How to Play a 12 Bar Rhythm & Riff on your Ukulele

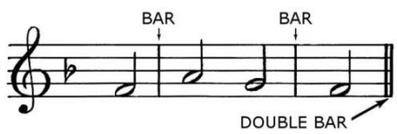
I hope these instruction pages will enable you to enjoy performing the '***riffs***' involved in 12 bar music for Blues as well as Rock and Roll tunes. I hope they are easy enough for you to understand and to enable you to enhance your tunes, giving harmony and avoiding repetitive boring same chord playing over a long line or lines of the song.

You really need to have a little finger that you can move easily and independently from its neighbour. Some little fingers can be stubborn or shy and won't want to come out and play with the others and there's little I can do to help you there. It may also be beneficial to have a low G string rather than the normal G (4th) string, but it's not necessary.

Definitions

First as a definition a ***riff*** (or a ***vamp***) refers to repeating a musical sequence of a chord in progression, which can be used as an accompaniment during a performance. What this means in simple terms is that you play an additional chord or two to enhance the rhythm. In normal guitar bands, this would be the job of a rhythm guitarist.

If you're musically inclined, then you will know that a ***bar*** is a musical notation (or measure) and within the bars is a segment of music.



Single and Double Bar Lines

In our case, within each bar is a ***riff*** or set of associated chords. That means there will be 12 ***riffs*** – one in each bar measure. The riff will be repeated in some form throughout the tune using the base notes as the starting point. The 12-bar set will also be repeated in the verse and the chorus.

Confused???

O.K. let's break it down in terms you can readily understand.

For 12 bar tunes there are 3 base chords (i.e. base = where you begin the riff or sequence of chords) e.g. the base chords can be

[G], **[C]** & **[D]** (for ***No Particular Place to Go***), or

[A], **[D]** & **[E]** (for ***Johnny B Goode***), or

[F], **[Bb]** & **[C]**

Since the first 2 groups mentioned above are most used, I'll describe what you play & illustrate the chord shapes only for them. If you need more clarification, come and talk to me. I'll be only too happy to help.

Firstly, we'll look at the **[G]**, **[C]** & **[D]** 12 bar tune. I'm using Chuck Berry's ***No Particular Place to Go***, which can be found on the page following the sequence description, as an example tune.

First to help you understand it, I'll simplify it by just using the **base** chord as the ***riff***.

1. The tune will begin with the chord of **[G]**. Play this ***4 times***.
2. Then play the chord **[C]** ***twice***.
3. Then return to the chord **[G]**. Play it ***twice***.

That's 8 bars so far.

4. Then move to play the chord **[D]** ***once*** only.
5. Then on to the **[C]** chord ***once***.
6. Finally play the chord **[G]** ***twice***. End on

And that's your 12 bars.

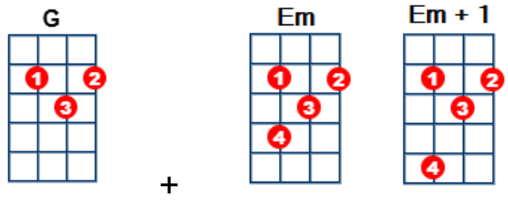
If you're happy, so far, we'll move on to the trickier bit…

Now, you'll play the ***riffs*** with the added chords to the base chord.

Fear not! I've included illustrations of the chords and their suggested fingering positions.

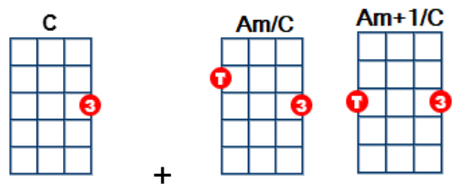
1. You begin by playing the base **[G]** chord. The first added chord is **[Em]**. In this illustration of **[Em]**, below, you should notice that the **[Em]** chord uses the **[G]** chord shape, plus the little finger as **(4)** .
   If you have the ability to be very flexible with your little pinkie then you could follow up with this **[Em+1]** chord. But it's not necessary to play the 3rd chord unless you are able. *Even I find that stretch difficult sometimes.*
   So, you play the base **[G]** chord immediately followed by the **[Em]** chord, then the **[Em+1]** chord (but only if you can). Play this riff ***4 times***.

Riff No.1 to 4



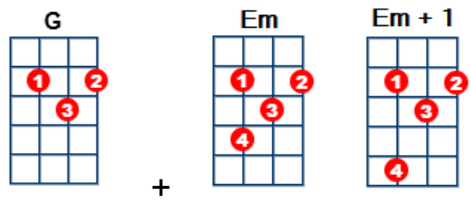
2. For the next ***riff***, play the base **[C]** chord immediately followed by the chord **[Am/C]** and then the chord **[Am+1/C]** as illustrated below. I have marked the suggested finger on the 2nd & 3rd chords as **(T)** for Thumb, but you could use your 1st finger instead of **(T)** for **[Am/C]** and your 2nd finger instead of **(T)** for the chord **[Am+1/C]**. Remember they're only suggested fingering solutions. Do whatever you find easier. Play this riff ***2 times***.

Riff No.5 & 6



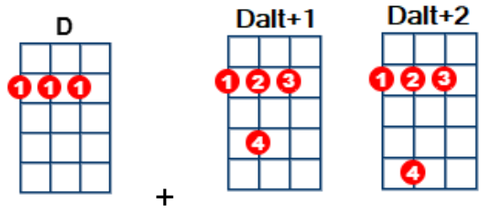
3. For the next phase, play the base **[G]** chord again, immediately followed by the **[Em]** chord, then the **[Em+1]** chord (but only if you can). Play this riff ***2 times***.

Riff No.7 & 8



4. Now for the run down. First you need to play the base **[D]** chord followed by **[Dalt+1]** where the pinkie finger is **(4)** and then **[Dalt+2]** (if you can reach it) as illustrated by these chords shown. Play this riff ***once***.

Riff No.9

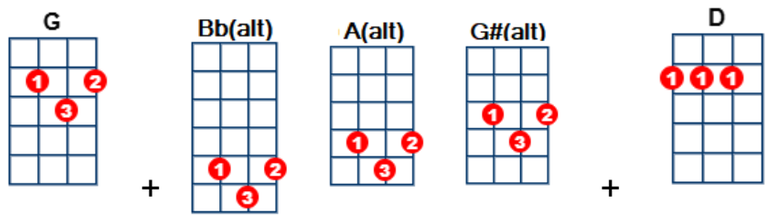


5. Then play the base **[C]** chord followed by the chord **[Am/C]** and then the chord **[Am+1/C]** as previously described. Play this riff ***once***.

Riff No.10

6. For the final phase, play the base **[G]** chord again, but this time, play the following chords **[Bb(alt)]**, **[A(alt)]**, **[G#(alt)]**, pause, then finally **[D]** once, pause then 3 more times

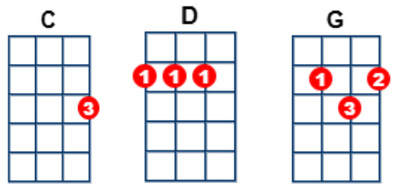
Riff No.11 & 12



This will be counted as the final 2 ***riffs***. Once completed, you just continue repeating it.

Now, try it out on this tune. **N.B.** Only the **Base** chord will be shown, so you'll have to play the other ***riff*** chords associated with the base chord. Good Luck!!!

No Particular Place to Go – Chuck Berry



(*Intro*) **[D]**

Riding along in my **[G]** automobile,
[G] my baby beside me at the wheel.
[G] I stole a kiss at the turn of a **[C]** mile.
[C] My curiosity running **[G]** wild.
[G] Cruisin' and playin' the **[D]** radio,
[D] With no particular place to **[G]** go. **[D]**

Riding along in my **[G]** automobile,
[G] I's anxious to tell her the way I feel.
[G] So, I told her softly and **[C]** sincere,
[C] And she leaned and whispered in my **[G]** ear.
[G] Cuddlin' more and drivin' **[D]** slow
[D] With no particular place to **[G]** go. **[D]**

(*Refrain as verse*) **[G], [G], [G] [C],**
[C] [G], [G] [D], [D] [G], [D]

No particular place **[G]** to go,
[G] So, we parked way out on ko-ko-mo.
[G] The night was young, and the moon was **[C]** gold.
[C] So, we both decided to take a **[G]** stroll.
[G] Can you image the way I **[D]** felt.
[D] I couldn't unfasten her safety **[G]** belt. **[D]**

Riding along in my **[G]** calaboose,
[G] Still trying to get her belt a-loose.
[G] All the way home I held a **[C]** grudge,
[C] For the safety belt that wouldn't **[G]** budge,
[G] Cruisin' and playing the **[D]** radio,
[D] With no particular place to **[G]** go. **[D],** (***end on***) **[G]**

Now, we'll look at the **[A]**, **[D]** & **[E]** 12 bar tune.

For this I'm using ***Johnny B Goode***, which can be found on the page following the sequence description, as an example tune.

There's a slight change to the previous sequence. In this, sequence 4 shows the base chord played twice and then moves to the final 2 chords of **[A]** thus avoiding a return to a **[D]** riff.

Again, I'll simplify it, first, by just using the base chord as the ***riff***.

1. The tune will begin with the chord of **[A]**. Play this ***4 times***.
2. Then play the chord **[D]** ***twice***.
3. Then return to the chord **[A]**. Play it ***twice***.

That's 8 bars so far.

4. Then move to play the chord **[E]** ***twice***.
5. Finally play the chord **[A]** ***twice***.

And that's your 12 bars.

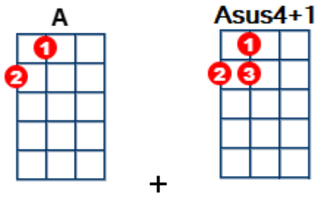
If you're happy with it, we can move on to the trickier bit…

Now, you'll play the ***riffs*** with the added chords to the base chord.

You may realise that this version of Johnny B. Goode differs to the one we normally use in that instead of playing an **[E7]** we are going to play a base **[E]** chord as in the original, to include the additional chords for the ***riff***.

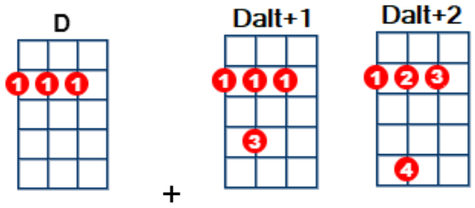
1. You begin by playing the first base **[A]** chord. The first added chord is **[Asus4]**. In this illustration of **[Asus4+1]**, below, you should notice that the chord uses the **[A]** chord shape, plus the 3rd finger as **(3)** . Play this riff ***4 times***.

Riff No.1 to 4



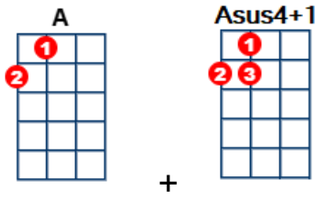
2. For the next ***riff***, play the base **[D]** chord followed by **[Dalt+1]** where the pinkie finger is **(4)** and then **[Dalt+2]** (if you can reach it) as illustrated by these chords shown. Play this riff ***twice***.

Riff No.5 & 6



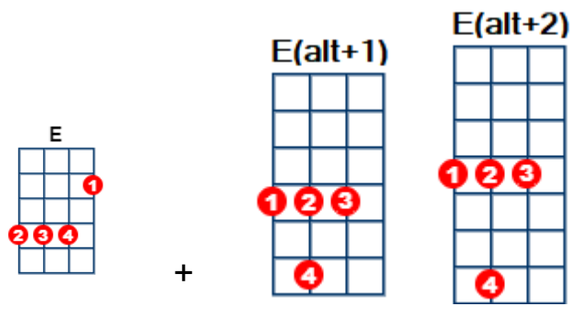
3. For the next phase, play the base **[A]** chord again, immediately followed by the **[Asus4+1]** chord, Play this riff ***twice***.

Riff No.7 & 8



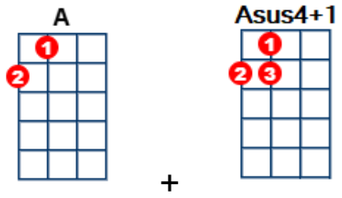
4. Now for the run down. First you need to play the base **[E]** chord followed by **[Ealt+1]** and then **[Ealt+2]** (if you can reach it) as illustrated by these chords shown. Play this riff ***twice***.

Riff No.9 & 10



5. For the final phase, play the base **[A]** chord again, immediately followed by the **[Asus4+1]** chord. Play this riff ***twice*** to end.

Riff No.11 & 12

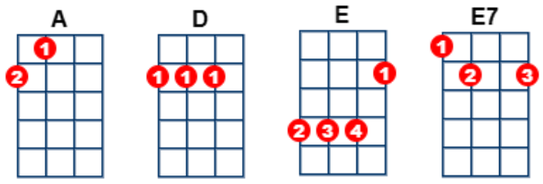


Having completed the 12 bars for the verse repeat for the preceding chorus and other verses.

Now, try it out here.

N.B. Only the **Base** chord will be shown, so you'll have to play the other ***riff*** chords associated with the base chord as described on the previous page. Enjoy!!!

Johnny B Goode - Chuck Berry



Deep **[A]** down in Louisiana, close to New Orleans,
[A] Way back up in the woods among the evergreens,
There **[D]** stood a log cabin made of earth and wood,
Where **[A]** lived a country boy named Johnny B. Goode,
Who **[E]** never ever learned to read or write so well,
But he could **[A]** play the UKULELE like a ringin' a bell.

*Go-oh. **[A]** Go! Go!, Johnny go! Go!*
__[A]__ Go! Johnny go! Go!
__[D]__ Go! Johnny go!
__[A]__ Go! go Johnny go! __[E]__ Go! Johnny B. __[A]__ Goode.

He **[A]** used to carry his *UKULELE* in a gunny sack,
And **[A]** go sit beneath a tree by the railroad track.
Old **[D]** engineers would see him sittin' in the shade,
[A] Strummin' with the rhythm that the drivers made.
When **[E]** people passed him by they would stop and say,
Oh! My, but **[A]** that little country boy can play.

*Go-oh. **[A]** Go! Go!, Johnny go! Go!*
__[A]__ Go! Johnny go! Go!
__[D]__ Go! Johnny go!
__[A]__ Go! go Johnny go! __[E]__ Go! Johnny B. __[A]__ Goode.

His **[A]** mother told him "Someday you will be a man.
[A] You will be the leader of a big ole' band.
Many **[D]** people comin' from miles around,
Will **[A]** hear you play your *UKULELE* till the sun go down.
[E] Maybe, someday, your name'll be in lights,
Sayin' 'Johnny **[A]** B. Goode tonight'."

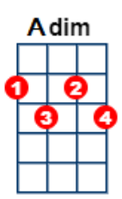
*Go-oh. **[A]** Go! Go!, Johnny go! Go!*
__[A]__ Go! Johnny go! Go!
__[D]__ Go! Johnny go!
__[A]__ Go! go Johnny go! __[E]__ Go! Johnny B. __[A]__ Goode.

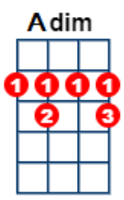
*Go-oh. **[A]** Go! Go!, Johnny go! Go!*
__[A]__ Go! Johnny go! Go!
__[D]__ Go! Johnny go!
__[A]__ Go! go Johnny go! __[E]__ Go! Johnny B. __[A]__ Goode.
__[E7]__/ __[A]__/

---- EXTRA ---- EXTRA ---- EXTRA ---- EXTRA ---- EXTRA ---- EXTRA ----

For those of you who have enjoyed my little riff at the end of the ***Five Foot Two Medley*** and would like to have a go, here's the chords sequence.

[Adim] x6 (approx.) followed by **[G7]** then **[C]** illustrated by:-

Either 

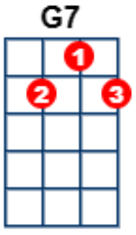
or as 

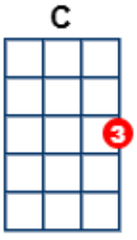
or 

play a **[D7]**

play this about **6** times

(the **1 1 1 1** 's indicate a '1st finger' bar)

followed <u>once</u> by 

then <u>once</u> with 

for your pleasure,

Mal Chislett