


ODD TIME SIGNATURES

While odd time is standard in some ethnic folk music notably around the Balkans, it's still an exotic quantity for many 'western' musicians - that's a shame as there's much material that can be derived from this area. Many progressive hard rock and metal bands now routinely employ odd times - check out Dream Theater for one or the pioneering Mahavishnu Orchestra.

Odd time signatures contain an odd number of beats in the bar as indicated in the top of the time signature - the 'numerator'. By definition 3/4 is an odd time signature, yet it's so commonly used that no one thinks of it in those terms. For a refresher on time signatures you may like to check out Lessons 65 and 66.

'numerator' **5** → Number of beats per bar - in this case 5.

'denominator' **4** → Type of value assigned to the beat - in this case a 1/4 note (crotchet).



The interesting thing about odd time signatures is the idea of transition points to get varying rhythmic pulses. Starting with 5/4 we can angle it like this -

ex.1



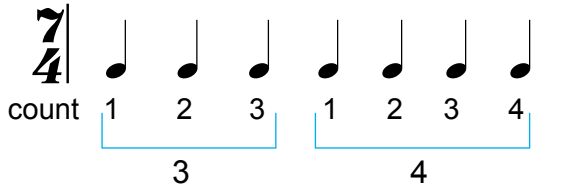
ex.2



Ex.1 gives us an extended waltz feel, think Dave Brubeck's aptly named swing tune 'Take Five', while the reversed version ex.2 gives us a different slant on things even though it's still in 5/4. Count and clap each one and you'll hear what I mean.

Taking it a step further in 7/4

ex.3



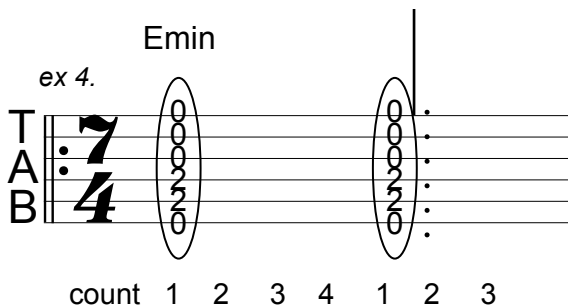
Strum a chord on the beginning of each transition point, see ex.4. Explore chord combinations and other strum patterns within the '3' and '4'. Be creative in other words.

Ex.5 shows the same Emin chord arpeggiated.

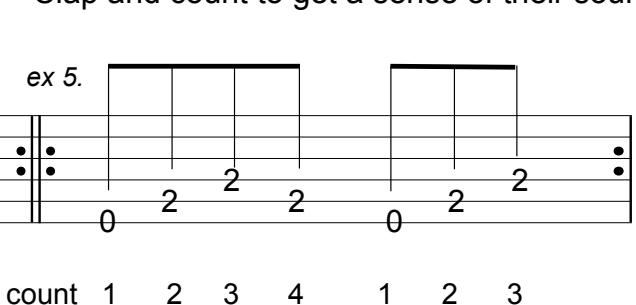
Try some different 7/4 groupings, 4 - 3 , 2 - 2 - 4, 4 - 2 - 2 or 2 - 3 - 2 for example.

Clap and count to get a sense of their sound.

ex.4



ex.5



Check out 9/4 or 11/4 , the larger the number the more sub-division potential. Decades of fun !