

STRUMMING PATTERNS LESSON 1

Its very common for people learning Ukulele to concentrate upon making chords. But there is a skill that is all too easy to neglect and that is learning to strum. Or more accurately learning different strumming patterns so as to enhance a particular song. Because we are playing the rhythm to a song rather than the melody it is very easy for each song to sound the same if the same strumming is used. (the melody is the bit of a song that is easy to recognise as it follows the words).

If we can play different strumming patterns we can put accent into the song and bring it to life.

Here are four strumming patterns for you to learn that will help you to go beyond the basic up/down strum. They look more complicated than they really are but it takes time and practice. We will demonstrate how they sound because hearing the sound and then trying to mimic is the best way to learn as is saying the pattern out loud and in time. Just like learning chords, take it slowly at first. You will find that the strum only comes alive when you play it faster. Each of the patterns should be viewed as a loop, you simply keep repeating the pattern without stopping.

One important thing before we try out the strumming patterns, it is crucial that we are strumming to a consistent timing. Our music, certainly initially is going to be in 4/4 time. This simply means there are 4 equal counts in each of the bars of music we play. You do this when we say 1 2 3 4 at the start of a song. This tells us we are playing in 4/4 and how fast we will play the song (thats called the tempo). Now heres the thing, we can divide the 4 by 2 to get 8th notes or even by 4 to get 16th notes. The only rule is however many notes we use they have to fit into the same time it takes us to play 1 2 3 4. to do this we will simply strum faster. We tried this and you proved you can do it. When learning different strums it helps to hear what it sounds like and to say out loud what you are doing, like this 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +. That is 1 is down strum, the + is an up strum. I will post some clips of me playing each of these strumming patterns in the members section of our website, aim to play the sound you hear rather than getting hung up on Ds and +s.

1. SHUFFLE STRAIGHT 4/4

This is the basic strum pattern and has its place in many songs.

D U D U D U D U
1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

Explanation: The D means play a Down stroke, The + means play an up stroke.

2. SHUFFLE SWING 4/4

In this pattern the Down strums are held slightly longer. The feel of this pattern is one where you want to sway along to it.

D U D U D U D U
1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

I have underlined the Down strums to indicate that you hold them slightly longer.

3. CHURCH 4/4

This is one of the most commonly used strum patterns, it is very versatile.

D	D	U	D	D	U
1	2	+	3	4	+

4. CALYPSO 4/4

You will get a happy sound with this strum.

D	D	U	U	D	U
1	2	+	+	4	+

You will see the 3rd Down strum is missed out, this is what gives it a Calypso feel.

5. DON'T HAVE A NAME FOR THIS ONE but it is very versatile

D	D	U	D	U	D	U
1	2	+	3	+	4	+

Have a go and take it slowly, it is a question of practicing slowly and then speeding up when you feel comfortable. Start just playing a C and then when you are ready play the pattern using other chords but don't stop the strumming pattern, just keep on looping around to the beginning of the pattern. You will find something magic happens as you speed up playing the strumming pattern, it will start to sound really good.

When you have a number of strumming patterns that you can play without thinking then its time to mix them up inside songs and think about interpreting the song to emphasise certain parts of it.

Dave