

# Parallel Octaves

by

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## Introduction

As classical guitarists, we tend to become very focused on developing right hand technique, often at the expense of left hand work. Parallel octaves offer the opportunity to work on left hand touch, coordination, and finger independence.

This booklet presents three different exercises dealing with parallel octaves. **Exercise 1** on page 4 simply runs up and down the scale. **Exercise 2** and **Exercise 3** on pages 5 and 6 deal with alternating adjacent notes in triplets. Pages 7 and 8 illustrate some rhythmic variations that can be applied to the three exercises.

## The Right Hand

Since these are primarily left hand exercises, I suggest using the simplest possible fingering in the right hand. Using *p* on the lower notes while alternating *i* and *m* for the top notes works best. This fingering is notated in the first exercise, but should be used for all exercises.

## The Left Hand

The left hand fingerings for the parallel octaves are only indicated in the first study. The fingering for each pair of notes never changes. Use the same left hand fingerings for each exercise.

There are three areas of left hand technique that are practiced in these parallel octaves:

## ***Preparation***

The left hand never rests until the end of a piece. That is, when playing the first notes of the parallel octave exercises, your left hand should be preparing for the next pair of notes. We do this by hovering our fingers over the strings on which they will be placed. There are no repeated left hand fingers in these exercises; everything can be prepared easily.

## ***Hand Angle and Economy of Movement***

The fingers themselves are not the only players in these exercises; the left hand itself can be used to help navigate through the octaves. Some octaves, such as the low F's or F#'s, require a more straight hand position. Others are easier with an angled hand position. Both of these hand positions are entirely "legal" to use, and both should be used in such a way that they make the exercises easier. I caution, however, that you work to use very subtle hand movements to help your fingers do their job, big jerky movements are not required.

Examples of the parallel vs. angled hand positions are below. The parallel and angled description refers to the big knuckles relationship to the fretboard. Notice in the first photo the line is not parallel to the edge of the fretboard as it is in the second example.



## ***Finger Pressure***

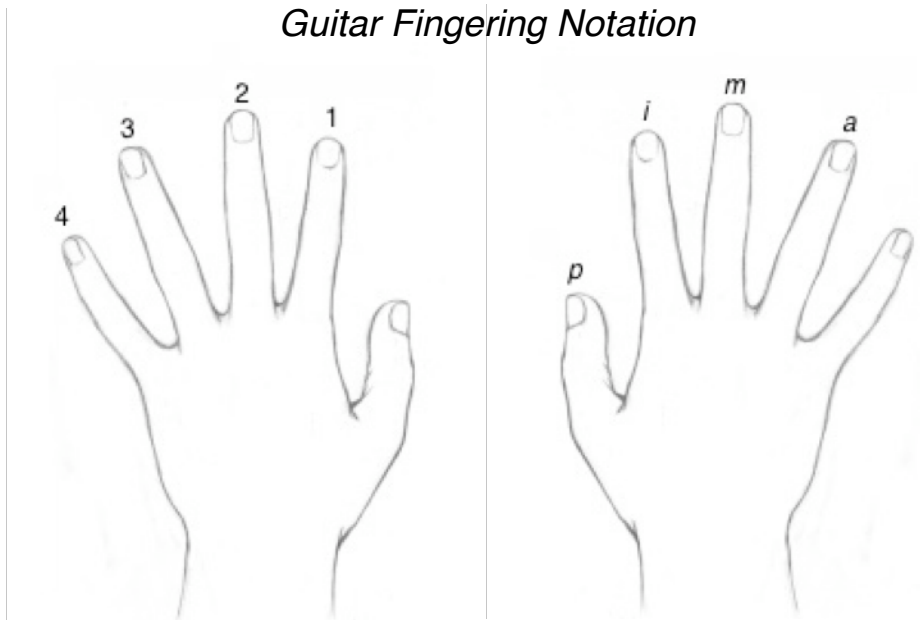
Be sure to work towards developing a light touch with the left hand. The fingers need not press down hard, just enough to get a good sound. The same pressure should be used whether the dynamic level is loud or quiet. Practice each exercise at a variety of dynamic levels.

# Parallel Octave Exercises

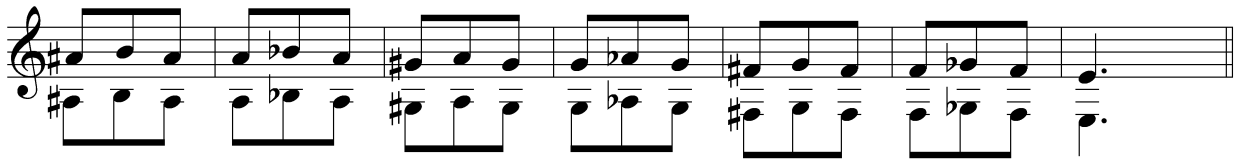
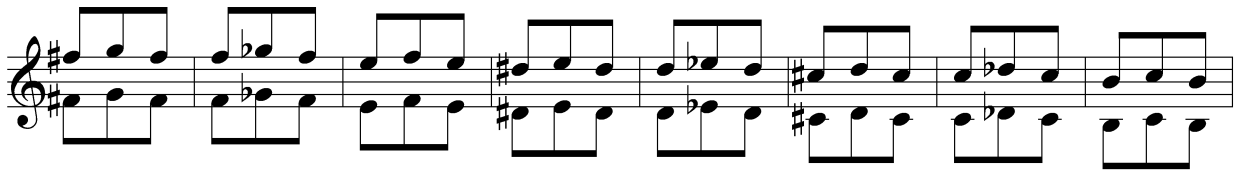
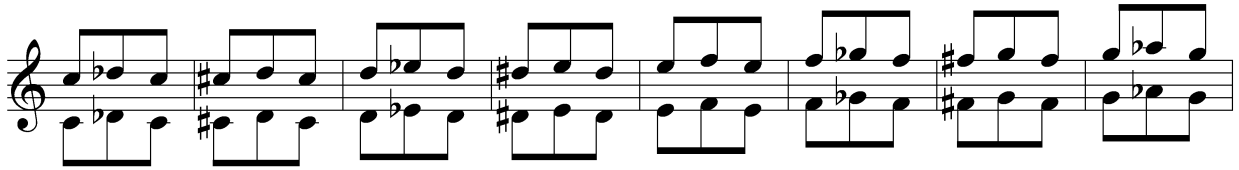
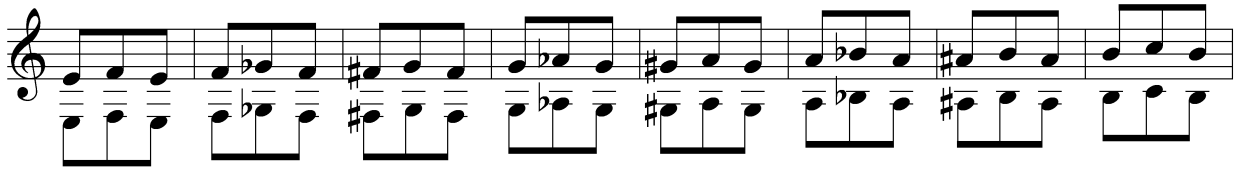
## 1.

1. *i* 2 3 4 0 1 2 3 0 1 2 3 4  
*p* *p* *p* 3 4 0 1 2 3 4 0 1  
0 1 2 3 4 3 2 1 0 4 3 2  
2 3 4 0 1 0 4 3 2 1 0 4  
1 0 3 2 1 0 4 3 2  
3 2 1 0 4 3 2 1 0

### Guitar Fingering Notation



2.



3.

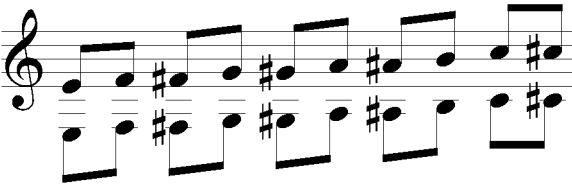
The image displays a musical score for guitar exercise 3, consisting of four systems of two staves each. The notation is written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The first system contains eight measures. The second system contains eight measures. The third system contains eight measures. The fourth system contains eight measures, ending with a final cadence. The music features a consistent rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and quarter notes, with various chordal accompaniment in the bass line.

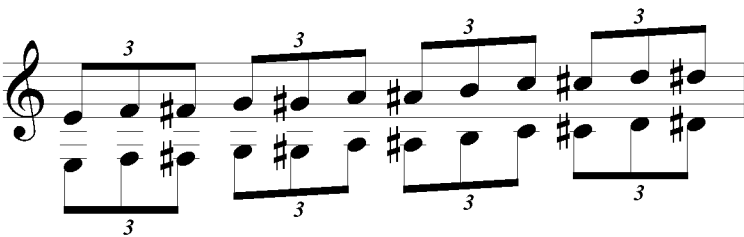
# Rhythmic Variations

For exercise 1:



Exercise 1 may also be practiced with...

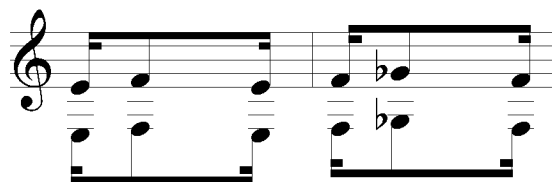
**Doubling:**  Musical notation for Doubling exercise. It consists of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and contains a sequence of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4. The lower staff has a bass clef and contains a sequence of eighth notes: G3, A3, B3, C4, B3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3. Sharps are placed above the notes G, A, and B in both staves.

**Tripling:**  Musical notation for Tripling exercise. It consists of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and contains a sequence of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4. The lower staff has a bass clef and contains a sequence of eighth notes: G3, A3, B3, C4, B3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3. Sharps are placed above the notes G, A, and B in both staves. Each group of three notes in both staves is bracketed with a '3' above and below the bracket.

**Quadrupling:**  Musical notation for Quadrupling exercise. It consists of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and contains a sequence of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4. The lower staff has a bass clef and contains a sequence of eighth notes: G3, A3, B3, C4, B3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3. Sharps are placed above the notes G, A, and B in both staves. Each group of four notes in both staves is bracketed with a '4' above and below the bracket.

Many other rhythmic variations are possible. Feel free to experiment!

**For Exercises 2 & 3**

 Musical notation for Exercises 2 & 3. It consists of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and contains a sequence of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4. The lower staff has a bass clef and contains a sequence of eighth notes: G3, A3, B3, C4, B3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3. Sharps are placed above the notes G, A, and B in both staves. The notes B4 and B3 in the upper and lower staves respectively have a flat symbol (b) above them. Musical notation for Exercises 2 & 3. It consists of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and contains a sequence of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4. The lower staff has a bass clef and contains a sequence of eighth notes: G3, A3, B3, C4, B3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3. Sharps are placed above the notes G, A, and B in both staves. The notes B4 and B3 in the upper and lower staves respectively have a flat symbol (b) above them.



## About the Author



Christopher Davis ([www.christopherguitar.net](http://www.christopherguitar.net)) began his musical education in fifth grade on clarinet. At fourteen, inspired by Black Sabbath and Metallica, he picked up the guitar.

Chris holds a Bachelor of Music degree in Guitar Performance and Music Business from Drake University, and is currently pursuing graduate studies in guitar performance. His primary instructors have included Scott Dalziel, Phil DeLong, and Stanley Yates. Chris has performed in masterclass for world-renowned artists such as the Assad brothers and Christopher Parkening.