

LESSON 3 TIMING AND SIMPLE STRUMS

Now that you know some chords (left hand positions) you will want to do more interesting strumming with your right hand. This lesson will introduce two simple strums, one in 2/4 time and one in 3/4 time. For more strums and detailed information on strums, read chapter {9}. Before introducing the two strums, let's talk about timing.

TIMING

Songs have patterns of beats or accents and the strum pattern follows these beats. For instance, in the song "ON TOP OF OLD SMOKEY" (see chapter {2}), the pattern is:

"ON TOP OF OLD SMO- KY ALL COVERED WITH. . . ."
1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3

In this song, the accent takes the count "1". To each "measure" there are 3 counts, each of which lasts as long as any other, or the length of one "quarter note". Therefore the song is in 3/4 time. This means that there are three counts or quarter notes per measure. If you tapped your foot to this song, you would tap on each count, 1,2,3, etc. The first word of this song is not accented. The accent is often called the "down beat". This song starts on count three or the "up beat".

Each song in the book has information on the title line to help in determining the beat, and to indicate where to start the song, and also to show what note the song starts on. For instance, the title line for ON TOP OF OLD SMOKEY has:

ON TOP OF OLD SMOKEY (3/4, 3, S2F3)

- Basic timing is 3/4
- Starts on third beat (3 of 1,2,3)
- Hold string 2, fret 3 to get first note of song

The first note (string 2, fret 3) is the "pitch" where you start singing and not necessarily the first string you strum when playing the song. Fret 0 indicates an open string (no fret held).

2/4 (4/4) STRUM

Now let's look at the strums. The first one is in 2/4 time. it is also useful in 4/4 time. This strum starts with your left hand in some chord position to start a song. Your right hand thumb plucks down (toward the ground) on a bass string (normally the "primary"), then your first, second and third (index, middle and ring) fingers pluck up together on strings 3, 2 and 1 respectively. See the picture below on the left. That is, your index finger plucks on string 3 only, while at the same time your middle finger plucks string 2 and at the same time your ring finger plucks string 1. See the picture below on the right.



Next your thumb alternates or switches to a different bass string followed by another pluck up with the 3 fingers (still on strings 3,2 and 1). You then repeat the pattern over and over, remembering to switch strings with your thumb. This strum will be called the **THUMB-PLUCK** ("TP") strum, or as one of my students dubbed it, the "dumb cluck" strum. The following is notation for this strum:

	-----R-- -----R--	String 1	(thinnest - highest pitch)
	-----M-- -----M--		
	-----I-- -----I--		
	---T---- -----		
	----- ---T----		
STRUM	----- -----	String 6	(thickest - lowest pitch)
NUMBER-->	1) q q q q		
TIMING-->	2/4) 1 2 1 2		

The lines below the strum are used to show timing and to give the strum an identifying number. The timing is 2/4 and is counted as 1 2, 1 2. The notes are quarter notes as indicated by the letter "q". The notation shows (from left to right) that you first use your thumb on the fourth string, followed by fingers I (index), M (middle), and R (ring) together on strings 3, 2 and 1 respectively. This is repeated, except that the thumb is used on the fifth string. You should first get the strum started, counting (1 2, 1 2) and then repeat it a couple of times before starting to sing the song.

The three plucking fingers should be touching each other and the plucking motion should be with the fingers only, not with the wrist or arm. To pluck a string, place the fleshy part of your finger on the string and apply a little pressure, then slide the finger off the string in a quick motion. If you have fingernails, they will hit the string as you slide off, but don't make a special effort to use the nail. It helps if your right hand nails are long enough to hit the strings, but not so long that they catch the string. Do not move your arm or wrist for the pluck - only the fingers, which should bend at the knuckles.

Now you can try this strum on any song you know in 2/4 or 4/4 time. Since you will probably be concentrating on new chords and new strums at the same time, try this: first get your left hand into the first chord. Then, holding it tightly, forget your left hand and concentrate on your right hand. Start your strum, and when ready, start singing on the proper count. When you get to the first chord change, finish the last thumb-pluck (TP) before the change, then stop strumming and concentrate on switching the left hand to the new chord. Take as long as needed, and only when comfortable in the new chord, forget the left hand then restart strumming and singing. This

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