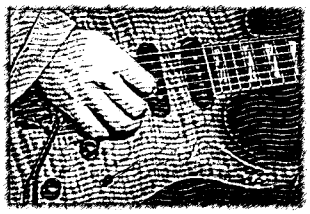


MUTING AND DAMPING

How Not To Play Stuff

In dictionary definitions and common usage, the terms damp and mute seem interchangeable, sometimes referring to a muffling, softening of tone and vibration, other times referring to an out-and-out "extinguishing" of oscillation and vibration.

For clarity here, let's refer to the total deadening of a string so that it doesn't sound at all as ***muting***, and to the muffling of a string so that it has little or no sustain as ***damping***.

Damping is the technique of using your fingers and hands to stop unwanted notes and strings from sounding. Often, this is an aspect of playing that tends to be much more unconscious than conscious, which is to say that damping and muting organically evolves out of efforts to play the notes of the part correctly and just to get it all to "sound" right, letting necessity be the mother of invention.

Basically, most of the time players use the back outside edge of the right palm to mute, damp, and stop strings. Sometimes after a downstroke or strum, the right wrist rotates through and damps with the muscle-pad below the thumb on the other side of the palm. In some instances, the 1st finger on the left hand rests across the treble-side strings (mostly on the E, or first), to keep them silent during passages. But what it really boils down to is a continuous coordination between the attack (left-hand finger, right-hand pick), the release (left-hand finger), and the damp (soft finger stop by left-hand fingers and/or the backside fleshy muscle of the right hand).

Try playing familiar scales and exercises, but damp every note after you play it. The faster you go, the more you'll need to utilize the backside of your right hand as a damper. Think of a piano: every string has a felt pad resting against it until you strike a key, which simultaneously drives a hammer against the string to sound the note and releases the pad that keeps the string from vibrating. As soon as you release the key, the felt pad returns against the string and dampens it. Your right hand's palm edge (pinky side) is your felt pad, and you have to develop the unconscious, mechanical muting action of that piano.

Again, if a picture is worth a thousand words, then let's save each other a lot of writing and reading and let the camera do most of the work.

Fig. 1

Fig. 1 shows a full damp by the right-hand backside muscle of the palm. This is the most common method of damping, and is used extensively (especially on electric guitar) for a chunky pick attack with no sustain. It's perfect for Al Di Meola staccato style running of notes or for that Chuck Berry two-string rock and roll rhythm chording. It's also evolved into a heavy metal power-fifth chord style of rhythm chunking.

Fig. 2 shows a common right-hand position for lead playing on "inside" strings (the D, G, and B). Notice how the picking hand has flattened out and the fleshy muscle-pad below the thumb rests against the bass strings to keep them from vibrating, while the 2nd and 3rd fingers have curled around to deaden the first string. This hand position uses the "front" edge of the pick to downstroke the string.

Fig. 2

Continued • • • • • •

If one were to play on the low A or E strings (and sometimes the D), the right wrist would curl around to release the damp on the bass strings, and the right hand would rest with the back edge of the hand across the treble side, as in **Fig. 3**. Notice how the 3rd finger still rests anchored and curled against the first string and the "back" edge of the pick provides the downstroke.

Fig. 3

Fig. 4 shows a different fingerstyle-and-pick technique, and consequently a different muting approach. The outside edge of the right thumb mutes on the bass strings, and the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th fingers of the right hand rest, up against and mute the treble-side G, B, and E strings, respectively. **Fig. 5** demonstrates a pickless approach, but the idea is more or less the same. These are both primarily hand positions that favor chording and broken-chording (arpeggiating) passages, but some jazz and rock players exploit them for other things, as well.

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

In addition, there are a few types of mutes that are so obvious, you might forget about them. A rest stroke (up or down), where you pick through a string and come to rest against an adjacent string, is an effective method of muting a noisy neighbor - in this case, with your pick.

Fig. 6

The concept behind the widespread fingers of **Fig. 6**'s full-hand mute is to eliminate any unwanted harmonic overtones. A casual one-finger mute across the strings at certain places may not kill the string vibration completely, but will merely divide the string oscillation proportionately, creating an overtone. Widespread soft pressure ensures that all oscillation stops.

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

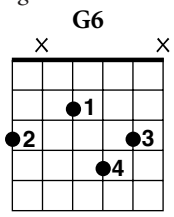


Fig. 7 is perhaps the most common mute of all - where the flesh pad of the finger that's fretting a note leans over and rests against an adjacent string to deaden it. Many times on chord diagrams, such as in **Fig. 8**, you'll see an "X" over an "inside" string. **Fig. 2** is how you mute that sucker.

Fig. 9 is a good example of that "unconscious" natural evolution of muting mentioned earlier. Good left-hand positional fingering leads you towards maintaining a natural, four-fret spread with the four fingers of the left hand. So if fingers 2, 3 or 4 are busy doing

Fig. 9

Continued · · · · · ·

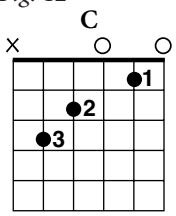
something, but #1 is at rest, it can do so in a useful fashion by laying across some unwanted strings behind the action and muting them.

Once you've developed some experience, you often unconsciously keep the 1st finger resting against the first string when you're not using either that finger or string (**Fig. 10**), just as you don't really think about the fact that your thumb is rotating up and over the top edge of the fingerboard to mute the sixth string for such things as the very common C chord of **Fig. 11** and **12.**

Fig. 10

Fig. 11

Fig. 12



There's no right or wrong way to get the job done. These examples are just a few suggestions, which may seem perfectly sensible to you, or completely lunar. In any case, they are only offered as a basic foundation upon which you may build and progress. As you develop, your need for more techniques could very well lead you to fresh discoveries and personal creative invention.

Keep in mind that some of the subtlest, trickiest things that a conscientious musician is always learning are the hows, whens, wheres, and whys..... of silence.

Rests used in notation and their corresponding time values