

Aprrende guitarra flamenca con
Learn flamenco guitar with

Oscar Herrero



DEMO



EL PULGAR

Learn flamenco guitar

with

OSCAR HERRERO

THE THUMB

© **Oscar Luis Herrero Salinas (Oscar Herrero), 2019**

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PRESENTATION

In the 90s I began publishing my first didactic flamenco works.

At first I published with a French publisher; in collaboration with my friend and colleague Claude Worms, we published a series of books with accompanying CDs. After that, with a Spanish producer, I did a series of nine videos which included various techniques, falsetas, compás, and cante accompaniment instruction. Since then I've traveled the world, even more so since the age of the Internet. In 2003 I founded my own publishing house, Oscar Herrero Ediciones, where I continue to publish my didactic works and concert pieces. Today, more than twenty years after those first published works, I'm coming out with this new didactic work, now with all those extra years of experience under my belt. Years in which I've continued to teach hundreds of students. It's so interesting that, by teaching, one continues to learn from one's students. But how else would I have learned to teach if not from my students?

All I've tried to teach my students, the same material they have helped me continue to improve and perfect, I want to capture in a series of exercises for guitar, published in both written and video formats. This entire repertoire of exercises with accompanying videos will begin first with a series dedicated to my own flamenco guitar technique, which is quite unique. I've divided this series up into basic techniques, in six volumes:

The pulgar

The alzapúa

The rasgueado

The trémolo

The picado

The arpeggio

All of these techniques have their own way of being played in flamenco guitar music, and this assures that this instrument acquires its own personality and sound, which is very different from other styles of guitar. They're principally techniques that affect the right hand. With respect to the left hand, there isn't a noticeable difference between flamenco guitar and other styles of guitar. However, throughout these six videos I'll be making a series of comments and providing some exercises and advice to aid in developing a good left hand technique as well, because that aspect is often overlooked by flamenco guitarists, being that they're so often obsessed with the right hand.

But this sound that is so characteristic of the flamenco guitarist, apart from the techniques that we use and how we use them, is also due to the instrument itself, the flamenco guitar. Ever since the guitar has been used as a flamenco instrument to accompany the singing, there have also been other factors at play—hand clapping (*las palmas*) and dance (*el baile*).

This means that the flamenco guitarist needed a distinct sound in order to mesh with these other flamenco sounds; the raspy voice, the heels hitting the ground, the percussive *palmas*. This meant that it was going to be difficult for a guitar, which isn't that loud, to compete with everything else. It was necessary to have a sound that complemented the others, a sound that was bright, that had both a quick and short sound, and didn't ring out for too long, since all those *rasgueados* don't make it necessary for the harmonics to linger, so as to not form a wall of sound. All of these

characteristics were incorporated by the guitarist Antonio de Torres, from Almería, who is considered the inventor of the modern guitar, both flamenco and classical.

So it's fundamental, in order to play flamenco, to have an instrument prepared for the job, that is able to faithfully and clearly reproduce the right hand flamenco guitar techniques that we use, which separate both technically and sonically the flamenco guitarist from other genres. At the same time, it's necessary to have a guitar that feels comfortable for the left hand, which often plays much more intricately now than in the past, when a flamenco guitarist didn't used to play beyond the fourth fret.

For this didactic series, I want to present to you my new Oscar Herrero flamenco guitar, with which I've recorded the videos you will see. The Oscar Herrero guitar, available in six different models, is an instrument made by hand by renowned master luthiers who have implemented my suggestions in the design, which I have given from experience and personal preference. Each one of these guitars is named after one of my own musical compositions.

Here I present the **MANANTIAL** model. Manantial (which translates to 'spring of water,' or more generally, 'source, origin') is the *soleá* that plays in the background of this video, and appears on my first album, **TORRENTE**. This studio guitar, for those beginning to play flamenco, was constructed in the traditional flamenco manner, with a spruce top and laminated Brina back and sides, and is very comfortable for both the left and right hands, and measures 650mm.

For more information, you can visit my website: www.oscarherreroediciones.es

¿TO WHOM ARE THESE BOOKS AND VIDEOS DIRECTED?

This series of books, along with their complementary videos, is directed toward flamenco guitarists or guitarists of other disciplines who want to learn or perfect the basic techniques that characterize flamenco guitar. It's also directed toward those who, though they may already know the techniques, haven't learned them in a systematic way.

This work is made to train the guitarist in various techniques. We're not going to learn any song forms (*palos*) or *falsetas*, but rather we will learn and perfect the necessary techniques in order to play *palos* and *falsetas* correctly. Each of these books consists of several sections, and each section has two parts:

MECHANICAL EXERCISES

Consisting of a series of routine exercises designed to mechanize and automate movements so that our hands carry them out with ease.

STUDIES

These are short works in which we will apply what we learn in the exercises. More specifically, I've selected some studies from the three books I've published myself: 21, 24 and 12 Studies for Flamenco Guitar. Some are the original studies from these books and others have been adapted. I've also included a new study designed specifically for the technique we're working on.

And now, let's start paying.

THE THUMB

The *thumb* technique is, along with the *rasgueado*, the oldest flamenco guitar technique. Considering that at first the guitar was only used in flamenco to accompany the voice, the *rasgueados* were used to keep time and maintain the song's *compás* (in flamenco a song's time signature, rhythm pattern and structure is known as the *compás*). And the thumb (known as *el pulgar* in Spanish) was in charge of carrying out various little solos in between the singing.

The position of the hand is fundamental in order to execute the thumb technique correctly. One must swing the wrist around so that one's thumb is facing the strings at approximately a 45 degree angle. The thumb should play with the aid of a revolving movement of the forearm, which in flamenco argot is known as "*toque de muñeca*" (*muñeca* means wrist, while *toque* is derived from the verb *tocar*, meaning 'to play an instrument').

Where does one put the other fingers? Some guitarists simply hold them in the air, and others, like me, lightly place one on the body of the guitar (normally the middle finger), and the index finger rests on the first string, lending more stability, though at no time are these fingers simply resting, but instead they're always moving in conjunction with the wrist. The fingers shouldn't press hard or anchor themselves on the guitar's body, but instead graze it and use it as a point of reference.

In flamenco guitar, the thumb usually plays in a manner wherein it comes to rest on the string directly below the one it has just played. This clearly identifies the sonority of the flamenco thumb technique, flesh and nail uniting to color the sound in the typical flamenco manner.

The fingertip attacks the string first, then the fingernail, which adds a certain brightness. But the fingernail is never the first to strike the string, which is why flamenco guitarists form a callous on the fingertip which ends up producing a dry sound, warm, powerful and definitely unique. The fingernail should be quite filed down near the area of the fingertip that strikes the string.

After striking the string, the thumb comes to rest on the string directly below the one that has just been played. If the next note is to be played on that string, the only thing we need to do is move the thumb to produce the sound. On the contrary, if we plan on playing another note on the same string we just played, or on a string other than the one the thumb has come to rest upon, we must turn the wrist and go to the corresponding string in order to play it.

This thumb technique can be seen in the corresponding video to this book, and I highly recommend you watch it. The explanation is thorough and, as they say, "a video is worth more than a thousand words."

Watch the video that accompanies this book, where I explain this technique in depth.

MECHANICAL EXERCISES

As the name of this section indicates, here I want to present a series of very “mechanical” exercises for each technique. In other words, basic exercises that permit the student to have a physical training routine, like circuit training, where little by little one’s fingers respond more and more to the difficult techniques, and gain dexterity.

We’ll always start with just the right hand, and later will sync it up with the left hand, always by making simple and repetitive movements.

Moreover, later on, these exercises will serve as a warming-up routine in our daily studies, even when we’ve reached an above average level.

At first it’s necessary to stay concentrated during the entire exercise so that it becomes completely automated. Attention must be paid to the rhythm, the sound and the movement of each finger, until the movements can be executed in a natural and unconscious way. When sensory and motor memory have habituated certain movements, the brain automates them; to go back and change a movement or a basic hand position is more difficult than learning it from zero. That’s why these first steps are fundamental and necessary to get right, because they’ll stay that way forever.

If you’re a guitarist who has spent a lot of time playing with other movements (which at one time you will have memorized and automated) but now you want to change them because you’ve realized that they don’t work and you trust in my experience (or at least you’re willing to give my advice a try, because it seems reasonable, or because what you’ve learned up to this point hasn’t worked well enough for you), it won’t be easy to change your technique, but if you’re patient and you work diligently, you’ll eventually get it. You have to erase what you’ve learned by repeating the new movements over and over, along with the new hand positions. If you are conscious of the movements and methodical in your learning, your fingers will respond. Don’t worry about going too fast. When you try to go faster than your brain permits, your fingers will begin to play in the way they did before you started trying to change your technique by learning these new movements. This happens a lot with guitarists who already play in a certain way, but want to change it. If they play without thinking, they go back to old habits, because the old way is still ingrained in their memory. To learn a new way of playing (including a new piece, a falseta, etc.) one must play consciously. One mustn’t play without paying attention. If that happens, the technique won’t become fully integrated, because the hand will automatically tend toward the positions one knew previously. One must be conscious of the way one’s hands and fingers move. I don’t know of any other way. It’s slow and cerebral work, and very repetitive, until at last the movements become automated and the old movements one had learned are erased. Then, everything will begin to be easier.

Technique should always serve expression. Technique is a vehicle to be able to express our emotions through an instrument. Technique isn’t the objective, it’s the path, the foundation. And because of that, there are sounds and musical expressions that are impossible to create without proper technique. So, first we have to prepare our fingers in a technical manner so that, once automated, we don’t have to worry about them, and they are completely at the service of our expression, our emotions, our art.

Having good technique is not synonymous with being a good guitarist. You can be an excellent guitarist with mediocre technique, or a terrible guitarist with marvelous technique. But, if we have good taste or musical talent (which can also be developed and improved, like everything),

technique will help us achieve certain melodies, sounds that we wouldn't be able to make without good technique. It will help us create beauty.

- Good technique will help us give the most on a physical level.
- Technique isn't only velocity, strength or cleanness of sound. It's also sound quality, the ability to play loudly without making too much effort... Good technique also means that our *rasgueado*, *pulgar*, and *picado* sound very flamenco, clean, powerful...
- Good technique saves us hours and hours of study. For example, a passage on which we have spent days and still can't play quickly and cleanly, can be solved quickly by simply changing the fingering or some other incorrect movement.
- Good technique makes it possible to carry out our musical thoughts automatically, without slowing us down and becoming preoccupied by the movement or the physical aspect. In this way, whatever we want to play on the guitar, we will be able to play, without being limited by our physical abilities.

In short, good technique will help us achieve things that would otherwise be impossible. We're all capable of creating, composing and demonstrating our individuality with our music, but for that we need the necessary tools that will help us channel through the instrument that which we hold inside.

Learning music is very similar to learning a language. One must have a good handle on the most simple aspects; the phonemes, the sounds, the grammar... they're like the technique, the harmony and the rhythms. No matter how clear we are on what we want to say, if we don't know how to construct a sentence, we won't be well understood. We won't be able to adequately express the beauty we hold inside of us until we learn the basic techniques. To speak a language well it's not sufficient just to learn words and memorize phrases. One must know how to use them, and understand grammar rules in order to create and understand new phrases. In the same way, to play guitar well it's not best to start right away learning melody lines and pieces. It's impossible to play a melody line well if you don't know the proper thumb technique, or *rasgueado* technique, or any other technique. It's impossible to play a *soleá* well if you don't understand its structure, its characteristics, its rhythm. The only thing you'll achieve is to automate movements you don't really understand and can't really control, and in that case your movements will mostly be incorrect. In short, you'll learn bad techniques that won't facilitate your development at all.

Like with anything in life, a solid foundation will ensure our ability to grow well. A building must have a strong foundation, or it will crumble before it has even been finished. Either that, or we'll knock it down ourselves out of frustration, because things aren't going well and we don't know why.

Music is a language through which we communicate with each other, express happiness, sadness, anger, passion... Traditionally flamenco music has been learned by ear and by repetition through imitation, like when a baby learns a language. However, once it's an adult and speaks a language fluently, using the same method to learn a new language doesn't work, because one already knows a number of automated sounds, words and structures in one's native language that don't work in another. So one must learn new sounds, new rules. In short, one must be conscious of what one does. An adult doesn't learn with the same ease and intensity as a baby, but makes up for this in other ways; he understands what he learns, understands why things are used like they are. This speeds up and helps his learning.

Throughout the history of flamenco the same things have been repeated: *in order to sing or play or dance flamenco, you must be born with it, it can't be taught...* I agree that for anything in life one must possess certain basic qualities, but then those have to be developed, because how many potential guitarists, singers, dancers, painters, doctors, are there in the world? How many geniuses who aren't born in the necessary environment to develop their qualities? If Paco de Lucía's father hadn't been a flamenco aficionado and had emigrated to Australia or some other place where Paco didn't come into contact with flamenco, would Paco de Lucía have been a guitarist? It's possible that he was a genius, but maybe he would've developed his genius in a different genre of music, or in medicine, or painting...or some other art. Are there not thousands of hidden geniuses among those kids who grow up without studying, who don't have the resources or access to places that would help their development? I've always believed that one is born with certain qualities, then a *vocation* is awakened, and lastly one *learns* a craft from someone who can teach it. That's why life's path continues to twist and turn based on what one discovers and invests in along the way. Those who are born into and grow up in an environment immersed in flamenco acquire the gift of knowing all of the flamenco rhythms by heart, because they grow up listening to them and have many flamenco aficionados around them all the time. The environment we grow up in, our education, the interests that manifest themselves from a young age, that which we work and fight for and feel deeply about and want to pursue, is the most important. A good environment helps us once we decide to achieve something. And the rest, family, heritage, origin—they're just stereotypes that almost never helped flamenco grow in stature.

RIGHT HAND

The routine we'll go through for each right hand technique is first to work on the technique by only playing open strings, so that all attention can be focused on the right hand. Once we've succeeded in mechanizing the technique, we'll bring in the left hand, starting off with very mechanical fingerings that don't distract us too much from the right hand. In each exercise we'll utilize four rhythmical forms, playing **four, three, two** and **one** beat(s) per note.



And we'll do it in that order, which is the order of difficulty from easiest to hardest, given that the more times we repeat a note, the more time we have to think about the next note.

LEFT HAND

Once we have control over our thumb, we'll begin incorporating the left hand, utilizing all possible combinations of the four fingers. These are the possible fingerings:

Block A (Finger 1)

A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6
1 2 3 4	1 2 4 3	1 3 2 4	1 3 4 2	1 4 2 3	1 4 3 2

Block B (Finger 2)

B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6
2 1 3 4	2 1 4 3	2 3 1 4	2 3 4 1	2 4 1 3	2 4 3 1

Block C (Finger 3)

C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6
3 1 2 4	3 1 4 2	3 2 1 4	3 2 4 1	3 4 1 2	3 4 2 1

Block D (Finger 4)

D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6
4 1 2 3	4 1 3 2	4 2 1 3	4 2 3 1	4 3 1 2	4 3 2 1

We'll also use the chromatic scale:

CHROMATIC SCALE

Ascending					Descending					Combined									
0	1	2	3	4	4	3	2	1	0	0	1	2	3	4	3	2	1	0	

SECTION 1

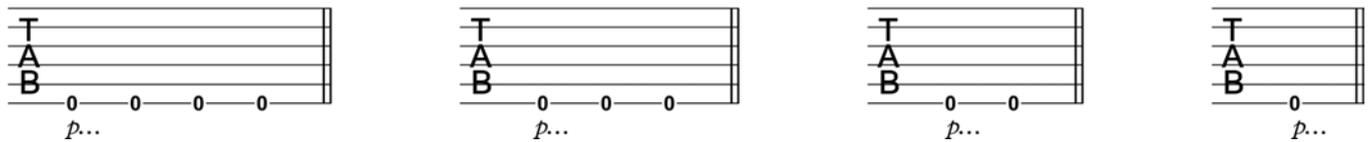
THUMB

Remember: It's important to watch the video that accompanies the book.

EXERCISE 1

We'll begin with some very simple exercises, playing open strings so that we can concentrate on the thumb of the right hand. We'll play **four, three, two** and **one** beat(s) on each string.

These are the variations we'll use:



Repeat each variation several times on each string until you feel somewhat at ease with the movement.

Now play the exercise in its entirety, stringing together the variations like this:

E1

ATTENTION! Each movement should be thought about before its execution. We should be conscious of what we're doing, because the first steps are key to correctly automating the technique.

EXERCISE 2

Now that we have some control over the movement of our thumb, we'll incorporate the left hand exercises, and to do that we'll use certain fingerings. There are different ways to practice each fingering, and we can change them up, or even create new ones.

We're going to take a look at some possibilities from **block A**. First, let's take fingering **A1** as an example.

A1
1 2 3 4

Play the exercise on strings 6, 5, 4, 3 and 2, leaving out the first string, because there isn't a string below it for the thumb to rest on, and so the thumb isn't often used on the first string.

Do the exercise, playing each note **four, three, two** and **one** time(s).

Beats



ATTENTION! Now we have two places to pay attention to: the right hand and the left hand. I beg you to please give utmost concentration to both.

Example with **four** beats.

E2

A1

T			
A			
B	1-1-1-1-2-2-2-2-3-3-3-3-4-4-4-4	1-1-1-1-2-2-2-2-3-3-3-3-4-4-4-4	1-1-1-1-2-2-2-2-3-3-3-3-4-4-4-4

p...

T			
A	1-1-1-1-2-2-2-2-3-3-3-3-4-4-4-4	1-1-1-1-2-2-2-2-3-3-3-3-4-4-4-4	1-1-1-1-2-2-2-2-3-3-3-3-4-4-4-4
B			

T			
A	1-1-1-1-2-2-2-2-3-3-3-3-4-4-4-4	1-1-1-1-2-2-2-2-3-3-3-3-4-4-4-4	1-1-1-1-2-2-2-2-3-3-3-3-4-4-4-4
B			

It's advisable to do the same for other fingerings (A1, A2, B1...), being that variation is of paramount importance if one is to improve.

EXERCISE 3

In the next exercise we'll connect the six variations of **block A**. We'll change the fingering on the second string, then on the sixth, then on the second... as always playing each note **four, three, two** and **one** time(s).

Example with **one** beat:

E3

A1 **A2**

A3 **A4**

A5 **A6**

We'll do it with the rest of the blocks as well (**Block B, Block C, Block D**).

EXERCISE 4

Now comes a really good mental exercise—playing every fingering on the same string.

Do it **four, three, two** and **one** time(s) for each note.

Example with **one** beat:

E4

A1 **A2** **A3** **A4** **A5** **A6**

Continue with the rest of the strings, and with all of the blocks.

ATTENTION! Become accustomed, once you've thoroughly gone through the exercises, to doing your own versions, inventing combinations or different fingerings, and **creating**.

EXERCISE 5

As a fourth example of the infinite possibilities of combinations we have at our disposal, we'll do, like before, all of the fingerings of one block on the same string, but in the following way:

A1-A2 four notes

A3-A4 three notes

A5-A6 two notes

A1-A2-A3-A4-A5-A6 one note

And we'll do it first on the sixth string, then on strings 5, 4, 3 and 2. As an example, I'll demonstrate how to do it on the sixth string.

E5

The diagram illustrates four examples of fingering patterns for notes A1 through A6 on the sixth string. Each example is shown on a three-line staff labeled T, A, and B. The patterns are as follows:

- Example 1:** A1 and A2. A1: 1-1-1-1, 2-2-2-2, 3-3-3-3, 4-4-4-4. A2: 1-1-1-1, 2-2-2-2, 4-4-4-4, 3-3-3-3. Includes a *p...* marking.
- Example 2:** A3 and A4. A3: 1-1-1, 3-3-3, 2-2-2, 4-4-4. A4: 1-1-1, 3-3-3, 4-4-4, 2-2-2.
- Example 3:** A5 and A6. A5: 1-1, 4-4, 2-2, 3-3. A6: 1-1, 4-4, 3-3, 2-2.
- Example 4:** A1 through A6. A1: 1-2-3-4. A2: 1-2-4-3. A3: 1-3-2-4. A4: 1-3-4-2. A5: 1-4-2-3. A6: 1-4-3-2.

We've seen four examples of the infinite number of ways to practice and combine the fingerings. Now I encourage you to find others, it will awaken your creativity.

STUDY

Before continuing with more exercises, the time has come to play a short study in which we apply what we've learned so far. We'll do it with **Study n°1** from my book "**21 Estudios para guitarra flamenca**" (*21 Studies for flamenco guitar*).

It's a short piece in the **Farruca** style, with a 4/4 *compás* and in the key of A (La) minor. The goal is to correctly execute the thumb technique in the piece. This is no longer a mechanical exercise, it's a piece of music to be played by applying the technique, or in other words, "the technique is at the service of the expression." If you've worked hard until now, your fingers will correctly carry out each movement, but even so, proceed slowly, with caution.

ESTUDIO 1

(Pulgar)

"Por Farruca"

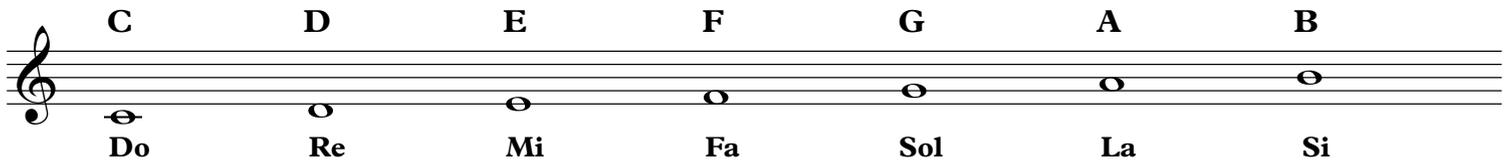
Oscar Herrero

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From the book "*21 Estudios para guitarra flamenca*" (*21 Studies for flamenco guitar*)

Remember that all of this can be seen in the video that accompanies this book and that a video is worth more than a thousand words.

NOTATION SIGNS



(Right hand) p = thumb; i = index; m = middle; a = ring finger; e = little finger; T = all

(Left hand) 1 = first finger; 2 = second finger; 3 = third finger; 4 = fourth finger

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ The numbers indicate the string which must be struck

* "Golpe" is a tap on the sound board with the ring finger and middle finger

Pos 1, Pos 2, ... Position of the left hand on the fret board. Pos "B^b" =  Pos "F" = 

cI, cII, cIII, cIV, ... Barré on the fret indicated by the Roman numeral

cII₁₋₄ "Half barré on the fret 1 on the strings 1-2-3-4"

┌ End of barré, (cejilla) Pos, Ras, ... () Optional

Alzapúa...
Picado...
p...

When a word or letter appears followed by three dots (. . .) continue using until a change is indicated.

RASGUEADOS (RIGHT-HAND STRUM)

↑ "Rasgueado" from bass to treble using all fingers except the thumb

↑_p "Rasgueado" from bass to treble using the thumb

↓ "Rasgueado" from treble to bass using the thumb

{ "Rasgueado" from bass to treble using the thumb accompanied at the same time by "Golpe"

^ "Rasgueado" from bass to treble with the index finger

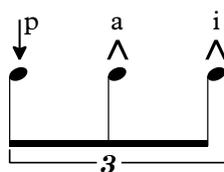
v "Rasgueado" from treble to bass with the index finger

(e, m, a)
^ "Rasgueado" from bass to treble with the finger indicated (e, m, a)

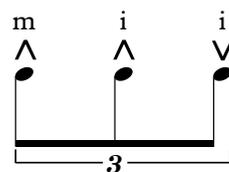
* ^ "Rasgueado" from bass to treble with the index finger accompanied at the same time by "Golpe"

* ^ "Golpe" on the 'upper' sound board (above the bass strings) followed by the index or middle finger

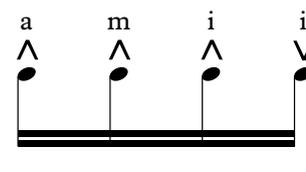
(p m p)



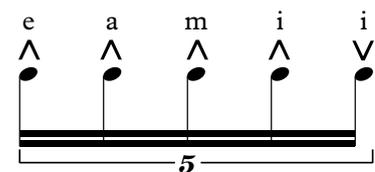
Ras A



Ras 3



Ras 4



Ras 5

¿A QUIÉN VAN DIRIGIDOS ESTOS LIBROS Y VÍDEOS?

Esta serie de libros, con sus vídeos complementarios, está dirigida a guitarristas flamencos o de otras disciplinas que quieran conocer o perfeccionar los elementos técnicos que caracterizan a la guitarra flamenca. También a los que, aun conociéndolos, no hayan adquirido una formación razonada de ellos.

Este trabajo está pensado para entrenar técnicamente al guitarrista, no vamos a aprender en él ningún palo ni ninguna falseta, sino a aprender o perfeccionar la técnica necesaria para poder interpretar esos palos o falsetas de una forma correcta. Cada uno de estos libros consta de varias secciones, y cada sección de dos partes:

EJERCICIOS MECÁNICOS

Consisten en una serie de ejercicios muy rutinarios con la idea de mecanizar y automatizar movimientos que queden fijados en la memoria de nuestras manos.

ESTUDIOS

Son pequeñas obras pensadas para aplicar en ellas todo lo trabajado con los ejercicios. Más concretamente, he elegido algunos estudios de mis tres libros publicados en mi editorial: 21, 24 y 12 Estudios para Guitarra Flamenca. Algunos son los estudios originales de estos libros y otros son estudios que he adaptado a partir de ellos. También he incorporado algún nuevo estudio ideado especialmente para la técnica que estamos trabajando.

TO WHOM ARE THESE BOOKS AND VIDEOS DIRECTED?

This series of books, along with their complementary videos, is directed toward flamenco guitarists or guitarists of other disciplines who want to learn or perfect the basic techniques that characterize flamenco guitar. It's also directed toward those who, though they may already know the techniques, haven't learned them in a systematic way.

This work is made to train the guitarist in various techniques. We're not going to learn any song forms (palos) or falsetas, but rather we will learn and perfect the necessary techniques in order to play palos and falsetas correctly. Each of these books consists of several sections, and each section has two parts:

MECHANICAL EXERCISES

Consisting of a series of routine exercises designed to mechanize and automate movements so that our hands carry them out with ease.

STUDIES

These are short works in which we will apply what we learn in the exercises. More specifically, I've selected some studies from the three books I've published myself: 21, 24 and 12 Studies for Flamenco Guitar. Some are the original studies from these books and others have been adapted. I've also included a new study designed specifically for the technique we're working on.

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