

CHAPTER III

**THE GUITARIST AND HIS TOTAL
DEVELOPMENT**

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A. TECHNIQUE AT THE SERVICE OF ART

One of the major concerns in mastering an instrument has always been *technique*. Rather than being a mere outcome of the activity of the fingers, technique should be conceived as a process that is under the complete control of the voluntary system of the cerebrum: it should never be an unmeditated state.

There is one thing that has to be learned: the trade; but there is something else that is our very own and that no one can teach us.

A performer is always faced with two problems. One concerns the purely mechanical difficulties contained within a musical work, the other the interpretative and expressive aspects of the music. It is highly advisable to tackle the latter problem first, for the artistic domain should be entered from the very beginning. Is it conceivable to plunge into a piece before knowing what is to be expressed? This is a point that should never be lost sight of since without it would come the risk of distorting the very nature of art. Were the trade, in its literal sense ever to become the main goal, the outcome would be devoid of art itself.

It is a fact that a performer could never be a great interpreter without a solid technique. Nevertheless, the starting point is what counts: that which comes from the spirit goes to the spirit; all other things belong to the laboratory. The mere player basically differs from the true performer in that he orients himself primarily around the mechanics of playing and keeps apart from everything else in order to highlight his digital juggling (which he treats as if it were a precious gift) and gives his technique personality, autonomy and value, characteristics that clearly do not pertain to it. Through this power of which he is proud, he hopes to obtain the desired traits of the virtuoso.

It can even be asked, What purpose would a technique that requires so much sacrifice serve? What possible justification could such hypertrophy have? It is absurd to pretend to be making music this way. With technique as the main goal, void of all else, art can be only dehumanized. Beware of that monster! Once created, it must be tamed and made to serve the pure values of art, for otherwise, only the contrary and irreversible effects would be obtained.

Spirit and substance are two forces that must be joined in the creation of art. In this way, substance would become somewhat spiritual and the spirit would somehow take on material form. Art pertains to the realm of the soul, and technique belongs to that of reason. Through the happy union of these two elements is born an artistic manifestation, a real symbiosis created by man.

B. WHAT IS SIMPLE DERIVES FROM AN INTELLIGENTLY COMBINED COMPLEX

The gradual acquisition of mechanical ability, or technique per se, has to be linked to various stages of development during a specific period of study. At first, the different elements are studied in isolation as though they were the only objective to be attained. At a more advanced stage, all the isolated elements can then be related to form a proper technique, a genuine mechanism.

From each movement is born every other: without complete knowledge and mastery of the motor complex, the total acquisition of these movements is not possible, and it would be useless to pretend otherwise. Each activity of the fingers is made up of a number of different movements that work together in association and converge in order to culminate in one precise action. In other words, a simple activity as such does not exist; rather it should be thought of as a complex from which the mind intelligently selects the combinations which will be used.

Total mastery is the result of controlling individual elements, and making correct use of it depends on the choice of the different combinations. This means then that technique must be responsive to conscious work that is thoroughly effected, and that other concepts relating to natural aptitude or, worse yet, to chance should be rejected.

Analysis in itself, along with the aid of a developed and defined logic with respect to the movements to be made, must not in any way be construed as an attack upon our intuitive impulses. In fact, the Emotional and the Subjective come fully alive, just as they should, when analysis is allowed to serve as a firm platform for the free expression of emotion.

Let us bear in mind that real work is done only when isolated exercises are prepared in advance and that the outcome is positive and effective when these are properly put together. Speed and freedom of movements, or professional ease and dexterity, are engendered in all that has been said. The combination, the correct interrelationship between different actions, will give us in the end the perfection and precision we seek.

In the first phase, in order to overcome a given difficulty, it is important to divide and isolate the different components and to work on them separately. Once this stage has been assimilated, a correct execution would consist of *the sum total* of every simple and partial movement submissively responding to the stimuli sent out by the brain.

Upon reaching a higher stage of development, simple movements as such no longer exist. It should be added, however, that these movements may *appear* at first sight to be simple, but that in reality EACH APPARENTLY SIMPLE MOVEMENT IS THE RESULT OF THE INTELLIGENT COMBINATION OF SEVERAL PARTIAL MOVEMENTS OF ITS COMPONENTS.

From this we can conclude that *the mechanism employed and the mental representation of what is to be effected have a direct bearing on the precision of each movement.*

Intelligent use of the different elements of the motor complex (arm-hand-fingers), and the active (direct) or passive (indirect) participation of these elements through exact *fijación* (see below) at a determined moment and place, lead to precision in instrumental execution. As such, PRECISION IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE LOGICAL AND REASONED BASIS FOR EVERY MOVEMENT AND FIJACIÓN PERFORMED.

C. MUSCULAR FATIGUE

Consider the following. The accumulation of useless hours of machine-like and unintelligent work; the lack of a theoretical founda-

tion from which to choose the appropriate mechanism; the almost exclusive employment of the fingers for each determined end while ignoring strong and more capable elements; the erroneous but fashionable belief that the main factor in the education of the student can be measured by the number of study hours—all these are counter productive and inevitably lead to *general and muscular fatigue*. In the long run, *negative habits* will develop, habits that can turn into an almost insurmountable barrier that would stand in the way of the redevelopment of the well-intentioned instrumentalist. *A negative habit can be defeated and abolished only through the employment of another constructive, but opposed and stronger habit, one capable of undoing the old one.*

In what corresponds directly to instrumental technique, it can be said that work in which the mind does not participate actively *should be considered harmful and noxious* for the real development of the technical faculties.

Taken as a habit, the chronic repetition of automated mechanical defects in a passage containing technical difficulties would develop into a vice that requires an obstinate and useless increase in the amount of work. Besides the unfortunately insufficient improvement, the inevitable consequence of this approach will be exhaustion and general fatigue. What is lacking is a *knowledge* of how to arrange every movement intelligently, allowing the superior will of the mind to determine the means of action that can comply with the principle of *maximum results through minimum effort*.

It must be understood that general and muscular fatigue cannot be attenuated solely through repetition which is not impelled by a purpose that guides all of the movements, and that THE ISOLATED WORK OF THE FINGERS IS THE MAIN CAUSE OF MUSCULAR FATIGUE.

The selective and conscious use of *fijación* can yield a radical change that eliminates gratuitous and useless fatigue and that transforms the difficult into the easy and the impossible into the completely feasible. The resultant eloquence comes from the use of a technique that works on the interest and not on the capital of one's maximum resources.

D. FIJACIÓN

Fijación (a Spanish term literally meaning *fixation*) will be defined as the VOLUNTARY AND MOMENTARY NULLIFICATION OR IMMOBILITY of one or more articulations for the purpose of allowing stronger and more capable elements to perform in a particular way. *Fijación* is, therefore, a *voluntary act which controls a specific articulation and temporarily cancels it in order to permit a movement or a force to be transmitted through it. In this way, the articulation can function as a bond or a bridge.*

Depending on the dynamic level, timbre, speed requirements, or any other performing nuance, it is through *fijación* that stronger muscles that are called upon will be of service. The work of the fingers could thus be taken over by the hand, the wrist or the arm; *this mechanism applies, of course, to the activity of both hands.*

It must be pointed out that nullifying an articulation *never implies a state of rigidity*. Furthermore, *fijación* must not only begin just when necessary, but must stop immediately when its need has terminated, with the articulation in question resuming its flexibility and readiness for any other mechanical demands.

E. LOGICAL SOLUTIONS AND HARD WORK: MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE? THE NOTION OF RELAXATION

For his complete development, the guitarist must have a *concrete and conscious attitude towards his instrument* (THEORY) and a *correct digito-mechanical formation* (TECHNIQUE). Theory is a premeditated mental attitude based on reasoning while technique is the application of that theory. Correct playing is the result of appropriately combining these two over a period of time.

Tiredness or muscular fatigue cannot be reduced, and even less made to disappear, by working daily and repeatedly on an exercise *when the real cause of this fatigue lies in the defective use of technique, and if what is lacking is the awareness of the various movements and their associations that can be made through fijación*.

One of the precious faculties of a true performer is *knowing how to select his movements*. SELECTION IS THE MARK OF THE CREATOR, a faculty that *belongs to the mind*, and the hands are those external elements at the disposal of the guitarist.

Fatigue is most efficiently avoided by knowing how to employ stronger, fitter elements for each determined goal. That is to say, that when a finger cannot perform a certain movement or movements naturally and with ease, *fijación* must be voluntarily called upon in order to delegate a component of the hand-arm complex to do it. This is why it is indispensable for all the parts of the motor complex to be completely trained. TRAINING OF THE FINGERS CANNOT BE CONSIDERED COMPLETE WITHOUT THAT OF THE HAND, WRIST AND ARM.

Although every action culminates at the fingertips, very often it does not have its origin in the finger itself; rather, the impulse is momentarily allowed to come from somewhere else. It is in these moments that the fingers execute a function similar to that of the nails: they act *passively* and are directed by other elements.

GENUINE STUDY TAKES PLACE DURING SHORT INTERVALS AND IN MOMENTS OF GREAT MENTAL CONCENTRATION. Its value should be measured by the level of concentration that correct playing requires and never by the number of hours employed. Not only might fatigue and exhaustion serve as a good indication that cramming is unsuitable, but it is clear that a reservoir of energy is necessary for much of the technical work to be done.

This is how to avoid the unconscious and automated development of skills, and to do away with the absurdity of repeating, with inappropriate means, the same parts or passages of a piece. The choice of the

correct movement has to be made intelligently so that the various skills could be performed without unnecessary muscular contractions.

The intelligent use of fijación permits those muscles which are not working to relax. By way of example, consider the lifting of a pencil with the hand. The hand, being capable of raising a considerably heavier weight than that of the pencil, can do this while completely relaxed, because here the potential (hand) is much greater than the resistance (pencil). What would happen, however, if now we were to lift the heaviest weight the hand could manage, i.e., if the potential and the resistance were equalized? The state of relaxation would be eliminated because we would be thus exerting the maximum tension on the muscles and thereby inviting fatigue. Just the same, we could recover that state if, through the necessary *fijación*, we were to add the strength of the arm to that of the hand.

It seems, therefore, that relaxation is linked to *stimulating work* in which the muscles put into play *only a part* of their potential for any given task. Every muscle can be said to own a "capital" that must be carefully safeguarded so that what is used is solely the "interest" from it. It is here that lies the importance of *fijación*—the concept by which fitter muscles can be used to avoid excessive labor.

As useless muscular contractions must be considered unsound and energy-wasting, it is indispensable to eliminate them from all exercises and skills. It is then prudent first to meditate on and select the various movements and *fijaciones* to be employed. Each repetition of false and mistaken movements hinders all freedom and eloquence, exacts a worthless increase in one's work, and greatly decreases the likelihood of acquiring mastery. One should, therefore, work towards MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY THROUGH MINIMUM EFFORT, the elimination of hypertrofied automatism, and the assembling and converting of Technique into what can be labelled PROFESSIONAL MEMORY.

The repeating of a particular movement will generate in time a *muscular memory analogous to this movement*. Repetition develops into habit which in turn induces and coordinates the functioning of the same task. Little by little, it retreats from the direct and constant act of intelligence, of the conscious, in order to become a reflex conditioned by a memory impulse (engram) that conducts forthcoming tasks. This impulse *can be either negative or positive* depending on whether the movements that were originally performed in a mentally conscious form, and that were later repeated until their total assimilation, were erroneous or not.

It is when the correct approach is used that constructive logic serves as an aid. Each movement is related to the one before and to the one after in a way that is coherent and that is directly dominated by the thought process, which is actually the coordinator of the motor mechanism. The freedom in one's movements, and even speed, are then forthrightly obtainable through the understanding and application of the preceding notions; the interrelationship between movements proceeds naturally and logically.

If the whole mechanical part of technique consists of the sum of each isolated movement, and if each attitude of the fingers also corresponds to some parallel mental image, it can therefore be stated that TECHNIQUE IS, IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, A SERIES OF MENTAL ASSOCIATIONS, a training of the mind that will rule all the impulses and movements of the fingers, as well as a total coordination and identification

that can respond to the voluntary process as a direct propellant and principle motor element.

The sense of security gained from the education of the mind, this voluntary struggle towards mastery of technique, leads to a state of *mental relaxation*. The guitarist who is aware that his knowledge level is below that exacted by the music he wishes to play must put himself in a state of excessive mental strain in order to compensate for what he cannot understand and assimilate. In this particular case mental relaxation could not exist. If it is to emerge naturally, his mental command must be greater than the demands of the musical work.

We can now affirm that relaxation has to function on two parallel levels, one physical, the other mental, and that both of these develop, in the end, through a process of understanding and over a period of time.

It is convenient to pause at this point and consider the fact that both types of relaxation, the easing of both muscular and mental tension, are effected *voluntarily*. A passive state of relaxation, such as exists in sleep, is inconceivable, for what is needed is a state of vigilance in which mental activity is constant.

Relaxation can be said to be a state at one and the same time *permanent and intermittent*. The permanency comes from the fact that there will always be muscles that are in repose, for it is primordial that those that are not needed be relaxing. It is intermittent because, depending on the requirements during playing, the relaxing muscles will be in permutation. What is being dealt with here is *partial* relaxation—complete loosening of muscles would imply inactivity—during which a muscle can be isolated and slackened while others are being activated. It is a guided repose that would last for as long as the mechanical requirements allow; and regardless of its brevity, whatever relaxation could be gained would be of utmost importance. The muscles that do not participate actively in the attack of notes must be isolated from the others, inasmuch as that is possible, so as to maintain them in a state of rest.

There is, therefore, the vast possibility of always working with fresh and relaxed muscles that are not molested by permanent tension; in any other way, the constant effort would invariably lead to a state of rigidity. Incidentally, if we were to add up all those intermittent and tiny moments of rest in every active part of the motor complex, the total would appear rather awesome and, if viewed from outside their musical context; even peculiar and almost inconceivable. These brief moments, however, are unnoticeable because they are below our auditory and visual thresholds.

It is to be understood that only through time does the gradual acquisition of muscular control offer the possibility of momentarily inhibiting the activity of certain sections of the motor complex, while the remainder continues to be at work. So it is that in the learning process the first step involves knowing how to *perform* a given task; it is on a later and more professional level that one should be capable of *suppressing* the functioning of certain muscles for the purpose of relaxing them during short intervals.

F. SOME SITUATIONS THAT REQUIRE FIJACIÓN

Without biasing the indispensable analysis to be treated later, here follows a short and simple, though by no means exhaustive, list of some of the situations which require the use of *fijación*:

- (1) Right hand strokes (*toques*) related to dynamics. (*Fijación* of one or more phalanges.)
- (2) *ff* strokes with the thumb. (Action from the wrist via thumb in *Fijación*.)
- (3) Right hand strokes for bright tonal coloring. (Angular *fijación* of the last phalange.)
- (4) Right hand: fast repeated chords. (Action from the wrist via fingers in *fijación*.)
- (5) Fast and repeated thumb strokes. (*Fijación* of the thumb.)
- (6) Effects of color. (Certain pizzicatos, *tambora*, hissing effects, etc.)
- (7) Presentation changes of the left hand. (Movements of the arm transmitted directly to the hand via *fijación* of the wrist.)
- (8) Longitudinal and transversal displacement of the left hand. (*Fijación* of the wrist to allow the arm to perform.)
- (9) Some slurs and trills.
- (10) Restful attitude of the fingers (when removed from the fingerboard.)
- (11) Contractions and distentions.

and any instance that requires the participation of other more appropriate elements for a given task.