

Classical Guitar Shed

play beautifully

Article by Allen Mathews from classicalguitarshed.com

“Divide each difficulty into as many parts as is feasible and necessary to resolve it.” René Descartes

Classical guitar music is often composed of two or three different lines of music. We play these together, like a “one-man band.”

We fill all roles. We play the part of the diva with the melody. We add support with the bass. We meld in color with the accompaniment. And within each of these, we create mood and psychological insight via tone, articulation, and the rises and falls in volume.

But those [new to classical guitar](#) may miss this symphony. They often only see the whole picture in two dimensions. They fail to recognize all the different parts that make up the whole. They miss the three-dimensional nature of music written this way.

And here is where problems arise. Issues likely occur when we don’t know the separate lines of music and how they flow from one note to the next. The music may sound chunky or disconnected, and we may not know why.

To play a piece of classical guitar music to its fullest, it helps to know all the elements individually. We can practice the melody alone, with [ideal phrasing and expression](#). Then the bass, then the other voices.

We may play just the harmony (chords). Or tap the rhythms of the different parts first separately then together.

This deconstruction practice is what pianist Mark Westcott calls “elemental practice.” We practice the elements separately in an effort to understand and master them. Then we combine them together again.

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When we practice this way, we hear the music in more detail. We notice the interplay between parts. We [recognize when an individual line](#) (such as the melody) becomes overshadowed by a less prominent voice (like the accompaniment).

Elemental practice is a practice method. It's a tool we can use to learn complex music. And we can use it to troubleshoot problems and [polish our music](#).

This becomes a game. Like a child taking apart a toaster to see how it works, we explore. We get our hands dirty and experiment. We let our imaginations open. We [ask questions](#) and seek answers.

In this way, we immerse ourselves in our practice. Time disappears as we follow curiosity and inquiry. We enter [flow states](#), and practice is a joy.