

BLUES: THE ROOTS OF ROCK

The blues is an African-American music form derived from spirituals and work songs, but it has evolved and developed in tandem with European musical forms and has affected all American music. This chapter covers picking and strumming styles of rural “folk” blues, which goes back as far as the beginning of the twentieth century, and urban electric blues styles of the 1940s up to the present.

The strums and picking patterns of both urban and rural blues are used in rock, country, folk, heavy metal, and funk/soul music. For example, the Travis-picking of country and rockabilly grew out of blues fingerpicking, and the boogie-woogie guitar backup style of rock and heavy metal goes directly back to rural blues guitar backup.

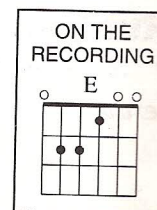
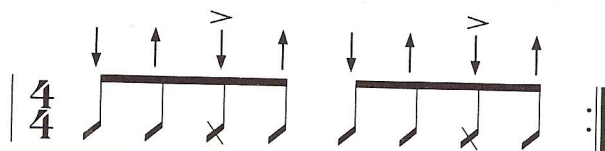
Since so many guitar styles grew out of the blues, this chapter is a good starting place for a study of guitar backup. As you listen to and play the patterns, don’t assume that “rural” strums can only be played on acoustic guitar and “urban” patterns must be electric. There has always been crossover, so try all the blues strums and picking patterns acoustically and electrically.

Contemporary electric blues guitarists often set their tunes to a rock or funk beat, in addition to using the traditional blues shuffle. Check the **ROCK** and **R&B/FUNK/SOUL** chapters for the appropriate backup patterns.

Rural Blues Shuffle, Strum #1

2

Tempo: Moderate to fast shuffle

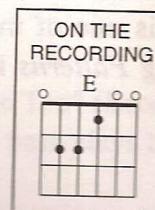
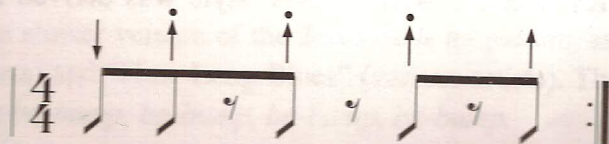


Through the 1950s and even into the 1960s, most blues guitarists (especially acoustic players) used their thumb and fingers. In this strum, you brush down with your thumb and up with your fingers. Damp the strings with the palm of your picking hand. Use for moderate tempos like “Help Me” (Sonny Boy Williamson) and “Pride and Joy” (Stevie Ray Vaughan), or faster tunes like “Baby Please Don’t Go” (Lightnin’ Hopkins, Van Morrison, and many others have recorded it).

Rural Blues Shuffle, Strum #2

2

Tempo: Fast shuffle



This is for faster shuffles in the “Boogie Chillun” (John Lee Hooker) vein. For a percussive effect and to enhance the beat, slap the strings with the palm of your fretting hand instead of carefully damping them. As in #1, the thumb plays downstrokes, the fingers brush up.

Boogie/Rock Lick (Moveable)

8

Tempo: Moderate rock

G

The moveable version of the *Boogie/Rock Lick* is based on the same chord formations as *Basic Boogie Lick (Moveable)*.

Boogie/Rock Lick #2

9

Tempo: Moderate rock

E

G

This is a variation of *Boogie/Rock Lick #1*. Here are the first position and moveable versions. You can play the same lick "up one string," i.e., on an A chord or a barred, abbreviated A chord.

Urban Blues Comping #1

10

Tempo: Moderate to fast shuffle beat

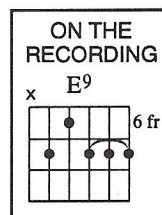
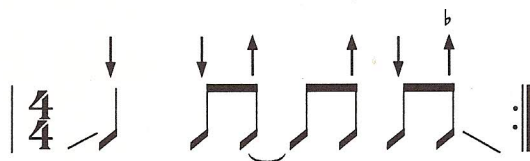
NOTE: These 9th chords are often used in all the *Urban Blues* patterns.

"Comping" is a swing/jazz expression for strumming backup chords, and it describes what the rhythm guitarist often does in a large electric blues band with a horn section (e.g., B. B. King's band). The chords are usually moveable and can be damped with the fretting hand. This strum is appropriate for tunes like "Everyday I Have the Blues" (B.B. King, Lowell Fulson, and many others), "Kansas City" (Wilbert Harrison and others), "One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer" (John Lee Hooker, George Thorogood), and "Eyesight to the Blind" (Sonny Boy Williamson, The Who, Eric Clapton).

Urban Blues Comping #2

10

Tempo: Slow to fast shuffle beat

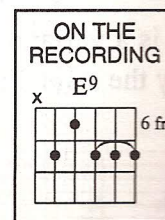
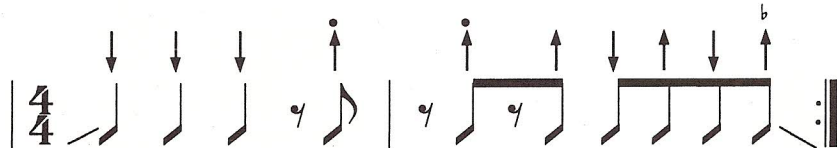


This is a variation of *Urban Blues Comping #1*. You can combine the two to make a two-beat pattern. The flat sign (b) over the last stroke of this pattern tells you to play that chord a fret lower than the others and slide up a fret for the next stroke. The pattern works with or without this embellishment. Besides the tunes mentioned for *Urban Blues Comping #1*, this pattern works for slow tunes like "Stormy Monday Blues" (T-Bone Walker, Bobby Blue Bland), "Sweet Little Angel," and "Three O'Clock in the Morning" (B. B. King).

Urban Blues Comping #3

11

Tempo: Moderate to fast shuffle beat

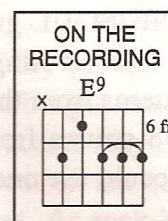


This rhythm figure is played often by horns and guitar in tunes like "Rock Around the Clock" (Bill Haley and the Comets) and "Shake, Rattle and Roll" (Bill Haley, Joe Turner, and others). It's a swing band riff that crossed over into rock and roll, and it works as a backup comping pattern as well.

Urban Blues Comping #4

11

Tempo: Fast shuffle

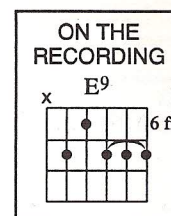
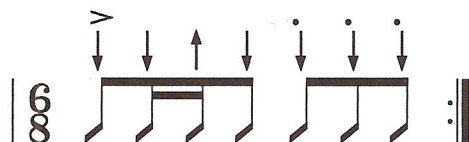


This is a faster variation of *Urban Blues Comping #3*, as in “Eyesight to the Blind” (mentioned before) and “Stang’s Swang” (Stevie Ray Vaughan).

Slow Urban Blues Strum (6/8)

12

Tempo: Slow shuffle

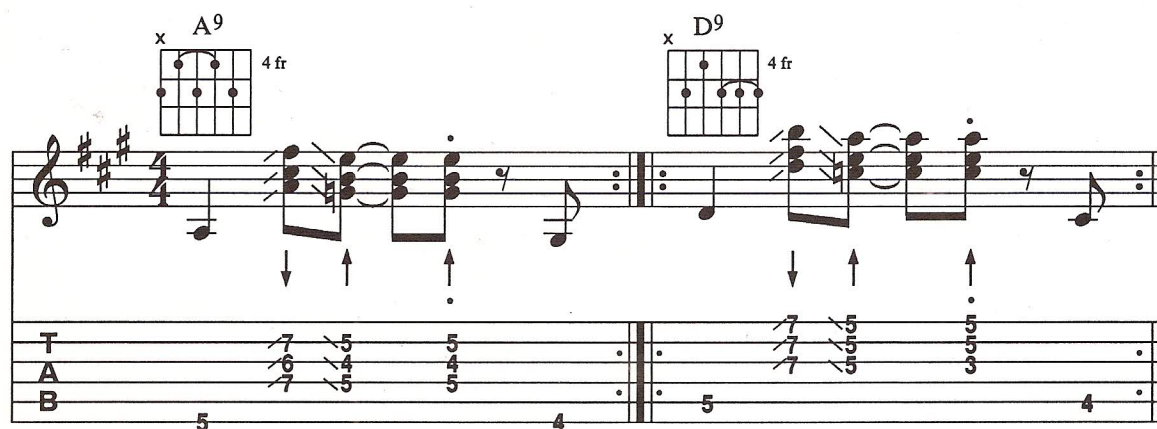


This works with the blues tunes mentioned in *Urban Blues Comping #2*. More titles are: “Reconsider Baby” (Lowell Fulson and others), “Blues With a Feeling” (Little Walter, Paul Butterfield).

Slow Urban Blues Strum #2

12

Tempo: Slow to moderate

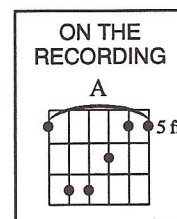
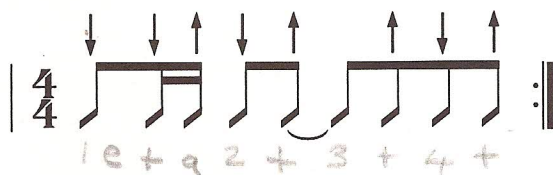


This strum is used for the tunes mentioned in *Slow Urban Blues Comping #1* and *Slow Urban Blues Comping #2*. These two sliding licks are often heard in Chicago-style blues bands. They are based on the 9th chords so often played in that genre. They are played usually on electric guitar.

Basic Rock #3

14

Tempo: Moderately slow to moderate rock

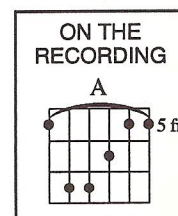
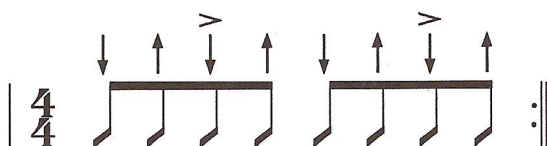


This is for rock with a slightly funky feel, as in "You're No Good" (Linda Ronstadt, The Everetts), "I Heard It Through the Grapevine" (Marvin Gaye [the Creedence Clearwater Revival version sounds more like *Basic Rock #1* with alternating up and downstrokes]), "It's Too Late" (The King), and "Sittin' on the Dock of the Bay" (Otis Redding, Michael Bolton).

Rock Shuffle #1

15

Tempo: Moderate to bright shuffle

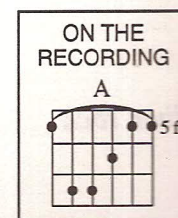
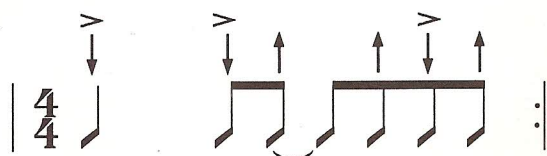


This basic shuffle strum fits tunes like "Bad, Bad Leroy Brown" (Jim Croce), "Pride and Joy" (Stevie Ray Vaughan), "All Shook Up" (Elvis Presley), "Crazy Little Thing Called Love" (Queen), "California Girls" (Beach Boys), "Higher Ground" (Stevie Wonder, Red Hot Chili Peppers). On tunes with moderate tempos, you can use all downstrokes to give this strum a harder edge.

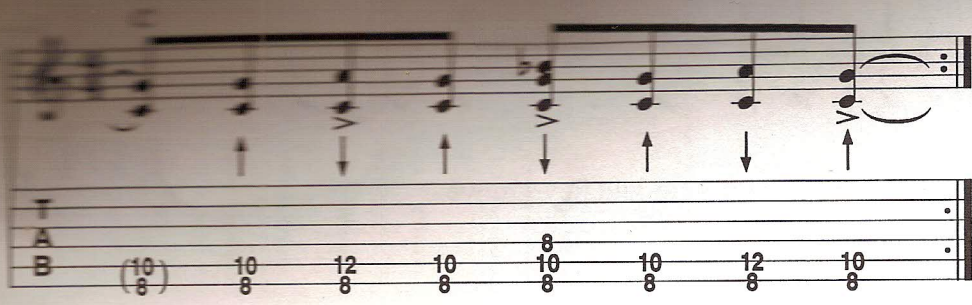
Rock Shuffle #2

15

Tempo: Moderate shuffle



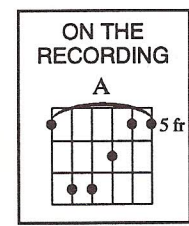
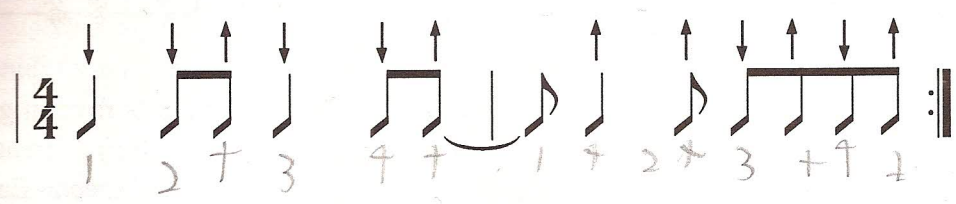
This is the same as *Country Strum #2*, as in "Chains" (the Cookies, the Beatles), "Mama Love" (Harold Dorman, Johnny Rivers), "How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved By You)" (Marvin Gaye, James Taylor), "Loves Me Like a Rock" and "Slip Slidin' Away" (Paul Simon).



This is more syncopated than *Rock Boogie Shuffle #1*. You can also play “straight” (without the anticipated first beat) and add the anticipation occasionally for variety and to give the rhythm an extra push. “Your Mama Don’t Dance” (Loggins and Messina), “Some Kind of Wonderful” (Grand Funk), and “Rockin’ Robin” (Bobby Day, Michael Jackson) are some examples.

Fast Rock Strum 21

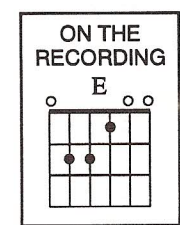
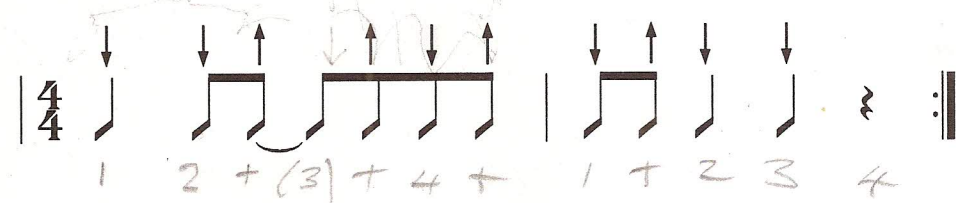
Tempo: Fast rock



This is a two-bar pattern for tunes like “Good Lovin” (Rascals), “Turn on Your Love Light” (Bobby Bland), “The Doctor” (Doobie Brothers), and “I’m a Believer” (the Monkees).

Bo Diddley-Style Strum #1 22

Tempo: Bright rock

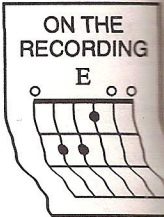
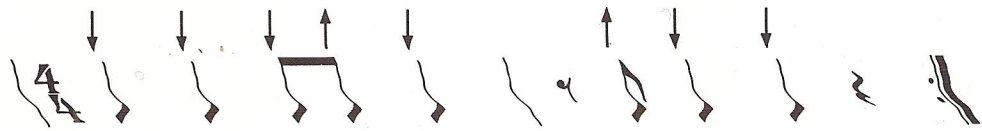


There are many variations of this strum, which is identified with Bo Diddley. Tunes with this rhythm groove include “Bo Diddley” and “Mona” (Bo Diddley), “Not Fade Away” (Buddy Holly), “Faith” (George Michael), “Willie and the Hand Jive” (Johnny Otis, Eric Clapton), and “Magic Carpet Ride” (Steppenwolf).

EQUIPMENT NOTE: Bo Diddley played electric guitar with a lot of reverb and tremolo, so these effects are used often with this strum.

Bo Diddley-Style Strum #2 22

Tempo: Bright rock



This is one variation of the Bo Diddley groove.

"Hi-Heel Sneakers" Boogie/Rock Strum #1 23

Tempo: Moderate to bright rock

C

C

"Hi-Heel Sneakers" (Tommy Tucker) was such a popular bar-band tune that its rhythm became known as the "Hi-Heel Sneakers" beat. As in "Lay Down Sally" (Eric Clapton), "Butter" (the Newbeats), "Cold As Ice" (Foreigner), "Morning Train (Nine To Five)" (Sheena Easton). Here are two variations of the groove, the second a bit more syncopated than the first.

"Hi-Heel Sneakers" Boogie/Rock Strum #2 23

Tempo: Moderate to bright rock

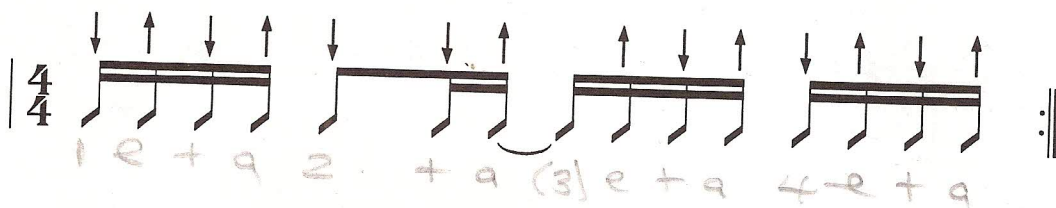
C

C

This is the same as #1, but a bit bluesier with the flatted 7th note added, as in "Tennessee" (Chuck Berry, Johnny Rivers), "Freeze Frame" (J. Geils Band), "Can I Get It" (Marvin Gaye, Rolling Stones), "The Boy From New York City" (the Newbeats, Manhattan Transfer).

Rock/Funk #1 25

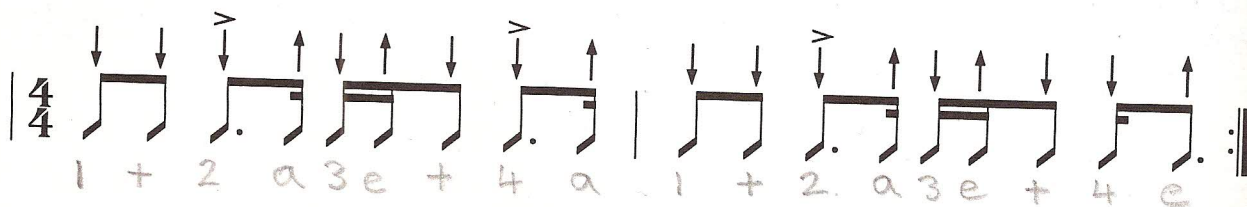
Tempo: Bright rock/funk



This is suitable for fast, strum-filled tunes like the Doobie Brothers' "Listen to the Music" or "Long Train Running" or Bachman-Turner Overdrive's "You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet" and "Let It Rain".

Rock/Funk #2 25

Tempo: Moderate to bright rock/funk

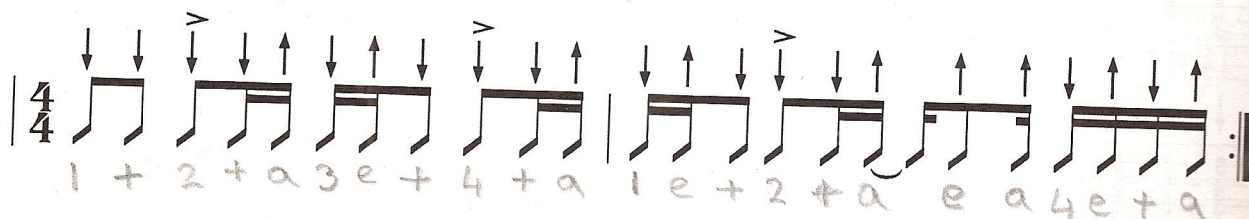


This is rhythmically tighter than *Rock/Funk #1*, as in "Centerfold" (J. Geils Band), "After Midnight" (Eric Clapton), "I Love Rock 'n' Roll" (Joan Jett), "Spinning Wheel" (Blood, Sweat & Tears), and "Purple Haze" (Jimi Hendrix). The first bar is the main groove of this strum. The second bar is optional and can be played every other time (as written) or at the end of a musical phrase when there is a space between lyrics.

EQUIPMENT NOTE: Often played on electric guitar with a lot of distortion.

Rock/Funk #3 26

Tempo: Moderately slow and heavy rock/funk

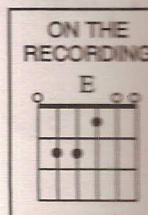
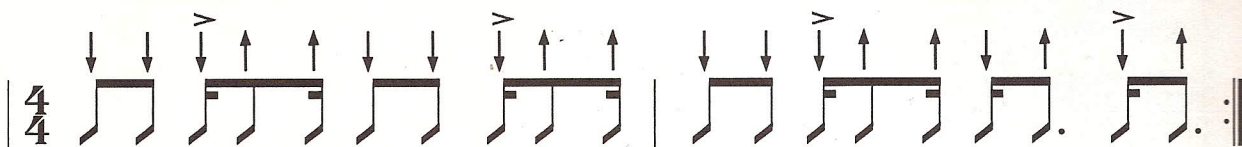


This is for slower tempos, as in "Wild Thing" (the Troggs, Jimi Hendrix), "Hey Joe" (Hendrix, the Leaves), "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" and "She Came in Through the Bathroom Window" (the Beatles). As in *Rock/Funk #2*, you can play the first bar most of the time and throw in bar two occasionally.

EQUIPMENT NOTE: Often played on electric guitar with a lot of distortion.

Rock/Funk #4 26

Tempo: Moderate to bright rock/funk

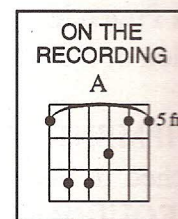
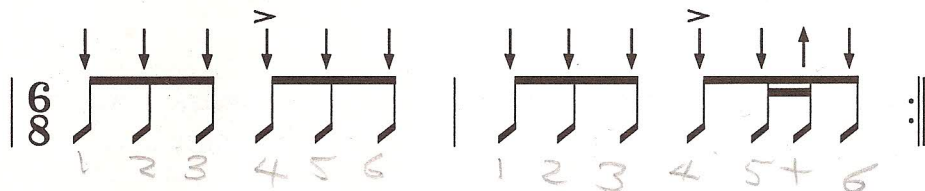


There are countless ways to vary *Rock/Funk #2* and *#3*. This syncopated version fits tunes like "Sweet Home Alabama" (Lynyrd Skynyrd) and "Magic Man" (Heart).

EQUIPMENT NOTE: Often played on electric guitar with a lot of distortion.

6/8 Rock Strum #1 27

Tempo: Moderately slow rock ballad

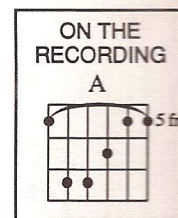
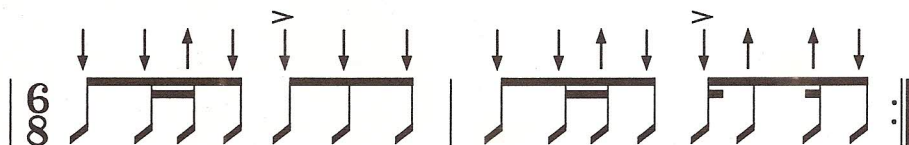


You can use the first bar and occasionally add the second bar for variety, or you can alternate the two bars as written. This strum fits countless fifties ballads like "Oh Donna" (Richie Valens), "To Know Him Is to Love Him" (Teddy Bears, Peter and Gordon, Bobby Vinton), and "You Send Me" (Sam Cooke).

EQUIPMENT NOTE: Often played on electric guitar with reverb.

6/8 Rock Strum #2 27

Tempo: Slow rock ballad



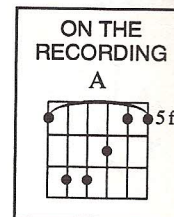
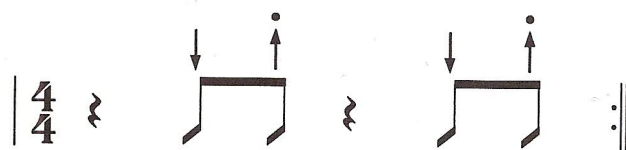
For slower 6/8 tunes like "Sleepwalk" (Santo and Johnny), "When a Man Loves a Woman" (Percy Sledge), "Time Is on My Side" (Wilson Pickett, the Rolling Stones), "This Boy" and "Oh Darling" (the Beatles), "Red House" (Jimi Hendrix), and "House of the Rising Sun" (the Animals). As in *6/8 Rock Strum #1*, you can use just the first bar and play the second bar occasionally, or you can alternate the two.

EQUIPMENT NOTE: Often played on electric guitar with reverb.

Reggae Strum #1

29

Tempo: Moderate rock



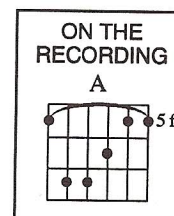
The electric guitar usually plays very sparse, clipped rhythm strums in reggae music. The tone is very sharp and biting. To achieve that clipped effect, moveable chord fragments are often employed. They are easier to mute (with the fretting hand), as in "The Harder They Come" (Jimmy Cliff), "Stir It Up" (Bob Marley and the Wailers), and "I Shot the Sheriff" (Bob Marley and the Wailers, Eric Clapton).

EQUIPMENT NOTE: To get the appropriate biting tone, use the back (treble) pickup on an electric guitar.

Reggae Strum #2

29

Tempo: Moderate rock

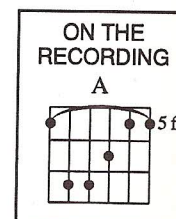
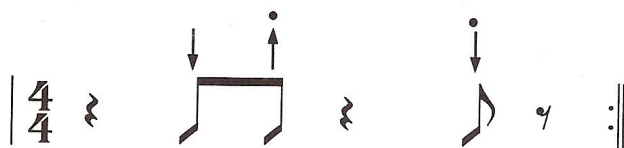


This is the same as *Reggae Strum #1*, but even sparser.

Reggae Strum #3

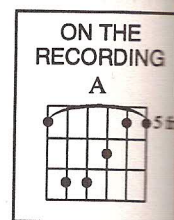
30

Tempo: Moderate rock



This is yet another of the many possible variations of *Reggae Strum #1*.

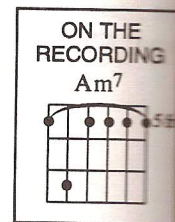
31



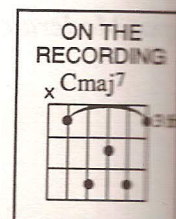
*NOTE: Bossa nova is a popular Brazilian dance music that has mingled with American jazz and pop.

31

The first system of musical notation for 'The Little Boat' is in 4/4 time. It consists of two measures. The first measure contains two eighth notes, each with a downward arrow above it. The second measure contains a quarter rest followed by a quarter note with an upward arrow above it. The system ends with a repeat sign.



32

$$\left| \frac{4}{4} \right\rangle \rightsquigarrow \begin{array}{c} \downarrow \\ \diagup \end{array} \gamma \begin{array}{c} \uparrow \\ \diagup \end{array} \gamma \mid \begin{array}{c} \downarrow \\ \diagup \end{array} \begin{array}{c} \downarrow \\ \diagup \end{array} \gamma \begin{array}{c} \uparrow \\ \diagup \end{array} \gamma \vdots$$


28

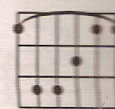
Latin Rock #4

32

Tempo: Fast Latin rock



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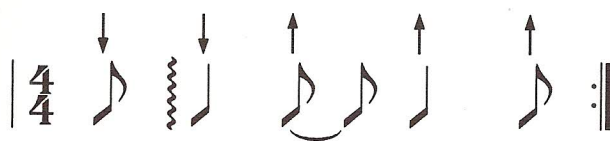


Similar to *Latin Rock #1*, but with some damped strums, this fast samba beat fits tunes like “(Marie’s the Name) His Latest Flame” (Elvis Presley), “Love the One You’re With,” and “Suite: Judy Blue Eyes” (Crosby, Stills & Nash).

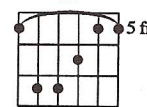
Latin Rock #5

33

Tempo: Moderately slow to moderately bright Latin rock



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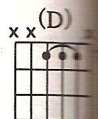
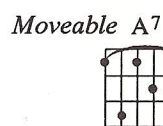
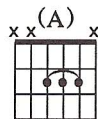
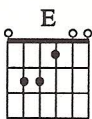
The wiggly line ($\{ \}$) indicates a slow rake in which the flatpick hits one string at a time in rapid succession, like a quick arpeggio. This rhythm was popular in 1950s rock tunes like “Love Is Strange” (Mickey and Sylvia), “Diana” (Paul Anka), and “Little Darlin’” (the Diamonds). It also works in 1960s tunes like “Under the Boardwalk” (the Drifters), “It’s Now or Never” (Elvis Presley), and “Stand By Me” (Ben E. King, John Lennon).

Rockabilly Fingerpicking #5

38

Tempo: Moderately fast

First Position



This pattern works well in faster rockabilly tunes like “Mystery Train” and “My Baby Let Me” (Elvis Presley), and country hits like “Workingman’s Blues” (Merle Haggard) and “That’s What Like About You” (Trisha Yearwood). Fret the final barred chord of each pattern with your ring finger.

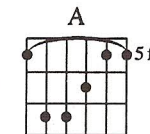
EQUIPMENT NOTE: Same as *Rockabilly Fingerpicking #1*.

Rock Ballad #1

39

Tempo: Moderately slow rock

ON THE
RECORDING



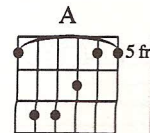
This is the same pattern as *Basic Rock #3*, only slower, as in “The Best of My Love” (the Eagles), “Right Time of the Night” (Jennifer Warnes), “Stand By Me” (Ben E. King, John Lennon) and “I’ll Be There” (Jackson 5).

Rock Ballad #2

39

Tempo: Slow rock

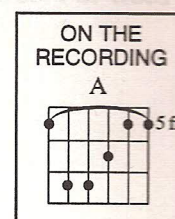
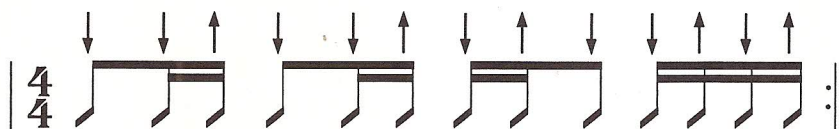
ON THE
RECORDING



This is slower than *Rock Ballad #1*, as in “Hey Jude” and “Let It Be” (the Beatles), “Every Rose Has Its Thorn” (Poison), and “Everytime You Go Away” (Paul Young).

Rock Ballad #3 40

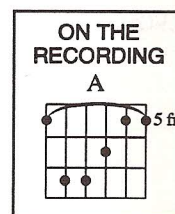
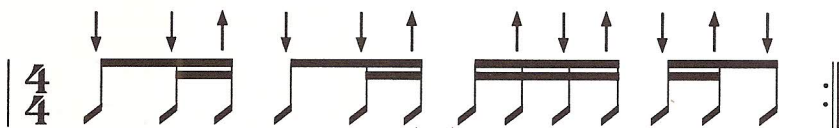
Tempo: Slower than Rock Ballad #2



The slower the tempo, the more sixteenth-note strums are added, as in “Knockin’ On Heaven’s Door” (Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton), “Helpless” (Neil Young), and “Don’t Know What You Got (‘Till It’s Gone)” (Cinderella).

Rock Ballad #4 40

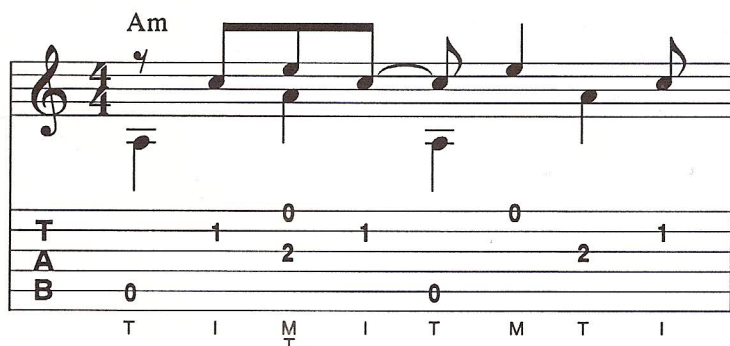
Tempo: Same as Rock Ballad #2 or #3



This is one of countless possible variations of the ROCK BALLAD #2 or #3 strums.

Fingerpicking Rock Ballad #1 41

Tempo: Slow to moderately slow rock ballad



There are many variations of this fingerpicking pattern. It’s a typical backup for tunes like “You’ve Got a Friend” and “Candy Man” (James Taylor), and “I’ll Have to Say I Love You in a Song” (Jim Croce).

EQUIPMENT NOTE: Use acoustic guitar, electric guitar enhanced by effects (echo, flanger, tremolo, chorus, etc.), or twelve-string guitar.



R&B/FUNK/SOUL

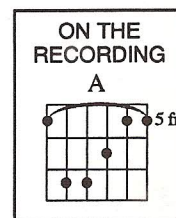
It has been called R&B (rhythm and blues), funk, soul, and many other names. In spite of musical crossover and racial and musical integration (e.g., super funkmeister George Clinton produced the white rock group, the Red Hot Chili Peppers), there are still “soul” (read “African American”) radio, “soul” video programming, and “soul” charts . . . and a “soul” section in your local record store. As the strums that follow illustrate, “black” pop music has a funkier beat than “white” pop music. Here are some other qualities that set it apart for the guitarist:

- Funk strums are more rhythmically complex than rock strums because the beat is more subdivided. Notice that there are many sixteenth-note strums in the patterns that follow. To give definition to those rapid sixteenth-note patterns, a crisp sharp-toned electric guitar has always been preferable. The Fender Stratocaster and Telecaster have long been standard funk guitars, though many modern hybrid electrics can achieve the same sound.
- Moveable chords are the chords of choice, because they can be muted more easily than fixed position chords. Muting is needed for the same reason a sharp-toned electric guitar is used: it gives sharp definition to those sixteenth-note strums.
- In rock and metal, the beat is often guitar-driven. A raunchy guitar riff defines the groove, and the bass and drums follow that riff. In soul or funk music, the bass and drums are more likely to define the rhythmic feel, and the guitar responds to them.
- Space is important in funk patterns. Notice how the patterns that follow often contain “holes,” rather than constant strumming. This can push and syncopate the beat. To make syncopated funk patterns, listen to conga drummers and try to imitate their rhythmic approach.

Basic Sparse Soul/Rock Strum #1

43

Tempo: Moderately slow to fast rock

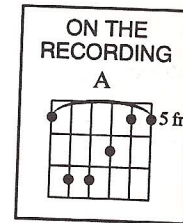
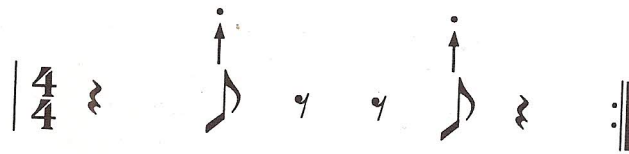


Like one of the most basic reggae beats, this strum is played in a high register and highlights the snare drum accents. It was used in many early soul tunes, such as “In the Midnight Hour” (Wilson Pickett), and “Ain’t too Proud to Beg” (the Temptations).

Basic Sparse Soul/Rock Strum #2

43

Tempo: Slow to moderate rock/ballad

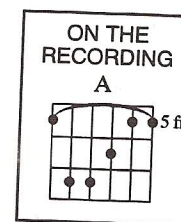
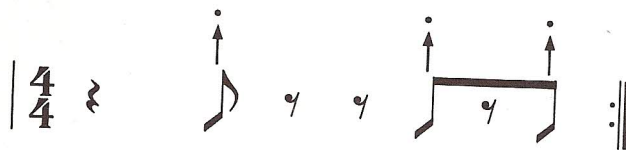


A more syncopated version of the previous strum was used in early soul/rock ballads like "Stand By Me" (Ben E. King) and "Under the Boardwalk" (the Drifters).

Basic Sparse Soul/Rock Strum #3

44

Tempo: Slow to moderate rock

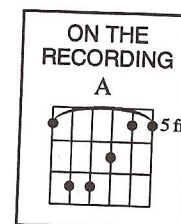


This is a slight variation of #2, as in "Walk On By" (Dionne Warwick).

Basic Sparse Soul/Rock Strum #4

44

Tempo: Moderate to fast rock

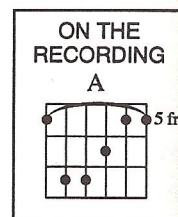
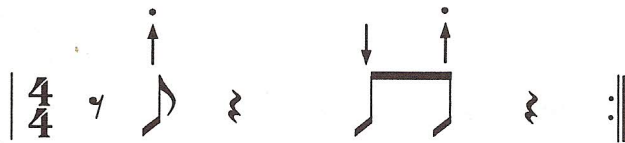


This is another more syncopated variation of #1 and #2.

Basic Sparse Soul/Rock Strum #5

45

Tempo: Moderate to fast rock

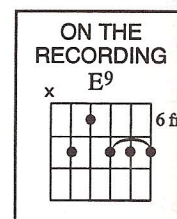


This is still another syncopated variation. All of these can be mixed and matched, and many patterns can be created (i.e., play #2 followed by #4).

Basic Sparse Soul/Rock Strum #6

45

Tempo: Moderate rock

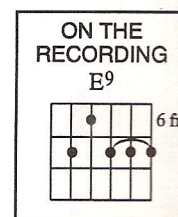
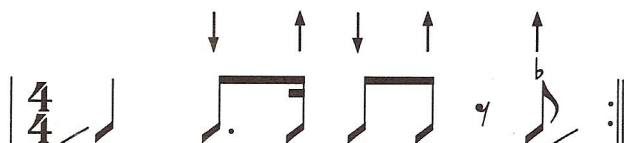


This strum has a funkier feel than the other *Sparse Soul/Rock Strums*. The sixteenth note syncopation. It has a rhythmic feel similar to the Sam and Dave hits, "Hold On, I'm Comin'" and "Soul Man."

Basic Soul/Rock Strum #1

46

Tempo: Moderate to fast rock

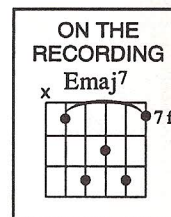
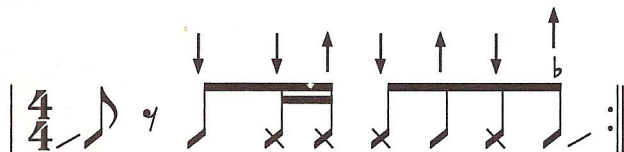


This strum is played in soul classics like "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" and "I Feel Good" (James Brown), "Knock On Wood" (Eddie Floyd and many others), and "Mustang Sally" (Wanda Pickett). The last stroke is played one fret lower and slides up a fret, so that the first beat of the next pattern is a slide. The strum also works well without this extra feature.

Basic Soul/Rock Strum #2

46

Tempo: Moderate to fast rock

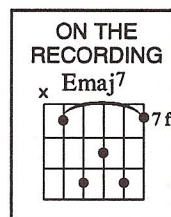
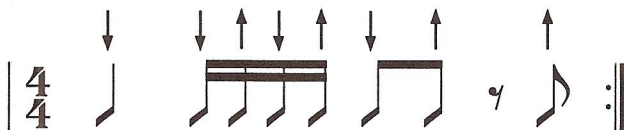


This is the same as #1, with a slightly funkier feel (because of the extra “scratch” strokes), as in “She’s Lookin’ Good” (Wilson Pickett). If a strum includes many muted strokes, it is sometimes called a “scratch rhythm.”

Basic Soul/Rock Strum #3

47

Tempo: Moderate rock ballad to moderate rock

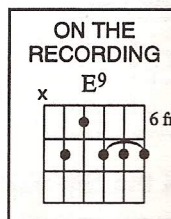
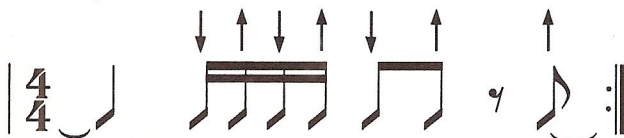


This is a slower variation of #1, for tunes like “Let’s Stay Together” (Al Green), “Midnight Train to Georgia” (Gladys Knight and the Pips), “The Thrill Is Gone” (B.B. King), and “Just My Imagination” (the Temptations, the Rolling Stones).

Basic Soul/Rock Strum #3 (Variation)

47

Tempo: Moderate rock ballad to moderate rock

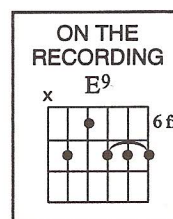
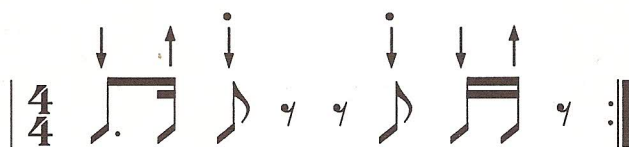


This is the same as #3, with one variation: the last beat is tied to the first, which creates a very syncopated feel. Try alternating #3 and #4, so that the “anticipated first beat” happens every other bar.

Basic Soul/Rock Strum #4

48

Tempo: Moderate to fast rock

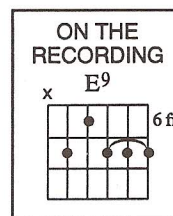
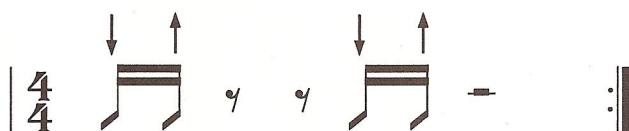


This strum fits songs like “Shotgun” (Junior Walker) or “Respect,” “Think,” and “Baby I Love You” (Aretha Franklin). Note all the “space” in this pattern.

Uptight Funk #1

49

Tempo: Moderate to fast rock

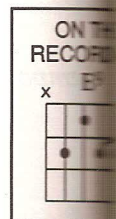
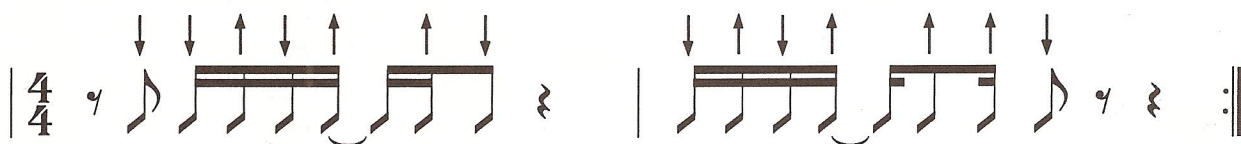


James Brown popularized this “uptight” (funky/high tension) feel in a series of tunes like “Say It Loud—I’m Black and I’m Proud,” “I Got the Feeling,” and “Ain’t It Funky Now.” Though each tune had a different guitar part, the overall groove was the same. His arranging in the late 1960s pushed soul music in a much funkier “rhythm groove” direction.

Uptight Funk #2

49

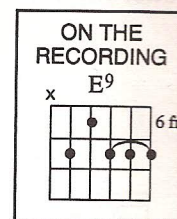
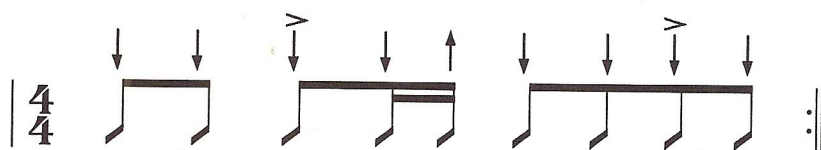
Tempo: Moderate funk



This is the flip side of *Uptight Funk #1*, which had few strokes and a lot of space. Here, you achieve the same groove with a scratch rhythm (many sixteenth-note strums), as in James Brown’s “Cold Sweat” and “There Was a Time.”

Uptight Funk #3 50

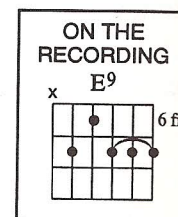
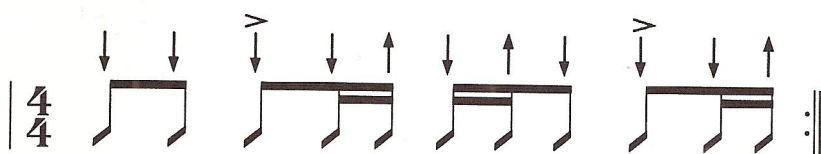
Tempo: Moderate funk



This is a modern funk strum, as in “I Give You My Heart” (Baby Face), “It’s Gonna Be Alright” (Aaron Hall), and “Disappear” (INXS).

Uptight Funk #4 50

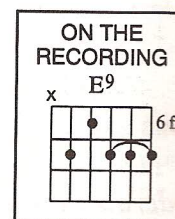
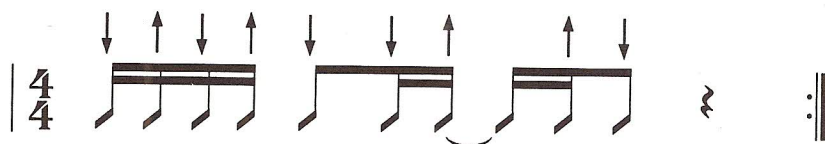
Tempo: Moderate funk



This is one of many ways to vary #3, as in “Don’t Wanna Love You” (Shanice) and “Hold On” (En Vogue).

Uptight Funk #5 51

Tempo: Moderate funk



This is another modern funk groove. It has more sixteenth notes, as in “Seven Day Weekend” (Grace Jones).