

Tip of the Month: October 2006
Loosening up your Barre

I have found that most of the time someone had a problem with their L.H. Barre technique, it is due to their applying too much pressure (squeezing too hard). As soon as someone presses harder with the thumb or squeezes the neck, the index finger curves a bit, causing the notes on the middle strings (G, D, A) to buzz or simply sound muted. The barre has little to do with brute strength, and more to do with a relaxed, straight index finger, which evenly applies pressure along the fretboard.

Place a barre down on the seventh fret, and press very lightly with your thumb. Squeeze harder and watch what your finger does. That curving that occurs will make sound poorly, and tire out your hand. The best position is with your index finger perfectly straight. Once you've laid it straight, push up a little from the wrist so that the knuckle of the index finger shows in your line of vision. Keeping this knuckle slightly above the plane your finger is on will give you leverage and save you the trouble of squeezing too hard.

It is important to relax your index finger while entering or leaving a barre. The following exercise is my favourite, as it does two things. 1) It relaxes your index finger during barres and 2) It trains you to apply pressure at different points along your finger. Start slowly. The motion is basically doing the same 3-note pattern once without a barre and once with it. When moving on and off the barre, find a L.H. position that doesn't alter. The motion should be going from the tip of the index finger to laying it flat in a relaxed manner, without moving the hand too much.

The musical score consists of four staves of music in 12/8 time. Each staff contains a sequence of notes with fret numbers (1, 3, 4) and barre instructions (No Barre, --CVII--). The exercise alternates between playing with and without a barre on the seventh fret.

Staff 1: No Barre --CVII-- No Barre --CVII--
1 3 4 1 3 4 1 3 4 1 3 4 1 3 4 1 3 4

Staff 2: No Barre --CVII-- No Barre --CVII--
1 3 4 1 3 4 1 3 4 1 3 4

Staff 3: No Barre --CVII-- No Barre --CVII--
1 3 4 1 3 4 1 3 4 1 3 4

Staff 4: No Barre --CVII-- No Barre --CVII--
1 3 4 1 3 4 1 3 4 1 3 4

I devised the next exercise to encourage stability in the barre finger. Play as legato as possible and pay close attention that your barre finger does NOT move throughout. Take a break after this one..it can be tough on the hand.

CV
throughout
12

2 3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4 3

15

2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 2

Detailed description: The image shows two staves of musical notation for guitar. The first staff starts at measure 12 and ends at measure 21. It features a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 2, 3, 4, and 2 below the notes. The second staff starts at measure 15 and ends at measure 18. It also features a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 2 and 4 below the notes.

Good luck. Rest your hand well in between attempts, and above all, avoid squeezing.

ST

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