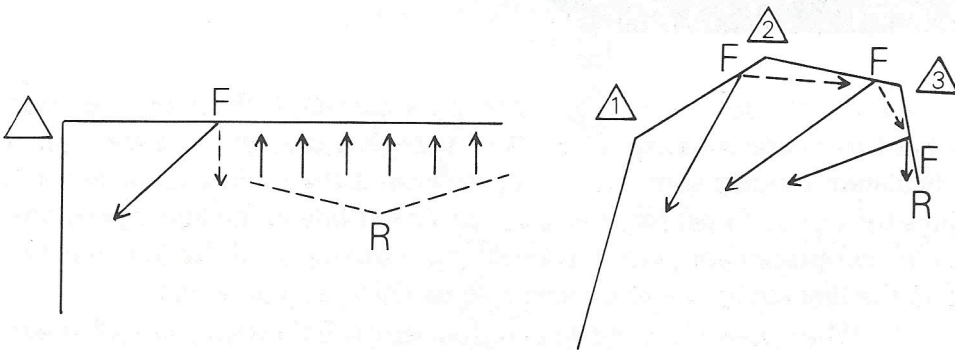


A more or less constant, subtle rotational “play” in the forearm is thus normal in good playing (see also p. 25). Unintentional outward turn of the hand in position shifts is an entirely different matter to which we will return in the discussion of movement. Before that, we must consider another aspect of left hand position which is a subject in itself: the various forms of bar.

THE BAR (BARRÉ, CAPOTASTO, CEJILLA)

Barred chords present certain unique difficulties, even to advanced players. The full bar in particular works at a mechanical disadvantage compared to a curved finger. With the finger fully extended, the joints cannot serve as subsidiary fulcra, and the flexor muscle hence can only partially contract. (Test this by alternately squeezing your forefinger, first extended and then curved, against your thumb and note the difference in the power with which the finger opposes the thumb.) The contrast in leverage between a straight and a curved finger can be diagrammed as follows:



Note in the bar the relative remoteness of force from resistance. By contrast, in the curved finger a flex at each joint both increases the force and makes its transmission to the strings more direct. The difficulty of the full bar is further compounded by variance in the size and shape of fingers and the general musculature of the hand.

There are some general aspects of efficient bar position which we can infer:

1. *A partial contraction between basal and middle segments is better than a completely straight finger.* In the case of very long fingers, all six strings may even be gripped by the middle and tip segments. For a hand of moderate size, the partial flex of the middle joint is still possible:

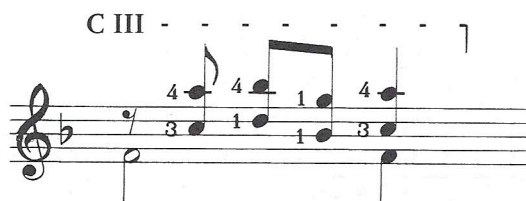


The value of this for the security of the grip, especially in the lower positions, is hard to overemphasize. First, the leverage is greater since the partial articulation permits some flexor contraction at the middle joint. Second, since the barred finger tends to press on its left side in the lower positions, the above placement permits the bony protuberance of the joint itself to hold the first string, thereby helping to produce a clear sound.

2. *When possible, use a five- or four-string bar rather than a full bar.* Most editions of guitar music make no distinction between four-, five-, and six-string bars.¹ This is unfortunate, because each represents a different sensation and a somewhat different technique. Almost all players will find the partial contraction described above quite easy for a five-string bar. (If the player cannot cover five strings with a partially bent finger, he or she needs a smaller instrument.) Consequently, in most situations where a bar is required as far as the fourth or fifth string, but not the sixth, this form is preferable.

There are exceptions, however. When the next formation is a six-string bar, it is usually better to cover all six strings, even though only four or five are necessary, to simplify the movement to the next position. When a smaller bar puts a sounding string into a “dead space” on the finger, such as the indentation between tip and middle segments, then a larger bar often helps

to avoid a buzz by placing the string under a fleshier part of the finger. The full bar may also provide a better base for fingers 3 and 4 in situations such as the following:

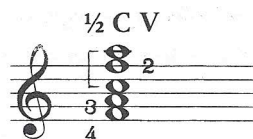


Although only the fourth string need be covered, a smaller bar here would push the moving fingers away from their work, weaken their arch, and lessen their reach. A full bar in this case and many like it allows the third and fourth fingers to play more naturally.

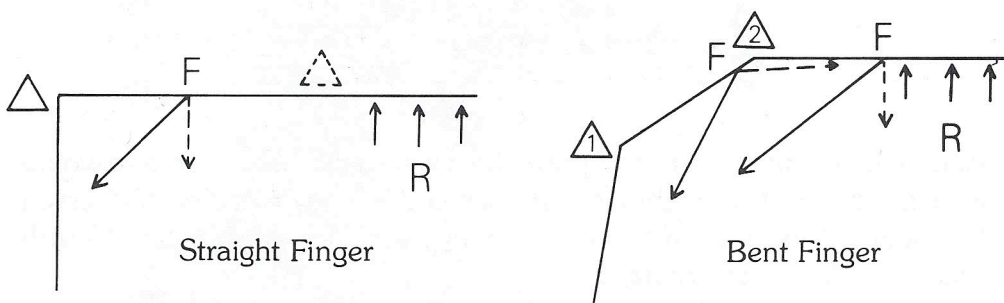
3. *The true half-bar (two or three strings) should be based on full contraction at the middle joint.*



Older methods sometime show the half-bar as a straight finger covering only two or three strings and even caution against bending the finger. Why this advice was ever offered, much less accepted, remains a mystery. The sheer inefficiency of such a position compared to the bent-finger half bar can quickly be proved merely by trying both on the following chord:



The advantage to the third and fourth fingers in ease of access, here and in comparable situations, leaves no doubt as to one major advantage of the bent finger. Another is the better leverage of the bar itself, as shown in the diagram below.



In the most efficient small bar the tip segment alone covers the strings to be depressed since this eliminates any wobble occasioned by the hinge of the joint. (For small hands, part of the middle segment may, if fact, be needed to cover three strings.) A corollary is that the small bar is not always confined to the first two or three strings; the collapsed tip segment also may be used to cover lower strings without recourse to the full bar:



PRINCIPLES OF MOVEMENT (I): THE ROLE OF THE ARM

All left-hand movements fall within the categories either of *position* or *shift*. Position movements include lateral exchanges of the fingers, plus one-fret extensions and contractions in which the thumb, although it may pivot quite freely, stays fixed to its point of support on the neck. Shifting movements relocate the thumb, whether by one fret or twelve.

During a shift, this temporary loss of contact plus the need to move quickly from one fret to another creates uncertainty. Careful fingering will help, especially the use of guide fingers. Guide fingers connect one position to another with a slide and serve as a mental and kinesthetic point of reference. Nonetheless, their use, even if quite clever, will not automatically make for effortless shifting; besides, we must often shift without a guide finger to help. The real "secret" of good shifting has to do rather with how we carry the hand from one position to another.

Bar Chord Position

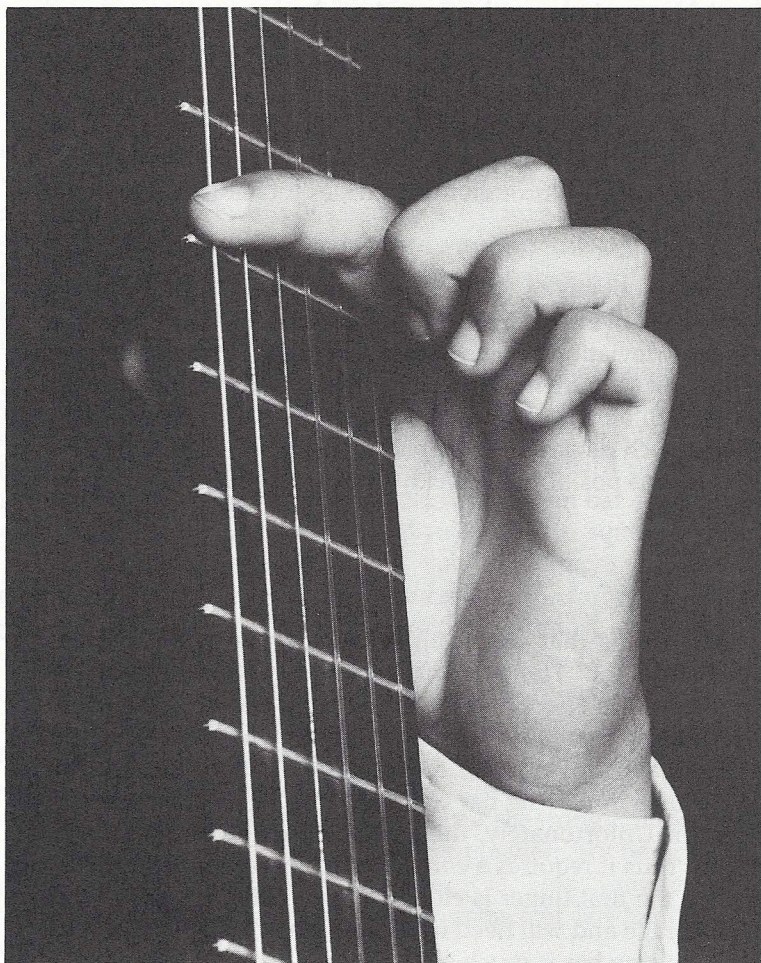
Fernando Sor recommends that one should “be sparing of the operations called barring and shifting.”⁹ The principal reason for avoiding bars is that playing them requires more effort than not. However, there are frequent occasions when bars are the best or only solutions for playing certain passages. So, if you have to use bars, why not look for the easiest ways of playing them?

A common mistake in playing bar chords is to hold the first finger literally like a straight bar. Unfortunately, the leverage provided by that position is not very great and thus it requires a considerable amount of energy to play the bar. However, if the first finger is curved to some degree, then you will have much more leverage and will need much less energy to play the bar. For example, the full six-string bar is much easier to play if the first finger is bent somewhat at the middle joint. It also helps to bend the base joint of the finger considerably so that the palm is close to the fingerboard. A sample of the curved full-bar position is shown in Figure 4-18.

The curved position can be used to special advantage in certain cases where some of the chord tones are held down by fingers other than the bar finger. In such cases, the bar finger only needs to exert pressure on those notes not pressed by the other fingers. In the five-string bar (a C minor chord) in Figure 4-19, the first finger is not only curved but is only pressing two notes, thus saving a great deal of energy.

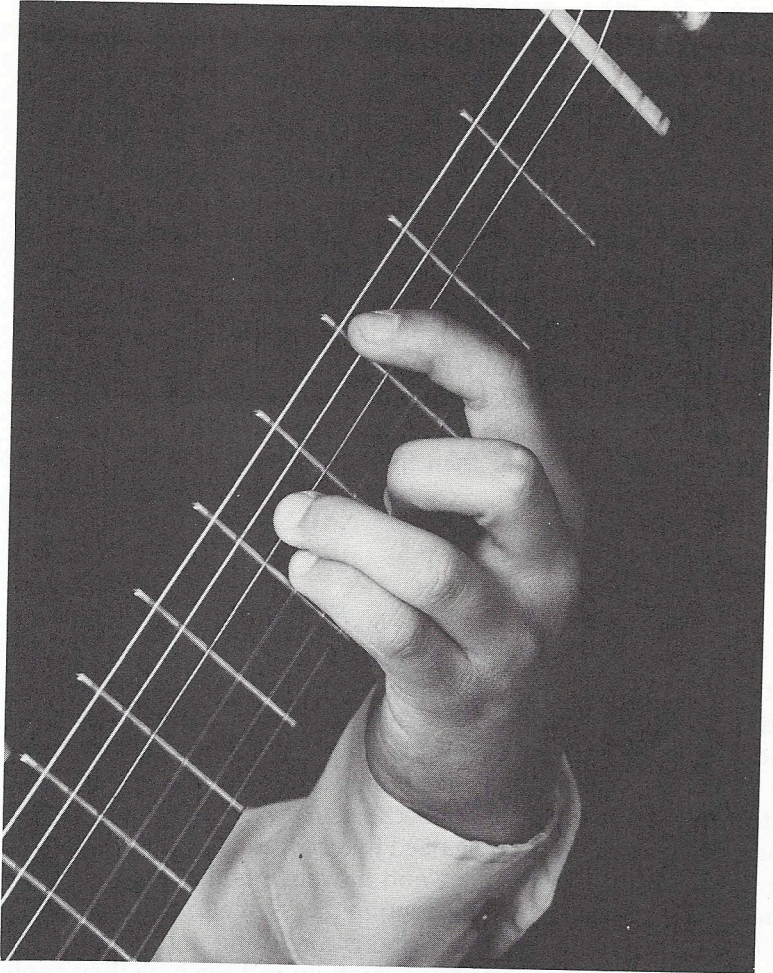
⁹Fernando Sor, *Method for the Spanish Guitar*, trans. A. Merrick, Da Capo Reprint Series (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), p. 48.

Figure 4-18 Full bar with curved index finger



If the second, third, and fourth fingers are raised, the strings that are under them will sound dead because the bar is just barely touching them; the first finger is curved such that it exerts pressure only on the fifth and first strings. This special technique can be very helpful in many situations. For a bar chord piece such as Sor's Op. 29, No. 1 (No. 19 in Segovia's edition of Sor Studies), the energy that can be saved by using this technique on many of the chords, particularly B^b in the first position, means the difference between playing it in relative comfort on the one hand and suffering through it with aching muscles on the other.

Figure 4-19 Partial bar with curved index finger



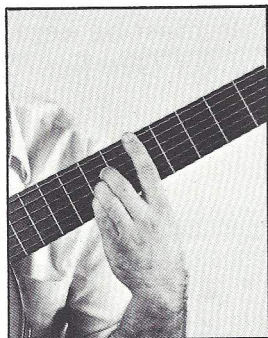
There are other energy-saving techniques for bar chords. You can use the gravity technique that we discussed earlier in this chapter and "hang" on the chords instead of squeezing them. This works best when combined with the curved bar finger described earlier. In this way of playing, you let the flesh of the bar finger roll up close against the fret and let the weight of the arm supply much of the needed pressure; thus little of the pressure comes from squeezing. To save energy, remember that the minimum bend in the wrist for a given position is generally best because the leverage is greater with less bending.

The thumb is perhaps the most important supporting point in the barre. The pressure on the fingerboard and neck should be equally divided between fingers and thumb with the barring first finger pressing most firmly between the proximal interphalangeal joint and the distal interphalangeal joint.

To add pressure to the barre without creating tension, roll the index finger toward the sound hole—do not, however, slide over the fret; keep the skin in the same place and simply roll the finger over. This also relaxes the other left hand fingers.

When barring without any other fingers down, the pressure of the thumb should be right behind the index finger. When other fingers are also holding notes, you must find the center of balance of all the fingers involved and direct the energy of the thumb to that point.

It is very important to strengthen the barre so that the other fingers are perfectly relaxed and able to move in any direction while the barre is being held (see figures 24, 25).



The Barre

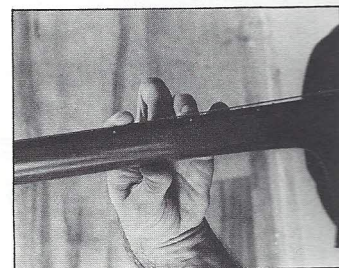


figure 24

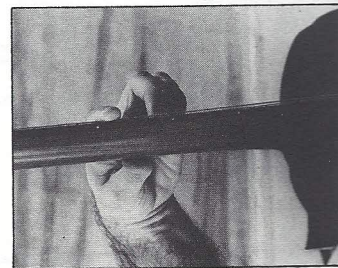


figure 25

EXERCISE NO. 14

Preparation of the Left-hand for Chordal Positioning; Preparation for the Barré

Goals:

- Independence and strength of left-hand fingers
- Understanding of the role of arm in chord playing
- For vertical extension and contraction of left-hand fingers
- Training of first finger for the barré

Practice approach:

- Avoid excess pressure
- Keep fingers on frets as indicated by note values
- Coordinate arm positioning (inwards and outwards) with hand position

A) Practise as notated, making sure exact durations and ties are respected

$\text{♩} = 60 - 80$

B) When properly assimilated, begin practising with the addition of four energetic 'strokes' of 1, on the corresponding fret. This finger should be fully extended to strike all 6 strings, before continuing the exercise (keep other fingers down, as noted)

When well assimilated, begin to descend, fret by fret, to 1st position.