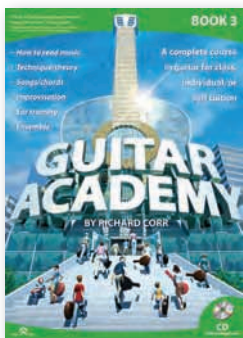


# Products



## Guitar Academy Book 3

Richard Corr

Academy Music Publications (2009)

£8.95

### Craig Ogden

In *Guitar Academy Book 3*, Richard Corr delves further into the technical complexities that make up good guitar playing, while also developing a broad range of musical ideas to create a thoroughly holistic approach.

Book 3 begins with the customary **introduction and advice** for parents, teachers and students, information about different types of guitars and some limited revision of material from the first two books. Corr packs a substantial amount of detail into each section of the book, without allowing it to become excessively wordy or visually cluttered. Topics such as notation, right- and left-hand techniques, tone production, popular accompaniment styles, improvising and playing by ear are all covered in a concise and direct fashion. The economy of the writing helps to ensure that this important information is actually read and understood.

Instruction begins in earnest with a review of the left hand in **first position**, using a chromatic scale to illustrate good left-hand technique with minimal finger movements. Corr uses an excerpt from Grieg's *Peer Gynt* Suite to illustrate playing in first position, also taking the opportunity to introduce the technique of pizzicato, which 'expresses Peer's creeping footsteps'. Using well-known pieces of orchestral music instead of unknown guitar-specific repertoire is a popular tactic that gives students the opportunity to play familiar tunes. Corr uses this to good effect throughout the book, while at the same time making prodigious use of the established guitar repertoire.

The first-position section of the book continues by introducing the **minor scales** (with reference to the Aeolian mode), and suggests chord sequences for improvising around these. The degree to which Corr integrates technique, theory and improvisation is one of the most appealing and, in my experience, unusual aspects of his method. The broad nature of this approach will surely create more capable, all-round guitarists.

A relatively in-depth discussion of **right-hand 'planting'** follows. I have some issues with this but I don't doubt that Corr would be able to rigorously justify his ideas. At college level I frequently encounter students who are unable to play without planting, which is very often inappropriate and leads, undesirably, to notes being cut short. Corr makes this point perfectly clearly and his ideas about improved accuracy and independence are totally valid. I would only reiterate Corr's point that the 'musical context will always need to be considered'.

**Barre technique** is probably the single most difficult and painful technique for small hands. Corr introduces it sensibly in an arrangement of *Plaisir d'amour* by using only half-bar chords. In the same arrangement he has the thumb bringing out the melody in the bass, with nicely contrasted accompaniment figures for the fingers to play. It is the fact that Corr routinely, in an understated fashion, manages to cover so many different techniques and issues at the same time that makes this series a real pedagogical gem.

The last three pieces utilising first position cover **melody-and-accompaniment** technique, an explanation of phrasing and an introduction to the concept of rehearsal marks. The ability to play one note loudly (the melody) while simultaneously playing another note quietly (the accompaniment) is a vital but frequently overlooked skill, so it was pleasing to see this introduced early in the book.

Corr then moves on to **second and fifth positions**, with further information about scales and modes, opportunities to improvise and the introduction of chords. *Scarborough Fair* appears in duo format with a detailed, arpeggiated accompaniment, a single-line melody, chord names and the words to the song. I like the idea that students might use material presented in this way to gain the broadest possible understanding of how music is constructed.

Due to the absence of rigorous ensemble or orchestral training (more in the past than the present), guitarists are notorious for having poor **rhythmic comprehension**. I was delighted therefore to see Corr lay out a very clear and simple approach to counting semiquavers.

Following this, the explanation of **bass-note stopping** is particularly well detailed. This is another issue frequently ignored right through to tertiary level. Although not terribly difficult in itself, this is a technique that lends such clarity and control that introducing it at this relatively early stage is hugely beneficial.

Corr introduces **playing by ear** by giving the first couple of bars of a well-known tune and encouraging the student to work the rest out by ear. As the book progresses there is a continuation of concise, well thought out instruction on topics such as practice technique, shaping and filing the fingernails, memorisation, harmonics and further left-hand positions, before finishing with some ensemble pieces and an explanation of chord theory and styles of playing. By necessity, the ensemble section and the chord-styles supplement are fairly concise, but they nevertheless provide an introduction to important elements of guitar playing that can be expanded upon by teachers or other specialist publications.

True to form, Richard Corr has created a book which will take players further down the road towards refined, accurate and musical performance with a liberatingly broad range of musicianship skills thrown in.

**Craig Ogden** is an Australian-born guitarist and principal lecturer in guitar at the Royal Northern College of Music.

**Overall:** ★★★★★

**Value for money:** astoundingly good – the quality of the content and clarity of the presentation makes this publication an exceptional bargain.

**Ease of use:** very straightforward – the progression of pieces and exercises is logical and sensibly paced.

**Most relevant for:** anyone with a predominant interest in classical-guitar technique, but it will also suit those interested in a range of common guitar styles.