

# How to play **Ave Maria (Gounod)**

Easy Fingerstyle Guitar arrangement by Damon Winter

[The following is a transcript of my original tutorial video]

Hi, I'm wedding guitarist Damon Winter. Today we look at my arrangement of Ave Maria by 19th century French composer Charles Gounod. Often heard during Roman Catholic weddings, the song is also a good choice for other gigs because of its expansive, very beautiful J. S. Bach-like melody. You can see my performance of Ave Maria and download the TAB notation and Sibelius file at [www.EasyFingerstyleGuitar.com](http://www.EasyFingerstyleGuitar.com)

## PART A

The key signature contains one sharp: F sharp. We are in the key of G major. The time signature is 4 – 4, or, four beats per bar where each beat equals a crotchet. The tempo indication is *andante* meaning an easy walking pace; think of a bride walking down the aisle. The first four bars making up part A spell out the main theme. Observe the long note values in the top line, allowing them to sustain for their full duration. The bass line in bar 1 is repeated as a sequence in bars 2 and 3 before being repeated verbatim in bar 4. A sequence is the repetition of a phrase or harmonic progression at different pitch levels with the succession of pitch levels rising or falling by the same or similar intervals. Look for sequences as a guide to phrase shaping in all of the music you play.

## PART B

From bar five Gounod's melodic ideas start rolling out one after the other. The first two bars in part B are repeated as a sequence before a new two-bar melodic

idea begins from the third beat of bar 11. Bars 12 and 13 are repeated as a sequence and the whole section concludes with a graceful descending melodic line beginning in bar 18. Think of part B as a series of connected phrases held together with *legato* articulation. Legato is sounding notes and chords so that they sustain and flow from one to the other without a perceptible gap...between...them. Cartoonist 'Hoffnung' does a great job of expressing the idea of legato with this cartoon.\* The opposite of legato is *staccato* whereby notes are sounded in a detached and separate way.

## PART C

Part C contains the melodic and dramatic high point of the piece in bar 30 when we play the note 'B' on the seventh fret of the first string. It feels like we are building up to this moment for the entire 10 bars that precede it. Try a subtle but steady crescendo from bar 20 to really make the most of this moment. You might also add vibrato to your target note in bar 30. Classical guitar vibrato is typically left to right rather than up and down as favored by pop and rock guitarists. Remember that just like every other aspect of your performance, vibrato can be counted in rhythmic terms. The note 'B' in bar 30 is a minim tied to a quaver; therefore you might consider counting the left and right movements of your vibrato in semiquavers. That would sound like this "1 e & ah, 2 e & ah..."

## PART D

Part D is a coda similar to the introduction. In part D the melody notes are held for even longer. This time as they are semibreves stretching across all four beats of each bar. The effect is of repose and homecoming after an eventful musical journey. A steady and even rhythm throughout the piece is essential although you may choose to *ritardando*, or, slow down gradually, from bar 35. Don't overdo it. Changes in tempo for expressive purposes should be carefully rehearsed and not seem excessive or out of keeping with the overall piece. Just like vibrato, tempo

changes can and should be counted out loud while rehearsing and internally while performing.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Charles Gounod composed Ave Maria in a very interesting way. It is his own original melody placed on the harmonic background of J. S. Bach's Prelude in C major for The Well-Tempered Clavier volume 1 . Such a great idea. Ave Maria is Latin for Hail Mary and is a prayer used in the Roman Catholic church. It is usually a safe choice to perform Gounod's version during a Catholic wedding but always check with the Priest conducting the service. Ask not only if the piece is suitable for performance in his church, but also, very importantly, at what point during the service it should be played. It is a curious fact that Gounod did not write the piece for religious use. He called his song 'Meditation' and the words of the prayer were added to his melody by somebody else. Have fun with my arrangement of Ave Maria. You can download the TAB, notation and Sibelius file and watch my performance at [EasyFingerstyleGuitar.com](http://EasyFingerstyleGuitar.com). Feel free to like, leave comments and subscribe for more videos like this. Until next time, I'm wedding guitarist Damon Winter. Thank you for watching.

\*From 'Hoffnung's Acoustics' first published in 1959. A delightful collection of music related cartoons (and excellent teaching aid).