

Tárrega's *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* - a New Edition

by Stanley Yates

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Introduction. An Early Manuscript Version. A New Edition. A Quick Note About Practicing Tremolo.
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Introduction

Before discussing Tárrega's evocative tremolo piece, *Recuerdos de la Alhambra*, I would like to briefly share the story of how I first came to look seriously into Tárrega's music. In the late 1980's I was invited to give a recital at the first Wirral Guitar Festival (later the Euro-Wirral International Guitar Festival and the Guitar Festival of Great Britain). The festival organizers had obtained a two-volume, leather-bound manuscript collection of Tárrega's music known as the "Leckie Collection" (after the Scotsman Walter Leckie, a student and patron of Tárrega), and had approached me with the idea of giving a recital of Tárrega's music based on the versions contained in the two volumes. Working from the manuscripts was a wonderful experience. Tárrega had written out a good many of his compositions and arrangements for Leckie, along with various studies and exercises, and in fine detail. Several colored inks had been used and it was obvious that the maestro had annotated the pieces during the course of Leckie's lessons with him, perhaps over a number of years. In several cases, Tárrega had written technical exercises in the page margins or on the reverse or facing pages.

Although Tárrega's iconic tremolo piece *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* was one piece *not* included in the Leckie manuscripts I felt compelled to include it as an encore at the recital.

I must to admit to having always found this piece to be not only very beautiful but also quite awkward. In my experience the difficulty relates not simply to the tremolo technique used, but just as much to the left hand fingerings indicated in published versions of the piece. Not only are many of the left-hand positions difficult in themselves, but connecting one to the next is often difficult as well (figure 1):



It is dedicated to Sra. Da. Conchita G. de Jacoby, and is dated Malaga, December 8th, 1899, with further dedicatory prose at the end of the piece (my translation):

"Ya que no puedo ofrecer a V. ofrenda de mas valia en el dia de su Santo, acepte esta mi pobre nota poetica, impresion que sintió mi alma ante la grandiosa maravilla de la Alhambra de Granada que juntos amiramos. Fran.co tarrega"

"Since I cannot offer you a present of any worth on your birthday, accept this humble poetic impression, made on my soul by the grandiose marvel of the Alhambra of Granada we both admire."

This early version of the piece includes quite a few differences from published ones, for example (figure 2):



The manuscript is unfingered, with the exception of the passage shown above, and the following spot (figure 3):



In contrast to published versions of the piece, this fingering places the tremolo on the *first* string. Perhaps Tárrega originally fingered the rest of the piece in this obvious manner (he didn't indicate any unusual positions in the manuscript)?

Other differences include the tempo marking - *Andantino* instead of the published *Andante*.

A New Edition

With this in mind, I thought I might publish online a revised edition of Tárrega's famous piece, not as a scholarly edition but as a suggestion for a more comfortable way to perform this wonderfully evocative piece.

I would like to bring attention to a few aspects of the left-hand fingering (please refer to the score):

1. In measure 11, I suggest finger 3 on the second-string e so as not to overburden finger 2, which has just played a ligado on the first string.
2. In measure 19 the bar covering three strings is raised so as to leave the first finger in place on the third string.
3. In measure 39 f-natural on the fourth string is played with finger 3 (instead of finger 2) in preparation for the following measure.
4. "Guide-fingers" (indicated by dashes and diagonal lines) do not necessarily remain on the string during a position change (especially on the bass strings, where a "finger-squeak" might result).

A Note About Practicing Tremolo

Although this is not intended as a full discussion of tremolo technique, I would at least like to provide a few ideas that may be useful for those still developing the technique.

Think of the tremolo (**p-a-m-i**) as comprising three units: the "compound" **a-m**, **i** and **p**. Use the following practice sequence to help develop the technique:

1. **a-m** play a compound-stroke - as a single unit - but are "staggered" so that **m** plays after **a**. This can be achieved by holding **m** a little further away from the string, as well as by introducing a little tension into the **m** finger to help time its stroke. Practice **a-m** alone, in short bursts.
2. Add the **i** finger to produce **a-m + i**. Practice in short bursts, alternating between a version that places a short pause between **a-m** and **i** and one that plays through.
3. Add the thumb **p**. Again, alternate between a version that places a pause between **a-m** - **i** and **p**, and one that plays through.
4. Add a second round of **a-m** to produce **a-m - i - p - a-m**. Then add **i**, then **p** and so on, until you have a tremolo!

(By the way, **a-m** return to the string as **p** plays.)

Practice the ornaments in such places as measure 11 as short bursts of **p - a-m**, without the left hand at first.

Although there's much more to be said about tremolo than this, I do think that practicing in this way can be helpful.

Source of the Edition

The edition presented here does not reproduce any copyrightable elements of the manuscript version discussed above.

Edited by
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Recuerdos de la Alhambra

["Improvisation !A Granada; Cantiga Arabe"]

(ca. 1899)

Francisco TÁRREGA

(1852-1909)

Andante [♩ = c. 92]

p a m i

1

3

5

7

VIII 5 VI 5 V 5

9

IV 3

11

13

Recuerdos de la Alhambra

15 *a m* 3

17 I 6

19 I 3 *a m* 3

21 II 4

23

25

27 *a m* 3

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Recuerdos de la Alhambra". The score is written on a single staff in treble clef, with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a time signature of 8/8. The music is divided into measures, with measure numbers 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, and 27 indicated at the beginning of their respective lines. The notation includes various musical symbols such as eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and rests, often grouped with slurs and fingerings. Above the staff, there are several performance markings: "a m 3" appears above measures 15 and 27; "I 6" is above measure 17; "I 3" is above measure 19; and "II 4" is above measure 21. The score concludes with a double bar line at the end of measure 27.

Recuerdos de la Alhambra

29 II^6 IV^6

31

33

35 II^4 $a m$ 3 \emptyset 1. 2

37 2 ③ 2 1 ④ 4 D. C. a \emptyset

39

41

Detailed description of the musical score: The score consists of seven staves of music, numbered 29 through 41. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The time signature is not explicitly shown but is implied to be 3/4. The notation includes various guitar-specific symbols: slurs for phrasing, triplets (indicated by a '3' over a group of notes), and fingering numbers (1-4). Measure 29 has a II^6 marking above the staff. Measure 31 has a slur over a triplet. Measure 33 has a slur over a triplet. Measure 35 has a II^4 marking and an 'a m' instruction above a triplet. Measure 37 has a \emptyset symbol and a 'D. C. a' instruction. Measure 39 has a slur over a triplet. Measure 41 has a slur over a triplet.

Recuerdos de la Alhambra

43

45

47

49

51

53

55

p

pp

ppp

f

rit.

II 4