

Rhythm Guitar Riffs

There is no doubt that many current rock guitarists' just love playing some good quality guitar riffs. A "riff" (sometimes called an ostinato) is the term for a short repeating melodic line. You can hear these types of patterns all through the history of modern music and there are millions of songs that use them across all genres.

Many people think that playing rhythm guitar parts is all about just strumming chords. Well that is a myth I can tell you. Many great rhythm parts call for the guitar player to pick single string lines to compliment the vocalist or soloist. Often the guitar doubles the bass part, and that is what this lesson is all about. It really is necessary to have a few of these types of back up guitar parts at the ready if you want to be a good rock/blues player because you never know when you will be required to play some.

Here I will show you four really cool rhythm guitar riffs. To get a good rock riff sound, use an electric guitar and select the back pickup, mute the strings slightly with the picking hand, and use a little overdrive. When you hear riffs like these on recordings be aware that the person performing them quite often varies them slightly.

First of all you need to learn the riffs so you can play them fluently with no flaws as you are going to play through a complete song form when you know them well. Take each one slow to begin and pay attention to the fingering and pick directions (∏ means a down pick, V means an up pick). Once you know them well you will also need to practice them beginning on C (3rd fret, 5th string) and D (5th fret, 5th string). You just transfer the riff pattern to the C or D note and play the same pattern again there so they sound the same, but just played higher.

Now that you have the riffs going great beginning on G, C, and D, it is time to put them into a song form, and there is no better song form than a twelve bar blues to get started. Here is a chord diagram for a twelve bar blues in G.

||G | | | |C | |G | |D |C |G | ||

What the diagram means is because each riff is one bar in length you play the G riff 4 times, the C riff twice, the G riff twice, the D riff once, the C riff once, followed by the G riff twice.

Ex 1 – 3 are minor pentatonic ideas and suit the rock or blues sound, while Ex 4 uses a major pentatonic idea and is more suitable to a country or country rock type of song.

Ex 1 Ex 2 Ex 3 Ex 4

Fingers 1 1 3 3 1 1 3 3 1 3 3 1 3 1 3 3 1 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 3 1

3-3 5-5 3-3 5-5 3 5 3 5 3 5 3-3 4 5 3 6-7 5-7 5

After you have practised the riffs with the twelve bar blues form you should apply these ideas to all keys and other chord sequences that you regularly use. What other riffs can you hear in your favourite songs? Try to work them out, as most of them are relatively easy and use the minor or major pentatonic scale. You should also try and write your own riffs because they form the basic structure of many great songs.

To hear the music for this lesson <http://www.guitar.co.nz/rhythm-guitar-riffs/>

 Kevin Downing is a professional guitarist, teacher, and author. For more great lessons or to study with him in person or over the internet visit www.guitar.co.nz

To see his best selling book *The Secrets of Successful Practising for Guitarists* click here <http://www.guitar.co.nz/products/>

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