

Gaspar Sanz left us this instruction for the left hand:

*"The left hand must be applied with **garbo** (gracefulness, gentility and elegance of manner) and **vizarria** (confidence of movement) to the fingerboard, keeping the thumb as the tiller of this sonorous vessel."*

I have always thought of the fingers of the left hand as five ballet dancers dancing beautifully on a stage (the fingerboard), and I cannot help feeling that Gaspar Sanz had a very similar image of the left hand when he referred to it with the terms "gracefulness, gentility, elegance" and "confidence". There is no better manner to describe the guitar than to call it a sonorous vessel, for the purpose of the guitar is none other than to transport those who play it and those who listen closer and closer toward finding happiness.

If we continue with the idea of the fingers being ballet dancers, we should train them as such. They must each know their parts independently of one another. The choreographer (the guitarist who decides on the fingering) must choreograph a piece to avoid clutter; one finger should not get in the way of another but should keep a smooth and beautiful flow of movement complimentary to the musical flow of a piece.

Fernando Sor tells us:

*"I saw no reason why the thumb, which plays such an important part in the right hand, should do nothing in the left hand. . . I therefore began by supposing, as an established principal, that being shorter than the fingers, and having the power of acting easily in the opposite direction, it might be brought to meet them and offer a point of support for the neck."*

This statement by Sor coincides perfectly with Gaspar Sanz's description of the thumb as the tiller. It indeed must be ready to accent and counterbalance the energy put out by the fingers at all times, and the fingers in turn must direct all their energy to the thumb. This balance is very much like a male dancer lifting up and supporting the female dancer.

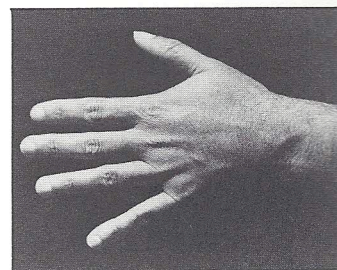
The left hand should always approach the fretboard in a position that allows each finger equal access to every string; this usually means that the knuckles will be parallel to the strings. In this position, each finger will be able to move, for example, from the first string to the sixth without moving the hand or arm (see figure 19).

The fingers should play close to the frets without covering them, for that would cause a pizzicato sound. When you play a note that does not sound good, freeze the movement and look at your left hand; see if the sound was caused by a bad finger position and, if so, try to correct it. Make sure you always press the string down with the same part of your fingertip; get the feeling of where the string should be under your finger. The complete weight of your fingers should go into the fingerboard. If the forces between your fingers and thumb are not balanced, the focus of the weight will not be correct and your fingers will not play with their full potential.

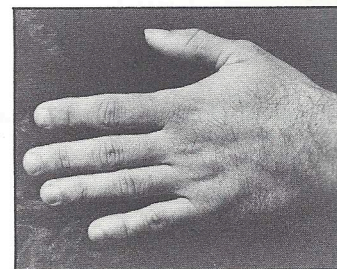
## LEFT HAND



Celedonio Romero



Celin Romero



Pepe Romero



Angel Romero

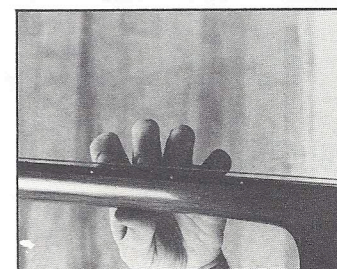


figure 19

### Left Hand Exchange And Synchronization Of Both Hands

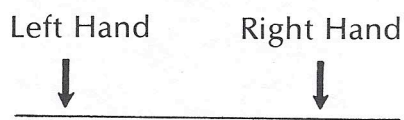


figure 20

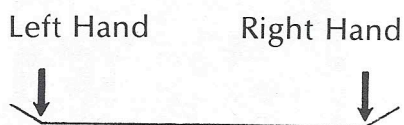


figure 21

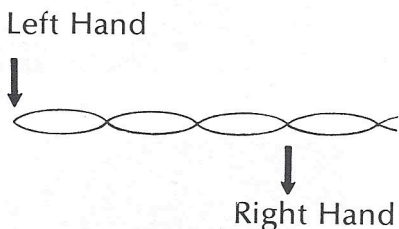


figure 22

Another very important principle to remember is to not make sudden movements with your left hand, but to take all the time you have available between notes; all your movements must be graceful. We should think only of the fingers being used, removing all awareness and energy from the fingers that are resting. At the same time, any and all fingers should be able to position themselves over any given string with the same ease and comfort.

The fingers work in much the same way as do the legs when we walk — only one leg at a time supports your weight and the other leg, although moving to take the next step, is completely relaxed. Imagine how terribly difficult walking would be if both legs were equally tense at all times. The fingers have to work in exactly the same way; this relaxation of the fingers that are not holding down a string has a rejuvenating effect, adding greatly to the acquisition of endurance.

The principle of exchange is as important to the left hand as it is to the right. At the moment a finger is released from holding down a string, energy is removed and given to the finger that has to play next. For example, when playing a chromatic scale, as the first finger plays, the second should be directly over the next fret, prepared to play. The next thought or impulse should simultaneously release the first finger, play the second and prepare the third over the fret it is to play next. The next thought releases the second, plays the third and prepares the fourth, and so on.

This exchange has to be coordinated and timed exactly with the right hand in the following order:

1. The string is touched exactly at the same time by the left and right hand fingers (see figure 20).
2. Pressure is applied by both fingers, also at the same time (see figure 21).
3. The left hand holds on while the right hand and finger lets go of the string, setting it into vibration (see figure 22).

These three steps are, of course, generated by one thought and are affected in one continuous motion. The movements of lifting the left hand fingers off the strings and of placing the next fingers down have to be coordinated both in their velocity and timing.

To practice this you should play slowly but with velocity in your movements (i.e., the time between notes can be great, but each note should be produced quickly with definite, not jerky, movements). When practicing slowly, you have plenty of time to direct your fingers in the right motions and to check them after each move to make sure they are playing properly.

## Left Hand Pressure

The way in which the pressure is applied is most important. To add solidity to the left hand fingers as they hold a chord, let the weight of the relaxed arm to be added to the pressure of the fingers. The arm should be held up by the pressure of the fingers and thumb so that if someone were suddenly to remove the guitar from your fingers, your left hand and forearm would drop. When the fingers shift position or release pressure on the neck, the arm is held up by its own power. This interchange offers both arm and hand a chance to rest intermittently.

Adding the weight of your arm also causes the fingers automatically to play perpendicular to the strings.

When shifting fingers, the thumb does not drastically change position; the only change is the direction in which the thumb's pressure is applied, and this depends on the change in finger configuration.

Releasing a left hand finger from duty is done in the same manner as in the right hand, with the movement originating in the metacarpo-phalangeal joint, never allowing the proximal interphalangeal joint to open up completely. Then you will always be ready to play, consistently keeping the necessary curvature to your fingers.

Movement at the proximal interphalangeal joint leads the finger to find the proper string, and movement at the metacarpophalangeal joint brings the finger to touch the string. This second movement must be executed with velocity, letting the string stop the motion of the finger. The contact should be as between two trapeze acrobats—secure, with confidence and perfect timing.

The left hand fingers should always play as if they are hammering, such that if you stop plucking with the right hand you should be able to hear the notes being hammered by the left hand. The same principle of the follow-through in the rest stroke of the right hand applies to the left: let the fretboard stop the motion of the finger in the same manner that the string stops a rest stroke. Make sure that the string is pressed straight into the fingerboard, not up or down, so that the strings are always the same distance apart on the fingerboard.