

# GT158

## Country Essentials 5

### *Piano - Double Stops*

*This month Dario Cortese will take us into the world of piano imitation and double stops.*

Double stops are one of the most exciting techniques in modern country guitar. They simulate piano players who have more facilities than guitarists to play more than one note at the time in fast passages. In the past 40 years of country music this approach has been absorbed and incorporated by many different instruments like fiddle, pedal steel, dobro and guitar and led us to today's panorama where each instrument influences the other sharing and copying (or trying to) double stop licks.

By definition double stops are two simultaneous notes (theoretically called harmonic interval). This interval is usually a 3<sup>rd</sup> but it's quite easy, especially these days, to find 4<sup>ths</sup>, 5<sup>ths</sup>, and diminished 5<sup>ths</sup>.

Many consider the fantastic Jerry Reed the father of double stops on guitar. His approach has always been refreshing, new and the way he developed his style around double stops made him the perfect example of funky-country guitarist.

Both James Burton and Albert Lee used double stops largely but it was Brent Mason who took double stops to a completely new level. Brent is heavily influenced by pedal steel player Buddy Emmons (who used double stops extensively) and guitar genius Jerry Reed and he found his own personal way to combine the two styles.

Jerry Reed's style is focused on the rhythm side of double stops which creates his incredible funky-country vibes while Buddy Emmons' style is focused more on the harmony side because of the facilities of the pedal steel instrument to play chords. This meaning that sometimes Mr. Emmons would play double stops licks using actual triads instead of simple double stops.

Brent's approach on double stops is not very far away from the funk guitar rhythms. In fact in funk guitar you often have a one or two bars groove that is repeated over and over through one section of the song. Usually in this groove you have the chords which often create the accents and the ghost/dead notes which just fill the space and create the groove (I do know that this is a very simplified explanation of the funk guitar world but please bare with me and you'll see what I'm trying to say).

To understand what Brent does try to substitute the chord with a double stop and the ghost/dead notes with single note lines. If you take a look at Examples 1-5 you'll see that I've added an extra score to make very clear the type of rhythmic approach used here.

As in funk guitar if you combine an even rhythm (let's say 8<sup>th</sup> notes which means 2 notes per beat) with an odd pattern (let's say 3 notes repeated over and over) the result is a polyrhythm – called polyrhythm because it combines two different rhythm figures at once. Depending on how hard you wanna make your life the polyrhythm can be quite simple and straight forward or very intricate and unpredictable.

This is of course just the starting point. Once you get your head around the concept and the technique involved in all this the possibilities are endless.

One of the reasons Brent Mason has been the most recorded guitarist ever in country music is because he never repeated himself (I did more or less 400/500 transcriptions of Brent's solo and I never found the same line twice). This means that you always need to look for new rhythms, new double stops and new ideas in order to keep your playing exciting. People should never know what's coming up next, if they do your career will soon be over.

Although is very common to play double stops at fast tempos it is much more groovy, fun and easy to play them at moderate speeds. I would suggest to focus on 8<sup>th</sup> notes around 160/200 (I call it the 'fun zone') and only when you mastered this zone you move onto the fast crazy stuff.

From a technique side the bottom line is that you play the double stops with the fingers and the single note lines with pick or pick and finger. It seems like the main picking movement involved is the circular picking which consists in moving thumb and index of the picking hand instead of the much common wrist motion. This lets you keep the hand in position without moving it too much and makes the fingers articulation slightly easier. Of course these are only suggestions, not

rules, I highly recommend exploring different possibilities and finding the one that is right for you. Hope you enjoy!

**Ex 1:** Example 1 is built around a D Mixolydian scale. The common approach for double stops is horizontal instead of the traditional vertical. This requires some time to get used to constant position changing so approach it slowly and speed it up only when you feel very confident at slow tempos. Use the pick on the D string and fingers on the G and B strings for the double stops. The rhythm is even (2 over 2) and makes it quite easy to master.

♩ = 180

Rhythm Pattern: 2 ----| 2 ----| 2 ----| 2 ----| 2 ----|

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**Ex 2:** Example 2 follows the same idea of Ex 01 but this time the rhythm changes as we have 3 over 2. This creates a basic common polyrhythm which makes the line a bit more exciting and less obvious. The picking directions might be tough at first but they proved to be the most efficient at higher speed.

♩ = 180

Rhythm Pattern: 3 ----| 3 ----| 3 ----| 3 ----| 3 ----|

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**Ex 3:** Same idea but this time is applied on 4 over 2. This doesn't create any crazy polyrhythm as both rhythm figure and accents within the line are even. To fill the spaces I've used chromaticisms to connect two notes in the scale. It would be worth spending some time on the fingerings of the fretting hand as this one

requires quite a lot of movements. I wrote the fingerings I've used but explore other possibilities and choose your favorite one.

$\text{♩} = 180$

Rhythm Pattern: 4 -----| 2---| 2---| 4 -----| 4 -----|

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**Ex 4:** Example 4 is one of my all time favorite kind of line. It's simple, easy to play, very effective and very groovy. The rhythm of this one is 2+3+3 creating a basic polyrhythm that restarts at the beginning of each bar.

$\text{♩} = 180$

Rhythm Pattern: 2 ---| 3 -----| 3 -----| 2 ---| 3 -----|

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**Ex 5:** This example explores some less common polyrhythm. This makes the line unpredictable and seems to be quite effective especially at high speed. The formula for this example is 4+2+5+7+3. From now on you'll be looking at phone numbers with a new prospective! (Doh!)

$\text{♩} = 180$

Rhythm Pattern: 4 -----| 2---| 5 -----| 7 -----| 3 -----|

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**Ex 6:** This example features a very clever technique used by Brent Mason on 'I Feel Like I'm Forgetting Something' solo with Lee Ann Womack. Basically the

pick plays a mini sweep across two strings and the fingers play the double stops. The tricky part of this technique is to play it at moderate tempos (as it's very easy to play at crazy speeds) so start fast and gradually slow it down until you get a perfect rhythm definition.

♩ = 180

T 10 10 12 10 12 10 11 9 8 7 7 5 7 7 7 7 5 5

A 12 12 10 11 10 9 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 7 5

B 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 9 10 7 5

P.M.- - P.M.- - P.M.- - P.M.- - P.M.- -

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**Ex 7:** The rhythm of this line is quite complex. Firstly we're using triplets on a backing track based on straight 8ths. Secondly we're applying a quite complex formula (2+5+2+4+2+2+4) which makes the rhythm very exciting. On top of that the speed factor may be a problem since the line is not properly slow. There's an awkward passage on the second beat of the second bar. I wrote the fingerings I've used but you might need to spend some time to get used to them.

♩ = 180

T 14 16 14 16 14 13 12 12 10 11 12

A 14 16 14 13 12 12 10 11 12

B 14 16 14 13 12 12 10 11 12

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**Ex 8:** This example shows how you can incorporate double stops in a guitar intro part. These four bars represent more or less the kind of sounds you would be looking for in Nashville. Instead of 4 bars of A chord this riff creates a Mixolydian texture adding the D and G chord. The key point for this riff is to make is sound

relaxed but tight at the same time. Double stops should be played with the fingers as usual while the pick takes care of the single notes.

♩ = 110

1. 2. D

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**Ex 9:** This example shows how to incorporate double stops on a fast train beat groove typical of bluegrass or traditional country. As usual fingers play the double stops while pick takes care of single note lines. The speed of this example might make things a bit more complicated. Make sure you start slowly and speed up only after developing accuracy and dynamic control on the lick.

♩ = 140

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**Ex 10:** Same context as Ex 09 this lick is heavily influenced by pedal steel player Buddy Emmons. Note the minor triads played at the end - F#m and Em - which

[illegible]

Musical score for "A" in 4/4 time. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 140. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes with various fingerings indicated above. The bass line consists of eighth and sixteenth notes with fingerings indicated below. The piece ends with a double bar line.

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## TONE SETTINGS

For the mp3 I've used my '69 Tele through the Line6 POD XT set on the Plexi 45 amp. I slightly varied the amount of distortion here and there but the basic patch was set as follow:

Drive: 4.5

Bass: 5.5

Mid: 6

Treb: 10

Pres: 10

Vol: 6

Cab: 4x12 Green 20's

Mic: 2:57 Off Axis

77% Room ambient

Line6 POD XT Compressor/Gate

Comp Thres: -23dB

Comp Gain: 6dB

Gate Thres: -81dB

Gate Decay: 69%

The reverb (when presents) has been added from the desk. Since I don't have a very expensive Lexicon reverb I had to simulate it using two reverbs: Large Hall (a long reverb quite low in the mix) and Small Room (short reverb quite high in the mix).

The '69 Tele has 0.09-0.42 strings and has been set on the bridge pick-up (which is the original '69 Fender). I've used a Jim Dunlop Jazz III XL pick in combination with middle, ring and little fingers with acrylic nails.