

Strumming, Part One

Now that you've got the fingerings for a certain number of chords under a certain amount of control, let us focus on the art and science of *strumming* those chords.

We haven't said much about strumming yet, just that there are two kinds of strokes available to the guitarist, the Downstroke ("D") and the Upstroke ("U"), which, by definition, alternate with each other. I mean, if your hand goes down, then it's bound to come back up. (That is unless you strum all Downstrokes in a pinwheel rotary arm motion like The Who's Pete Townsend, but don't, okay?)

A guitar that is being strummed has a very rhythmic, percussive quality. Well, a guitar is a modified drum, really: a drum that can also play melody, harmony and bass. Just add a voice and you've got a one-[wo]man band.

So your job as a Strumming Guitarist is, among other things, *to keep the beat*. To achieve this goal, the strumming arm, usually the right arm, must execute a ***Relentlessly Steady Down-Up Motion***. DUDUDUDU. Do it. Choose a favorite chord (not easy, I know; probably not **F**) and strum DUDUDUDU.

We've already talked about the need for a thin pick. A medium pick wouldn't be awful, but don't let them sell you a thick pick. Thick picks don't *give*. I shudder to imagine how many music store owners have been able to retire early as a direct result of the income generated from selling thick picks to beginners.

You are probably already getting a feel for strumming with a pick. Remember: Hold it lightly, not too close to the tip, and let it wiggle in your fingers. If you hold it too tightly, you'll get a brash sound; if you hold it too *lightly*, you'll drop it in the soundhole. When you do, inevitably, ***drop it in the soundhole***, observe the following Patented Emergency Pick Extraction Procedure (PEPEP):

- (1) Hold the guitar flat in your lap on its back, with the neck extending to the left.
- (2) Jostle the instrument, roughly if necessary, to bring the pick **into view** at the bottom of the soundhole. (There are braces on the inside back of the guitar that will impede the sliding motion of the pick, so you have to horse it around.)
- (3) Check around for the current locations of lamps, pets and guitar students.
- (4) In a single fluid motion, raise the guitar rapidly and flip it over (toward you) **halfway** (soundhole facing down) so that the pick becomes "unweighted" inside the body of the guitar and begins plummeting toward the soundhole.
- (5) Watch helplessly as the pick comes skittering out the soundhole, hits the floor and bounces 20 feet into the next room. I cannot account for this pick-kinesis.
- (6) If (5) does not happen, repeat (1) through (4) until it does. Or you can give up and buy another pick. A thin one.

Enough levity. Let's get down to the serious business of having fun strumming the guitar. (Actually, we used to have a pick-kinesis when I was a kid. His name was Tchu-Tchu.)