

New Orleans Funk Guitar

The Guitar Styles of New Orleans
Funk, Cajun and Zydeco Greats

by SHANE THERIOT



- Funk Rhythms
- Muting & 16th Note Grooves
- The Clave
- Melodic Phrases
- Authentic "Second Line" Grooves
- Styles of Leo Nocentelli, Snooks Eaglin, Professor Longhair, Dr. John and Others
- Cajun and Zydeco Styles



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INTRODUCTION

Since being founded as a French colony in the early 1700s, the entire area of South Louisiana has influenced and broadened the cultural palettes of the rest of America. The same holds especially true when talking music. This area has evolved to a unique place in America's rich musical heritage. New Orleans, a musical hotbed of activity, differs from other musical areas in that it was originally a major seaport, forming a direct connection with Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean. Thus, many styles of music and traditions were brought here and still remain today.

In an area of New Orleans once known as Congo Square, African slaves were allowed to play their drums and practice their dances. This was not only a means of communication and musical expression, but it also fulfilled a need to keep their traditions alive. The strong chant-like rhythms, which once reverberated in the square, have been incorporated and hidden in the music of today. The sounds and cultures of Haiti, Jamaica, and the Caribbean found their way into the humid air of the Vieux Carre. A great number of Cuban musicians also called New Orleans home in the 1940s and '50s. Add the Calypso and mambo rhythms, the influence of pioneers Sidney Bechet and Louis Armstrong, and it's not hard to see why this part of the country is something special. New Orleans really has it all—Dixieland, jazz, blues, doo-wop, funk, second-line, gospel, and the driving brass of the marching bands.

After fleeing Nova Scotia due to religious persecution, the French-speaking Cajuns, settling in towns like Lafayette, Thibodaux, and Houma, brought their own music and culture (and food!) along. Today, musicians such as Beausoliel, Jo-El Sonnier, and Wayne Toups carry on the rich tradition of Cajun music.

The Creole people of South Louisiana (a mixture of Black, Indian, Spanish, and French descent) also contributed to the culture greatly with their driving, trance-like zydeco rhythms. Today, zydeco music is hotter than ever, heard in television commercials and on movie soundtracks.

This book will introduce you to this incredible music by providing you with a taste of each style. In Louisiana, we sometimes ask for *lagniappe*, which means "a little something extra." Wherever possible, I'll try to add a little history and background to the subject at hand. I hope, since much of this book was written while on a U.S. tour with the Neville Brothers and Dr. John, the spirit of the music of South Louisiana throughout the centuries will grace these pages and open your ears to new sounds.

Good Luck!
Shane Theriot

Section One

DEVELOPING RHYTHM TECHNIQUE

Since much of this book deals with various rhythms and their applications to the guitar, let's begin by going over a few basic rhythm guitar techniques.

In this section, we will focus on building a solid foundation for rhythm guitar playing. By practicing the following exercises, you will develop your right and left hands and greatly improve your rhythm chops. It's always a good idea to practice these examples with a metronome. Using a metronome can become a valuable part of developing into a great rhythm player.

16th-note basics

The first exercise is derived from 16th-note groupings and is designed to develop muting and syncopation. Strum all strings with a percussive stroke while *applying* and *releasing* pressure with the *left* hand. This will take a little practice if you are not used to it.

Learning to count these 16th-note pulses will also aid in playing the more complex rhythms found later in the book. Now fret the G major chord shape on the first four strings while muting the low E and A string with your *thumb*. You might also try fretting the low E string with the pad of your thumb while muting the A string with the *tip* à la Jimi Hendrix for a fatter sound.



Examples 1a–1b: (16th-notes are counted 1 e & a, 2 e & a, etc.)

⌞ = downstroke ∨ = upstroke

EXAMPLE 1a

EXAMPLE 1b



THE "CHOKE"

By pressing and releasing with the left hand (as mentioned previously), we arrive at Examples 2a–2h. (Play each example four times.)

(One very important thing to remember when playing and creating rhythm parts is to think like a drummer! Imagine the hi-hat pattern and the drummer opening and closing it with his/her foot. In New Orleans and other funk music, this sometimes defines the whole guitar part.



Examples 2a–2h

EXAMPLE 2a

G

EXAMPLE 2b

G

EXAMPLE 2c

G

EXAMPLE 2d

G

EXAMPLE 2e

G

EXAMPLE 2f

G

EXAMPLE 2g

G

EXAMPLE 2h

G

COMBINING 8th NOTES AND 16th NOTES

Now let's expand on the 16th-note examples by adding 8th-note examples to our exercises. Eighth notes are counted: 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &, etc.

(Remember to count the examples in order to place the accents in the right spots, but most importantly, try to **feel** and **breathe** the rhythms. More on this later.)



Examples 3a–3d

EXAMPLE 3a

G

(1 & 2 & 3 e & a 4 &)

T
A
B

EXAMPLE 3b

G

(1 e & a 2 & 3 & 4 e & a)

T
A
B

EXAMPLE 3c

G

T
A
B

EXAMPLE 3d

G

T
A
B

THE TRIPLET

Now let's add a different feel to the next exercise. Triplets are counted like this: one trip-let, two trip-let, etc. Of special importance here is the placement of the downstroke. Although it may feel awkward at first, this really helps you to feel the triplets and is also a great secret to playing really tight, syncopated rhythms.



Example 4a

EXAMPLE 4a

G (variation on strum)

Another variation is found in Example 4b. In this example, by feeling where the downstroke is "layered," a more natural flow is produced. After playing a few of these exercises, you will begin to really feel the accents and learn to adjust your up/downstroke pattern accordingly.



Example 4b

EXAMPLE 4b

G

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Now we're ready to look at an example that combines our previous exercises into one basic New Orleans-style rhythm. Practice this one repeatedly to feel the main pulse, which will be expanded on in the next chapter. (Don't skip through this section without experimenting with different tempos, voicings, tones, etc.) We'll use a basic C7 voicing for this one.



Example 5

C7

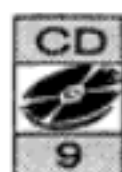
TAB

Even a part as simple as this can be difficult to execute and make sound convincing. Listen closely to the recording to hear how the part should sound and play along.

PICK VS. FINGERS

Much has been written and discussed on the subject of pick or fingers when dealing with the picking hand. It has been my observation and experience that different musical situations call for different techniques (country, jazz, classical, etc.). Some styles (like country) call for pick and fingers together. As far as the music in this book and the players it discusses, whatever works best to produce the desired sound is the correct method. It would be wise to try the examples all three ways to really broaden your technique. Try the following examples and their respective techniques. Be patient!

For example, the previous example could be played with the fingers to achieve the sound of a piano comping a chord. Furthermore, the notes that were muted can become bass notes played with the thumb.



Example 6

C7

(T)
w/ thumb

TAB

Section Two

ESSENTIAL RHYTHMS

CLAVE RHYTHM

In Example 7 we find a classic New Orleans-style groove built off of this basic clave pattern:

EXAMPLE 7



This is one of the most important rhythms found in New Orleans music. You may also recognize this example as the "Bo Diddley" rhythm, but its real origin can be traced back to Latin clave rhythms. Sometimes known as the "foundation" rhythm in bossa nova music, this figure is usually based on a two-bar phrase. Notice how the emphasis is placed on beats 1 and 3 as opposed to beats 2 and 4. Here is another example:

EXAMPLE 8



Here is yet another variation, this time applied to guitar. Notice how the guitar mimics the kick drum pattern. This groove is very similar to the Meters recording of "Pocky Way."



Example 9

Example 9 is a guitar groove in 4/4 time, featuring a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a 4/4 time signature. The notation is presented in two staves: a standard musical staff and a guitar tablature staff. The musical staff shows a series of chords and notes, with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a 4/4 time signature. The guitar tablature staff shows the fret numbers for each note, with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a 4/4 time signature. The rhythm is characterized by a strong emphasis on beats 1 and 3, mimicking a kick drum pattern. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and bar lines, as well as guitar-specific symbols like 'V' for vibrato and 'X' for bends.

Practice playing this groove until the pulse really gets inside you. Art Neville, co-founder and member of both the Meters and the Neville Brothers, describes "the groove" as "simple parts all played to where they complement one another. By leaving space, you allow the parts to breathe." You will notice that many of these examples, although simple, are strongly hypnotic. This is one of the secrets of great rhythm guitar parts.

Example 10 is similar to the Neville Brothers version of "Congo Square." Listen closely to the CD and you can still hear the basic pulse even though the guitar has shied away from echoing the kick drum pattern.



Example 10

Example 10 is presented in two systems, each with a musical staff and a corresponding guitar tablature (TAB) staff.

System 1:

- Staff 1:** Musical notation in 4/4 time, key of C minor. It features a repeating rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Chords are indicated as Cm7 and F/C. A double bar line is present after the first four measures.
- Staff 2 (TAB):** Guitar tablature corresponding to the first system, showing fret numbers and string numbers.

System 2:

- Staff 1:** Musical notation continuing the pattern. Chords are indicated as Cm7 and G7(#9). A double bar line is present after the first four measures.
- Staff 2 (TAB):** Guitar tablature corresponding to the second system, showing fret numbers and string numbers.

USING OTHER VOICINGS

We can spice up this part even more by plugging in the following voicing to the above example. Note also that, as in comping jazz chords, the whole chord is sometimes not necessary. In this C minor 6 chord, only the $\flat 7$, $\flat 3$, and the 6th are used. A half-step slide from below is thrown in to make the part a little more interesting. These few touches will harmonically and rhythmically go a long way towards altering the example, and they'll add a new twist to it.



Example 11

The musical notation for Example 11 consists of two systems, each with a standard staff and a guitar tablature staff. The first system (measures 1-4) features a C minor 6 chord (Cm6) in the first measure, followed by a half-step slide from below, then a C minor 7 chord (Cm7) in the third measure, and an F/C chord in the fourth measure. The second system (measures 5-8) continues with Cm6, Cm7, F/C, and Cm7. The tablature shows fret numbers and picking patterns (X for pick, O for natural).

Known as the Funky Four, the Neville Brothers are undoubtedly the most well-known musical family to emerge from the streets of New Orleans, spreading their positive music and lyrics around the world. The four brothers—Charles (sax), Art (keys, vocals), Aaron (vocals), and Cyril (vocals, percussion)—blend Cuban, funk, African, Caribbean, and jazz/blues together into a totally original style.

By using just the fingers of the picking hand (à la Leo Nocentelli of the Meters) and the choking technique discussed in the last section, we can really control the dynamics and make the part groove even harder.



Example 12

Example 12 musical notation showing a sequence of chords: Cm7, F/C, Cm6, Cm7, Cm6, Bb5. The notation includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of two flats and a 4/4 time signature. Below the staff is a guitar tablature (TAB) with six lines, showing fret numbers and chord voicings.

Example 13 is a funkier variation based on a previous figure. Notice the voicing used here. This is a really useful voicing and is refreshing to hear because it is not used as often as its cousin, the dominant 9 chord. The tight sound of this chord is due to the presence of the $\flat 7$ and the root. The major 2nd interval produces the effect.

Note the repetitive, chant-like quality, which is delivered from this simple rhythm.



Example 13

Example 13 musical notation showing a sequence of chords: D7, V, V etc. The notation includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp and a 4/4 time signature. Below the staff is a guitar tablature (TAB) with six lines, showing fret numbers and chord voicings.

Let's now add a few more chords and extend the progression. Practice stringing the chord voicings together over the changes. Notice how these particular voicings are closely connected. Some of them may also share notes. This concept is similar to a technique used in chord-melody and is also a common compositional technique. It is known as "voice leading," and it helps to keep the harmony nice and tight sounding.



Example 14

Example 14 musical notation showing a sequence of chords: D7, G6, A9. The notation includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp and a 4/4 time signature. Below the staff is a guitar tablature (TAB) with six lines, showing fret numbers and chord voicings.

The next example is a really driving riff, which still has one foot in the clave pattern, or Bo Diddley rhythm. This figure is based on “Fiyo on the Bayou” recorded by both the Neville Brothers and the Meters.

In this example, muting with the fretting hand becomes very important in order to separate the two parts of the riff. Play this one with a nice tight feel.

Example 15

Here we have another example based on the previous riff. This time let's expand to 16th-notes and vary the accents at the end of each phrase. Try this one with a tight scratchy sound and keep the accents really short. (Since muting is an integral part of this example, pay close attention to the fingering here. Only the top three strings are fretted to suggest the minor 7 tonality.)



Example 16

By working on rhythm parts such as these, you are increasing your chord vocabulary, feel, and palette of ideas from which to draw.

Having discussed the influences from Cuba and other Latin rhythms, let's see how these sounds filtered down into the next example. Here the guitar plays a simple but important role in this groove by outlining the progression with higher voiced chords on beats 2 and 4.

Although the bass line varies and moves around a bit, the backbone of this whole example and this section is our basic kick drum/clave pattern. This is the glue that holds everything together.

This example is loosely based on a tune recorded by a group called The Wild Tchoupitoulas. Comprised of Mardi Gras Indians and members of the Neville Brothers, this recording is regarded as a New Orleans classic and is a great lesson in this style.



Example 17

CLAVE VARIATIONS

The variations of this basic clave/kick drum pattern are virtually endless. Here are a few more figures with this rhythm to incorporate into your own versions of these examples.

Author Shane Theriot is a Louisiana native. Since 1996 Shane has toured and recorded with the Neville Brothers—the legendary New Orleans family that has dominated the New Orleans music scene since the early sixties.

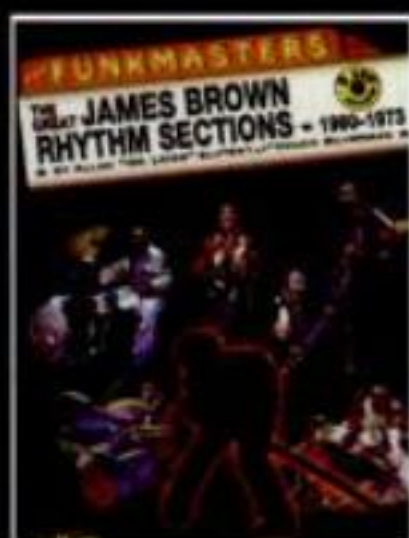
In this book Shane discusses and demonstrates all the stylistic elements that set the music of New Orleans apart. All the music is demonstrated on the included CD featuring Shane and a group of premier New Orleans musicians.



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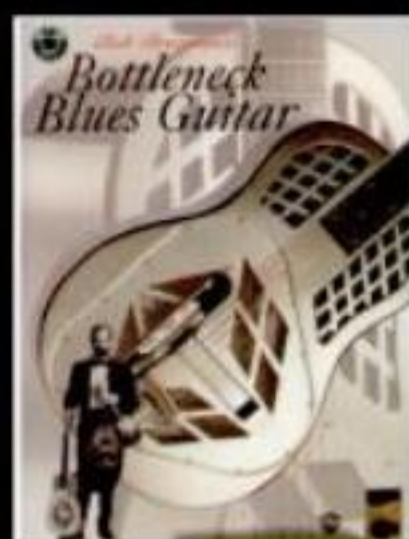
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