



## Tárrega's "Recuerdos de la Alhambra" Made Easy

by [Steve Eckels](#)

### The Secret of Playing the Tremolo Technique

In this article I'll present an overview of my simplified arrangement of Tárrega's "Recuerdos de la Alhambra", and share my secret of practicing tremolo for those who are looking for ways to improve their technique in rendering the original version.

"Recuerdos de la Alhambra" is one of the most famous pieces ever written for the guitar. The composer, Francisco Tárrega (1852-1909) was trained as a pianist at the Madrid Conservatory and was influenced by the solo piano music of Frederick Chopin. Tárrega was a central figure in the development of guitar technique and composition. To learn more about his life and guitar innovations, I recommend the Mel Bay publication, [A Concise History of the Classical Guitar](#) by Graham Wade.

Tárrega used the tremolo technique almost exclusively in his most famous piece, "Recuerdos de la Alhambra". The sound of the tremolo resembles that of a mandolin, with the melody being played by a seamless flow of repeated notes. The piece is an audience favorite because of the extensive use of the tremolo throughout. "Recuerdos" was inspired by a famous hilltop complex of Moorish buildings called The Alhambra in the city of Granada, Spain. The Alhambra has inspired many artists with its beautiful architecture, gardens and fountains. Segovia used to go there to practice.

Because of the difficulty of the tremolo, Recuerdos can only be played by guitarists who have spent enough time to develop the tremolo technique. In my book *Fingerstyle Classics Made Easy* (21089BCD), I have taken many of the great classical guitar masterpieces, including Recuerdos, and arranged them for recreational guitarists. Although I have removed the tremolo, which is the signature of the piece, the melody and harmony are beautiful by themselves. I feel that learning the piece this way provides an entry point for the recreational guitarist.

The arrangement of Recuerdos that I present in *Fingerstyle Classics Made Easy* retains the original melody and the harmony but does not include the famous tremolo. Learning the piece in this fashion will help the student become familiar with the piece and have fun playing it in a short period of time. At that point, the student may move on to the original "full-strength" arrangement if that is their wish. Before you start, it would be helpful to review the following open position chord forms: Am, G7, C, F, E, Dm, Am, and D.

In addition, the piece contains three barre forms: F#, G# and C#m. If you don't know barre forms yet, you may think of them like this: When you lay the first finger of your left hand across a fret it functions in the same manner that a capo does. Therefore, F# minor = capo (first finger) on the second fret + E minor, G# = capo on the fourth fret + E major, and C# minor = capo on the fourth fret + A minor. The C# minor capo should cover only five strings so that the tip of the index finger is pressing the note C# at the fourth fret.

When playing barre forms, keep your left elbow close to your body, arch your wrist, and place the index finger so that the boney side facing the thumb presses directly to the left of

the fret. Many beginners make the error of trying to barre with the soft underside of the finger.

Now that you have had the opportunity to pre-finger the necessary chords, let's take a look at how the arrangement is constructed. Measures one through four consist of the Am chord with the pinky added for the note D, on the third fret of the second string (3/2), to create the melody. Finger the Am chord and practice adding the pinky on 3/2.

As another preliminary measure, practice the finger-picking pattern all by itself. The fingers play: *a-m-i-m-a-m* (*a=third finger, m=middle finger and i=the first finger*). Pinch the thumb and the *a* finger together at the beginning of the pattern *p/a*.

Measures 5-8 use the same pattern, transposed over some other chords. Finger the C chord and add your pinky and first finger to embellish the chord.

Measure 9 is a point of interest because in order to finger this F chord you need to use the *transverse presentation*. The transverse presentation is a fancy way of saying that the fingers of the left hand need to be at angle to the strings rather than vertical as if you were playing a C chord. This is achieved by positioning the palm of the hand so that it is at an oblique angle to the strings with the fingers pointing away from the nut. *Generally speaking, if there are two or more fingers on the same fret, the hand should be in the transverse position.*

### **The Secret of Playing Effective Tremolo**

For those of you who aren't familiar with the tremolo technique, it is the rapid repetition of the right-hand pattern *p-a-m-i*, wherein the thumb usually plays the bass line and the *a-m-i* fingers play the melody. The classical 4-note tremolo pattern should be played absolutely evenly with no inherent "gallop". Played in this manner, the tremolo technique is the best means of achieving the illusion of a sustained, bowed-string effect on a plucked string instrument.

At the beginning of the original Recuerdos, the thumb (*p*) plays an arpeggio pattern on the strings as follows: 5-4-3-4-3-4. In between each thumb note, the fingers play the melody by repeating *a-m-i* on the second string. There are many different practice strategies for creating a tremolo that is loud and smooth. The one I am about to share is the one that finally worked for me.

Here's how I arrived at my tremolo practice strategy. I was driving down the road listening to Christopher Parkening playing Recuerdos on my iPod. Because of the clarity of the ear buds, I noticed that the accents weren't where I expected them. In fact, *I had a bit of a problem determining where beat one was!* It hit me that Chris was placing the accent *not on beat one*, which is the natural thing to do, but on the *a* finger which falls on the second note of the tremolo pattern. I cannot say how Chris practiced the tremolo, but it sounded as if the thumb was anticipating the pattern and the *a* finger was falling on the down beat. In other words, although the piece is written *p-a-m-i*, it is more natural for the movement of the hand to play *a-m-i-p*. For me, *a-m-i-p* is perhaps the most simple of all right-hand patterns.

As an experiment:

1. Place your thumb on string 4 and your fingers on strings 321.

2. Play this string pattern: 4-3-2-1(*a-m-i-p*), 4-3-2-1(*a-m-i-p*) etc. This is a natural movement for the fingers. The accent NATURALLY falls on the downbeat, which is played with the *a* finger.
3. The next step is to play *a-m-i* on the first string and the thumb on the fourth string repeatedly. 1/*a-m-i*, 4/*p*
4. Now, instead of repeating the thumb on the fourth string, let it play the Recuerdos arpeggio pattern 4-3-2-3-2-3 repeatedly.
5. The final result is the Recuerdos pattern played samba style, that is- with the bass note anticipating the beat, and with the melody note (*a* finger) on the beat.

To summarize you, might say that my practice strategy for an even and clear tremolo on Recuerdos is *for the thumb to anticipate the beat, and the fingers to begin their arpeggio on the beat*. If you are counting 1-e-&-a, start the pattern *p-i-m-a* with the thumb as the pickup note to beat one, and with the *a* finger playing on the downbeat.

At first, this will seem awkward, but for me it has been worth the time invested. I always practice Recuerdos in this fashion, and my tremolo is louder and more even as a result.

If you are working on your tremolo for the original version of Recuerdos de la Alhambra, I hope that this practice strategy will help you as it did me. If you're getting started with the easy version, I hope that you enjoy the quick start presented in *Fingerstyle Classics Made Easy*; at some future time if you decide to take on Tárrega's original version, as I hope you will!- an authentic edition can be found in *Francisco Tárrega, Collected Guitar Works, Volume 1 (97475)*.

You can hear my interpretation of "Recuerdos de la Alhambra" on my recording, *Sparks from the 7 Worlds*. Sparks was compiled with the idea of presenting the "greatest hits of the essential classical guitar repertoire" on one recording. ([www.guitarmusicman.com](http://www.guitarmusicman.com))

Sincerely,  
Steve Eckels  
[www.guitarmusicman.com](http://www.guitarmusicman.com)

Listen to [Recuerdos de la Alhambra!](#)



# Recuerdos de la Alhambra

Francisco Tarrega (1852-1909)  
arranged by Steve Eckels

J=104

**A** Am G7/D

0 2 2 2 3 2 | 1 2 2 2 3 2 | 0 2 2 2 2 2 | 0 2 2 2 0 0

**C**

3 0 2 0 0 | 3 0 2 0 0 | 3 0 2 0 0 | 3 0 2 0 0

**F** \* see optional measures Esus E

0 1 0 0 0 | 0 2 0 0 0 | 2 1 | 0 2 2 1 0 0

**A7** Dm

6 6 6 | 5 3 5 5 | 0 2 2 2 | 0 2 2 2

17

Dm F E

21

**B** A

25

D/A A

29

F#m G# C#m

33

Bm7(b5) E7 A To Coda  $\Theta$  (last time)

*rit.*

1.

37

*D.C. al Coda*  $\Theta$  A C F/A

*(optional)*

2.

38

41

A E

1.

45

A E

*rit.*

2.

*rit.*

49 A

2 4 2

0 3 4

0 3 4

0 2 2 0 5

53

9

9

*\*optional measures*

Dm Esus E

9 4 2

8 6 6 7 6

5 6 6 7 6

5 4

0

0

0