Back-up In 3/4 Time

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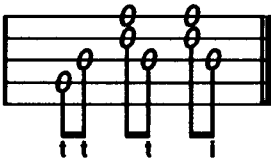
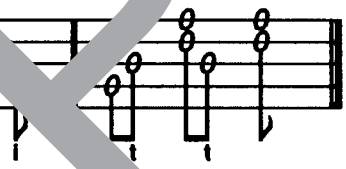
This is a topic that undoubtedly has been covered a time or two before in the pages of [illegible], what with Janet Davis devoting a complete monthly column to back-up. However, the sheer volume of requests I receive to cover this topic has encouraged me to put in my 75 cents (3 quarters) worth. To get your ears tweaked to good bluegrass back-up in 3/4 time, I recommend two recordings: J.D Crowe playing "Sitting Alone In The Moonlight" on T*he Bluegrass Album, Volume Two* (Rounder 0164) and Tom Adams with the Johnson Mountain Boys playing "My Better Years" on the *[illegible] Diamond* album (Rounder 0293). The former recording is in the key of A and the latter in Bb. For our purposes, we'll explore 3/4 time licks in the key of G. You can then use your capo to transpose a song to other keys. These recordings serve as great examples because the banjo is loud and clear throughout each song and the ideas played can be transferred to just about any 3/4 time bluegrass song, such as "In The Pines," "Amazing Grace" and "Blue Moon of Kentucky."

To start, first get a feel for how the basic rhythm pattern in Example 1 is executed. Since most 3/4 songs will be played with a pronounced bounce in the right hand thumb, the pattern will sound better when you think of the note that occurs on beat 3 as a pick up note to the down beat as presented in Example 2.

Example 1

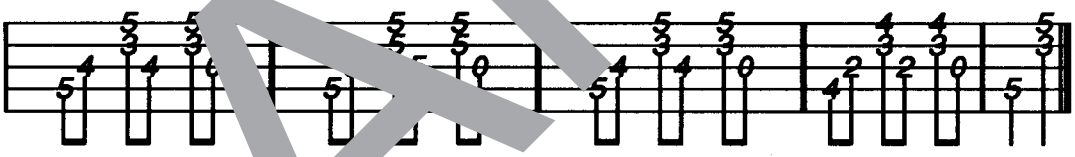


Example 2



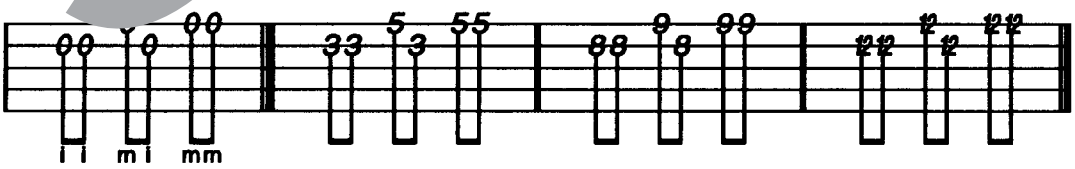
As with all back-up, knowing the three moveable chord forms (fretted strings 1 - 4) described in Earl's book on pages 32 - 33 is the basis for finding the basic chords needed in any key. Example 3 demonstrates switching between the three forms using G, C, and D chords. To change smoothly, you can play a soft open 3rd string between fretting the next chord.

Example 3



The next type of back-up you will want to explore is what I call "tinkling back-up." In this style, the banjo achieves a bell like tone by moving your right hand away from the bridge closer to the neck and playing only strings 1 and 2. You will want to familiarize yourself with where the two notes on those strings are for each of the three moveable forms played as a G chord as in Example 5. Some players use I and M of the right hand as demonstrated while others use T and M.

Example 4 *Example 5*



SAMPLE