Tuned In
November 30, 2007

Syncopation

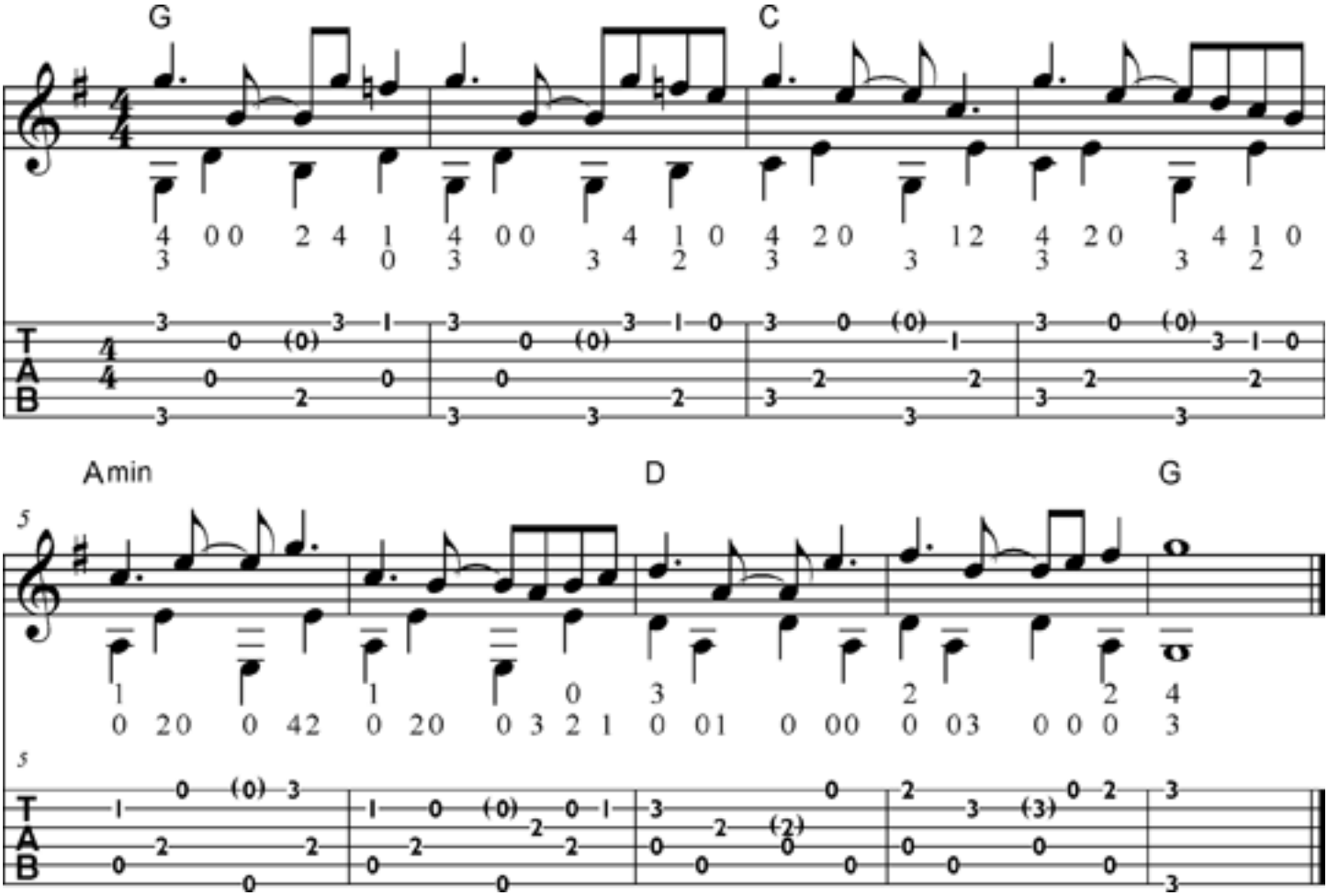
By Jason Kokoszka

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!

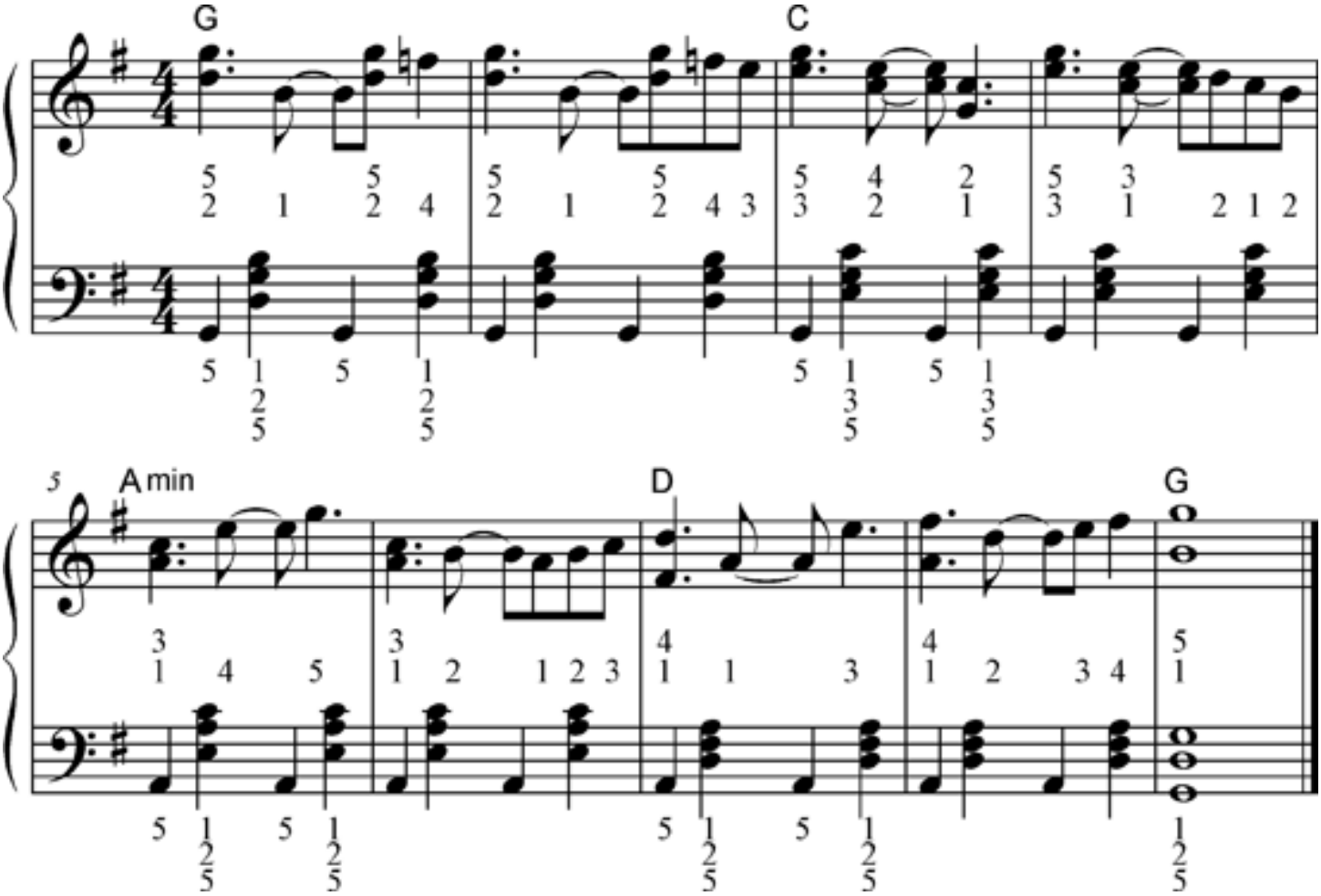
Guitar

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!



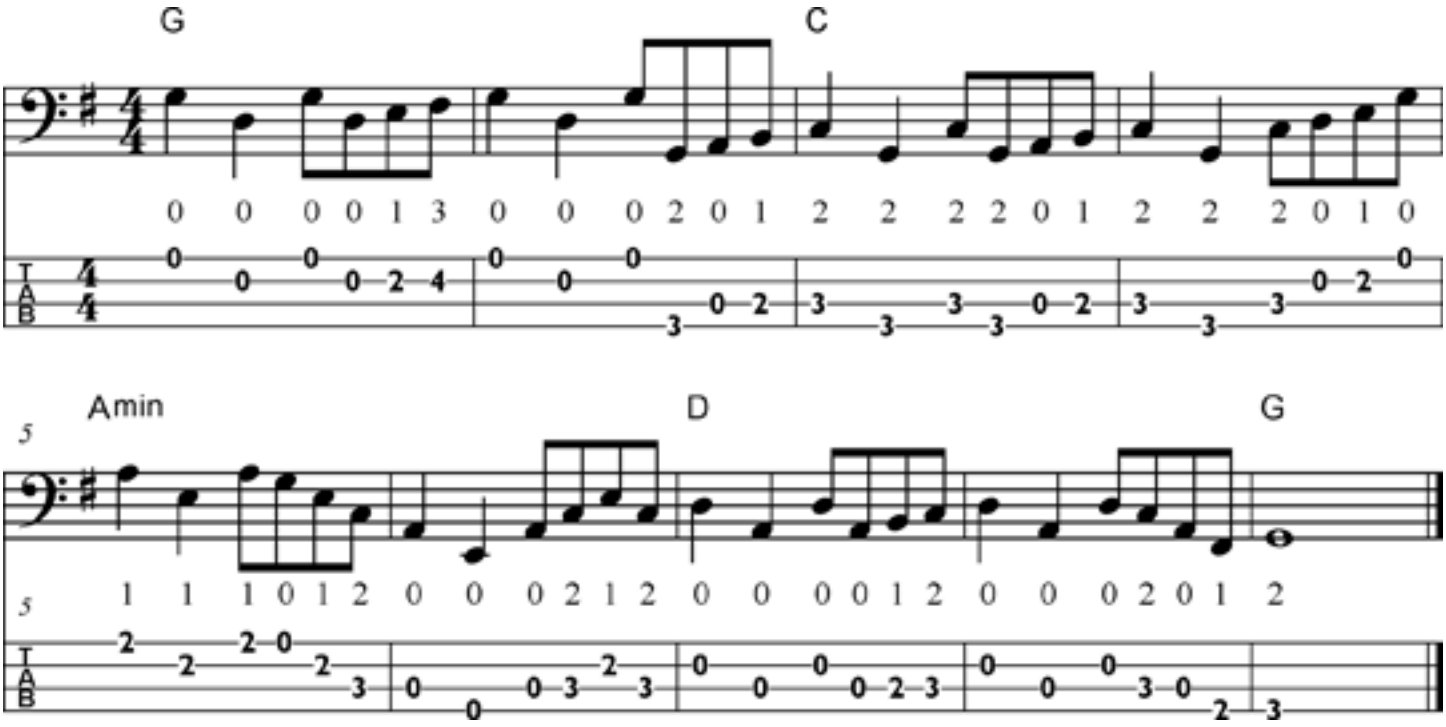
Keyboard

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!



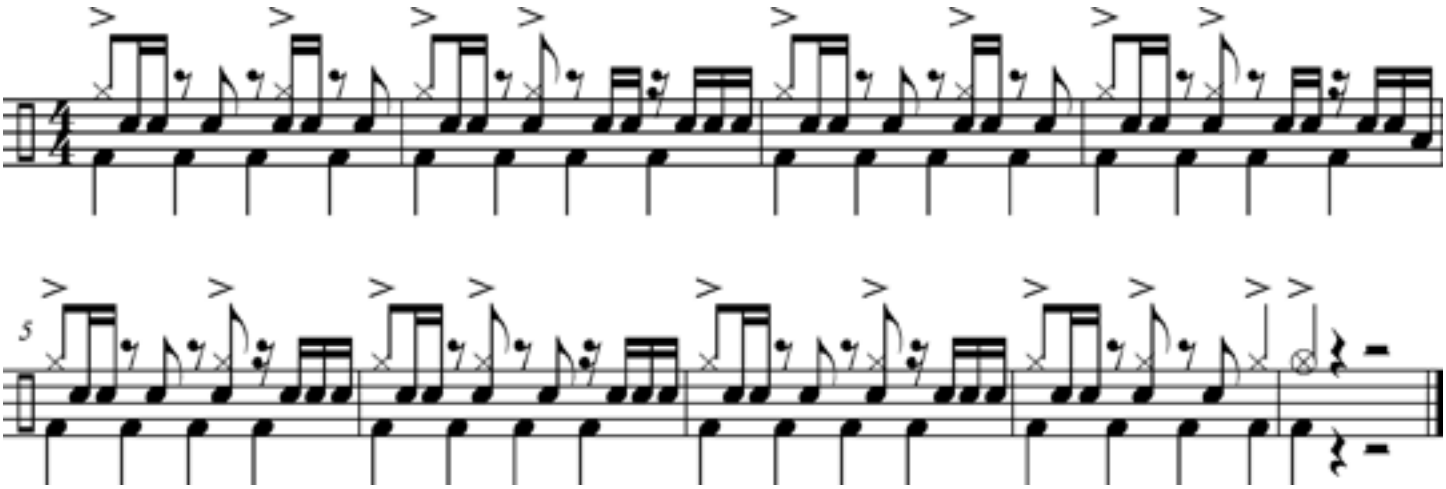
Bass

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.



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.



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.

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!