Level 3 exercises

Included on the sheet of tab are right hand exercises that I came up with to help gain some accuracy and awareness of the right hand. These will help you build confidence as well as help you to discover some of the most important fundamentals of flat-picking. These are basic strokes and foundational points of how to begin your journey with your best foot forward.

I designed these exercises to be worked on without involving the left hand, meaning all of the tabs are on open strings. Why? Because I have the opinion that chords and thinking of the left hand can fray the focus on the task at hand… which is right hand challenges. As you’ll see, the last few exercises are different and more challenging and will cause you to have to concentrate deeper, take your time, and maintain diligence. But, don’t give up; these are good for your playing.

Eventually, you’ll feel in control of the open string ‘right hand only’ exercises and then will be able to move forward with these same exercises while holding a chord with the left hand. Then melodies and solos can be part of the exercises… but first things first.

I approached these exercises to get you to work on symmetry and consistency in the up and down picking strokes. So, here are my suggested steps to accomplish getting better at these patterns. The patterns should be played one at a time in a repeating loop to get fluid with each pattern.

**Step 1:** Begin with Exercise #1. Play the first note of each exercise pattern with the down stroke followed by an up stroke for the next note. This includes doubles and trios: two and three string strokes. Continue that pattern throughout all the exercises. Down, Up, D, U, D, U. Do that until you can play each pattern fully at a medium tempo without making any mistakes. Make it easy on yourself and try not to play too fast too soon.

**\*Note that Ex. 7 and Ex. 8 are reflective of rhythm patterns.**

**It’s good to practice these as picking patterns as well.**

**Step 2:** Reversing the starting notes. Start with Up, Down, U, D, etc., again begin with exercise #1. Follow the directions for Step 1.

**Step 3:** Again starting with #1, play each exercise at a slower tempo, and concentrate on clarity and equal volume and tone. Attempt to pick the string with each Down and Up stroke sounding as even as possible. Imagine a ball bearing repeatedly bouncing on one string so that the sound of each bounce is exactly the same. That evenness of each stroke on each string is the desired end result. Again, take your time to be as correct as possible while maintaining the task. Stay on exercise #1 until you feel that is in good shape. Then move to #2 and repeat the instructions of Step 3 above. Same for exercise #3, then #4, etc.

**Step 4:** Reverse the starting notes. Start with Up, Down, U, D, etc., again begin with exercise #1. Follow the directions for Step 3.

This should give you plenty to do while you are here this week. The next logical step is to try an incorporate these strokes and patterns over chords, and chord changes. Then, apply these in a song. Choose a simple song such as Mary Had a Little Lamb, or Red River Valley, or Happy Birthday. I recommend focusing on even timing and tempo, as well as volume and tone. This might seem somewhat boring, but the effort is to accomplish solid foundation and basic structure to help you to gain symmetry and confidence.

Then, begin altering the dynamics of a melody so that you pick important notes slightly louder than others, to allow for expression. This will take some time, so maintain plenty of patience.

Record yourself as often as you feel you have made progress in your practice time and accomplishments, and/or if you feel you are not making progress. Audio recording for sure, but video recording is even better I think, as long as you can clearly hear what you are playing. But be kind, proactive, and use PMA (positive mental attitude). Don’t get caught-up in being negative to yourself, constructive honesty is the best idea.

Enjoy!

~Jim