

CHAPTER 2: FINGERPICKING

Now that you've gotten a good handle on strumming, let's throw the pick aside for a bit and work with our bare hands. Though fingerpicking is most closely associated with folk and rockabilly styles, we'll learn in this chapter how it can be applied to many more.

When guitarists begin to feel at home with the pick, they often shy away from learning to play fingerstyle because it can feel like "starting from scratch." This sentiment is certainly justified; it is in a way like starting over again. However, only one hand needs to learn something new. Also, it should be noted that many players prefer the use of a thumbpick when playing fingerstyle. Whether you choose to try one or not (they can be quite handy in moving between fingerstyle and strumming quickly), all the exercises in this chapter will still apply just the same.

TRAVIS PICKING

Perhaps the most common fingerstyle technique is *Travis picking*. Popularized by country legend Merle Travis, the technique usually involves the thumb alternating between two bass notes while the fingers "fill in the holes" on the treble side.

This first example demonstrates a basic Travis picking pattern that should help you get a feel for the technique. Note the fingering indications for the right hand: T = thumb, 1 = first finger, 2 = second finger, etc.



TRACK 18

C Play 4 times

RH: T 2 T 1
let ring

TAB: 3 2 0 1 2 0

Here we're moving between C and G chords. Notice the difference in the thumb pattern: we're rocking back our forth between strings 6 and 4 on the G chord. It should be noted that the "and" of beat 2 is often slightly accented in Travis picking patterns such as these, providing a gentle syncopation that helps create a sense of momentum. Also notice that we're not playing string 5 during the G chord at all. This means, for all practical purposes, that we don't have to fret that string. Of course, there's nothing wrong with fretting that string if you so choose; the point is that you have the option.



TRACK 19

C G

RH: T 2 T 1 T 2 T 1
let ring

TAB: 3 2 0 1 2 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Now that you've got the basics down, let's take a look at some common variations. In example A, we're simply striking the first two notes on beat 1 at the same time, creating a quarter note instead of two eighths. In example B, the right-hand thumb is working overtime, substituting the low 5th every other time for the root. Example C omits the first treble note altogether, beginning only with a bass note on beat 1. Example D elaborates on C, making use of the third finger to create an interesting pattern. Example E introduces a right-hand shift, which is another option when accessing higher strings. Example F elaborates on this idea with syncopation.



TRACK 20

A C **B**

RH: T T 1 T 2 T 1 T T 1 T 2 T 1

TAB: 1 2 0 1 2 0 1 2 0 1 2 0

3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2

C **D**

T T 1 T 2 T 1 T T 1 T 2 T 3

0 1 2 0 1 2 0 1 2 0 1 2

3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2

E **F**

T T 1 T 1 T 2 T 1 T 2 2 T 1

0 1 0 0 1 0 0 1 0 0 1

3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2

Keep in mind that these variations are often combined freely in actual musical applications. Let's take a look at a few classic Travis picking examples.



TRACK 21

YOU WERE MEANT FOR ME

$\text{♩} = \text{♩} \text{ ♩}$
Csus2

G6/B C Em

let ring w/ fingers

TAB: 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3

3 0 2 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0 3 0

*slight vibrato

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TAKE ME HOME, COUNTRY ROADS

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ARPEGGIATION

Another common fingerstyle approach, especially on ballads, is to arpeggiate chords in a rolling fashion. This often involves striking a bass note with your thumb on beat 1 and allowing your first, second, and third fingers to finish the chord. Let's take a look at some basic examples.

This first simply arpeggiates through C and G chords in ascending fashion. Notice that although the thumb shifts positions, the right-hand fingers remains on the same group of strings. One thing to consider on a riff such as this is how to maintain a smooth transition between chords. In this example, it will help to sustain the C note (on the B string) right up until you strike the low G note on beat 3. This will assure there won't be an unwanted gap of silence.



TRACK 22

Next we see a way to maintain an even greater sense of continuity when changing chords. We've voiced the chords in such a way that a common tone (the high G) is allowed to ring throughout, creating a full, resonant sound. When working through a new progression, it's often possible to find these common tones between chords. This is a good habit to get into, as it can make the difference between a mediocre guitar part and one that really sings.



TRACK 23

Musical notation for Track 23 in 4/4 time, featuring a C to G chord progression. The right-hand part (RH) uses a triplet pattern: T 1 2 3 T 1 2 3 T 1 2 3 T 1 2 3, with the instruction "let ring". The guitar tablature (TAB) shows the following fret numbers:
 Treble: 0 1 3 | 2 0 1 3 | 0 0 3 | 0 0 0 3
 Bass: 3 | 3

Here's a common fingerpicking pattern in 3/4 applied to a I-vi-V progression in C. Notice again the common tone (open E string). As far as fingering, here's another trick. Instead of fretting the A minor chord as you normally would (fingers 2, 3, and 1), try using fingers 2 and 1 only, for the A and C notes, respectively. Remember, since you're not playing string 4, you don't need to fret it. This way, your third finger will be free to fret the low G note at the beginning of measure 3.



TRACK 24

Musical notation for Track 24 in 3/4 time, featuring a C to Am to G to (G7) chord progression. The right-hand part (RH) uses a pattern: T 1 2 3 2 1 *sim.*. The guitar tablature (TAB) shows the following fret numbers:
 Treble: 0 1 0 1 0 | 2 1 0 1 2 | 0 0 3 0 0 | 0 0 0 1 0 0
 Bass: 3 | 0 | 3

As our next two examples demonstrate, you can also combine arpeggiation with simultaneously struck notes. This can help to break up the monotony and provide additional interest for the listener.



TRACK 25

Musical notation for Track 25 in 4/4 time, featuring a C to G7 chord progression. The right-hand part (RH) uses a pattern: T 3 2 1 T 1 2 3 T 3 2 1 T 1 2 3. The guitar tablature (TAB) shows the following fret numbers:
 Treble: 0 0 0 | 0 1 0 | 0 0 0 0 0 | 0 0 0 1
 Bass: 3 | 3 | 3 | 3



TRACK 26

Musical notation for Track 26 in 4/4 time, featuring a C to G chord progression. The right-hand part (RH) uses a pattern: T 3 2 1 T 1 2 3 T 3 2 2 T 3 2 1 T 1 2 3 T 2 2 2. The guitar tablature (TAB) shows the following fret numbers:
 Treble: 0 0 0 | 0 1 0 | 0 3 1 | 0 0 0 0 0 | 0 1 3
 Bass: 3 | 3 | 3 3 2 0 | 3 | 3 3 0 2

Let's take a look at a few songs that make use of arpeggiation.

TIME IN A BOTTLE

Chords: Dm, Dm/C#, Dm/C, G7/B, Gm6/Bb, A7

let ring throughout

rit.

TAB

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ANNIE'S SONG

Chords: D, Dsus4, D, Dsus4

let ring

TAB

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STRONG ENOUGH

Chords: D, G, Bm(add4), A

let ring

TAB

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