

Essential Techniques and Exercises

This quest for pedal steel simulation begins with a variety of exercises designed to get your hands and ears in shape and ready to go. Many of the exercises that follow either build finger strength through a variety of bending techniques, or work to improve bending intonation by matching pitches with open strings or other stationary (i.e., unbent) notes. Steelers often play two or more notes and then hit a pedal or lever, dropping the pitch of one of the strings. In order for you to achieve this effect on electric guitar, you'll have to do an awful lot of *prebending*, where a given string is bent up to a specified pitch before it is struck. Intonation is crucial here, as is a great deal of muscle memory—you'll need to know precisely how far to bend a string without hearing it first!

Notice, by the way, that the accompanying CD is split-channel. You can pan your stereo to one side to hear a lick demonstrated, or to the other side to play the lick along with a rhythm guitar.

Unison Bending Exercise

This exercise matches whole step bends with fretted notes on an adjacent upper string. Execute all of the bends with your ring finger and allow the strings to ring for their full durations. Loop the example repeatedly and work slowly. Speed is meaningless if the notes aren't clean and in tune. This one will reveal how accurate your string bending really is!



TRACK 02

♩ = 100
C

Short Licks and Phrases

Let's start making some music with the techniques you've learned so far. These quick licks and fragments put together much of what's been examined already and aim to get you thinking of these techniques as tools for making beautiful, pedal steel-inspired music. Be sure to take any example you particularly enjoy and learn to play it in all keys, registers, and tempos. It needs to be under your fingers and in your ears if you want to access it later in a musical, uncontrived fashion.

Easy Major Lick

Here's a super-common major lick that's right in the country style. After the three-note pick-up, use your middle finger to execute the prebend, release, pull-off, and re-bend (!) on the G string while your ring finger and pinky remain in place on the B and high E strings, respectively.



TRACK 24

♩ = 108

A Major/E Major Phrase

This sunny little lick could actually be in A major (I–V progression) or E major (IV–I). Begin with a G-string hammer-on, follow with an index-finger slide from the 9th to the 10th fret of the B string, and then use your ring finger to execute the whole step bend-and-hold at the 12th fret. Play the final double stop with your ring finger on the B string while your middle finger bends the G string.



TRACK 25

♩ = 144

A

With shuffle feel (♩ = ♪♩)

First system of music notation. Treble clef, key of E major (three sharps). Chords: E, A, E, E7. The guitar tablature below shows fret numbers for each measure.

Second system of music notation. Treble clef, key of E major. Chords: A, A7, E. The guitar tablature below shows fret numbers for each measure.

Third system of music notation. Treble clef, key of E major. Chords: B, A, E, A A# B, E. The guitar tablature below shows fret numbers for each measure.



(Arlen and Ralph Macchio working on the movie "Crossroads")

Example 2

Chuck Berry, as I said before, is the king of the shuffle lick for the guitar, and his influence was obvious in the playing of folks like John Lennon and Keith Richards. His approach was much more hard-driving than the aforementioned lick, and it usually incorporated two strings played together, like in the following exercise. These shuffle positions were often heard in tunes of Chuck's like "Sweet Little Sixteen," "Roll Over Beethoven" and "Rock and Roll Music." Take note that these are all the lowest two notes of each chord we are playing.

Piano Style Rhythm Grooves

To get into some fancier picking, and great variations on the shuffle licks, here are some rhythm licks that resemble the patterns of classic boogie-woogie piano players. This is also a style strongly associated with the great Chuck Berry, and may have also been influenced by his playing for years with the one and only piano great, Johnny Johnson. Not only do the notes themselves resemble the piano style, but the rhythmic pattern actually simulates the pianist's use of two hands working off of each other. This juxtaposition is created by some deft picking of some well-placed "jabs" in between the main licks, just as the piano player might do with his right hand. In this next exercise, you see just where these extra accents take place, and how the actual lick contains a "walking" style of bass pattern.

Example 5

Pay close attention to the music and tab for this piece to really get the proper feel. Also, I would recommend using upstrokes with the pick for the additional "jabs," but using all downstrokes would not be out of the question.

E5

P.M. on ⑥ - ④ throughout



A9 Asus2 E5



B5 B6 B5 A7 A5 E A/E E A/E E

discontinue P.M.



MYSTERY TRAIN

Words and Music by Sam C. Phillips and Herman Parker, Jr.

Performed by Elvis Presley in 1955

"Mystery Train" had originally been cut by Junior Parker at Sun studios in 1953 and would be Elvis' final single for Sam Phillips. Similar to the first Sun session, the fellas were casually jamming when they stumbled on the signature riff by chance.

Though not as culturally significant as “That’s All Right Mama,” “Mystery Train” has had the larger impact on the development of rockabilly and by extension, rock ‘n’ roll. With the addition of D.J. Fontana on drums, the lineup—with acoustic rhythm guitar and electric lead—would provide one of the templates for future rock combos. Keith Richards, John Fogerty, and Danny Gatton are just three of the many illustrious guitarists to be directly inspired by Scotty’s brilliant comping and solo.

Figure 18–Intro and Verse

The twenty-eight-measure verse has an unusual structure made all the more so by Elvis' stretching of the IV chord (A) and the I chord (E). Scotty told Peter Guralnick, "There was an extra bar of rhythm thrown in at one point, that if I sat down to play it myself right now, I couldn't, but with him singing it felt natural." If the extra measures were subtracted, the verse would be a standard twenty-four-measure progression constructed from three eight-measure phrases.

Performance Tip: The main intro riff is a classic based around a I (E)—IV (A) move with contrapuntal bass notes. Play the C#7/A double-stop by flattening the ring finger after the E formation. To cop that cool “Scotty Moore vibe,” try plucking the low E string with the thumb (with or without a plastic thumbpick), the triad and double stop with the index, and the E on string 4 with the middle finger.

Fig. 18

Intro
Fast Rock $\text{♩} = 120$ ($\text{♩} = \text{♩}^3$)

E

Gr. 2 (acous.)

Verse

E A A5 A

1. Train _ ah ride, _____

Gr. 1 (elec.)

mf
w/ fingers
w/ slap echo
let ring throughout

P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M.

TAB

Easy Intro in G Major

Here's another typical country intro, this one featuring multiple bends, each of which should be played with your ring finger while your pinky plays the notes on the string above it. Add some gentle, musical vibrato to mimic the sound of the steeler!



TRACK 48

$\text{♩} = 120$ ($\text{♩} = \text{♩}^3$)

Sheet music for "Easy Intro in G Major" in 4/4 time, tempo 120. The music is written for guitar, showing the treble clef staff and the bass clef staff with fret numbers.

The first system features a G major chord (G, B, D) and a melodic line in the treble clef. The bass clef staff shows fret numbers: 12, 12, 14, 15, 14, 15, 14, (14), 12. The melodic line includes a triplet of eighth notes and a bend.

The second system features a D major chord (D, F#, A) and a melodic line in the treble clef. The bass clef staff shows fret numbers: 10, 9, 10, 9, (9), 7, 10, 9. The melodic line includes a bend and a triplet of eighth notes.