

Make sure that the change in the rhythm of the melody does not throw off your steady bass. As you can see, it is not hard to keep a steady bass going, and the melody is simple. It's putting the two different things together that will take practice.

Pattern Picking

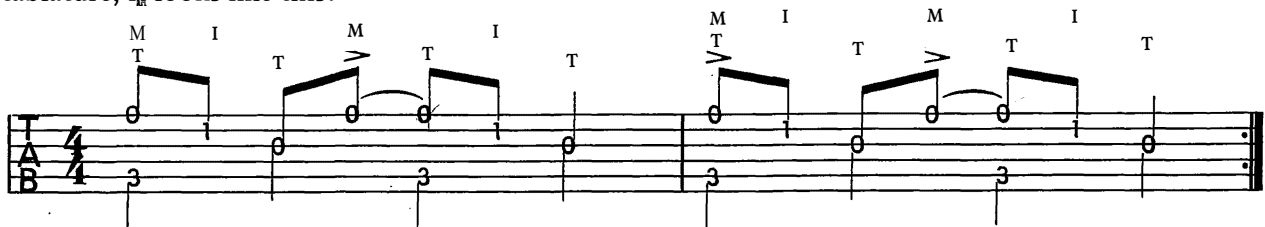
Many guitar students start picking by learning a preset right-hand pattern. I call this *pattern picking*. This pattern remains virtually unchanged throughout a song. Although none of the guitarists represented here use this type of playing, it has many advantages as well as disadvantages, and is used so widely that it deserves some discussion.

The most well known pattern (usually misnamed *Travis picking*) goes like this:

Finger a C chord. Now, your right hand thumb will alternate between the fifth string and the third string, while your index and middle fingers alternate on the second and first strings respectively. All together, the pattern is:

MITMTIT MITMTIT
T T

In tablature, it looks like this:

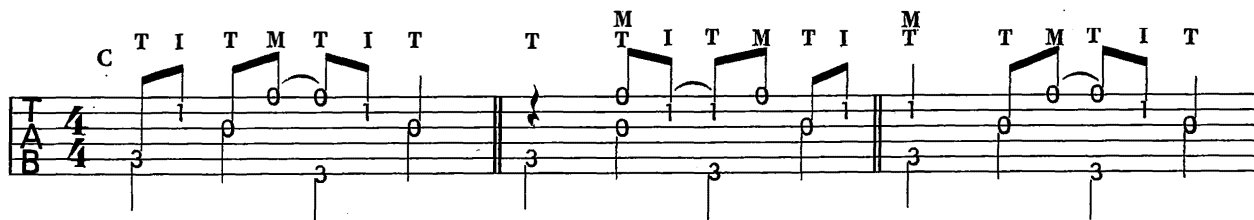


Notice where the accents fall: This is what gives the pattern that nice syncopated bounce. The thumb is playing a steady $\frac{4}{4}$ beat, while the index and middle fingers are providing the on-beat, off-beat treble. If you were playing a tune, the *middle finger* would carry most of the melody notes. This pattern has to be played over and over until it is fast, smooth and automatic.

Although it looks complicated at first, this and other patterns can be learned with a few hours of practice, and the results can seem spectacular. It is pleasant to listen to, and it seems (to yourself and others) as if you are doing something that is very advanced. The trouble is, you often get set in this pattern, and find yourself in a rut that's hard to break out of. It can be very useful, though, and certainly worth learning, if you remember that an unchanged pattern can get very boring after awhile, and that it is not the last word in picking!

Once you have mastered the above pattern, try using it as an accompaniment to some songs. "Pretty Peggy-o," "Old Blue," "Freight Train," and "Don't Think Twice" come to my mind as possibilities, but you can use your own judgement as to where it fits best.

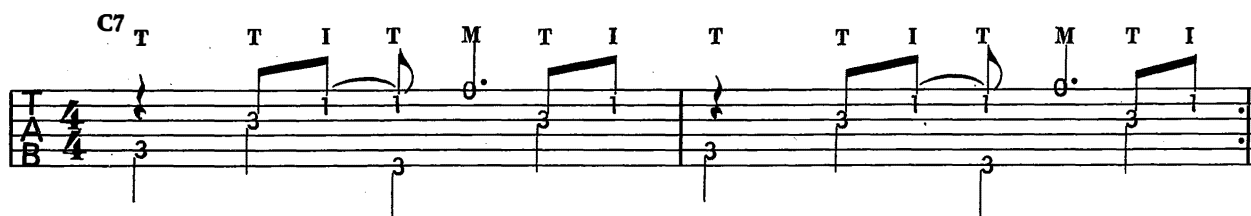
There are several simple variations on this pattern, such as:



These changes may seem insignificant, but they do help change the feeling of the pattern enough to break the monotony. Try mixing them up.

For certain chords you will want to alter the bass pattern. For instance, I use a 6-4-6-4 with the G chord, and 4-3-5-3 with the D. When you are playing melodies, you will find that your middle and index fingers will have to shift to the second and third strings to pick the right melody note.

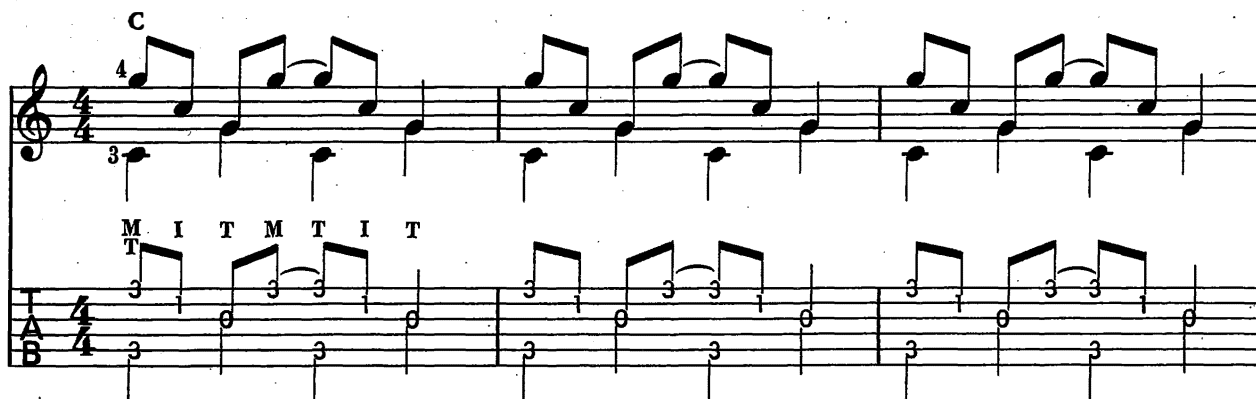
Another pattern that is especially effective for song accompaniment is the one that Peggy Seeger occasionally uses when she is singing a quiet song or ballad. It is based on Elizabeth Cotten's unusual style:



"Shady Grove," "Pastures of Plenty," "Nine Hundred Miles," and "Blowing in the Wind" are just a few of the songs that work well with this strum.

"Railroad Bill" and "Freight Train" are the two most popular picking pieces to learn by, so let's see how they're done.*

Railroad Bill



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* These tunes are not transcribed from the recordings by Hobart Smith or Elizabeth Cotten. Rather, they are simplified as illustrations of this particular style of picking. Compare the pattern picking with the freer styles used by the artists mentioned.

The image shows three systems of guitar music. Each system consists of a treble clef staff with standard notation and a six-line bass staff with numbers 0-3. The first system is for E7, the second for F and C, and the third for G7 and C. The first system has a '4' in the first measure of the treble staff. The second system has a 't' in the first measure of the treble staff. The third system has a '4' in the first measure of the treble staff and 'M T' and 'T' in the last two measures of the bass staff.

Fingerpicks

Many people who play steel-string guitars like to use *fingerpicks*, both to enhance the sound of the guitar and to save wear and tear on the fingernails. There are many varieties of picks on the market. I recommend a plastic thumb-pick and *National* brand fingerpicks, which are metal and usually go on the index and middle fingers of the right hand. The metal picks can be adjusted to the size of your finger easily. Some people prefer plastic fingerpicks, which are softer and have a quieter tone. It is large-

ly a matter of individual taste, and you should experiment with them until you find what is right for you.

Fingerpicks always feel clumsy at first, and the temptation is to immediately throw them away as an unnecessary bother. If you stick with them, however, it will soon become as easy to play with them as without them, and the advantages they afford you will be worth the effort.