

FINGERSTYLE GUITAR

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Right Hand Studies

The term *fingerstyle* refers to the use of the fingers to activate the ringing of strings on the guitar. For the majority of players, it is the right hand that performs this function. This technique can be found in numerous styles and genres: classical, flamenco, jazz and blues.

If we are to develop competency in the area, it is necessary to focus attention on the use of the right hand.

Ex. 1

Ex. 2

Exercises 1 and 2 are what I regard as *meat and potatoes* studies - no frills and fundamental. Ex. 1 deals with an arpeggiated C major chord and uses the thumb (p), index (i) and middle (m) finger to execute the triplet pattern. Ex. 2 is similar but uses the thumb, index, middle and ring (a) finger to perform the eighth note pattern.

The way in which we can breathe further life into these exercises is through the accenting of different beats (Ex. 3 & 4). This serves a dual purpose: it develops the independence and control of each finger and adds a dynamic component to the pattern. Accenting of different notes results in a subtle, yet noticeable variation that can be a very useful musical tool. It is important to ensure that the non-accented notes are even and consistently quieter.

Ex. 3

Ex. 4

In Ex. 1, a set of three notes are grouped as triplets. Let's retain the same note sequence but change the rhythmic subdivision, playing the pattern as 16th notes as opposed to 8th note triplets.

Ex. 5

Some interesting things arise. We see that the 3-note group (which once sat happily as triplets) is now being displaced by a 16th note. Because the pattern is condensed, it now repeats over the duration of 3 beats (hence the 3/4 time signature). Accenting the start of every 3-note group results in 4 even pulses over the 3 beat measure. This is regarded as a 4 over 3 polyrhythm (the term refers to multiple rhythms played simultaneously).

Similarly, let's retain the same note sequence of Ex. 2 but alter the subdivision from 8th note, to 8th note triplets:

Ex. 6

On this occasion, we observe that the 4-note group (C E G C) is now being displaced by an 8th note triplet throughout. Accenting the start of every 4-note group results in 3 even pulses over the 4 beat measure. This is regarded as a 3 over 4 polyrhythm.

Having gained a mastery of these two polyrhythmic exercises, we can proceed to accent different beats as demonstrated previously in Ex. 3 & 4:

Ex. 7
Ex. 8

I am a great advocate of incorporating numerous challenges within an individual exercise –

changing its focus from the realm of technique to that of actual music. This exercise cultivates a polyrhythmic dimension, independent finger dexterity, dynamics through the use of accents, whilst promoting an engaged mind.

I would recommend that each example be played with a metronome. Aim for a smooth and even consistency and be sure to vary the tempos. There is no better way to integrate and internalise these rhythms than by practising them while you walk - making use of all the limbs and voice. Passers-by won't help but notice the groovy gait.