

# Badi Assad

The Brazilian nylon-string virtuoso demonstrates how she plays melody and percussion at the same time.

by Julia Crowe



Listening to Badi Assad's adventurous fusion of jazz, Brazilian rhythms, and pop music is akin to watching a juggler create a beautiful halo of motion with ordinary and unexpected objects. Moving far beyond her early training as a classical guitarist, she creates the sound of an entire band with just her guitar, voice, and percussion. Of her new album, *Verde* (Edge/Deutsche Grammophon, [www.deutschegrammophon.com](http://www.deutschegrammophon.com), due out in the US in September 2005), Assad says, "I named it the Portuguese word for *green* because, as in nature, you can see a forest of green but when you look closer, it is made up of variegated shades of the color. My music is the same. The voices and instruments may sound as one but they are made up of many different tonal shades." I sat down with Assad during one of her recent trips to New York City, and she showed me some of her unique approaches to polyrhythms and percussion.

*You often play a melody with your left hand while your right hand plays percussion on the guitar. Do you have any exercises you recommend for players who want to try this?*

**ASSAD** To play independently with your right and left hands you must first become familiar with the applications of each hand. In this example [Example 1] the left hand plays all the notes on the sixth string. I prefer playing with the index, middle, and annular [ring] fingers of my left hand because they are stronger than the pinky and the similar length of the first three fingers provides the swiftest, strongest attack.

In this example, use your ring finger to pluck the open sixth string (E) and then use your ring finger again to hammer-on to the E note at the 12th fret. Release the string and pounce down on the sixth string B at the seventh fret with your index finger, hammering on the eighth fret C with your middle finger. Pull-off this C with your middle finger to play the B note again. Then slide your index finger up to the eighth fret (C) before hammering on to the D with your ring finger. End by sliding to the 12th fret (E) be-

## Ex. 1: Fretting Hand Only

\*Pull-off with ring finger from 12th fret

fore pulling off with your ring finger to play the open sixth string (E) that begins the second measure. You must have a strong ring finger to pull and propel the melody.

**TO HEAR BADI ASSAD'S MUSIC, go to [www.badiassad.com.br](http://www.badiassad.com.br).**

*When you play percussion on the guitar with your right hand, you use different parts of your hand on various parts of the guitar. Could you explain each one?*

**ASSAD** I use three kinds of right-hand approaches to percussion: tapping with the tip of my ring finger; tapping with the outer edge of my thumb, and knocking with the first knuckle of my middle finger. When you do this last

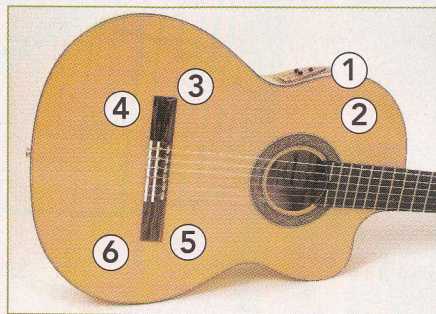
## WHAT SHE PLAYS

- **Acoustic Guitars:** Paul Fischer classical in the studio ([www.paulfischerguitars.com](http://www.paulfischerguitars.com)), Takamine HP-7C classical onstage, custom Pimentel and Sons Grand Concert Special classical ([www.pimentelguitars.com](http://www.pimentelguitars.com)).
- **Strings:** Hard-tension D'Addario ProArté EJ46 nylon.
- **Amplification:** DPA mini-omnidirectional mic on the guitar ([www.dpamicrophones.com](http://www.dpamicrophones.com)); AKG C 420 headset vocal mic, with AKG wireless system: PT300 transmitter, SR300 receiver.



type of percussion, curl your index, ring finger, and pinky inward like a bird's claw so they do not get in the way of your first knuckle when it makes its tap.

In the diagram of the guitar [right], I have mapped out the six best percussive areas on the acoustic guitar: (1) the upper side, for a high-pitched sound; (2) the upper portion of the top, for a more resonant sound; (3) the lower portion of the bridge, inside near the bass strings; (4) the lower portion of the bridge on the outer side, away from the bass strings; (5) the upper bridge interior, toward the treble strings; and (6) the upper portion of the bridge, away from the treble strings. The



Badi Assad's percussive map of the guitar.

third and fourth areas carry bass overtones, while the fifth and sixth have more treble overtones.

*This feels like trying to pat your head and rub your stomach at the same time. How would you recommend getting both hands to work together?*

**ASSAD** The hands are not really independent: the right hand is playing the rhythm to the left-hand's melody, so they work together. Here is an example with the same left-hand melody as earlier, adding percussion [Example 2]. Count out the rhythm slowly in 16ths, following the right-hand percussion styles and shifts according to the diagram. If you get stuck, sing the melody while your right hand plays the percussion. Then combine the two hands.

### Ex. 2: Melody and Percussion Combined

\*Pull-off with ring finger from 12th fret  
 \*\*Tap guitar; numbers correspond to diagram above; x=middle finger; ■=thumb; ▲=ring finger

## Lick of the Month

Badi Assad devised this groove to combine the lesson's basic percussion technique with an Am7b5 chord thrown in for some strumming sass. The left-hand melody is confined to the sixth string, between the seventh and 12th frets. The right-hand percussion uses

areas 1, 2, 5, and 6, according to Assad's diagram. Strum the Am7b5 chords with your right hand, following the direction of the arrows. To hear the Lick of the Month, go to [www.acousticguitar.com/lick](http://www.acousticguitar.com/lick). Password: september05.

\*\*Tap guitar; numbers correspond to diagram above; x=middle finger; ■=thumb; ▲=ring finger