

## Peabody Stroke Lesson #2 by Ron Hinkle

Hello, this is Ron Hinkle again, with a follow-up to my Peabody Stroke Video Tutorial. In that presentation, I commented that there were many variations; here are a couple of them to expand on your Peabody-style playing. Eddie Peabody played plectrum banjo of course; these particular exercises obviously work best for that tuning, but the *strokes* themselves will work for any tuning. These have been transcribed from different recordings of different players.

Eddie Peabody has been *the* most influential plectrum banjoist in our short history, and many players—including myself—owe him a huge debt of gratitude; his is *the* characteristic plectrum style.

The first example comes from recordings of *Swanee* by Brad Roth, and by Eddie Peabody himself:

The image shows a musical score for a Peabody stroke exercise in 4/4 time. It consists of three staves: a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat (Bb), a guitar-style TAB staff, and a bass clef staff. The treble staff shows a sequence of chords and notes, with a key signature change from Bb to F. The TAB staff shows fret numbers and picking directions (upstrokes 'v' and downstrokes 'x'). The bass staff shows a simple bass line. The exercise is divided into four measures, each containing a group of three notes. The first measure is in Bb, and the second measure is in F. The third and fourth measures are also in F. The notation includes various symbols for fretting and picking, such as 'X' for muted notes and 'v' for downstrokes.

This stroke uses the exact same four-bar syncopated rhythm as the one from the first video, just with different chords; you should review that lesson before moving on. This uses two chords in all inversions: Bb—the IV chord, and F—the tonic chord, and could be used anywhere you have this 4-bar, 2-chord progression.

The most important thing to realize about this stroke is that they are not triplets! They are straight, syncopated eighth notes which go “across the bar” in strange places. Notice that the first group of three notes starts **on** the beat, the next group starts **off** the beat, the next on, off, on, off, on, off, on, and finally escapes the pattern in the last half of the last measure. Different-length segments of this stroke could be used just about anywhere, so long as you figure out the math to escape the pattern and lead back to a solid down-beat. This is not a problem when playing solo—in that situation, a “fluid sense of time” is okay—but when playing with others, you must assure everyone else understands what you are doing so they don’t get lost, or be so dead-on with your execution that nobody *can* get lost. Test: Am *I* dead-on in my video demonstrations? Well. . .use your own judgement, but it’s easy to get excited and be just a millisecond off; I would need to know my tuba/bass/piano player very well (and vice versa) before I attempted this on a gig!

I must emphasize the importance of metronomic accuracy in all of these syncopated strokes; playing along with the MP3s will help considerably. They are computer generated, so are inhumanly “perfect.” If you can’t play the MP3s on your computer, contact me at [banjoplayer1@yahoo.com](mailto:banjoplayer1@yahoo.com); we will figure out another way of getting them to you.

I have always found, when learning a new technique, that *slow is best*; these strokes are no different. Using the sound files, master the stroke at a *slow and deliberate* tempo before increasing the speed. Let me say it again; you absolutely *must* practice with a metronome—there are simply *no alternatives* if absolute precision is your goal! This will help assure that your time is perfect and that you play them correctly!

Another point I feel it’s important to make at this time is about knowing how to read music; much of the four-string banjo repertoire is an “oral tradition.” Someone *shows* you a technique, and you copy it, or you simply *listen* to a recording and teach yourself. As serious musicians know, however, this method is rife with difficulties; they know that—when learning to play a serious instrument—*also* learning to read music is the key to *learning things properly*, in a *musically-correct* fashion, and makes possible the learning of more complex techniques such as the one presented here. One of my personal goals is to figure out how to write down—in proper musical notation and TAB—and *teach* these oral traditions (this is how *I’m* learning them finally!). Only then will four-string banjo technique be considered by the “learned” musical community

to be a “legitimate” musical subject; I enjoy playing “fun, toe-tapping music” as much as the next guy, but let’s “get serious” for once! In my opinion, the future of the four-string banjo depends on it.

Moral of the story? *Learn to read music, and the musical world is your oyster!* Don’t let the fact that you’re “just a banjo player” be an excuse for not learning (as it was for me for many years)! Did you get “turned off” by seeing the notation— **and thus believe that you are incapable of learning from this lesson?** Then I’m talking to you! I say this not just for your own good, but also for the good of the banjo, and its reputation as strictly a fun instrument, unworthy of serious study. Okay, off my soapbox for now. . .

The next variation is obviously Peabody-inspired, and comes from Buddy Wachter’s recording of *Yes Sir That’s My Baby* in his *Charleston Medley*:

This is a good moment to re-emphasize an important point: Triplet strokes and syncopated split strokes are two very different things, though they both use groups of three, and look similar on paper. Look for these differences, and get used to the way they look on paper; this is one of the keys to learning to read music.

This is the 8-bar bridge in the key of F; it uses 2 bars of a Triplet Glissando Stroke for the F7, 2 bars of Syncopated Split Strokes for the Bb, 2 bars of triplets for the G7, and finishes with 2 bars of split strokes for the C7.

First, lets’ learn the Triplet Glissando Stroke: The triplet is simply three notes in the space of one beat; say

**“trip-o-let-trip-o-let-trip-o-let-trip-o-let”**

with the “trip” on the beat. Another popular way of intoning this is

**“1 & a 2 & a 3 & a 4 & a”**

Learn this rhythm first:

**“1 & a 2 . . . 3 & a 4 . . .etc”**

Realize that beats 2 and 4 are up-strokes, so

## “down-up-down-up, down-up-down-up.”

Strum this now; kill the strings with your fretting hand, so you are not distracted by tones.

Now play a full measure of triplet strokes; use your metronome (I start at 80 bpm and go up from there), and repeat until it's comfortable.

The next step to learning this stroke is in moving from one chord shape to the next (the glissando) *while playing* the triplets. Play the first shape, then change to the next shape as soon as you start to move.

1. Start on the first chord and slide up to the next chord in time for the next beat.
2. Do this from each chord to the next.
3. Keep playing the triplets all the way through the chord changes. For the last two beats of the second measure, simply keep sliding while playing two beats worth of triplets.
4. Play two measures of Bb chords with the syncopated split stroke.
5. Play two measures of G7 chords with the triplet stroke.
6. Play two measures of C7 chords with the split stroke.
7. Finally, put it all together.

It's important to strum with a light touch, the pick lightly skimming the strings; otherwise, you'll get a very heavy-handed sound, and the stroke will be even more-difficult to play. Experiment with how softly you can play this exercise; your family and neighbors will appreciate it!

To get the free-wheeling sound of Eddie Peabody, you need to play it like *he* did; with your picking-hand fingers folded in and *without* head contact. For most techniques I advocate head contact, but this one is different. Many players use a soft pick to make these strokes “easier”; I use the same pick that I use for all other styles; a fairly stiff, three-cornered pick. That way I can mix it up in real time, without need to modify equipment in the middle of a song.

Since the four-string banjo is an historic instrument, the best way to learn to play it as they did “back in the day” is to emulate those who came before us. As they say, “imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.” I do this not just to improve my *own* playing and add to my usable “bag of tricks,” but also to *honor* our instrument's past and our banjo heroes, and to *encourage you* to do the same. In my opinion, you need to know what the historical “rules” are before you can break them (i.e. develop *new* styles and techniques). I have a long way to go myself, but I hope it is obvious from the video that I am making great strides in my determination to learn!

If you have difficulty with this—or any other plectrum banjo technique—I am available for private lessons via Skype; contact me at [banjoplayer1@yahoo.com](mailto:banjoplayer1@yahoo.com) for more information. If you have never before taken private lessons, I encourage you to try it; there are many great teachers out there, just waiting for the opportunity to help you improve your playing! Thank you and enjoy!