GT144

Slap Guitar

Masterclass

This month Dario Cortese from the Guitar Institute will introduce us into the world of Slap Guitar; throw your pick away!

What is the slap guitar?

Most of the time if you say ‘slap guitar’ people think of a slap bass line played on guitar but this doesn’t reflect totally what slap guitar can do. There is not a huge tradition on the slap guitar (like we have for alternate picking for instance) and that give us the freedom to explore it in a very personal way. The bottom line of slap guitar is that it needs ‘slap and pop’ (the two main slap techniques) but everything else is up to you: the slap sound can be combined (as we’ll see) with other techniques more familiar to guitarists.

The slap technique has been explored by the new wave of acoustic guitarists like Raul Midon or Michael Hedges or by electric guitarists like Scott Mishoe and Regi Wooten (Victor Wooten’s brother) but is still quite unexplored.

For this month’s Masterclass we’ll work on the basic movements of the slap guitar and we’ll try to combine them into something musical. Don’t get scared of the tab or the sound of this technique because it’s less complicated that it seems.

Let’s see in details what is usually meant by slap.

Slap is a combination of two main movements: slap and pop. Slap is a technique that consists of hitting the string with the thumb of the picking hand near the base of the guitar's neck.

Pop consists of snapping the strings usually with the index (also called ‘popping’). The invention of this technique is generally credited to Sly & The Family Stone’s bassist Larry Graham and nowadays is a necessary tool for most funk (and not only) bass player.

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Thumb Technique
This is the most 'bass related' technique in the slap guitar as we're trying to emulate the percussive sound of a slapping bass. To produce this sound let's focus on the bottom two strings only as they are the more 'bassy'. The movement should come from the wrist only so make sure that there's no movement coming from the thumb itself. The position of the hand should look like 'hitchhiking' or 'Happy Days' Fonzie'. The thumb hits the string and quickly comes back to its position. When playing this technique the muting comes from the fretting hand.

Popping Technique
The pop is usually played with the index finger only (usually without finger nail). The index snaps the string quite powerfully so that it hits the fretboard. This happens usually on the D and G strings but it's worth exploring on the top two.

Extra Techniques
In slap guitar you can combine the basic slap and pop with any other technique helps you keeping the rhythm floating. The techniques used in this Masterclass are:

- ***Hammer Ons – Pull Offs:*** this is a very familiar technique for guitarists and can be combined with both slap or popping technique to achieve a more rhythm complexity.

- ***Fretting Hand Tapping:*** this technique might be familiar to the rock guitarists: it consists in hammering on the strings with the fretting hand only so the sound it's produced without the picking hand.

- ***Harmonics:*** when playing a chord position with the fretting hand, the right hand can slap (with any finger) the strings 12 frets above to produce harmonics. This creates a nice contrast: high harmonics versus bassy slap lines.

- ***Fake double-thumbing:*** the double-thumbing technique (popularize by Victor Wooten) consists in the slap movement (down-stroke) plus a backward slap (up-stroke). This technique doesn't seem to be very popular on the guitar because of the minor distance between the strings. A very simple way to fake it is: play the slap on a dead note and rest the thumb on the string. Then just simply play a down stroke (a normal one not a slap) to obtain two consecutive notes.

Make sure that you follow the video carefully with the magazine around so you can see the explanation of each example.

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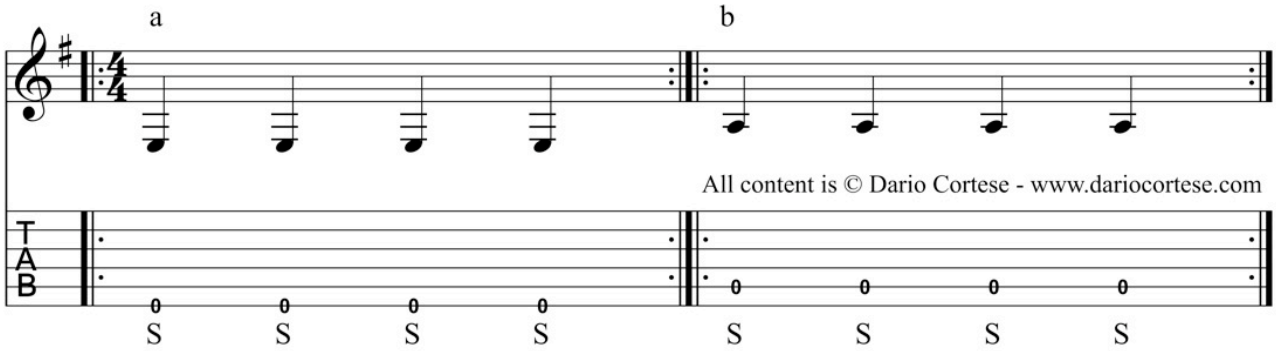
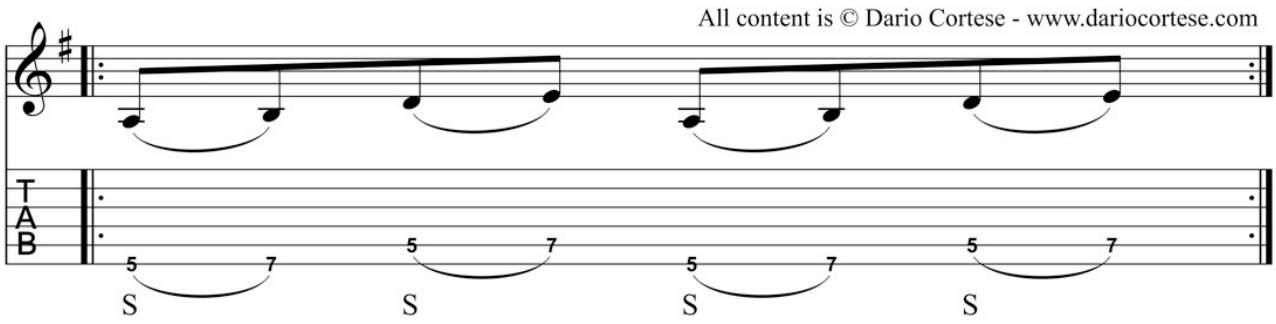
THUMB

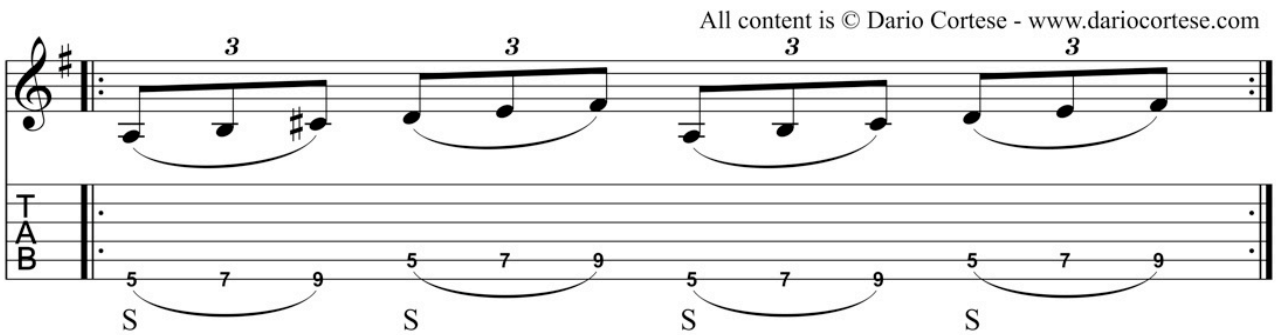
Ex 1a & 1b: This is the basic slap technique. For Ex 1a the fretting hand has to mute the top 5 strings. The Ex 1b the fretting hand mutes the top 4 strings and also the 6th string with the thumb. Take a close look at the video for both slap and muting technique.



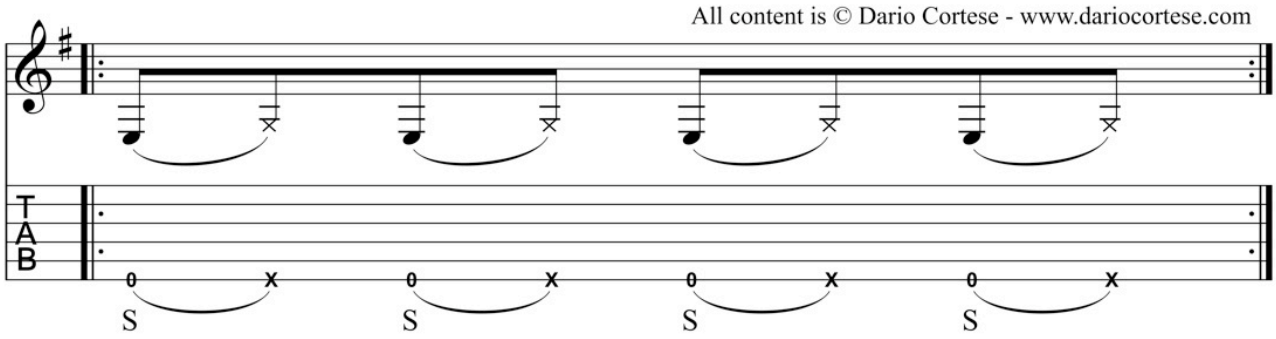
Ex 2: This example is a combination of the slapping technique with hammer-ons. Again the left hand does all the muting.



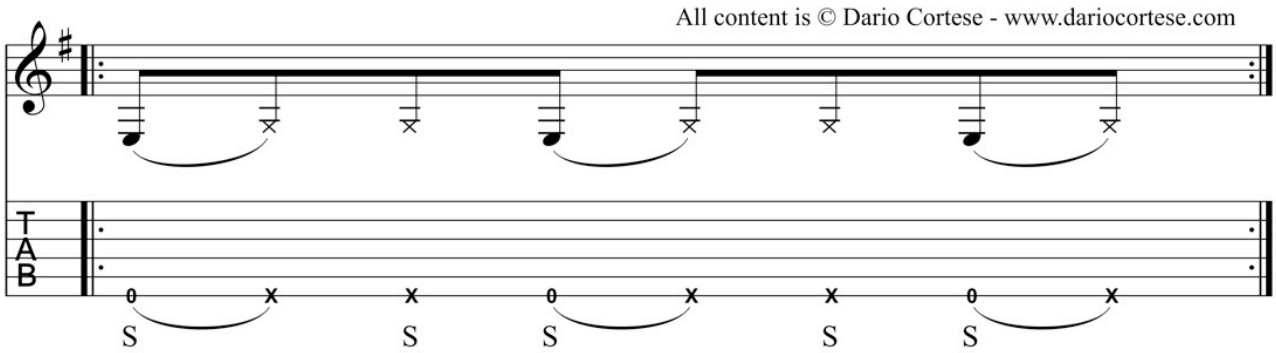
Ex 3: Same example as before but with three note per string, very helpful for fast runs.



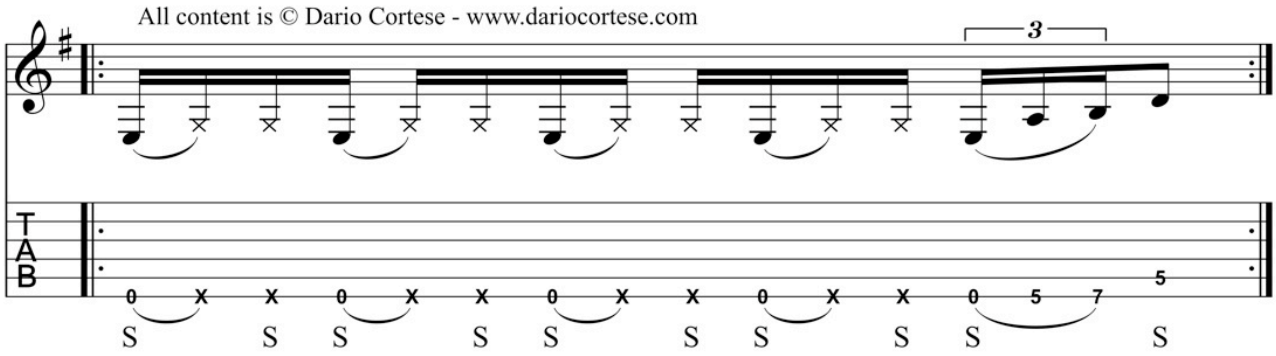
Ex 4: This example shows a different muting technique for the fretting hand. Slap the open low E then mute the string just laying the fingers on it as shown in the video. It's a sort of hammer-on but the hammered note is a dead note.



Ex 5: Quite similar to the previous one but after the hammer-on we slap the dead note. The rhythm is one of the most simple poly-rhythm: 3+3+2 in 8ths or 16th notes.

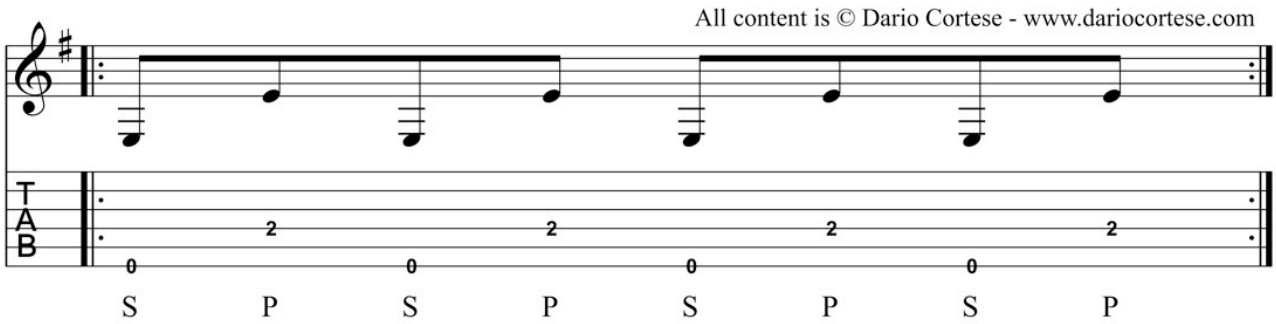


Ex 6: This is the final example on the thumb-slap technique. This features a rhythm similar to the previous example with a simple pentatonic run at the end.

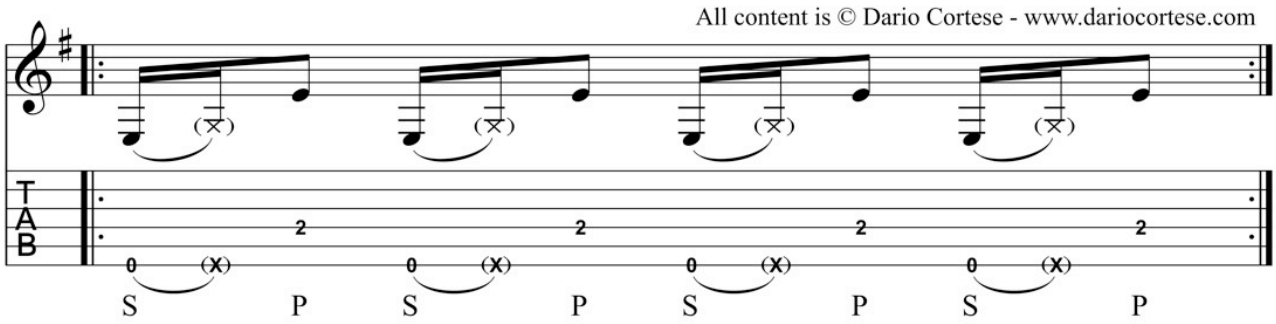


POP

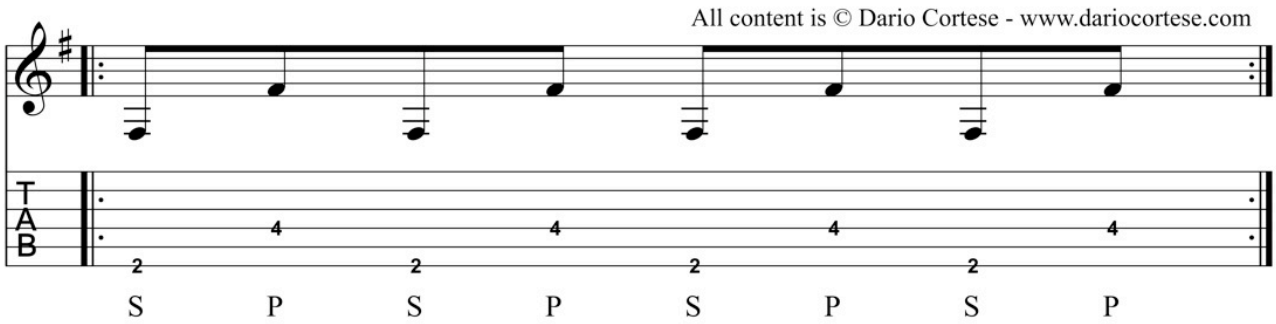
Ex 7: Ex 7 combines the slap and pop techniques. Again take a close look at the video for the popping technique.



Ex 8: Very similar to the previous one but this time the fretting hand has to mute the low E string. The idea here is to get a 'staccato' feel, a very short sound typical of funk music.



Ex 9: Same as example 7 but this time no open string. Here the muting it's a little bit easier as you just have to release the pressure off the fretting hand.



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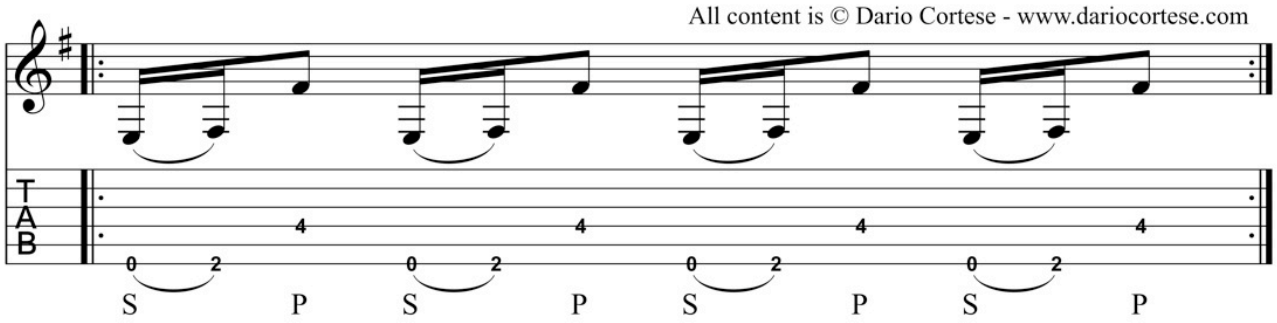
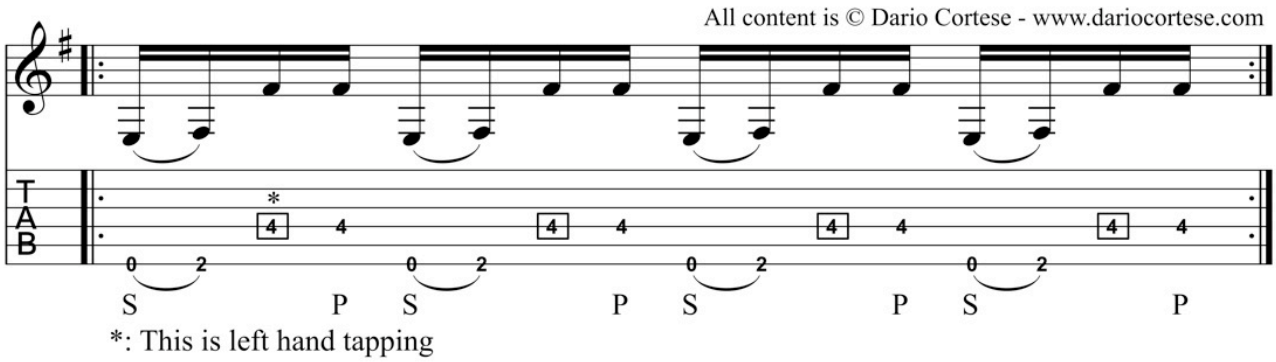
Ex 10: The last example on the popping technique combines slap, hammer-on and popping.

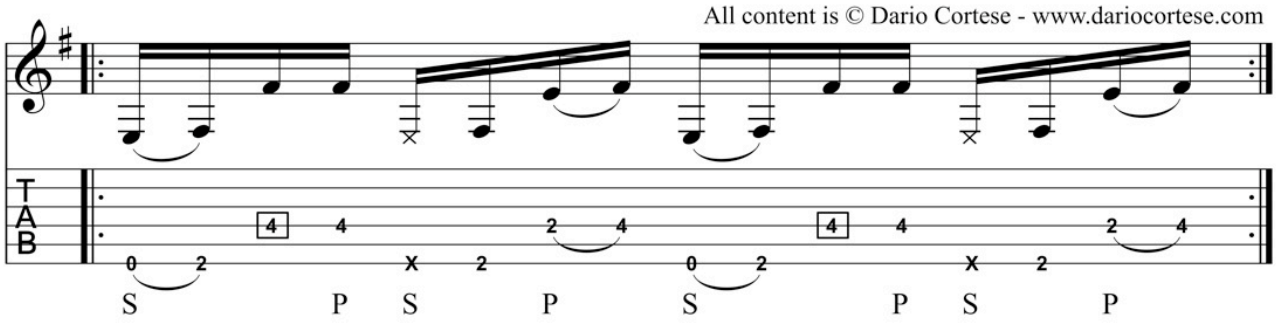


EXTRA

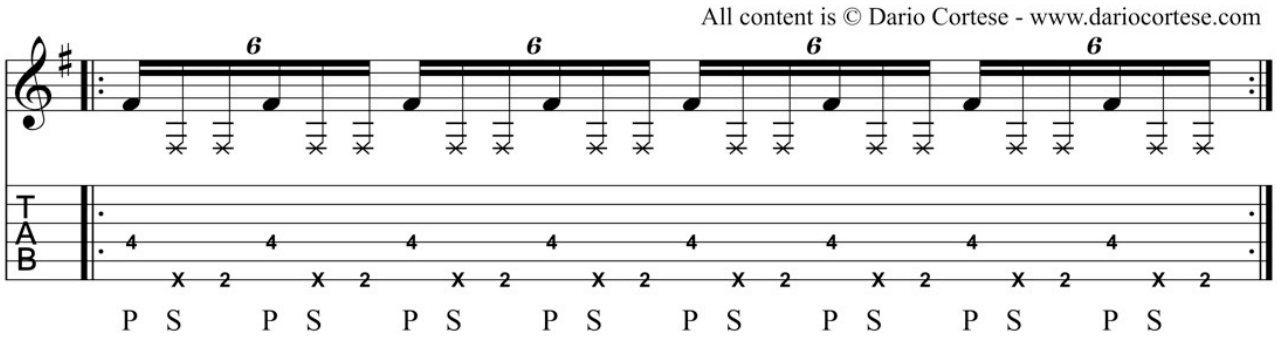
Ex 11: These last four examples combine some advanced technique so make sure you master the basic movements before approaching this section. Ex 11 features four different movements. Slap the open low E, hammer-on the 2nd fret, tap (with the fretting hand) the 4th fret on the D string then pop the same note.



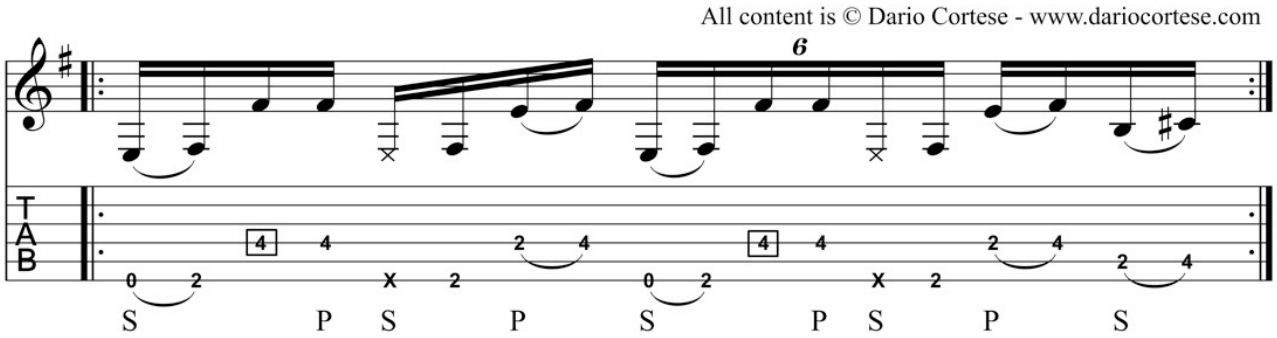
Ex 12: This example is the evolution of the previous one and features the 'fake double-thumbing' technique. After the four movements of the previous example (first beat) we do: slap on a dead-ghost note resting the thumb on the string, play a down-stroke with the thumb (just a normal down-stroke), pop the 2nd fret on the D string and then hammer-on the 4th fret.



Ex 13: This is a close up of the ‘fake double-thumbing’ technique. Start with popping the 4th fret on the D string; slap the low E and then down-stroke with the thumb. These last two notes can be either real notes or dead notes. The idea here is to get the rhythm and the ‘triplet’ feel.



Ex 14: This strummer is like example 12 except it has a spitting sextuplet pattern in bar 3. Learn it slowly and carefully!



SLAP MY BLUES

This example has been composed just to combine the different techniques discussed and add a few new ones. It's a 12 bar blues progression with a couple of slightly different chords (just to make it a bit more interesting). Approach this study bar by bar very slowly. Once all the movements feel natural the speed just come without doing any effort (I have never tried to speed up this stuff, it just came out this way).

Bars 1-2: The first couple of bars feature mainly slap, fretting hand tapping and fake double-thumbing. We also need a couple of percussive sounds: popping dead notes or just strumming dead notes.

Bars 3-4: Mainly the same groove as before with a quick run at the end featuring double-thumbing and fretting hand tapping.

Bars 5-6: Again the main groove but this time the fretting hand plays power chords. At the end we slap the top 3 open strings on the 12th fret. To do this you can use any finger, just try to hit exactly on top of the 12th fret.

Bars 7-8: Again very similar to bars 3-4

Bars 9-13: This is the last part of the chord progression so we play the main groove following the chord. We end with a quick run built on the E Natural Minor Scale. For the scale you can slap the first note on each string (again any finger) or you can slap the first note on the A string and then hammer-on the notes on the low E. Again after the run we play the 8-8-7 with the fretting hand while we slap (on 20-20-19, an octave higher) with the picking hand.

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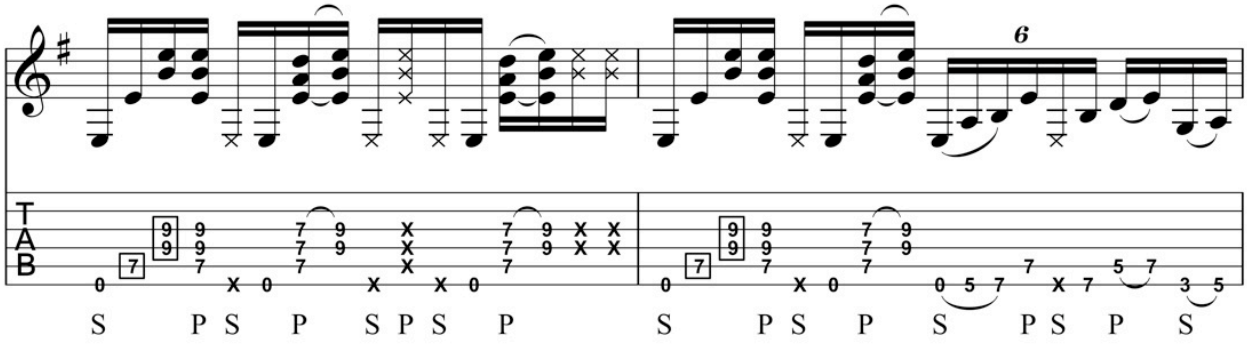

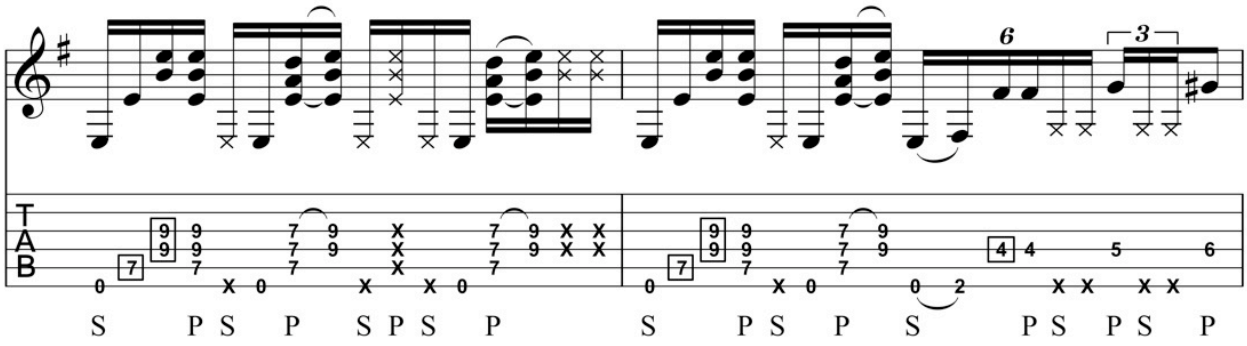

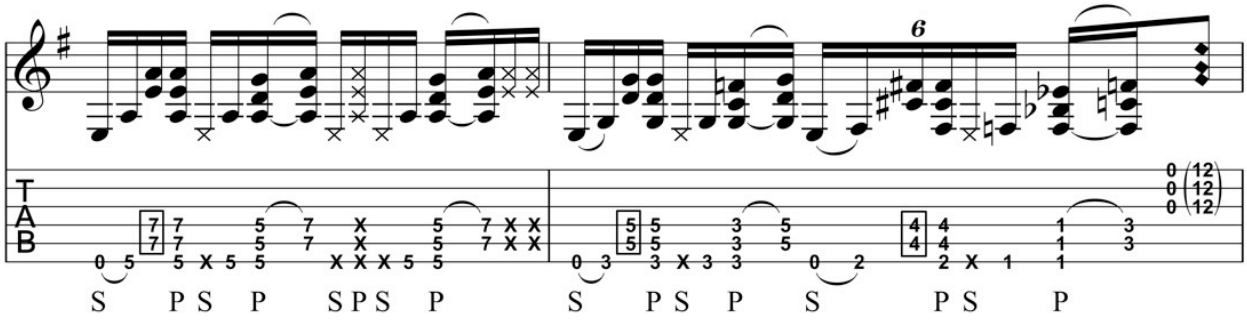

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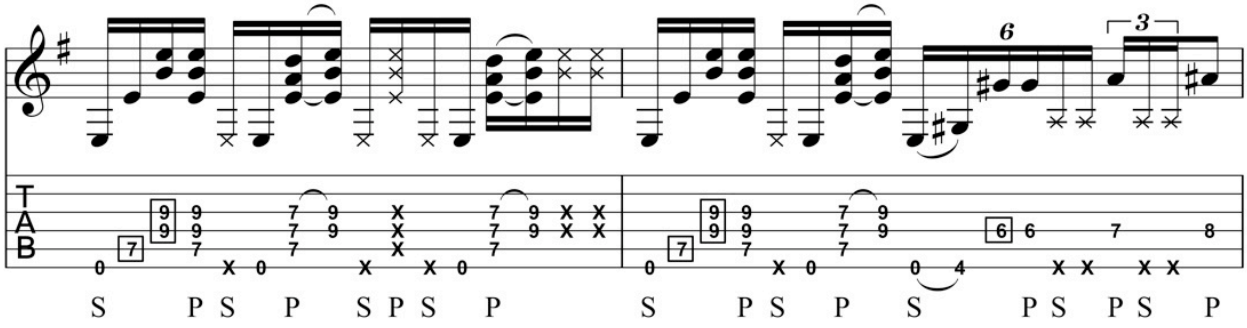

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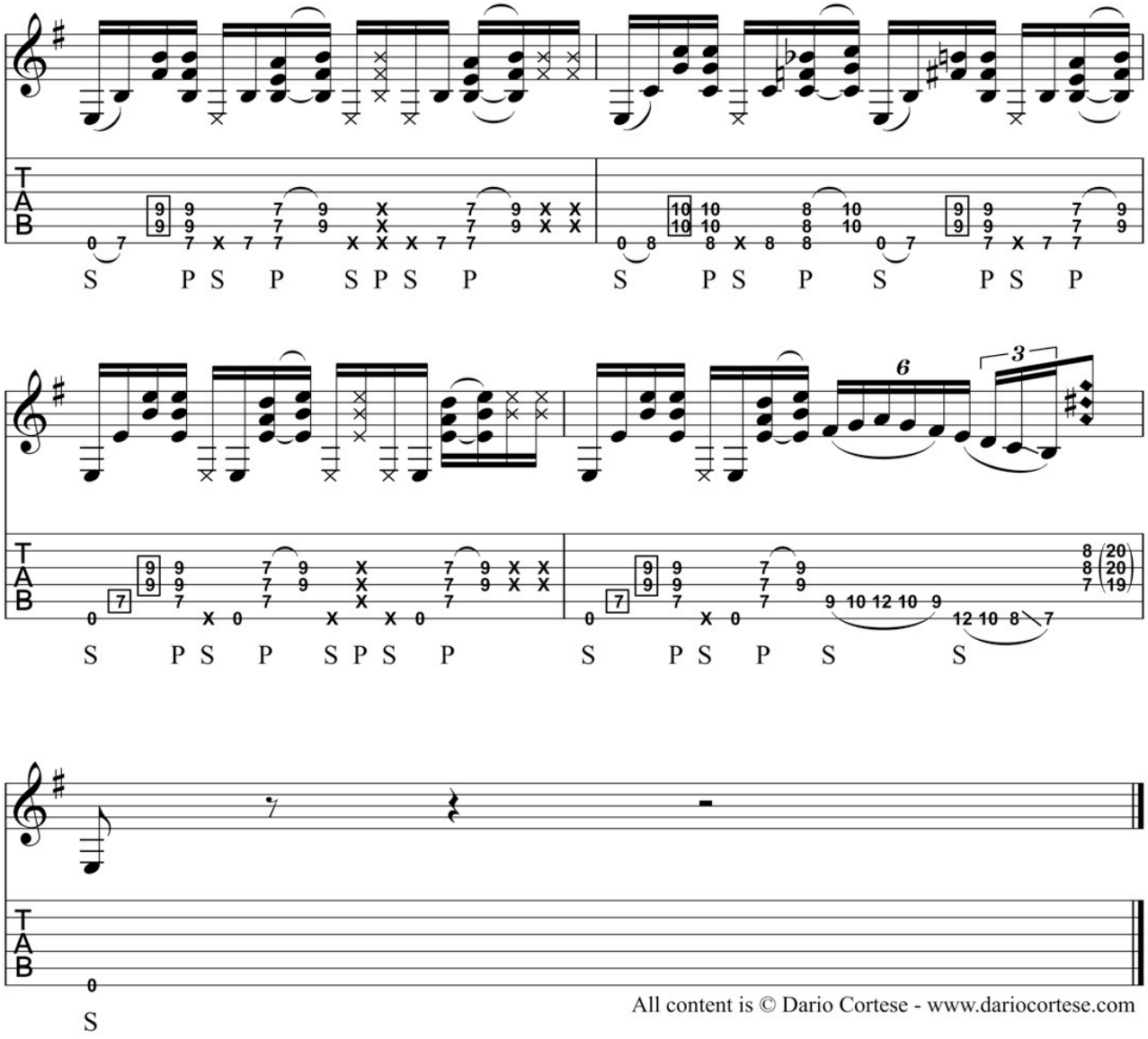

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