraordinary career was marked by winning thirteen first prizes at international competitions (including the Tarrega Competition and Pro Musicis, New York), and he is currently one of the most celebrated guitarists worldwide.

He has been pre-nominated for a Latin Grammy, received enthusiastic reviews, and appeared on international radio broadcast.

## OUTLINE

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# STYLE OVERVIEW



Rafael Aguirre is here to talk with us about the Grand Overture by Mauro Giuliani. In the opinion of Rafael, this is a very difficult piece. Rafael first performed it when he was sixteen, at a competition that he won, but he admits, he was perhaps too young for it then! His goal is not to obtain something profound from the piece, but to emulate the spirit of the bel canto in Italian opera. This requires a very expressive and convincing approach to playing. Rafael recommends imagining that you are an entire orchestra playing the overture to an opera.



“Give an impulse like a conductor! Really get into the drama!”



# DRAMA

Feel the silence after the first chord, almost without air, to induce drama. The first chord, in the second measure, is a dominant chord, so it can be played with a heavy sforzando. Rafael recommends a bit less sforzando on the second chord (measure four), since it's an F major chord, which sounds much more stable.



In the fifth measure, imagine that the music gets a bit more mysterious. Rafael cuts the top melody note to avoid it blurring into the next. He does this either by lifting his left hand fingers a bit up, or by stopping them in the right hand.



Don't shorten the notes from what is written, but be very careful not to play them any longer.



Play the crescendo without any hesitation! Imagine the full orchestra is playing tutti in measure eight, and perhaps the clarinet is playing the descending arpeggios. Giuliani writes some interesting counterpoint in measures nine, ten, and eleven, as well. In measure nine, the counterpoint ascends while the top melodic line descends.

In measure twelve, the tension finally resolves, reaching a brief musical climax. However, as soon as the dotted eighth-note to sixteenth note rhythm returns, the journey starts over again, in the same way it did in measure five. Notice that, in measure thirteen, the bottom voice is the same as the top voice in measure twelve, just one octave lower.

## CREATING ENERGY

The second section, *Allegro Maestoso*, is played with a large amount of energy, as if you're just waking up. In the tenth measure, on the A major chord, imagine a bottle of champagne has just been opened!





Rafael stops the bass notes with his thumb in the fourth measure, to recreate the feeling of a piano playing this with two hands.



After these very short notes, the sixth measure contains very long notes underneath long, fast phrases. You could imagine that the first violin is playing these.

Listen to the dynamics that Rafael uses throughout this section. He is very expressive and deliberate in where he chooses to place crescendos and subito-pianos.



The image shows a page of musical notation for guitar, consisting of three staves. The notation is in treble clef and includes various rhythmic patterns, dynamics markings (f, p), and a section marked 's. 427.' at the bottom. The music is written in a style that suggests a specific technique, likely related to the text above.

In the fifth measure of this page, play each chord slightly stronger than the one before it, until the high D signals the climax of the piece. Be careful that when the bass line moves in half steps, you stop the notes from ringing over each other. Otherwise, they will sound like dissonances..

Once the A sounds, lift off of the G-sharp with your left hand. After Rafael plays the A with his index finger, he rests his finger back on the same string to stop it.



## FINGERINGS



For the descending dominant seventh arpeggio, you can choose from one of two fingerings. You can either play the D on the third string, or slide to the D from the second string. Your choice depends on whichever feels most comfortable with the right hand.

The section that contains fast octave leaps requires a very strong right hand. The chords that follow should be plucked as quickly as you can. Aim for a sound that's as dry as you can, or without any long, ringing tones.



Before playing the A Major chord in the downbeat of the sixth measure, Rafael cuts the bass note (E) with his thumb. This makes it really clear that the bass here is an A. Repeat this same technique for the A Major chord each time the phrase repeats.



For the octaves in the sixth measure, Rafael plays with the index finger and thumb. While starting with the index finger, he will use the thumb to stop the bass on the fifth string, leftover from the A Major chord. Be sure to do the same at the end of eighth measure by stopping the B in octaves before going to the chord.

Finally, for the full measure of octaves that follows, prepare your thumb and index finger in advance.

## **KEY TAKEAWAY**

Use your fingerings to create the right palette of colors that sound short and strong, when necessary. Additionally, cutting the bass notes will help create clarity and intention, so be sure to practice this way as soon as you start.

# MODAULTION



**Allegro**

Violine I

Violine II

Viola

Violoncello und Kontrabaß

In the fifth page, the music modulates to C Major. The pattern in the first two bars is slightly reminiscent of Mozart's "Eine kleine Nachtmusik" (A Little Night Music), a common theme that you have surely heard (score on bottom).

In the first measure on this page, Rafael will use the thumb to stop the low C before playing the sixteenth notes. For the second measure, it's all right to let the notes ring over each other. However, for the C at the beginning of measure three, cut the low G that may still be ringing.

# TIRANDO

On the second line, the music suddenly obtains a very light texture. These sixteenth notes should be played tirando. Imagine a galloping horse- that should help you to get the right level of lightness.

Rafael slides down to play the final beat of the fourth measure. His second finger now plays the B, and his fourth finger plays the G-sharp.



## STORYTELLING

This next section, during and after the chromaticism on page five, contains many difficulties for the left hand.

Before examining, a brief note about tempo. All these passages are played at the same tempo, so don't slow down for the difficult passages. This requires that you practice very slowly!

To help yourself internalize this passage, imagine that you're an actor, and your role is to be as playful as possible. Or, imagine a story within an opera. To Rafael, it sounds as if a person suddenly appears on stage and doesn't know where they are. Here, at the sixth page, they finally find whatever it is that they may have been looking for.





On the second line, this playfulness can be highlighted by trying to create a call-and-response dialogue with the two lines. The low eighth notes might be an orchestra, and the flourish in the middle register might be a singer. Keep the low notes articulated sharply, and the flourish very legato.

## SLURS

Starting on the third line, Giuliani writes a number of long slurs underneath the sixteenth notes. Rafael has devised an unusual but helpful fingering for them. Play the low B on the fourth string, and then finger the sixteenth notes as follows:



Slurring these scales requires a lot of strength in the left hand. This is developed over time, with slow practice. Play as slow as is necessary for you to play in tempo. As always, your patience will be rewarded!

Toward the end of this page, the music starts to transition to a new world. Nobody listening to the piece knows that highly virtuosic arpeggios are about to follow. Create a sort of sly expectation in the music for what is to come!



Rafael slurs every other note in this passage to the next one, beginning with the first. This way, it feels like a series of short appoggiaturas. Never play these notes mechanically- always with musicality!

## ARPEGGIOS



It's very common for students to slow down on the arpeggios because the tempo is very difficult, but, musically, it's crucial that the tempo remains consistent. Try to practice first without arpeggios to get the movement of the melody in your ears. This melody should remain very clear! To help this, keep the bass on the softer side.



Again, don't play these arpeggios robotically. An orchestra would always play a series of small crescendos and decrescendos.

When the melody reaches E, on the second line, Rafael shifts to play the E with his fourth finger. In the next measure, when the bass changes to B, stop the E.



Rafael has some advice on what to do with the thumb to get the most sound out of the guitar. Keep your thumb as straight as possible on the string so that it projects much more.



The A-sharp in the bass is a tension in the harmony, so give extra weight to it when it appears in this section.

"I like to make a subito-piano here, otherwise it's like the Niagra Falls- tons and tons of water without end. That isn't interesting!"

In the third line, the G-sharp in the melody turns into a G-natural, signaling a change in the harmony. Here, Rafael likes to add a subito-piano. This keeps the music interesting and prevents it from being loud all the time. Once E Major suddenly returns in the next measure, grow back to forte!



## KEY TAKEAWAY

The more theatrical you can be with your interpretation, the more effective this piece will come across to an audience! This involves practicing the right combination of dynamics, tempo, accents, and phrasing to paint a larger picture.



Where the harmony changes to C Major, slide the third finger to G-natural and put the second finger on the fifth string. This creates stability in the left hand.

Ending this section provides another challenge. Since the intensity is already so high, getting even louder may not have the most pleasing effect on your ears or your fingers! Rafael uses fingerings to create a different effect. Rafael will finger this dominant chord with P-I-A-I, and play an apoyando on the last I.

When the melody begins ascending again in the next measure, Rafael continues with the A finger on the melody. Keep an eye on the tempo all the time, preventing it from rushing or dragging during transitions.



# DYNAMICS



Here, beginning on the second line, it is very important to articulate and play loudly. Just after you play each bass, touch the thumb to the string to stop it. Remember, again, that you're playing Italian music, which is always very alive and dynamic.

While playing the sixteenth-note runs in this melody, practice slowly and make every note important. This will develop clarity. Rafael starts the second group of notes with the thumb (the second sixteenth note of the second beat).

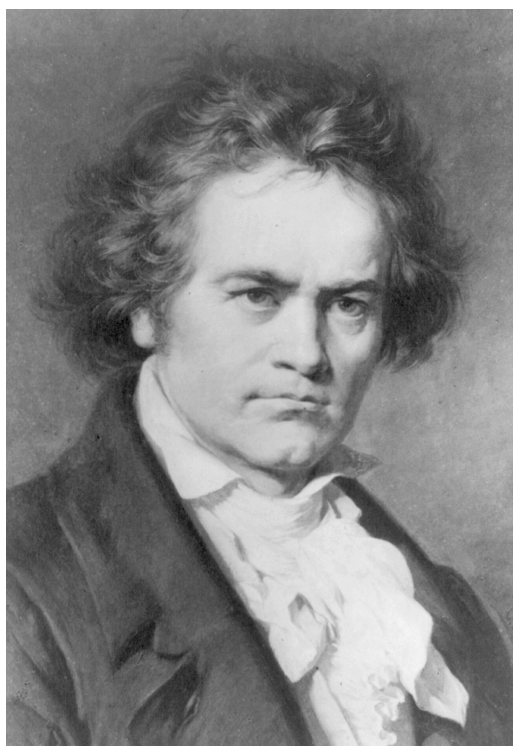


Moving into the next page, try to disappear from the stage with your decrescendo. At the key change to C Major, come in like the next chapter of an opera! Here, Rafael will try to change chords like a popular guitarist. Rather than shift individual fingers at a time, he will shift his whole hand at once. This is also called playing 'block chords'.

To play the fifth measure of the new key, Rafael will shift his first finger to the right of his second finger. This is a technique that jazz guitarists often use. It feels difficult at first, but experiment with turning your hand to the left until the sound is clean.

## BEETHOVEN

Mauro Giuliani lived in Vienna from the time he was about twenty-five, a time when Beethoven was deep into his career in Vienna. Giuliani become active in the classical style soon afterward, and acquainted himself with some of the highest figures of Austrian society- Rossini, Beethoven, and Hummel, among others.



'Grand Overture' was written in 1809, the same year Beethoven published his fifth and sixth symphonies. In the next section, there is a certain amount of stylistic similarity evident to a Beethoven harmonic cadence. Listen to the harmony on the eleventh page and compare it to some of Beethoven's middle symphonies, and see if you can hear the homage. The Italian bit returns on the next page.



## NOTE CLARITY

In the second measure of page twelve, try to start the octaves with the thumb. This ensures that any additional notes won't resonate. Do the same each time these octaves repeat. Again, never let the tempo drop.



Listen to piano pieces such as the Hungarian Rhapsodies by Liszt for the phrasing and intent of these fast octave passages. Play with fearlessness! Add a crescendo underneath the descending chromatic line to heighten the drama.

## RECAPITULATION

Even after going on such a musical journey with this piece, return to the recapitulation as if nothing has happened. Your audience has grown so much by listening to your performance of this piece that playing the introduction again takes them back to a feeling of innocence and naiveté.





Immediately after every group of two eighth notes, use the rest to prepare the fingers for the next one. On the next page, the octaves return, hinting that, in some way, the knowledge gained over this journey has not been lost. Accent every second bass note, starting with the B natural. This will help each note sound even, since the downbeats will get a natural accent.



For the slurred sixteenths in the middle of this page, Rafael slides them with this first and second fingers, and lands with his second finger. The jump is a bit awkward, so practice it carefully.



The theme that follows is another return of an older theme. Previously, it was stated in E Major, but now it is in A Major. It's up to your taste how you play it. Be aware that the slurs Giuliani notated occasionally require you to play this phrase in your left hand, rather than your right hand as it was played before.

## KEY TAKEAWAY

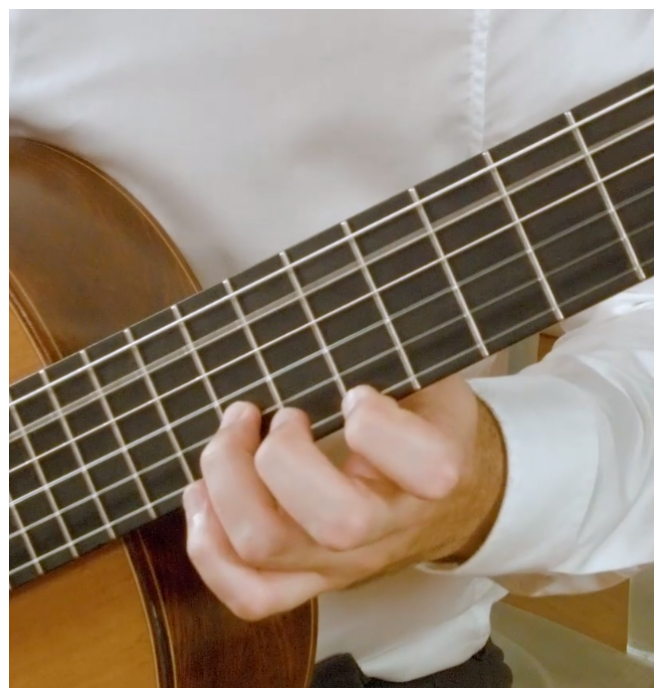
Be very clear with the articulations Giuliani wrote, and pay attention to the exact rhythm! Imagine an opera soprano singing this melody, and aim to develop that level of clarity!

## REPEATED MATERIAL



In this measure on page sixteen, Rafael uses a special fingering that allows him to multitask. In this position, he can play the high B with his fourth finger, stop the B in the middle of the staff, and setup for the next part. With his right thumb, he will also stop the low B.

For the eighth notes that follow, remember the articulation from before. Accent the first in the group, and keep them separated. Rafael uses another specific fingering to guide him through the ascending arpeggios in the second line of page seventeen. See the full lesson on tonebase to see how he fingers the full line.



Wherever the bass note changes from E to A, be sure to stop the E. Prepare the a finger for the next arpeggio.

The image shows a musical score for three staves in G major. The top staff features a melodic line with eighth notes and chords. The middle staff has a bass line with chords and arpeggios, marked with dynamics *mf*, *f*, *p*, and *ppp*. The bottom staff has a bass line with arpeggios, marked with dynamics *cres*, *poco*, and *a*. The score is numbered S. 427.

## A MAJOR

“It’s the same A Major chord that you’ve always listened to, but this part of the music is so full of joy that it’s transformed into something really beautiful”.

It’s ok to press a bit harder in the left hand to keep the position stable. Prepare the left hand for the A Major to come on page twenty-one. On this measure, play each note to its very end. Don’t anticipate the change of position prematurely.

As the piece nears its conclusion, play like an orchestra bellowing at triple-forte! Your right hand must be very strong in order to make each note of the arpeggio clear.

To achieve the two octave arpeggio, shift down to the A with the second finger on the second string, pictured below.



When you have a lot of notes to play and they go by very fast, some notes have to be used as a reference to remain oriented. Accentuate every four notes to keep your place- don't accent them too noticeably, but just add a bit more weight.

This is perhaps the most joyful part of the Overture- so be sure to feel it! The French have an expression that's useful to relate to here- *joie de vivre*, or, roughly, "joy of life". It refers to a joy for the sake of joy alone. Imagine a choir behind you singing along! That's perhaps all that is needed to convey the spirit of this section of the piece.





# ENDING THE PIECE

Rafael has been playing this piece for seventeen years, as of the recording of this lesson, but he is still discovering more optimal ways of executing certain passages. Specifically, getting out of the arpeggios into the big chords on the final page has proved a challenge.



On second measure of the last page, he prefers to use his thumb, I, and A on the A major chord. After this chord, slide back up the fretboard with the left hand.



The measure after the octaves contains strong downbeats. Separate these from the upbeats, as if a pianist is playing it with two hands. When an A Major chord follows a chord with E in the bass, stop the E so it doesn't ring underneath the A Major.

Gioachino Rossini was another composer who certainly had a strong influence on Giuliani. Play the end of this piece as if it were one of Rossini's Overtures, with a rousing crescendo at the end. Again, maintain the tempo all the way to the very last chord!



This piece is very challenging, and, as a result, not heard often in concerts. If you are sure to maintain the tempo even through the difficult themes, it will come across very successfully with any audience.

This concludes the lesson on Giuliani's Grand Overture. Take your time working on this piece- don't be discouraged if it takes much longer to get these arpeggios feeling comfortable than it does for other pieces. Experiencing an occasional failure is part of the growth process. If you use your mistakes as motivation to continue moving forward and focus on making daily incremental growth, you will see massive improvement in the long term. We wish you the best of luck!



# RESOURCES



## **Rafael Aguirre's lesson 10 Technical Exercises**

Love Rafael Aguirre's lessons? Get inspired by another one and take a look at ten of his favorite comprehensive technique exercises.

## **Andrea DeVitis lesson on Fantasia Traviata**

Interested in another piece inspired from opera? Take your expression to the next level with a piece by Tarrega based on an opera by Verdi.



