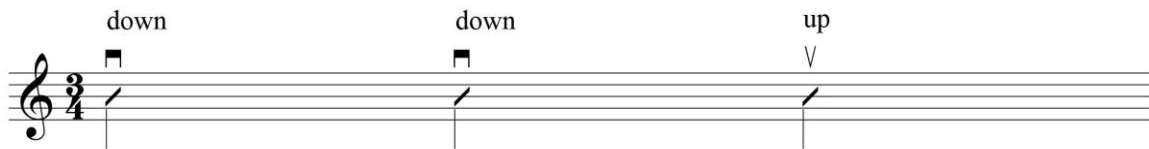


Fun With the Triple Strum

The triple strum is a fundamental *rasgueado* technique in flamenco guitar music. It was a stylistic trademark of the great British comedian and banjo 'ukulele player George Formby. He pioneered this flashy and exciting strum on the 'ukulele. It is a welcome variation to basic down-up strumming patterns, and when played quickly, it can create bursts of energy with strumming flourishes. It is also one of the most effective ways to strum 3/4 time and odd meters like 5/4 and 7/8.

The basic right hand motion of the triple strum is: down, down, up.

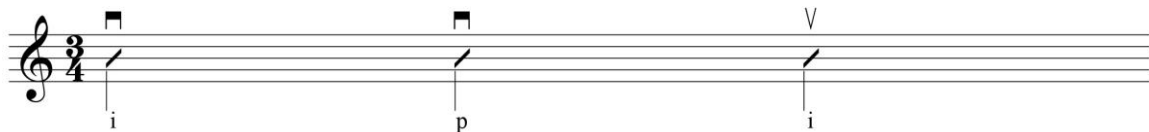


The letters *p*, *i*, *m*, and *a* are used to designate which fingers on the right hand should be used to pluck strings. The letters are abbreviations of Spanish words: *p* = *pulgar* (thumb), *i* = *indice* (index finger), *m* = *medio* (middle finger), and *a* = *anular* (ring finger). The pinky is not used, so it is not assigned a letter.



You can use any fingers on your right hand to play the triple strum. Experiment with the following suggestions to see what feels most comfortable to you.

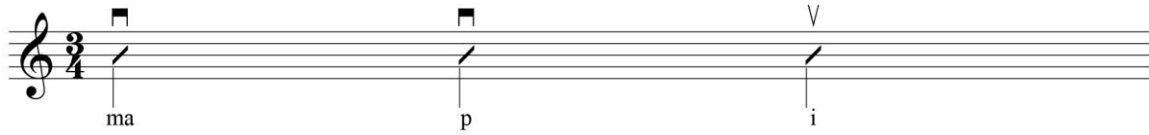
Fingering pattern #1:



Fingering pattern #2:

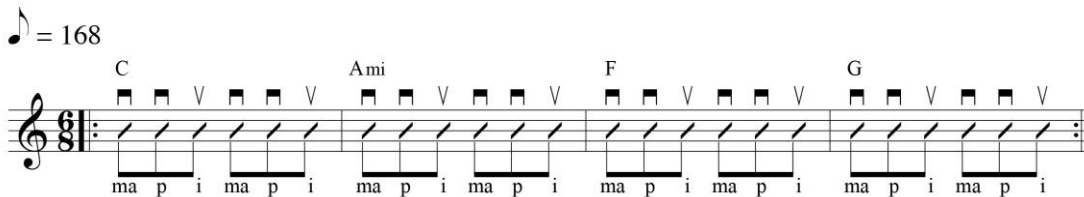


Fingering pattern #3:

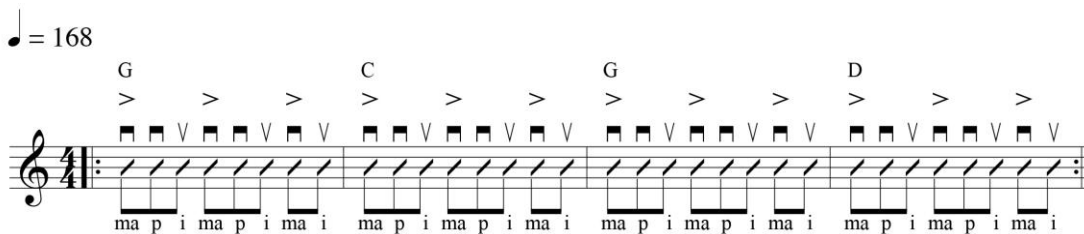


I prefer fingering pattern #3 because it takes advantage of four fingers and avoids using any finger twice. This is especially important when playing faster passages. For example, a common way to pluck linear melodies is by using traditional classical guitar fingering—alternating between the index and middle fingers of your right hand. Sometimes, it feels natural to repeat a finger when transitioning from one string to another. However, the overall speed of the passage is limited to how fast you can repeat that finger. If you compare your fingers to cylinders in a car’s engine, each of the four cylinders in a Mini will be moving a lot faster than the twelve cylinders in a V12 Jaguar E-Type. Also, like fingering pattern #2, the first down-strum is played with the middle and ring fingers. The first beat of the triple strum is accented, and strumming it with two fingers results in a natural accent without having to strum it harder. The following examples will show fingering pattern #3, but feel free to use one of the other fingerings or create your own.

The most obvious use of the triple strum is in meters that have three beats like 3/4 or groups of three beats like 6/8. The following example is a common chord progression in doo-wop music.



The following triple strum is a signature George Formby pattern. The 4/4 bar is made up of two triple strums and a down-up strum. It is convenient to think of it as 3 + 3 + 2, exactly as the eighth notes are beamed together in the example. Notice the first strum of each grouping is accented and played with two fingers while the other unaccented strums are only played with one finger. This pattern works well on rock songs.



Hawaiian turnarounds are almost always dominant-circle-of-fifths chord progressions. Triple strums are often played in Hawaiian turnarounds to add interest and energy.

♩ = 104

D7 G7 C D7 G7 C

ma pi ma i ma pi ma i ma pi ma i ma pi ma i

The following are examples of how the triple strum can be used to play odd meters such as 5/4 and 7/8. Basically, the notes are grouped into sets of three or two.

♩ = 160

three two

G Gma7 Cma7 C6

ma pi ma i ma pi ma i ma pi ma i ma pi ma i

♩ = 220

two two three

Dmi7 G7

ma i ma i ma p i ma i ma i ma p i ma i ma i ma p i ma i ma i ma p i

Finally, using the triple strum as a flourish is one of its most attractive applications. This march-like rhythm has a quick triplet at the end of each measure. Try emulating a snare drum by muting the strings with your left hand while strumming the pattern.

♩ = 69

Ami

ma ma ma ma p i ma ma ma ma p i

Now that the triple strum has been added to your rhythmic toolbox, you'll have more to draw from when arranging 'ukulele accompaniments.