

Alternating-Bass Fundamentals

Four Travis Pick Patterns

The Travis Pick style is characterized by an alternating-bass pattern plucked by the Thumb. The meter is almost always two or four beats per measure (2/4, 4/4, 6/8, or 12/8).

Rule #1: *The root note of the chord is always the first note plucked by the Thumb.* Rules are made to be broken, of course, but adhere to Rule #1 for the time being.

Ex. 7A shows a standard bass pattern in 4/4 time on a C chord:

Ex. 7A

To produce a complete Travis Pick pattern, treble notes plucked by the Right-hand fingers are added to the Thumb pattern from Ex. 7A. The treble notes most often fit into one of four distinct patterns: Outside-In (O-I), Inside-Out (I-O), Pinch, and Descending-Arpeggio (D-A). All of these patterns may be played by the Thumb and Index finger alone (as Merle Travis did). However, plucking with the Middle and Ring fingers--in addition to the Thumb and Index--provides more variety and a fuller sound. At one point in Solo Style even the Little finger of the Right hand is incorporated into the picking scheme.

Ex. 7B illustrates all four Travis Picking patterns, plucked by the Thumb and three fingers. In general, the Thumb plucks the three bass strings, the Index plucks the third string, the Middle plucks the second, and the Ring plucks the first. However, chords that have the root note on the fourth string (D7 in measure 2, for example) do not use the Ring finger for plucking.

Measure 1 of Ex. 7B illustrates the Outside-In pattern (so named because the outside finger [the Middle or Ring] plucks before the inside finger [the Index]). Measures 2-4 illustrate the Inside-Out, Pinch, and Descending-Arpeggio patterns, respectively.

Ex. 7B