

LEARN BLUES FINGERPICKING

INTERMEDIATE COURSE

3.3 Riffs, Triplets & Chord Tones



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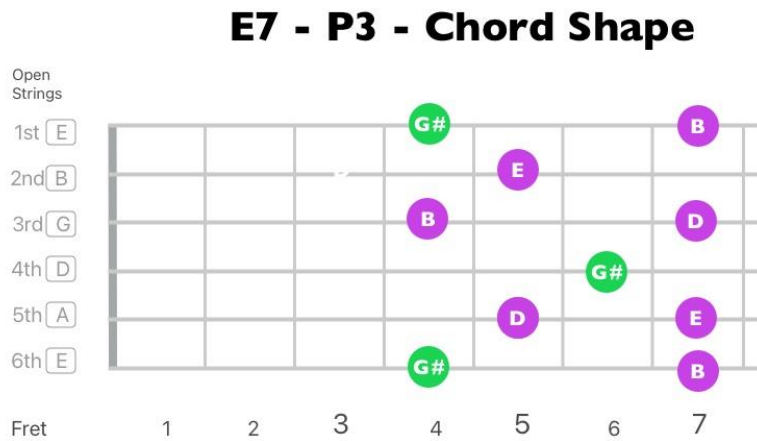
Intro

In this lesson, we are going to play more riffs.

Using our knowledge of arpeggios, we'll identify a few notes of the scale to target (i.e. give emphasis to in our playing) that are also chord tones (notes of the E7 chord in our case!)

The E7 arpeggio in Position 3

Here is the shape and name of each of the notes in the E7 chord



We can practice this arpeggio ascending:

Musical notation for an ascending arpeggio exercise. The top staff is in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The music starts with a dynamic marking of *mf*. The first measure is marked with a '1' above the first note. The second measure is marked with a '2' above the second note. The notes are: G2 (quarter), A2 (quarter), B2 (quarter), C3 (quarter), D3 (quarter), E3 (quarter), F3 (quarter), G3 (quarter). The bottom staff is labeled 'TAB' and shows the fret numbers: 0 4 7 5 7 6 4-7 5 4-7.

And descending:

Musical notation for a descending arpeggio exercise. The top staff is in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The music starts with a dynamic marking of *mf*. The first measure is marked with a '1' above the first note. The second measure is marked with a '2' above the second note. The notes are: G3 (quarter), F3 (quarter), E3 (quarter), D3 (quarter), C3 (quarter), B2 (quarter), A2 (quarter), G2 (quarter). The bottom staff is labeled 'TAB' and shows the fret numbers: 7 4 5 7 4 6 7 5 7 4 0.

Riff E

A few cool things in the first half of this riff. Firstly, we have those bends where we hold the 1st string at the 7th fret (with index finger of fretting hand) and then we bend up the 2nd string at the 8th fret. Very bluesy.

We also have a unison slide. Sliding into the 5th fret of the 2nd string gives us an E note so if we play the open 1st string (also an E note), we will get two E notes and these notes are “in unison”. It’s a lovely effect and again a hallmark of blues playing.

The first half of Riff E is shown in musical notation. The top staff is a treble clef with a common time signature (C). The melody starts with a quarter note on the 3rd fret of the 1st string, followed by a quarter note on the 4th fret, and then a quarter note on the 5th fret. There are two bends indicated by a 'b' symbol and a curved arrow. The first bend is on the 7th fret of the 1st string, and the second is on the 8th fret of the 2nd string. The melody then continues with a quarter note on the 7th fret, a quarter note on the 8th fret, and a quarter note on the 9th fret. The bottom staff is a guitar TAB with six strings. The fret numbers are 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0 for the first four notes, 0, 0, 0, 0 for the next four notes, and 7, 6, 5 for the final three notes. There are two '1/2' symbols above the 7th and 8th frets, indicating half-step bends. The TAB is labeled 'T A B' on the left.

The second half of the riff starts off the same and just has a different ending. Here we target the G# note (the 1st string at the 4th fret).

If you look at the E7 arpeggio above, you’ll see it is a chord tone and you’ll also notice that it is not in our scale. Because the G# is the major third of E, it really emphasizes the chord. The first note is 1st string at the 3rd fret (between bass notes) and then hammer-ons to the 4th fret (with bass note). This technique is explored more in my [intermediate guitar course](#).

The second half of Riff E is shown in musical notation. The top staff is a treble clef with a common time signature (C). The melody starts with a quarter note on the 3rd fret of the 1st string, followed by a quarter note on the 4th fret, and then a quarter note on the 5th fret. There are two bends indicated by a 'b' symbol and a curved arrow. The first bend is on the 7th fret of the 1st string, and the second is on the 8th fret of the 2nd string. The melody then continues with a quarter note on the 7th fret, a quarter note on the 8th fret, and a quarter note on the 9th fret. The bottom staff is a guitar TAB with six strings. The fret numbers are 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0 for the first four notes, 0, 0, 0, 0 for the next four notes, and 3, 4 for the final two notes. There are two '1/2' symbols above the 7th and 8th frets, indicating half-step bends. The TAB is labeled 'T A B' on the left.

Triplets

A triplet is basically a way of sub-dividing the count of music into three.

You can try practicing triplets verbally, right now.

Just say “ONE-and-ah TWO-and-ah THREE-and-ah FOUR-and-ah”

Just by playing the open 6th string and open 1st string on the guitar, you can also practice triplets.

Play just the “one, two, three, four” as your bassline (open 6th string)

And play each of the twelve sub-divisions (one-and-ah, two-and-ah etc) on the 1st string!

The image shows a musical score for a guitar exercise. It consists of a treble clef staff and a guitar tablature staff. The treble staff is in common time (C) and contains four measures of music. Each measure contains a triplet of eighth notes on the first string, indicated by a '3' over the notes. The first measure is marked with a '1' above it. The dynamic marking *mf* is placed below the first measure. The guitar tablature staff shows the corresponding fretting: the first string has a '0' for each eighth note in the triplet, and the bass line (open 6th string) is represented by '0' on the sixth line of the staff.

Riff F

The first half of the riff uses triplets.

We play the 1st string at the 7th, 6th, 5th fret and notice how those are played over one beat (i.e. one bass note).

In the following bar, we again have triplets but this time on the 2nd and 3rd strings but using the same rhythm as the first bar.

You may also have noticed that we let 2 notes ring (1st string at 7th fret & 2nd string at 5th fret) that are chord tones (i.e. in our arpeggio)

Musical notation for the first half of Riff F, measures 1 and 2. The notation is in treble clef with a common time signature (C). Measure 1 contains two triplet eighth notes on the 1st string (7th, 6th, 5th fret) and two triplet eighth notes on the 2nd and 3rd strings (5th, 7th fret). Measure 2 contains two triplet eighth notes on the 2nd and 3rd strings (8th, 5th fret) and two triplet eighth notes on the 1st string (8th, 5th fret). The dynamic marking *mf* is present. Below the staff is a guitar tablature (TAB) with fret numbers: 7 6 5 7 6 5 7 for measure 1, and 8 5 7 8 5 7 5 for measure 2. The bass line is indicated by '0' for open strings.

The second half starts off the same and has a different ending.

Musical notation for the second half of Riff F, measures 4 and 5. Measure 4 is identical to measure 1. Measure 5 contains two triplet eighth notes on the 1st string (7th, 6th, 5th fret) and two triplet eighth notes on the 2nd and 3rd strings (8th, 5th fret). The notation ends with a double bar line. The guitar tablature (TAB) shows fret numbers: 7 6 5 7 6 5 7 for measure 4, and 8 5 for measure 5. The bass line is indicated by '0' for open strings.

Take your time with this if you are new to the concept of triplets. You are not just learning something on the guitar neck, but rather learning a little how to count time and this will really improve your playing.

Riff G

The first half of this riff uses triplets again. We use the blues scale, and we end on a chord tone (the root note or E note)

Musical notation for the first half of Riff G, measures 1-2. The notation is in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The first measure is marked with a first ending bracket (1) and contains four eighth-note triplets. The second measure is marked with a second ending bracket (2) and contains a half note. The dynamic marking *mf* is placed below the first measure. The guitar tablature (TAB) below the staff shows the fret numbers for each note: 5 8 5 7 6 5 5 8 5 7 6 5 for the first measure, and 5 for the second measure. The bass line (TAB) shows 0 for all notes.

The second half of this riff uses triplets again. We use the blues scale, and we now let a note ring that is a scale tone but not a chord tone – can you hear that additional tension? It's fine if you don't yet, but really cool if indeed you did..

Musical notation for the second half of Riff G, measures 4-5. The notation is in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The first measure is marked with a first ending bracket (4) and contains four eighth-note triplets. The second measure is marked with a second ending bracket (5) and contains a half note. The guitar tablature (TAB) below the staff shows the fret numbers for each note: 5 8 5 7 6 5 5 8 5 7 6 5 for the first measure, and 8 for the second measure. The bass line (TAB) shows 0 for all notes.

Riff H

This riff goes back to open position.

We now add some pull-offs and hammer-ons to our playing – using open strings.

The image shows a musical score for a guitar riff. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a guitar tablature staff. The treble staff has a 4th fret barre over the first measure and a 5th fret barre over the second measure. The first measure contains two triplet eighth notes. The second measure contains two triplet eighth notes. The tablature staff shows the fret numbers for each string: 3-0, 0-3, 0-0 for the first measure, and 0-3, 0-3, 0-0 for the second measure.

Assignment

Focus on the following elements as you practice these riffs:

- Playing triplets for us fingerpickers usually means for each bass note, we are playing 3 notes with our fingers (melody notes)
- We focus on playing those evenly
- We count one-and-ah, two-and-ah, three-and-ah when we play triplets