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CHAPTER ONE: String Slapping

Mastering string slapping will open up a whole new world of percussive possibilities in your playing. In this chapter, we'll look at the basic muted percussive slap and eventually move on to a "slap bass"-style approach. Both are seriously percussive and very effective. You'll have it all mastered in no time; just stay relaxed, and remember the movements should be natural.

The Snare Drum Slap

THE WARM UP

Here's a nice simple warm up. Let the side of your thumb come to rest against the lower strings. Don't worry about being too precise; even though the "X" is notated on the E string, we are simply aiming for the lower strings. We want a muted sound, so once you make contact with the string, don't lift the thumb away too quickly.

Note that we're slapping on the 2nd and 4th beat of the bar (just like a snare drum would usually play). Try counting "1, slap, 3, slap" in your head to help you. Don't move on until you can slap confidently and freely on beats 2 and 4.

♩ = 60

1 2 3 4

T
A
B

X X

THE EXERCISE

BARS 1-4: Count "1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and" to help you keep time. The pattern is very repetitive: a simple down-and-up strumming pattern with a slap thrown in. Notice how the string slap replaces where a downstroke would be.

BARS 5-8: Here we move to fingerpicking and add an extra note (the high E played after the string slap). The open low E string is played very quickly after the string slap. Try to play it as you pull away from the string slap in one smooth movement.

BARS 9-12: Things become a lot busier here! It's all just a repeated pattern, so don't panic and take your time.

CHAPTER 2: Body Percussion

Arguably the most exciting element of percussive guitar playing, body percussion is certainly the technique that gets an audience's attention. My advice would be to use it sparingly in your playing. The guitar is a naturally percussive instrument, but there is a fine line between being a creative guitarist and just trying to play the drums on your guitar! Be thoughtful and creative; the whole body of the guitar can be used. We'll be focusing on some specific areas, but remember that each guitar is different, so don't feel that you have to play in exactly the same place. Just pay attention to the rhythms, use this book as inspiration, and let your musical ear decide what is best.

The Basic Beat

THE WARM UP

It can be very confusing to read tablature with body percussion squeezed in. To make it easier, we've added a second line of music specifically for guitar body percussion. But don't worry; you don't have to be able to read music well. We'll only be using two notes on this staff. All you have to remember is that the kick drum sound is the lower note, and the snare drum sound is the higher note.

BAR 1: To make the kick drum sound, try using either the side of your thumb or even the heel of your hand against the body of the guitar somewhere between the strap button and the bridge. The goal is to create a low, bassy sound.

BAR 2: To make the snare sound, tap or rap the side of the guitar with the back of your knuckles just below the strap lock. We're trying to create a higher-pitched sound here. Spend as much time as you need honing and experimenting with your technique to create the best possible sound.

BAR 3: Here we're alternating between the two so you can get used to the feel of it.

BAR 4: And here's the full beat. Try counting "1, 2, 3 and 4" to help you get the rhythm. This beat is played in countless pop songs.



♩ = 60

kick kick kick kick snare snare snare snare kick snare kick snare kick snare kick kick snare

THE EXERCISE

Okay, so now you can see you have two lines of music together: the guitar tablature with notation (for your picking and strumming), and the body percussion line for your raps and taps! Simply read each line together.

BARS 1-2: Strum your chord down and up for beats "1 and 2 and," follow with a very basic kick on beat 3, and finish with the snare on beat 4.

BARS 3-4: This is the same as the previous bars, except for the addition of an extra upstroke in bar 3.

BARS 5-8: Notice the introduction of a double kick drum sound and the use of the extra upstroke from bar 3. Count "3 and 4 and" or "kick, kick, snare, strum" to help you.

CHAPTER 3: Tapping

Hammer and Tap

THE WARM UP

Using two hands to play notes and chords is quite logical when you think about it. Piano players do it, and it works pretty well for them. It may take a while for this to become natural, but before long, you'll be tapping all over the fretboard without a care in the world. The effect is percussive, but it also gives you more options melodically and physically.

The actual process of tapping is just like a hammer-on or pull-off, except we're using the picking hand. Feel free to try using different fingers, although I tend to favor my middle finger. Simply tap down your finger onto the note in one sharp movement and hold it there while the note rings out. Here's a step-by-step breakdown for the first bar:

- ▶ Pluck the open B string.
- ▶ Now hammer on to the 1st fret with your fretting hand.
- ▶ Next, tap onto the 5th fret with your picking hand.
- ▶ Then pull your tapping finger off to the note on the 1st fret.
(Note that you need to be fretting this note before you pull off the tapping finger!)

Notice that your picking hand only plucks once!



♩ = 60

THE EXERCISE

Here we're blending chords with tapping. Give the chord a confident strum before working your way through the tapped pattern. Note that it will be easier to strum around the fretboard area, since you'll need to be there for the tapping. The chord should still ring out while you tap, resulting in a nice full sound.

CHAPTER 4: Harmonics

Harmonics are magical things. They create that classic bell-like chime. Very simply put, harmonics are best explained as a note divided. It's a bit strange to think a note can be sliced in half or chopped into quarters, but it can. When we play a note on the guitar, such as an open E, we think we hear only one sound. In truth, we are hearing that E note and a whole bunch of other, higher notes (albeit much fainter) mixed together. A harmonic actually separates those notes, which creates the ethereal and alien sound. They really work well amongst the other percussive techniques, as well.

Keeping It Natural

THE WARM UP

Creating a harmonic—or, in this case, a natural harmonic—is a bit tricky at first. Lightly touch the string (don't press down) over the relevant fret (directly over the fret wire) and strike the string. Two questions (the “two P's”) are worth keeping in mind when learning to play harmonics: position (i.e., where are you exactly on the fretboard?) and pressure (i.e., how much pressure exactly are you applying?). This warm up will help you explore most of the natural harmonics that are relatively easily achievable; you'll no doubt find the 12th fret the easiest. Take note of the melodies that can be created simply by working up and down the strings at various fret locations.



♩ = 60

1

Harm. -----

T
A
B

5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7

5

loco

Harm. -----

T
A
B

12 12 12 12 12 12 12 12 7 7 12 12 7 12 7 12

CHAPTER 5: Alternate Tunings

The subject of alternate tunings has been saved until last. Why? Well, it will completely change the way you approach your instrument. It's important to understand that your guitar doesn't have to be tuned the way we have come to believe is "standard." The most basic string alterations will completely change the way the guitar sounds. And, of course, all your scale patterns get jumbled up. To some, this might seem scary, but to others, it's a great way of giving you a fresh approach to the guitar. With many tunings, you also free your hands up to concentrate on creating other sounds—like body percussion for example—as the sound of open strings is deeper and fuller.

The following examples will give you a good grasp of the subject, but don't forget there are endless ways to tune your guitar. Refer back to the Introduction for more inspiration, and don't forget to try creating your own tunings!

TIP: Although we have supplied instructions on how to reach these new tunings, it's worth purchasing an electric chromatic tuner, as it really will make your life easier!

Drop D Tuning

THE WARM UP

Drop your low E string down to a D. It's an easy thing to do, it won't confuse the fretboard too much, and now you have the full power of a low D to play with. In this warm up, we're simply working through some chord shapes in D major, with the drop D plodding away in support. If you haven't got a chromatic tuner, simply use your open D string (string 4) as a tuning reference.



Drop D tuning:
(low to high) D-A-D-G-B-E

♩ = 60

let ring throughout

THE EXERCISE

BARS 1-2: We are using the drop D beneath simple melodies here. Let the drop D ring out and notice how much it adds to the accompanying notes.

BARS 3-4: Now introducing the idea of a constant bass part, we are simply alternating the drop D and the higher D string and then throwing in the melody from the first two bars.

BARS 5-6: These final two bars are basically an arpeggio; be aware of how we accelerate to 16th notes in beats 3 and 4.