

Frank A. Wallace

Polyphonic Exercises

and Examples

how to balance
multi-voiced textures
and create more depth
in your musical art

please search #techandtone or go to
<http://www.frankwallace.com/techandtone/polyphonic-technique-part1/>
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HELPFUL HINTS

- 1) If one uses the three combination strokes described, all the various dynamic combinations can be accomplished. It is crucial to think only about each individual combination at first, before trying to make music.
- 2) Be physical! A forte is a forceful stroke, piano is light. Forte presses the string and you feel its tension, piano is like a brush glancing over the string, up and away. Conceiving of the physical sensation between thumb and fingers is essential to understanding and execution and actually hearing the result. Force has both magnitude and direction, use it.
- 3) Rest stroke forte comes from the base knuckle of the finger, piano free stroke from the mid-joint with very little follow through.
- 4) Take advantage of each fingers natural position - the a is more separate and distant from the thumb, so *ponticello* is possible while playing *tasto* with the thumb...explore how this aids dynamics.

BACKGROUND

I spent more than twenty years devoted to the music of Renaissance Spain. Seven composers left about 700 works for the *vihuela de mano* that still exist. The vast majority of them are intricate polyphonic fantasías, inspired by Josquin and other famous authors of the day. The clear presentation of these magnificent works became my passion.

The skills required for these fantasías, and my two included etudes, as well as many many other works, require a knowledge of imitation. Musical imitation is the same as any other, a motive or phrase is repeated in its identical form, at a different time and/or pitch. It is essential that the imitation be exact

in expression (dynamic, color) as well as form. When these iterations overlap is when the fun begins and when the guitarist needs the techniques described in this volume to achieve clarity and continuity. Bach reached the ultimate expression of this concept in *The Art of the Fugue*.

My two “simple” etudes presented at the end of this booklet use repeated notes as motives, thus requiring little left hand preoccupation and total focus on right hand control: dynamic, articulate and timbral. The judicious use of rest stroke and free stroke with a continuous flow of timbral changes enhance the auditory effects. In other words, when playing a forte, use rest stroke and *sul ponticello*, for piano: free stroke and *sul tasto*. It is then essential, after mastering the three basic combination strokes, that more subtle gradations become possible and useful. Play as if you are singing!

Any texture can be colored in this manner: arpeggios, repeated chords, pointillistic sections. Indeed the purpose of arpeggio or tremolo is to create a more sustained texture, but that texture can be constantly shifting in hue. Take advantage of the inherently different tone of each nail, or each finger’s proximity to the bridge. Don’t just alternate i and m because it’s what your supposed to do – rather explore using one finger or changing not only attack, but timbre for an accented note. Mastery of these techniques will lead to new modes of expression in non-imitative music. Dissonance or consonance can be greatly enhanced by the use of color – try playing the dominant chord nasally and the resolution more roundly: or use an *e* vowel on the dissonance and an *ah* to resolve it.

Find blogs, tweets and videos on technique and tone by searching my handle #techandtone

Polyphonic Exercises

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EX. #1 *f* rest stroke *p* free stroke

p free stroke *f* rest stroke

EX. #2 *f* rest stroke *mf* free stroke *p* free stroke *mf* free stroke *simile*

p free stroke *mf* free stroke *f* rest stroke *mf* free stroke

EX. #3 *ff* *f* *mf* *mp* *p* *mp* *mf* *f*

p *mp* *mf* *f* *ff* *f* *mf* *mp*

EX. #4 *ff* *pp* *ff* *pp*

pp *ff* *pp* *ff*

EX. #5 — Hemiola (3 against 2)

The goal of this exercise is to use timbral and dynamic changes together to aid definition of the rhythmic structure. Emphasize the difference in the timbre of i, m and a, so that the i is fat and round close to the hole, m is moderate and a is more ponticello, thinner and weaker.

rest stroke free stroke

rest stroke

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Preparatory Exercises

Single String Studies from Sketches I

alternate loud rest strokes on melody and soft free strokes accompany

Gentle $\text{♩} = 52-64$

I. 5th string – A natural minor

II
etc.
V X V VIII V
rit. a tempo
VI II

III. 1st string – E melodic minor

Longing $\text{♩} = 88-98$

molto ritardando

a tempo *poco rit.* *poco rit.* *rit.*
l.v. l.v.

Examples

from Duo de Josquin - Fuenllana

Two staves of musical notation in G major, 3/4 time. The first staff shows a melodic line with a fermata and a triplet. The second staff shows a bass line with a triplet and a fermata. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1-4.

from Fantasía 6, Book 2, Narvaez

Three staves of musical notation in G major, 3/4 time. The first staff shows a melodic line with a fermata and a triplet. The second staff shows a bass line with a triplet and a fermata. The third staff shows a melodic line with a fermata and a triplet. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1-4. The piece ends with "etc."

EX. #6

One staff of musical notation in G major, 4/4 time. The exercise consists of a series of chords and intervals, with a fermata and a triplet. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1-4.

EX. #7 (from Villa-Lobos Prelude #4)

One staff of musical notation in G major, 3/4 time. The exercise consists of a series of chords and intervals, with a fermata and a triplet. The dynamics *f* and *p* are indicated. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1-4. The piece ends with "etc."

from F. Sor Study 1 (Segovia)

Three staves of musical notation for F. Sor Study 1 (Segovia). The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature (C). The music consists of a series of chords and melodic lines with various articulations such as accents and slurs. The second and third staves continue the piece with similar notation and articulations.

from Cunctipotens Genitor, by FW

Two staves of musical notation for Cunctipotens Genitor by FW. The first staff starts with a treble clef, a common time signature (C), and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It includes a 4-measure rest and various rhythmic patterns. The second staff continues the piece, featuring a 1/4 time signature and a 4-measure rest. The music is marked with slurs and accents.

Andantino ♩ = 84

Two staves of musical notation for Andantino. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature (C). It includes a 4-measure rest and various rhythmic patterns. The second staff continues the piece, featuring a 1/4 time signature and a 4-measure rest. The music is marked with slurs and accents. The tempo is marked as Andantino with a quarter note equal to 84 beats per minute.

from Loor (Nuevas Cantigas) by FW

Musical score for 'Loor (Nuevas Cantigas)' by FW. The score is written in treble clef with a 3/4 time signature. It features a melody with various ornaments and dynamics. The first staff includes a triplet of eighth notes and a slur over a quarter note. The second staff has a slur over a half note and a dynamic marking of *f* *allargando*. The third staff shows a triplet of eighth notes and a dynamic marking of *p*. The piece concludes with a final chord.

from The Pilgrim's Road (From the Windy Place) by FW

Musical score for 'The Pilgrim's Road (From the Windy Place)' by FW. The score is written in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It features a melody with various ornaments and dynamics. The first staff includes a triplet of eighth notes and a dynamic marking of *p*. The second staff has a dynamic marking of *f* and a dynamic marking of *mp*. The third staff has a dynamic marking of *f* and a dynamic marking of *pp*. The piece concludes with a final chord.

from First Lute Suite – JS Bach

Musical score for 'First Lute Suite' by JS Bach. The score is written in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It features a melody with various ornaments and dynamics. The first staff includes a triplet of eighth notes and a dynamic marking of *p*. The second staff has a dynamic marking of *f* and a dynamic marking of *pp*. The piece concludes with a final chord.

VI. Polly #1

for Trevor LaBarge

Lento ♩ = 44

The musical score consists of two staves in G major, 4/4 time. The tempo is Lento (♩ = 44). The score is divided into six systems. The first system includes dynamics *pp*, *p*, and *f*, with articulation markings *tasto* and *pont*. The second system features *p* and *f* dynamics. The third system includes *pp*, *f*, and *pp* dynamics. The fourth system features *pp*, *ff*, *f*, and *pp* dynamics. The fifth system includes *pp*, *f*, and *pp* dynamics. The sixth system features *f*, *p*, *f*, *p*, *mf*, and *pp* dynamics, ending with the instruction *molto ritardando*.

* Use timbre (position of attack in right hand) combined with type of stroke (rest or free) to enhance dynamics and separation of voices.

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Croton Falls, NY

VII. Polly #II

for Celeste McClain

Largo ♩ = 52

⑤ *p*

f *p* *f* *mp*

③ *p* *f* *f* *p* *f*

mp

f *mf* *p*

p *f* *ff* *mp* *p* *l.v.*

molto ritardando

p *ppp* ④ *molto vibrato*

January 12, 2020
Croton Falls, NY