BASS

by Peter Murray

RUDIMENTS FOR SLAP BASS
AN INTRODUCTION

This issue, I would like to introduce the concept of rudiments for the development of slap technique. It is the subject of a book I am writing entitled *Slap Science: Rudiments for Slap Bass*, which I expect to have released by the end of 1993.

Slap is often referred to as "drumming on the bass" and is usually used as a predominantly rhythmic technique. It therefore stands to reason that we can apply drum concepts to the bass in order to enlarge the rhythmic scope of slap playing. Rudiments are exhaustive sets of combinations of left and right strokes, and drummers practice them to develop stick control, technique and chops. In the same way, the elements of the slap technique can be broken down and arranged into single-beat combinations to be practised and applied.

We first need to analyze the components of slap. First is the slap itself, executed by the thumb. Second is the muted slap, which involves the muting of a regular slap, usually by the left-hand. Third and fourth are the pop and the muted pop, played by either the index or the middle finger of the right hand. Last is the almighty rest, essential for all rhythm. The much-discussed "thump", which involves a muted twack of the left hand fingers on the E-string, is an essential component of most flashy slap licks and something that I include as a variation of the muted slap (more on that later).

These five components of basic slap technique can be arranged into rudiments, or single-beat combinations. Since quarter notes and eighth notes rarely present any difficulty to players who have any experience at all with slap, it's only really necessary to work on sixteenth note rudiments (four to a beat), eighth note triplet rudiments (three to a beat) and sixteenth note triplet rudiments which are usually combined with an eighth note preceding or following the triplet. Artificial groupings such as 5 and 7 are also possible, but very difficult and, ultimately, not very useful.

Once all of these combinations are found (and this is no small task — I've researched over 800 resulting rudiments), we can go about discovering the multitude of possibilities that arise from hammer-on and pull-off

variations. These include all possible sequences and repetitions of hammer-ons and pull-offs and the "thump", which is essentially a muted hammer-on, both played and muted at the same time by the left-hand fingers. The variations that result number over 1400, which means that there are over 2200 separate single-beat combinations to practice!

The rudiments (which will all appear,

analyzed in gory detail in my book) are vitally useful for several reasons. First, they provide an invaluable tool for developing slap technique because they force you to analyze what is possible, what is impossible and why. Secondly, they comprise every rhythmic combination possible, so practising them prepares you for any slap situation possible — quite literally, because any slap part ever played is made up of rudiments. Thirdly, they develop a greater understanding of rhythm and make it infinitely easier to pick out and identify what other slappers are playing. Lastly, they are useful for those bouncers out there who want to do something new.

Rudiment theory is pretty much breaking things down into their smallest elements in order to better understand the whole, and that is really the task of science. But what you do with that knowledge, hopefully, is not science. It's art.

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Here are the 36 sixteenth note rudiments that combine slaps, mute pops and rests. The slapped note here is G, but of course, you can and should move these patterns all over the neck. Muted pops can be played on any string, but are notated here on the G-string. The note values and hammer-on/pull-off variations for these rudiments aren't written in, but they're easy to figure out. For rudiments that include more than one pop or slap in a row, you simply substitute the note-value of the slap, eliminating rests. Also try replacing "double slaps" with hammer-ons and pull-offs, for example, G to A or A to G. Practice these rudiments on repetitions of 4, followed by a bar of rest) with a metronome or drum machine and watch your tempos. Speed is never as important as rhythmic consistency and tone quality. Once you're somewhat familiar with the rudiments, try composing grooves and bass lines using one or two of them as a base. You'll probably find yourself playing parts that you wouldn't have otherwise thought of.