

FINGERSTYLE GUITAR

WITH LUCAS MICHAILIDIS



Polyrhythm and Note Grouping

In our last edition, we focused on playing two independent rhythms simultaneously and applying these to the guitar. You may recall that we worked primarily with the 3 over 2 rhythm that is prevalent in much African and South America music. Now that we have acquired an understanding and mastery of the workings of this polyrhythm, let's take a look at how we can introduce another element into the mix - *grouping*. With the addition of note grouping, a deeper level of complexity arises, opening up to some intriguing musical vistas!

Ex. 1

Here we have the *two* located in the lowest voice, while the *three* remains on top. The interesting thing about this example is that while the top voice consists of three pulses, the actual pitches are grouped in two! (i.e. the pitches repeat their sequence after every two). As a consequence, it takes two bars before the cycle completes itself.

Ex. 2

Some closing thoughts...

Grouping a polyrhythm in such a manner can yield fascinating results. The constant, unexpected shifting of note groups tends to create an ambiguity that makes the 3 over 2 less obvious. This is under - explored terrain that can prove fertile ground in numerous musical areas such as composition, arranging, accompanying and improvisation.

A cautionary note when dealing with music on such a mathematical level - be sure to let this material inform your music rather than making it your object desire. Numbers devoid of expression don't tend to count (pardon the pun) for much. Our aim here is relish the interplay of two simultaneous rhythms, while treating them as a springboard for further creative and musical sojourns.

Hope you enjoy and see you next time.