



# Syncopation

By Jason Kokoszka

When a rhythm stresses weak beats, we describe it as being syncopated. To see syncopation in a folk context, check out the examples below. For more information on syncopation, check out the current Theory Corner to read an excerpt from Pat Johnson's book, *Beginning Fingerstyle Arranging and Technique for Guitar*, which is a great volume for anyone interested in fingerstyle guitar.

Please note that the chord symbols given for each bar reflect the overall basic harmonic structure (when the examples for guitar, keyboard and bass are taken into account). Try these ideas out with your friends; complimentary parts for guitar, keyboard, bass and drums are included below. Dig in, and enjoy!

## Guitar

In this example, there is a syncopated melody over a simple quarter-note bass part, which can be played with a fingerstyle pattern or with hybrid picking. Although there are no notes shorter than an eighth note, this can still be a tricky exercise due to the syncopation and multiple parts involved. Just count carefully as you play this example, and you'll have it down in no time!

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 1-4, and the second system covers measures 5-8. Each system includes a treble clef staff with a syncopated melody, a bass clef staff with a simple quarter-note bass line, and a tablature staff. Chord symbols G, C, Amin, D, and G are placed above the treble staff. The bass line consists of quarter notes: G, B, D, G. The tablature provides fret numbers for each string (1-6) and includes fingerings (1-4) and accents. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

# Keyboard

Here the keyboard doubles the guitar melody an octave higher in the right hand while the left hand plays a boom-chick bass-chord pattern. Some chords are inverted to give the example smooth voice-leading in the left hand. Try applying a boom-chick pattern like this to some of your favorite folk songs!

The musical score is written for keyboard in G major, 4/4 time. It consists of two systems of four measures each. The right hand plays a melody that is an octave higher than the guitar melody, while the left hand plays a boom-chick bass-chord pattern. Chords are indicated above the staff, and fingerings are indicated below the notes. The first system features G and C chords. The second system features Amin, D, and G chords. The left hand uses a consistent boom-chick pattern: a bass note followed by a chord. The right hand uses various fingering patterns to play the melody smoothly.

# Bass

Although this bass part does not have any syncopation, it provides a solid foundation for the guitar part above. It can be a good idea to play a simple groove when accompanying syncopated melodies because the simplicity of your bassline will emphasize the rhythmic contrast between parts. Try playing a line like this with other folk tunes, too.

The musical score is written for bass guitar in 4/4 time. It consists of two systems of music. The first system is for measures 1-4, and the second system is for measures 5-8. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

**System 1 (Measures 1-4):**

- Measures 1-2: Chord G. Bass line: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F#3, G3.
- Measures 3-4: Chord C. Bass line: C3, D3, E3, F#3, G3, A3, B3, C4.

**System 2 (Measures 5-8):**

- Measures 5-6: Chord Amin. Bass line: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F#3, G3.
- Measures 7-8: Chord D. Bass line: D2, E2, F#2, G2, A2, B2, C3, D3.

The guitar staff (TAB) shows fret numbers for each string (T, A, B) in 4/4 time. The bass staff shows the corresponding notes.

## Drums

This part provides good rhythmic support and accents notes from the melody with the ride cymbal. Measures 1 through 4 present one pattern, while measures 5 through 8 demonstrate a slight variation. Try using this pattern (or your own variation) the next time you are playing a folk gig.

The image shows two staves of musical notation for a drum pattern on a ride cymbal. The first staff contains measures 1 through 4, and the second staff contains measures 5 through 8. The notation uses 'x' marks to indicate cymbal hits, with accents (>) placed above the notes. The rhythm is in 4/4 time. The first four measures show a consistent pattern of eighth-note pairs with accents. The last two measures of the second staff show a variation, with the final measure ending with a cymbal roll.

For more on syncopation, be sure to check out the beginner acoustic lessons “Syncopated Strumming” and “Boom-Chick, Syncopated Strums in the Style of Bob Dylan,” taught by Pat Johnson and Susan Mazer. You can also order Johnson’s book, *Beginning Fingerstyle Arranging and Technique for Guitar*, available at [www.ordermusictoday.com](http://www.ordermusictoday.com).

To see how syncopation relates to other styles, watch “Strumming Syncopation” in beginner rock taught by Paul Howard and Alex Nolan, “Syncopation” in advanced rock taught by Tobias Hurwitz and Dave Martone, “Rhythms and Grooves” in Chop Shop taught by Matt Smith and the “Introducing Syncopation” and “Travis Pattern with a More Complex Melody” lessons taught by Susan Mazer in intermediate fingerstyle.

Not a guitarist? Wait! We’ve got something we’d like you to see. Keyboard players should check out the Adult Refresher lesson “I Got Rhythm: Rhythmic Patterns and Syncopation,” taught by Leo Marchildon and Andrea Amos, David Pearl’s Tool Box lesson “Merengue,” or the Absolute Beginner lessons “Trickier Rhythms” and “Syncopation” taught by Cathy Schane-Lydon.

Bass players will like to see the beginner and intermediate rock bass lessons “Sixteenth-Note Chord Tone Groove,” “Ties with Sixteenth Notes” and “Sixteenth-Note Rests” taught by Tracy Walton. Drummers and percussionists will dig Kalani’s “Traditional Salsa Patterns” and Pete Sweeney’s “More Advanced Eighth-Note Beats” lessons.

Until next time, keep jammin’ and have fun!