

# Carcassi's Scale Exercises.

David Raleigh Arnold \*

## 1 Introduction

Matteo Carcassi was a successful *touring* concert guitarist, composer, and teacher working in Europe and England in the early 19th century. His "Complete Method for the Guitar" has been in print continuously since 1838. Nine of these exercises are taken from the first part of the method and three are from part two.

These exercises promote better right hand position and steadiness for speed and accuracy. They avoid or undo damage caused by relaxation techniques. Use your metronome at a variety of tempos, not at the one where you can *almost* make it. As a daily routine, about six times each of the first nine is plenty for a young person. Even accomplished players can benefit from practicing these if they never have done the like. When you play them very well, move on, don't "adapt" them. They were written to be played in a certain way, to attain certain goals.

I haven't made substantive changes, but considerable fingering has been added. This is not to make up for any deficiency in Carcassi's work, instead it is to make up for deficiencies in modern playing and teaching. Unfortunately, many guitarists today do not learn soon enough that notes have endings as well as beginnings. In Carcassi's pieces for beginners, that is a central issue, well considered and well realized. I have applied to these "scales", as Carcassi called them, that which was explicit in the pieces originally published on the same pages.

## 2 Essential Instructions for the Right Hand

### 2.1 General

Carcassi played without right hand fingernails, as did Sor. I don't know why anyone would voluntarily bear such a cross. Fingerprint ridges and perspiration can suddenly cause surprises. Nevertheless, if your lifestyle does not permit fingernails, suck it up and do without. Millions have.

- Keep your fingers where the strings are, never on the top.
- Keep the index to the right of the thumb, so that they never meet.
- The thumb side of the hand should be closer to the top of the instrument than the small finger side. In the language of anatomy, your hand should be somewhat pronated, and not supinated.
- You should not have to move much to lay your thumb down across the strings to mute them. Consider using the palm to do that to be a bad habit. Using the thumb for that is a much more useful and sometimes an essential technique.
- Bend the wrist less, or not at all, by bringing the head of the guitar up. Carcassi advocated the use of a footstool under the left foot.

### 2.2 Specific to these Exercises

- *All* of the solo notes on the three bass strings are played with the thumb *apoyando*. *Apoyando* denotes a "trap stroke" meaning that the digit comes to lean against the next string as it leaves the string just played.
- *All* of the solo notes on the three treble strings are played with the index and middle fingers alternating, playing all notes with an escape stroke. The finger playing an escape stroke does not make contact with any other string after sounding the note.
- The starting finger is indicated, and the alternation is strict. Speed, accuracy, and a rich powerful tone are greatly enhanced by keeping a steady hand. You must move the string. The string must not move you.

---

\*©2004 David Raleigh Arnold. Please see the end of this document for restrictions.

### 3 Instructions for the Left Hand

#### 3.1 General

- Keep the thumb straight across the neck, never along it, to support both sides of the hand equally or the 4th finger side, which is weaker, a bit more.
- The wrist may bend outward but it must not bend inward. Over time it will bend less, as you develop.

#### 3.2 Specific to the Exercises

- “To facilitate the execution of the scales, it is necessary that the fingers of the left hand should be held sufficiently separated and so placed that they may be put on and taken off the strings without moving the hand.” That’s a good idea for now, but don’t overdo it.
- All notes which can be played with an open string should be. If there is a left hand finger indication, it can’t be.
- Assume position, until you meet a contrary indication. Stay in the same position until you meet a contrary indication.

I am introducing something completely new in fingering. An “s” placed before a finger indication, whether that finger be left or right hand, indicates with which finger the note in question is to be *silenced*. The various techniques involved are extremely important. It is ironic that they are even more essential to playing easy music than to playing more difficult music, but that is simply because there are more open strings in easy music.

### 4 Twelve Scale Studies of Carcassi

#### 4.1 Exercise in C Major

Musical notation for Exercise in C Major. The first staff shows a scale with fingerings: i, i, i, 1 3, 4, i, st. The second staff shows the continuation of the scale with fingerings: 4, i, a, a.

#### 4.2 Exercise in G Major

Musical notation for Exercise in G Major. The first staff shows a scale with fingerings: i, m, m, sm, si. The second staff shows the continuation of the scale with fingerings: st, st, i.

#### 4.3 Exercise in D Major

Musical notation for Exercise in D Major. The first staff shows a scale with fingerings: 1 3 m 1, 1 2 m, 2 3, 2 1, 2 3, 1 2, 4 2, 2 3, 2. The second staff shows the continuation of the scale with fingerings: 3 2 1 4, 1 3 m, i, st 2, st, m.

#### 4.4 Exercise in A Major

Musical score for Exercise 4.4 in A Major. The score consists of two staves. The first staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a common time signature. It contains a melodic line with various fingering numbers (i, 2, 1, 4, 1, 1, 2, 4, 1, 1, 2, 1, 3) and a final measure with a fermata. The second staff is in bass clef with a key signature of two sharps and a common time signature. It contains a bass line with fingering numbers (4, 1, 4, 2) and a final measure with a fermata and a 'st' marking.

#### 4.5 Exercise in E Major

Musical score for Exercise 4.5 in E Major. The score consists of two staves. The first staff is in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a common time signature. It contains a melodic line with fingering numbers (i, m, m) and a final measure with a fermata and a 'sm' marking. The second staff is in bass clef with a key signature of three sharps and a common time signature. It contains a bass line with a final measure with a fermata.

#### 4.6 Exercise in F Major

Musical score for Exercise 4.6 in F Major. The score consists of two staves. The first staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a common time signature. It contains a melodic line with a final measure with a fermata and an 'i' marking. The second staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. It contains a bass line with a final measure with a fermata and an 'i' marking.

#### 4.7 Exercise in A Minor (Melodic)

Musical score for Exercise 4.7 in A Minor (Melodic). The score consists of two staves. The first staff is in treble clef with a key signature of no sharps or flats and a common time signature. It contains a melodic line with a final measure with a fermata and an 'i' marking. The second staff is in bass clef with a key signature of no sharps or flats and a common time signature. It contains a bass line with a final measure with a fermata and an 'i' marking.

#### 4.8 Exercise in E Minor

Musical score for Exercise 4.8 in E Minor. The score consists of two staves. The first staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature. It contains a melodic line with a final measure with a fermata and a 'si' marking. The second staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp and a common time signature. It contains a bass line with a final measure with a fermata and an 'i' marking.

#### 4.9 Exercise in D Minor

1  
s1  
st i  
st

#### 4.10 Exercise in B Minor

m  
1 2 4  
1 2 1  
4  
m  
sm  
2

#### 4.11 Exercise in B $\flat$ Major

i  
i  
1 1  
i  
3

#### 4.12 Exercise in E $\flat$ Major

i  
i  
i  
1  
2

### 5 Afterword

Whenever there were two simultaneous notes in the music it is seldom that playing both with a trap stroke is a realistic choice. Usually, if it is possible to do either the upper or lower note with a trap stroke a choice must be made.

All of the “classical” players chose to play the lower note *apoyando* rather than the upper note, because it made a far more positive difference in the tone. Nothing has changed. It still does today. Learning the trap stroke with the thumb is a must. You will sound better. The best time to learn it is when you are a beginner, because it soon becomes much more of a help than a hindrance, and because it’s never too soon to start sounding better. Play the exercises legato, which does not mean that a note continues to sound after the next note is played, and does mean that a note does not cease to sound before the next note begins to sound.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Feel free to use this document in unaltered form. While this document is copyrighted, the music in it is obviously almost entirely in the public domain. The author claims copyright to any recordings of these pieces or midi versions which may accompany this document. This document was produced using GNU software, especially the incomparable LilyPond typesetting program. The possession of this document does not confer on the bearer any rights at all. For any payment for copies of this document, you will remit to Amnesty International \$1.00 US or 50% of the sale price, whichever is larger, for each copy sold. That offer applies only to the latest version of this document, and is rescinded for older versions of this document, which may not be distributed. dra@openguitar.com