Elizabeth Cotten picking style: alternating bass practice sheet

Original exercises in her style, not the Freight Train melody. Standard tuning, key of C. Let the bass ring: no palm muting.

How to read the tab: dots are the string lines, numbers are frets, the top line counts eighth notes. **T** = thumb. Thumb plays the bass on every beat (1, 2, 3, 4); index and middle play the melody. A **pinch** is a bass note and a melody note together. **h** = hammer on. She played left handed with the guitar upside down, so her fingers took the bass and her thumb the melody; you can use the normal method. Start at 60 bpm.

Exercise 1: thumb only

Two minutes without stopping. Bar 2 drops to the low G.

```
      1   &   2   &   3   &   4   &     1   &   2   &   3   &   4   &
e  |.....................................|.....................................|
B  |.....................................|.....................................|
G  |.....................................|.....................................|
D  |..........2..............2.......|..........2..............2.......|
A  |..3...............3..............|..3..................................|
E  |.....................................|..................3..............|
      T       T       T       T                          low G
```

Exercise 2: the pinch

Melody note on beat 1, together with the thumb.

```
      1   &   2   &   3   &   4   &     1   &   2   &   3   &   4   &
e  |.....................................|.....................................|
B  |..1..................................|..1..................................|
G  |.....................................|.....................................|
D  |.........2..............2.......|.........2..............2.......|
A  |..3...............3..............|..3..................................|
E  |.....................................|..................3..............|
      pinch                               pinch
```

Exercise 3: melody between beats

Original line. Thumb on the numbers only.

```
      1   &   2   &   3   &   4   &     1   &   2   &   3   &   4   &
e  |..............0.....................|..3..........................0...|
B  |..1............................1...|..............1.....................|
G  |.....................................|.....................................|
D  |..........2..............2.......|..........2..............2.......|
A  |..3...............................|..3..................................|
E  |..................3..............|..................3..............|
```

Exercise 4: change to G7

Thumb alternates 6th string fret 3 and open 4th.

```
      1   &   2   &   3   &   4   &     1   &   2   &   3   &   4   &
e  |..1.........................1...|..............1.....................|
B  |..............0.....................|..0..................................|
G  |.....................................|.....................................0...|
D  |..........0..............0.......|..........0..............0.......|
A  |.....................................|.....................................|
E  |..3...............3..............|..3...............3..............|
      G7: thumb on 6th and 4th strings
```

Exercise 5: decorations

Hammer on inside the bass, then a rolled C chord.

```
      1   &   2   &   3   &   4   &     1   &   2   &   3   &   4   &
e  |.............................0...|..0..................................|
B  |..1..................................|..1..................................|
G  |.....................................|..0..................................|
D  |..........0...2...........2.......|..2..................................|
A  |..3...................................|..3..................................|
E  |..................3..............|.....................................|
                        h                   roll the C chord, let it ring
```

Easy version of the study

Play the study below with only the melody note on beat 1 of each bar (the pinch). Add the in between notes when the thumb is steady. F chord: thumb on 4th string fret 3 and 5th string fret 3.

Exercise 6: eight bar study, full version (C, C, G7, G7 | C, C7, F, F), then C, G7, C to finish

```
      1   &   2   &   3   &   4   &     1   &   2   &   3   &   4   &
e  |..............0.....................|..3..........................0...|
B  |..1............................1...|..............1.....................|
G  |.....................................|.....................................|
D  |..........2..............2.......|..........2..............2.......|
A  |..3...................................|..3..................................|
E  |..................3..............|..................3..............|
      C                                   C

      1   &   2   &   3   &   4   &     1   &   2   &   3   &   4   &
e  |..0.........................0...|.....................................|
B  |..............1.....................|..............1.....................|
G  |.....................................|..3..........................3...|
D  |..........2..............2.......|..........2..............2.......|
A  |..3...................................|..3..................................|
E  |..................3..............|..................3..............|
      C                                   C7

      1   &   2   &   3   &   4   &     1   &   2   &   3   &   4   &
e  |..1.........................1...|..............1.....................|
B  |..............0.....................|..0..................................|
G  |.....................................|.....................................0...|
D  |..........0..............0.......|..........0..............0.......|
A  |.....................................|.....................................|
E  |..3...............3..............|..3...............3..............|
      G7                                  G7

      1   &   2   &   3   &   4   &     1   &   2   &   3   &   4   &
e  |..1.........................1...|..............1.....................|
B  |..............1.....................|..1..........................1...|
G  |..........2..............2.......|..........2..............2.......|
D  |..3...................................|.....................................|
A  |..................3..............|..................3..............|
E  |.....................................|.....................................|
      F                                   F
```

Tempo log

Date	Exercise	bpm	Thumb steady? (yes or no)	Note

Listen to

Folksongs and Instrumentals with Guitar (recorded 1957 and 1958)
Shake Sugaree
When I'm Gone
Elizabeth Cotten Live! (1984)

Practice plan

5 minutes thumb only at 60 bpm, 5 minutes Exercises 2 and 3, 10 minutes on the study: easy first, then full. Tick 60, 70, 80, 90 bpm as you reach them.