



# A contribution to breaking down barriers between classical and electric guitar

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**Artigo | Doutorando no PPG em Música, o genebrino Pierre Willmann escreve em língua inglesa sobre a adaptação para o violão clássico de uma técnica da guitarra elétrica usada no blues**

\*Por Pierre Willmann

\*Ilustração: Sophia Kornalewski/Programa de Extensão Histórias e Práticas Artísticas, DAV-UFRGS

The classical guitar and the electric guitar are closely related instruments. They are mostly made of wood, have 6 strings and are both played by vibrating the strings with the right hand and locking them with the left to select the pitch of the desired note.

However, the main difference between the two instruments is that electric guitar strings are made of metal, while classical guitar strings are made of nylon. As a result, specific techniques have naturally been developed for each instrument.

In this article, we're going to look at ways of adapting an electric guitar technique used in the blues to the classical guitar. The technique chosen is the specific blues slide.



Jimi Hendrix with acoustic guitar, 1967 (Source: Bruce Flemming Photo Studio, London.)

Through the review of literature and our listening, we have repeatedly noticed slides, which some classical guitarists would possibly describe as exaggerated, due to their physical length (sometimes performed over the entire neck), their length in time and their intensity, in contrast to the glissandos used in classical guitar, by Francisco Tarrega for example, where the glissandos are played rather discreetly, with a transitional role: arriving from a note a to a note b. To ensure that this is not a secondary characteristic of the blues, we conducted quantitative research according to López-Cano and San Cristóbal Opazo's method, in 2014.

For four guitarists considered to be major blues players of the 1960s and 1970s: Eric Clapton (\*1945), Rory Gallagher (1948-1995), Jimi Hendrix (1942-1970) and Jimmy Page (\*1944), we have chosen one work to analyze. It should be noted that these four guitarists are ranked respectively seventh, third, first (as in most rankings for Jimi Hendrix) and second in the *Top 10 Greatest Guitarists of Rock & Folk* according to the ranking of Behot in 2020. We chose to test the presence of these slides in each of the works.

The results have been compiled in the table below:

GUITARIST	SONG	YEAR	ALBUM	LABEL	REFERENCE SCORE	NUMBER OF TYPICAL SLIDES AND LOCATION IN THE SCORE
Eric Clapton (*1945)	Layla	1992(acoustic cover from the 1970 version)	Unplugged	Reprise	<a href="https://guitaralliance.com/100%20Blues%20Guitar%20Tabs/Moonchild.pdf">guitaralliance.com, https://guitaralliance.com/justacoustic/bonuses/layla.PDF</a>	Bars : 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 42, 43, 44, 49, 53, 72, 73.
Rory Gallagher (1948-1995)	Moonchild	1976	Calling Card	Chrysalis Records	<a href="https://guitaralliance.com/100%20Blues%20Guitar%20Tabs/Moonchild.pdf">guitaralliance.com, https://guitaralliance.com/100%20Blues%20Guitar%20Tabs/Moonchild.pdf</a> (transcribed by Slowhand)	Bars : 5, 6 (4 beat slide); 12 (2 beat slide); 134 (2 beat slide); 138, 139 (2 beat slide)
Jimi Hendrix (1942-1970)	All Along the Watchtower	1968	Electric Ladyland	Reprise	<a href="https://guitaralliance.com/ROMTOP100/songs/all_along_the_watchtower/hendrix_jimi_all_along_the_watchtower.pdf">guitaralliance.com, https://guitaralliance.com/ROMTOP100/songs/all_along_the_watchtower/hendrix_jimi_all_along_the_watchtower.pdf</a>	Bars : 17, 19, 23, 31, 35, 41, 49, 57, 58, 59, 60, 62, 63, 85, 91, 93, 95
Jimmy Page (*1944)	Whole Lotta Love	1969	Led Zeppelin II	Atlantic	<a href="https://guitaralliance.com/private/riff-a-day/april/whole_lotta_love/led_zeppelin-whole_lotta_love2.pdf">guitaralliance.com, https://guitaralliance.com/private/riff-a-day/april/whole_lotta_love/led_zeppelin-whole_lotta_love2.pdf</a>	<b>Guitar 1</b> , bars: 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 18. <b>Guitar 2</b> , 4 time each chorus (=16 time).
<b>TOTAL</b>						<b>62</b>
<b>AVERAGE</b>						<b>15,5</b>

Table 1 – Presence of specific slide in 4 tracks by 4 major blues guitarists of the 1960s and 1970s: Eric Clapton, Rory Gallagher, Jimi Hendrix and Jimmy Page. Source: author (2024).

The result is clear. For these four representative blues songs of the 1960s and 1970s, we found a total of 62 specific slides, which implies an average of 15.5 slides per song. *Whole Lotta Love* by Led Zeppelin had the most slides (27). *Moonchild* by Rory Gallagher has the fewest (6), but some slides are very long in time (4 beats). This blues slide is powerful and long (as opposed to the passing glissando of the classical guitar). In the electric blues guitar of the 1960s and 1970s, it is a major characteristic of the style that we will try to adapt to the classical guitar.

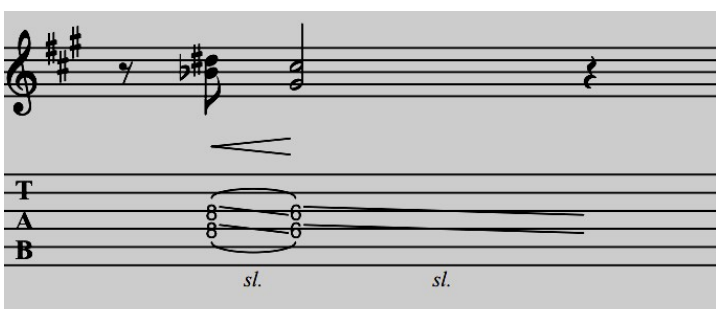


Figure 2 – Example of a slide (in bar 19) in the song *Whole Lotta Love* by Led Zeppelin (Source: guitaralliance.com, transcription of *Whole Lotta Love*)

Moreover, unlike the classical guitar glissando, its specificity is that it is used with the aim of being a desired stylistic effect, more or less long (2 beats in the previous example of Led Zeppelin's *Whole Lotta Love* and up to 4 beats in bar 5 and 6 of Rory Gallagher's *Moonchild*).

*We have applied this technique in an example that can be played on classical guitar. An additional feature to the length and power is that our glissando goes in both directions of the neck without stopping (alternating the direction: towards the bass, towards the treble).*

One of the musical objectives is that this C minor chord (slid to B minor) should sound as loud at the end of the bar as it did at the beginning of the bar.



Figure 3 – Bar 14 of the etude blues, specific blues-style glissando. Source: author (2024).

It is much harder to maintain the sound during these glissandos on a classical guitar than on an electric guitar. The main reason for this is that the amplifier of the electric guitar provides substantial sound support. It is for example possible for the electric guitar to produce an acceptable sound (as loud as if played with the right hand), just by tapping the neck with the left hand.

To adapt this technique in a satisfactory and academic way, we decided to call on classical guitarists of excellence to see if they had any ideas on how to solve this problem on our instrument. We sought the advice of the guitarists from Porto Alegre Eduardo Castañera and Daniel Wolff, because both studied with the uruguayan maestro Abel Carlevaro, who was used to solving this type of technical problems with certain precise movements of the left arm. These are the solutions they proposed:

"To execute a semitone glissando legato, partial translation is used through the use of the thumb and hand. Avoid using your arm", says Eduardo Castañera. On the other hand, Wolff considers: "You have to maintain the pressure of the fingers so that the notes are not lost".

These two tips of Castañera and Wolff are making it possible to achieve consistent results and are breaking down the boundaries of interpretation between classical and electric guitar and between classical music and the blues.

Pierre Willmann is a graduate student at Programa de Pós-graduação em Música – Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS).

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(51) 3308.3368

jornal@ufrgs.br

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