

Basic Rumba Techniques

by Rick Nelson, 071107

Rumba is played in 2 or 4-beat measures. I think of it in four beats of quarter notes divided into eighth notes for a total of eight beats. The syncopation of rumba puts accents on the first, fourth and seventh of these eighth notes.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

To me, there are two basic types of rumba strums with many variations of each. The two types are defined by the percussion placed on the fifth eighth note (beat 3 of a four-beat measure). One type of strum has a percussion tap on the soundboard. The other type doesn't; the sound of the preceding strum carries over the beat.

Here are two examples of the first type, with taps on the fifth count. The first is the "simplest" and is called "el ventilador," the "fan," for one appears to be fanning the guitar. Because the strum is used so much in the Barcelona area, in Cataluña, I call it "rumba catalan."

"rumba catalan"

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

t ↑ ↓ Π s ↑ ↓ Π

t fingertip tap on soundboard

s palm slap on sound hole

↑ general fingertip upstroke, high to low

↓ general fingertip downstroke, low to high

Π general thumb upstroke, high to low

The second type, "rumba flamenca," is used all over, including salsa of the Americas. It has a combination stroke on the first beat: The thumb picks a bass note while the index finger taps on the top of the guitar. From there, the pattern is the same as "rumba catalan."

"rumba flamenca"

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

* ↑ ↓ Π s ↑ ↓ ↑

* thumb down stroke with an index finger tap

↑ upstroke with fingertips

↓ downstroke with fingertips

Π general thumb upstroke, high to low

s palm slap on sound hole

↑ general index upstroke, high to low

↓ general index downstroke, low to high