

# Playing a Soprano, Alto, Requinto, Bass or Contrabass guitar

Derek Hasted's Guitar Ensemble School

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## 3rd Movement - Tutti

In this section we'll see how to play these guitars

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## Playing an Orchestra Guitar

### Are they easy to play?

Yes they are! The Bass, in particular, is so similar in size and feel to a Classical that anyone will feel at home with it in a matter of minutes.

What makes them easy to play, apart from the obviously familiar feel that they all have, is the notation.

Despite the range of keys these instruments span, they are all notated as if the top string were E. This makes all the instruments "Transposing Instruments", in that what the composer writes and what the listener hears aren't one and the same.

Have a look in my [Masterclasses](#) where I talk about other Transposing Instruments. This principle that each instrument is apparently the same as each other is the way that a British Brass Band is laid out. Any player can move to another instrument with little to learn apart from adjusting to the size. Compare this with the string quartet, or recorder consort, in which the instruments have a similar feel and the same basic technique, but every instrument's top string or open pipe is notated differently - it's almost impossible for players to swap instruments. It's only when tuning up these Orchestra Guitars that the true pitch of the instruments is a concern. During playing, it's the composer or arranger who's done all the thinking - the player just plays what's on the page, and can forget about which instrument is being played.

Mind you, I do advocate dots on the neck, even though they are out of fashion, for anyone who moves between instruments in the Orchestra family - one can screw up big-time whizzing up the neck and losing the plot...

If you have Full Score music, then Orchestra music can be quite odd to study - like Brass Band Music, it's in a variety of keys, but all apparently at the same pitch, with the bass parts apparently no lower than the tune.

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### Technique for the higher instruments

The basic technique is identical to a normal guitar. Nothing is different. The strings are marginally closer together but not enough to notice.

Because these new instruments bring new, higher, notes, most arrangers will concentrate on these extra notes, which are, of course, found in the higher positions of the neck, where the reach is a lot smaller than the same area on the Classical Guitar. Some left hand tidiness is required!

Just as a violin's pizzicato is briefer than a double bass, so the sustain on these higher instruments isn't as long as on the Classical or Prime Guitar. For this reason, well-written music for these instruments tends to be a little "busier" - always on the move - possibly with rests where other guitars are playing sustained notes.

A busy part is not necessarily a difficult part, however, because the stretches on the left hand aren't so huge.

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### Technique for the lower instruments

The basic technique is identical to a normal guitar. Nothing is different. The strings are marginally wider apart but not enough to notice.

Because these new instruments bring new, lower notes, most arrangers will concentrate on these "extra" notes. These, of course are in

the first position, meaning that the music for the lower instruments is often quite straightforward. A sensitive arranger, however, will also use the rich 'cello like sound which can be obtained with vibrato round about fret 7.

Four or six strings are wound, and this can tax your fingernails in the right hand. However, the thumb is well suited to the job of providing bass, and by driving the strings into the soundhole, as it were, the axis of motion of the bridge couples well to the motion of the strings and gives deep and powerful bass notes.

It is discordant to allow two bass notes to ring on together by accident, and some tidiness is needed when dealing with open strings. A good apoyando or rest stroke will prevent a lower open string from continuing to vibrate. The upper open strings are best replaced by the duplicate on fret 5 of the string below.

Hear my [Guitar Orchestra](#)



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