

# FABULOUS FINGERINGS

## VILLA-LOBOS ÉTUDE NO. 1

### CHALLENGE #1: The Right-Hand Fingering Pattern

Most guitarists use the conventional right-hand fingering as indicated by Heitor Villa-Lobos in his manuscript and the Max Eschig editions of the twelve Études. Example #1:

Villa-Lobos' right-hand fingering in the manuscript and the Max Eschig editions.

There is nothing wrong with this fingering. But, if you want to play the piece really fast (160-176 for a quarter note), Pepe Romero's fingering is far better. Example #2:

Pepe Romero's right-hand fingering.

Notice that Romero's fingering eliminates the "a" finger. That is the secret to the speed of the fingering. The "ama" combination in Villa-Lobos' original fingering creates a bottleneck and slows down the potential velocity of the pattern. Using only the thumb, index, and middle fingers unlocks great potential for playing the pattern very fast with less effort.

[Watch me demonstrate the pattern at MM=168 in Video #1:](#)

Some may argue that the point of the original fingering is to develop finger independence between "m" and "a." While that may be true, [there are much better exercises you can practice](#) to develop "ma" independence.

If I'm going to play this piece in a concert or record it, I want to play it fast with minimal effort. Pepe Romero's right-hand fingering pattern accomplishes both goals.

Finally, you may not want to play the piece at MM=168 as I do in the video. You may want to play it more musically at a slower speed with a touch of rubato here and there. That's fine. But again, using Romero's fingering will allow you to play the piece solidly and comfortably at any tempo.

## CHALLENGE #2: The Left-Hand Fingering for Measures #24 and #25

Many guitarists find they can play almost all of Villa-Lobos' Étude No. 1 very well. But playing measures 24-25 can be challenging, especially at high speed.

Here is Villa-Lobos' left-hand fingering in the handwritten manuscript. Example #3:

*Etude No. 1* (Heitor Villa-Lobos) measures 24 and 25  
Villa-Lobos' fingering in the handwritten manuscript.

Annotations: Weak slur with 3-4, Weak slur with 3-4, Weak slur with 3-4, Finger hop from 3rd to 4th string, Finger hop from 5th to 6th string.

It is not a strong or reliable fingering. The slurs with the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> fingers will be difficult to play clearly and the hopping of fingers on adjacent strings will produce uneven slurs and chopped notes. I'm also not a fan of the first slur. In the Max Eschig edition, that slur is eliminated. Example #4:

*Etude No. 1* (Heitor Villa-Lobos) measures 24 and 25  
Villa-Lobos' manuscript fingering altered in the Max Eschig edition.

Annotation: No slur

Here is a fabulous fingering for this passage, created once again, by Pepe Romero. Example #5:

*Etude No. 1* (Heitor Villa-Lobos) measures 24 and 25  
Pepe Romero fingering. This is a fabulous fingering!

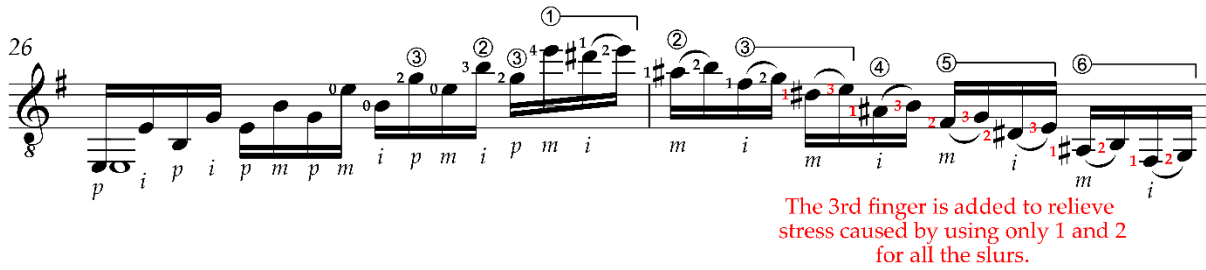
Annotations: Smooth shift with no rhythmic pauses, Strong 1st and 2nd fingers on the slurs for the descending passage.

The shift is easy, and the slurs are executed by the strong 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> fingers. The fingering enables the arpeggio rhythm to be continuous with no hesitations or pauses. Finally, you have a fingering where, as

you are playing the previous measures, you aren't thinking, "Oh no, measures 24 and 25 are coming. I hope I don't mess up." It is such a relief to know you will play the passage successfully!

Some players don't like using the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> fingers continuously on the slurs in the descending passage. They say it causes a bit of tension by the time they reach the 4<sup>th</sup> string. Here is an alternate fingering I use that mixes in the 3<sup>rd</sup> finger to relieve that tension. Example #6:

*Etude No. 1* (Heitor Villa-Lobos) measures 24 and 25  
Pepe Romero fingering with fingering alterations on the descent.



The 3rd finger is added to relieve stress caused by using only 1 and 2 for all the slurs.

[Watch me demonstrate in Video #2. I'm playing it at MM=160.](#)

For those who want to explore even more fingerings, watch how virtuosos Xingye Li, Tal Hurwitz, and Sanel Redžić play this daunting passage. [Watch Video #3:](#)

The first guitarist, Xingye Li, uses this traditional fingering. Example #7:

*Etude No. 1* (Heitor Villa-Lobos) measures 24 and 25  
Xingye Li fingering. This is a common fingering.



This shift might cause a pause or hesitation

It is reliable, and although Xingye Li has no difficulty with it, many players pause at the shift, interrupting the continuous rhythm of the notes.

The second guitarist, Tal Hurwitz, uses this fingering. Example #8:

*Etude No. 1* (Heitor Villa-Lobos) measures 24 and 25  
Tal Hurwitz fingering.



The third guitarist, Sanel Redžić, takes a very original and entirely different approach with no slurs. It may not be what Villa-Lobos intended, but I admire the creativity and virtuosity. Note that he uses the LEFT-HAND thumb to bar the first three strings at the 12<sup>th</sup> fret! Example #9:

*Etude No. 1* (Heitor Villa-Lobos) measures 24 and 25  
Sanel Redžić fingering. This is very unusual but original.

The left-hand thumb  
bars the 1st three strings  
at the 12th fret!

24 LT=Left-Hand Thumb

## SUMMARY

For the right-hand fingering, although you are welcome to use Villa-Lobos' original fingering, if you are looking for speed and security, eliminate using the "a" finger and try Pepe Romero's fabulous right-hand fingering.

For measures 24 and 25, once again, I think Pepe Romero's fingering is the winner for speed and stability. But every player is different, so be adventurous and try the other fingerings as well.