

TECHNIQUE

**ROVSHAN
MAMEDKULIEV**

On Color



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“WHAT IS A GOOD SOUND? WHAT IS RIGHT OR WRONG? IN MUSIC, EVERYTHING IS TOO SUBJECTIVE. TODAY, THIS IS A GOOD SOUND, IN 10 YEARS, FASHION CHANGES AND IT WILL NOT BE A GOOD SOUND.”

LESSON DESCRIPTION



The guitar is one of the most sensitive instruments, and, as a result, guitar players have a tremendous variety in the possible sounds they can create. While it can often be very difficult to be aware of every detail that has an effect on your sound, considering each element of your technique can shed light on the many ways you can interpret a piece.

In this lesson, Rovshan Mamedkuliev shares his ideas and thoughts about the use of colors on the classical guitar. He covers many of the devices you can control as a guitarist, and applies the use of color to two repertoire excerpts to show how to use these ideas in your performance. By the end of the lesson you'll understand better how to obtain more colors and how to apply them musically.





ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR



Since 1999, Rovshan Mamedkuliev has won more than 25 awards in national and international guitar competitions, including top prizes in the GFA, Brouwer, Villa-Lobos, Tarrega, and Pittaluga competitions.

In addition to his competition career, Rovshan has performed around the world as a soloist and recitalist, making his Carnegie Hall debut in 2012. In 2014 Rovshan Mamedkuliev was appointed a professor of the classical guitar department at the Maimonides State Classical Academy (Moscow).

OUTLINE

1. Introduction to Possibilities
2. Location on String
3. Finger/Nail Proportion
4. Angle of Attack
5. "Good sound"
6. Left Hand and Extended Techniques
7. Orchestrating Music
8. Tarrega and Conclusion

INTROUODCTION TO POSSIBILITIES



In Rovshan's opinion, classical guitar is the most colorful instrument in the world, because there are so many possible ways to produce a sound and different ways to play. If you change the position of your hands or the spot on the string you are touching, you can affect a lot. On piano, for example, you can control the dynamic, but you can't control the particular touch- it's always the same hammer striking the string.

Guitar is unique, in that the sound is struck by a flexible combination of skin and nail, and influenced by many other things. To take the guitar to its full potential and be as expressive as possible, we should use the full range of colors we have at our disposal.

LOCATION ON STRING



If we are only trying to play one note, the open string B, as an example, let's pose the question; what options do we have?

We can pluck on a different spot on the string. Playing in the normal spot, over the rosette, creates a familiar sound. Moving closer to the bridge, as in this image, creates a brighter sound. This is also called a ponticello.





At the other end, plucking up on the fingerboard gives a much sweeter sound. All spots in between have their own subtly different color as well, so don't hesitate to explore them all!

FINGER/NAIL PROPORTION

We can change the combination of finger and nail that we pluck the string with. If we touch the string with just nail, we straighten the finger a bit and create a bright sound. If you touch the string lower on your finger, you use more flesh and create a darker sound.

In every position on the string, we can now use any combination of flesh and nail. Each new parameter Rovshan discusses is multiplied with the previous ones, very quickly creating countless possibilities!

ANGLE OF ATTACK

We can change the angle of attack- or, direction that we pluck the string. Typically, we attack at 90 degrees, perpendicular to the string. You can move the angle lower and lower until you have an attack of almost 0 degrees, or parallel to the strings themselves. Here we get a really soft and thin sound.

Here, Rovshan demonstrates a very low angle of attack while also plucking with his nail, and the result is a mere whisper.



We can also rotate around the string and go underneath it to find different locations to attack. We can create a much different sound by moving the finger underneath the string and plucking the finger up, as Rovshan does here.

"GOOD" SOUND



To Rovshan, the idea of a "good sound" is very subjective. There are no absolutes in music. Trends can change, and, as a result, sounds can change. However, at the same time, a sound can be a good fit in one style and a bad fit in another. The current trend is more of a round sound, playing around 45 degrees, a bit inside the string, with combination of nail and flesh.

This doesn't mean this is the only option for playing. To bring variety and different characters to your sound, it's ok to use whatever colors strike your fancy. This can be preferred, especially in modern music. In music where the player has to imitate different instruments of the orchestra, ex. Sor or Giuliani, we can get closer to the color of another instrument by shifting the way we play (discussed later on in the lesson).

LEFT HAND AND EXTENDED TECHNIQUES

In this section, Rovshan discusses the left hand. We can change the color of the sound by playing the B on a closed third or fourth string. The left hand can also add vibrato, somewhat simulating an expressive human voice. You can also play a B in several different spots using harmonics, each giving different, somewhat muted, colors.

If music requires a slur, you can slur to the B from another note. You can even hammer the note straight on with the left hand for a softer sound.

We can also pluck the string with our left hand.

Mamedkuliev demonstrates how, while plucking a B on the third string, using your fourth finger makes the strongest sound. This is because of the increased distance from where you press the string down.



When Rovshan was young, his teacher urged him to “search for sound”. Searching for a sound means to try to get closer to what you hear when you play. If he wants to imitate a cello, for example, he can experiment with a number of variables until he finds something he likes. He tries playing closer to the bridge, but gets too nasally a sound, so moves back up toward the center. He adds more flesh, but there isn’t enough power, so he adds more nail to the pluck. He adds more vibrato, but stays aware of the amplitude and frequency that would best resemble the cello. There are so many different details to be aware of!

ORCHESTRATING MUSIC

To search for and develop colors on guitar, Mamedkuliev starts to imagine how he would orchestrate Sor's **Andantino** for other instruments. He plays the piece normally first, but then breaks each piece into sections. The beginning might be played by winds, so he plays to imitate them.

5. *Andantino.*



The image shows a musical score for Sor's 'Andantino' on guitar. It consists of two staves of music in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The score is numbered '5.' and includes various guitar-specific notations such as fingerings (1-4), accidentals, and slurs. The tempo is marked 'Andantino.' and there is a 'S' symbol at the beginning of the first staff.

To get the sound of a wind instrument, Rovshan plays close to the bridge and with a specific articulation. Though he chose not to speak on it previously, articulation can impact the color tremendously. Wind instruments tongue notes, so there is a definite attack and a detached quality that must be matched on guitar.

At his level of experience, Rovshan can find the right sound quickly, but while young it was a very long process to try to identify a sound he had in his mind. Experimentation and experience is essential to coming to these discoveries.

TÁRREGA AND CONCLUSION

Rovshan finds Tárrega's **Mazurka Adelita** to be a very guitaristic piece. Tárrega thought very much about the color he wanted the sound to have and which strings certain notes should be played on. Lots of elements repeat, so using one color for each repeat can get stale, especially in this romantic-influenced music. Colors bring a different character to each section.

It is very difficult for Rovshan to use words to describe every single change he makes in his sound, but that is why we have the music itself to communicate our intent where words might fail.



Within one particular timbre and dynamic, he can find five different colors simply by changing the location and angle he attacks on the strings. With each of them, he is still conscious about their intent and meaning (happy/romantic/song-like, etc.).

The sensitivity to find each of these comes from inside yourself- it's too specific to convey entirely with words or even over video lessons. Guitar is very natural and person, so each element of your body/guitar system impacts the sound. Even the tension in your muscles will bring a different energy.

The image displays two staves of musical notation for guitar. The first staff features a melodic line with dynamics 'p.' and 'un poco cresc:' leading to a 'p' dynamic. The second staff shows a chord progression with dynamics 'ritard.' and 'f', and includes fingering diagrams for G7 and C4 chords.

Even though guitar technique worldwide has improved tremendously in the last twenty to thirty years, the world has become more mechanical, and has perhaps lost the sensitivity of many minor details. Guitar is among the most sensitive instruments, creating a real challenge for performers to consider so many details. Using all the possibilities of colors, you can achieve another level of understanding of the music, and showcase the qualities of the guitar that no other instrument has in quite the same way.



RESOURCES



Eduardo Inestal's lessons On Muting Notes

As important as knowing which notes to play is know which ones to cut! Learn how to clean up the harmonies in your all your interpretations by muting unwanted notes and overtones.

Thomas Viloteau's lesson On Right Hand Technique

Expand your right hand abilities one step further with Thomas's lesson on the right hand where he shows you how discovering your own technique helps you achieve your musical ideas more effectively.



