

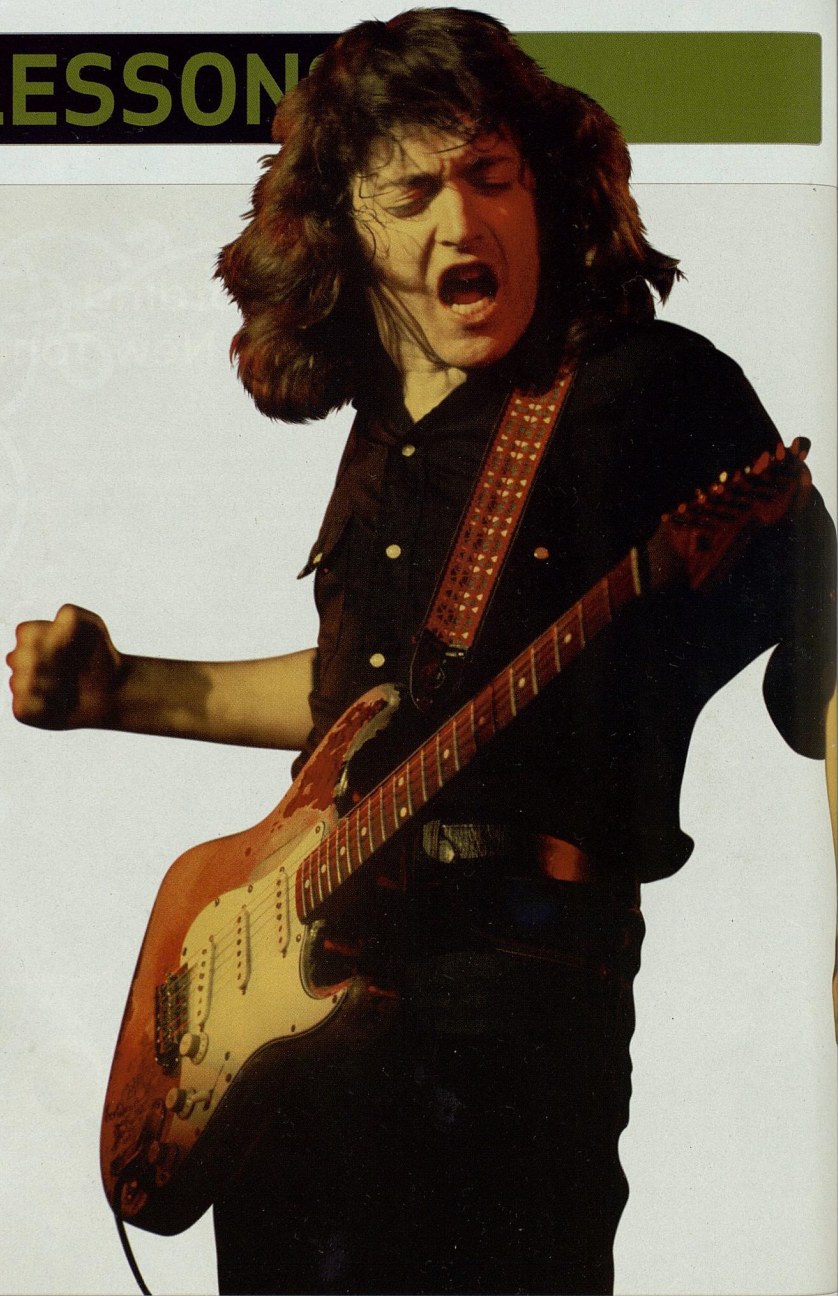
# 10 Things You Gotta Do to Play Like: RORY GALLAGHER

Jesse Gress

*Guitar Player*; Apr 2008; 42, 4; Alumni - Research Library

pg. 92

## LESSON



# 10

Things  
You  
Gotta Do  
to  
Play  
Like

# RORY GALLAGHER

BY JESSE GRESS

**ALTHOUGH HE'S OFTEN EXCLUDED** from lists and polls that rate the upper echelon of blues-rock guitar heroes, the late, great Rory Gallagher (1948-1995) certainly deserves that honor. Why? Consider the Irish blues-rockers' pedigree. It includes the formation of rock's first power trio in 1966 (one that would become John Lennon's favorite band three years later), dethroning Eric Clapton as *Melody Maker's* Musician of the Year in 1972, recording with and being asked to join the Rolling Stones as Mick Taylor's replacement in 1975, and perhaps most important, his emergence as the era's first Strat cat to eschew Marshall and Hiwatt stacks in favor of small Vox and Fender combo amps. Now

you can begin to understand why world-class players from Clapton (who credits Gallagher for getting him back into the blues) and Brian May (who claims he appropriated his sound from R.G.) to Johnny Marr and Slash have been singing Gallagher's praises for up to four decades.

Born in Ballyshannon, County Donegal, Gallagher (pronounced *Gall-a-her* in Gaelic) played around Ireland with a local R&B outfit called Fontana (later renamed the Impact) before forming the Taste (soon shortened to Taste) in Cork City in 1966. Arguably the era's first power trio, the band's lineup solidified when bassist Richard McCracken and drummer John Wilson came aboard in

1968. Following two superb studio albums (*Taste* [1969] and *On the Boards* [1970]), the band recorded a pair of live shows (one documenting their triumphant appearance at the 1970 Isle of Wight Festival), but neither was released until well after their final performance in Belfast that same New Year's Eve.

The eternal pub rocker, Gallagher melded his flair for fiery improv with a more traditional blues-rock approach and soldiered on with the Rory Gallagher Band, which evolved through several lineups that toured and recorded relentlessly from 1971 through 1990. Gallagher and company released 14 memorable albums, including *Rory Gallagher, Deuce* (both 1971), *Live in Europe* (1972), *Blueprint*,

Ex. 1a

♩ = ca. 140

Gtr. E D/E

Bass arr. for gtr.

T 0 0 0 0 7 7 7 7 7 7 0 0

A 0 0 0 0 7 7 7 7 7 7 0 0

B 7 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Ex. 1b

♩ = ca. 140

E5 G5 C5 D5 E G C D

Piat four times

T 0 0 12 12 5 5 7 7 9 9 12 12 5 5 7 7

A 0 0 10 10 3 3 5 5 11 9 12 12 5 5 7 7

B 7 7 10 10 3 3 5 5 14 12 7 7 9 9

*Tattoo* (both 1973), *Irish Tour* (1974), *Calling Card* (1976), *Top Priority* (1979), *Jinx* (1982), and 1990's *Fresh Evidence*, his final studio album. Along the way Gallagher had the opportunity to perform and/or record with some of his musical heroes, including Jerry Lee Lewis, Albert King, Muddy Waters, and Lonnie Donegan. Tragically, Gallagher failed to recuperate from a liver transplant performed in April of 1995, and passed into the realm of musical legend on June 14th of that same year.

Gallagher could certainly play traditional acoustic and electric blues with the best of them, but there was something unique to his electric playing that one didn't find in the Clapton, Beck, Page, and Hendrix vocabularies—especially during his trademark extended improvisations—and *that's* what we're going after here. So fire up your Strat and get ready to rock out beyond the blues. First, you gotta ...

# 1

**CATCH STRAT FEVER**  
Informed by many different musical styles early in his career, Rory Gallagher was a fan of skiffle, folk, rock and roll, and blues, and he strived to combine all those elements

in his playing. Initially inspired by folk musicians such as Lonnie Donegan and Woody Guthrie, Gallagher soon tuned his ear to rockers Eddie Cochran and Buddy Holly (the reason Gallagher gravitated towards the Fender Stratocaster), and blues artist such as Muddy Waters, Jimmy Reed, and Buddy Guy. Gallagher was also a self-taught blues scholar, and was especially well versed in the acoustic styles of Leadbelly, Josh White, Son House, and Blind Blake. Additionally, he played killer electric and acoustic slide guitar in both standard and open tunings. Both of these techniques, however, are subjects in themselves and have been excluded from this stylistic analysis in favor of the standard-tuned Strat wailing that gave Gallagher his most identifiable individual voice.

# 2

## WALK TALL AND CARRY A BIG SHILLELAGH

Rarely has one guitarist been so identified with a single instrument, but let's set the record straight: Over the years, Gallagher's signature beat-to-crap Stratocaster (recently replicated in a limited edition by Fender) has been mistakenly referenced as a 1959 model, but, in truth, it's a '61.

Reportedly the first Strat in Ireland, Gallagher bought the guitar in 1963 for just under £100 at Crowley's Music Store in Cork, and it wasn't long before the instrument became part of his psychic makeup. Gallagher's extensive modifications included replacing the tuners, nut, scratchplate, and pickups, as well as the installation of a 5-way pickup selector, but none of these alterations detracted from the guitar's original vibe. (Debatable but intriguing is the Wikipedia tidbit claiming that what remained of the guitar's nearly non-existent original sunburst finish was partially the result of its being stolen and left out in the rain for several days.) Coupled with a single vintage Vox AC30 that he used for the bulk of his career, plus the occasional tweed Fender Twin, Bassman, or Concert amp, Gallagher used this beloved ax to virtually define the perfect Strat tone for decades. Gallagher's additional axes did include a 1957 maple neck sunburst Stratocaster purchased from a man named Robert Johnson (!) in Ft. Worth, Texas and used only in the studio and on occasional gigs, as well as a '59 Fender Esquire and '67 Telecaster, both of which were retrofitted with Strat pickup assemblies.

Other Gallagher goodies included a 1963 Gretsch PX6134 Corvette purchased at an

Blister On The Moon Words and Music by Rory Gallagher Copyright © 1969 by Strange Music Ltd., Universal Music Publishing MGB Ltd., and Warner/Chappell Music Ltd. Copyright renewed. All Rights for Strange Music Ltd. and Universal Music Publishing MGB Ltd. in the U.S. Administered by International Music - Careers. All Rights for Warner/Chappell Music Ltd. in the U.S. Administered by WB Music Corp. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted by Permission of Hal Leonard Corporation.

Ex. 2a

= ca. 146  
 Acous. gtr.  
 Elec. gtr.

**Ex. 2a**  
 D  
 Elec. and acous. gtrs.  
 Fmaj7(6) or Dmaj9/F  
 N.C.  
 D  
 etc.

3 1 4  
 fcbk  
 10  
 11 9 12 11 9 12 11 9 12  
 2 2 2 0 0 0 0  
 3 3 3 3 3 3 3  
 0 0 0 3 2 0  
 3 2 0 3 2 0

\*Play A first time, E second time.

Ex. 2b

**Ex. 2b**  
 D  
 Elec. and acous. gtrs.  
 Fmaj7(6) or Dmaj9/F  
 N.C.  
 D  
 etc.

1. 2. 3.  
 3 2 0 3 2 0  
 3 2 0 3 2 0

L.A. pawn shop for \$50 (!), a mid-'60s Dan-electro 3021 "Short Horn" (an even bigger pawn shop score at \$15!), and a 1968 Coral Vincent Bell Electric Sitar named "Philly." Gallagher's acoustic arsenal consisted of a Martin D-35 (newsflash: A Rory Gallagher signature model acoustic should be available from Martin by the time you read this), a prototype acoustic-electric Takamine, a Martin mandolin, and a 1932 National Resonator. Early on, Gallagher plugged a Dallas Rangemaster treble booster into his AC30 (apparently the sound that Brian May pinched), but he generally steered clear of effects. Gallagher also experimented with various Ampeg (VT-40 and VT-22) and Marshall combo amps throughout the '70s and '80s.

### 3 EXPAND YOUR HORIZONS

While Gallagher drew much of his blues and rock vocabulary from the same melting pot as most of his peers, his considerable prowess as an alto saxophonist also had a major effect on his overall guitar style. This factor is particularly evident during the extended group improvisations that marked Gallagher's live concerts from the earliest Taste shows through his final gigs. On the Official Rory Gallagher website ([rorygallagher.com](http://rorygallagher.com)), Rory's brother Donal relates how, during his early years with Taste, the guitarist became enamored enough with the free-form jazz antics of Eric Dolphy and Ornette Coleman to go out and procure a Selmer alto saxophone: "Within a couple of weeks, he was playing the thing, and the next thing it was

on the album *On the Boards*. You could hear that free-form approach translated into his guitar playing when he soloed."

Right on.

Listen to any extended Gallagher solo, and you'll hear all sorts of sax-like note choices and slurred phrasing techniques. Though very little of Gallagher's sax playing has been documented, you can check him out on "It's Happened Before, It'll Happen Again" from Taste's *On the Boards* and the extended live version circulating on YouTube, "Can't Believe It's True" from *Rory Gallagher*, and "I Ain't No Saint" from *Defender*. Those who have never heard him blow will be nothing short of amazed. (Fact: Gallagher also played a mean harmonica.) Gallagher's other musical X-factor was that the man sang his ass off. His soulful voice (sometimes a dead ringer for Clapton at his best) was virtually inseparable from his guitar playing—one simply picked up where the other left off. In this department, Gallagher was on a par with Hendrix himself.

### 4 DEVELOP GOOD TASTE

Our stylistic tour-de-force begins with a look at Gallagher's pioneering power-trio work with Taste. Compositionally speaking, "Blister on the Moon," the opening track from the band's self-titled debut album, displays one of the earliest recorded examples of slash chords (triads played over bass notes other than their roots) to appear in the rock idiom. **Ex. 1a**, which recalls the part of the song's intro and verse figures, features full E and D chords played à

la Townshend over a pulsing E bass pedal tone, and the sum of both parts creates a now-familiar Mixolydian tonality that has since been exploited by everyone from Jeff Beck to Prince. (Tip: Try replacing the lowest note in the D chord with E.) Gallagher veers into proto-metal mode for the repeated power chord riff in **Ex. 1b** and its arpeggiated counterpart in **Ex. 1c**, either of which would sound at home in the Black Sabbath or Iron Maiden catalogs. Surf the net and you'll discover a great video of "Blister," complete with Gallagher venturing into near-Holdsworthian territory during an impromptu bass-and-guitar dialogue. (It's that sax thing!) Search a little harder and you'll find both sides of the original single by the Taste cut with original members Eric Kitteringham and Norman Damery in 1968. (Tip: It's misspelled as "Blistrer.")

### 5 ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR ROOTS

That said, Gallagher rarely flaunted his Irish heritage in his electric music. One exception can be found on the previously referenced Taste single's B-side, "Born on the Wrong Side of Time," which has a pronounced progressive-rock vibe and features layered acoustic and electric guitars, key and tempo changes, an intro that could easily pass for a lost Rush tune, and perhaps the song's most enduring riff: the piper-flavored clarion call shown in **Ex. 2a**. Repeat as written, then segue directly to the adventurous harmonies and contrasting low-register single-note triplets that comprise the quirky, repetitive six-bar rhythm figure in **Ex. 2b**. Note how that

Fmaj7(6) functions as Dm(add9) with F, the b3, in the bass.

# 6

## REPEAT YOURSELF

Gallagher certainly wasn't afraid to latch onto an idea and hammer it into submission. (There's that sax thing again.) One way to get a handle on some of Gallagher's characteristic non-blues-based solo moves is to learn some of his favorite repetitive motifs. The following dozen short melodic fragments (the first eight were conceived over Em, while the last four shift to Dm) may be repeated as many times as you like over a static, one-chord vamp, or applied to an appropriate chord progression such as Em-D-C-B or Dm-F-C-Dm. We begin in seventh position with the simple-but-saxy

b3-2-1-2 motif (G-F#-E-F#) in **Ex. 3a**. Repeat the lick on beat two, then play the entire measure three more times for starters. **Ex. 3b** mutates the previous lick and adds four more notes to create an eight-note motif. More guitaristic are the nearly identical sixteenth-note-triplet pull off motifs in **Examples 3c** and **3d**, which are played in the same position on adjacent strings. Study the picking pattern carefully—it's the same one found in the next four examples. **Examples 3e** and **3f**, which have shown up in live versions of Gallagher's "Tattoo'd Lady," use open strings and identical minor-third fingerings spaced five frets apart, while **Examples 3g** and **3h** explore symmetrical E Dorian modal moves (more on those to come) on the first and second strings. (Melodic Mileage Tip: Try reversing the two fretted notes in the previous four examples.) Finally, **Examples 3i** through **3l** drop

to D minor for a quartet of pull-off licks—two with open strings and two without. Shift all of these motifs to different strings and positions, vary their tempo, note which sound good to you, then crank 'em up and go all night! Woo hoo!

# 7

## CREATE MODAL MAGIC

The previously mentioned Dorian mode played a huge role in Gallagher's musical vocabulary. By definition, this is essentially a pentatonic minor scale with an added 2/9 and (D Dorian: D, E, F, G, A, B, C; E Dorian: E, F#, G, A, B, C#, D; etc.), and Gallagher managed to introduce some aspect of this distinctive modal flavor into the majority of his solo excursions. We're in D minor for

**Ex. 3a**      **Ex. 3b**      **Ex. 3c**      **Ex. 3d**      **Ex. 3e**      **Ex. 3f**

♩ = ca. 110      Em(7)

Play each measure four times

**Ex. 3g**      **Ex. 3h**      **Ex. 3i**      **Ex. 3j**      **Ex. 3k**      **Ex. 3l**

♩ = ca. 110      Em(7)      Dm(7)

Play each measure four times

## Ex. 4a

♩ = ca. 166 Dm

## Ex. 4b

♩ = ca. 120 E

## Ex. 4c

♩ = ca. 55

w/double-time feel

## Ex. 4d

♩ = ca. 100 Dm

starters, and **Ex. 4a** blends numerous *E*'s, the 2/9, into an otherwise *D* pentatonic phrase based on a repeated 3/4 hemiola played over a *Dm-B<sub>7</sub>-C* progression a la "Shadow Play" from *Photo-Finish*. Often unaffected by musical boundaries, Gallagher had no qualms about superimposing saxophonic *E* Dorian moves like the fleet-fingered 11th-position (index finger at the 11th fret) run in **Ex. 4b** over major tonalities (Check that key signature and chordal accompaniment!) in songs like "Used to Be" (*Deuce*), or preference for where to play them, as shown in the swinging, seventh-position variation in **Ex. 4c**, which is played over the indicated descending bass line. Recalling the solo in "Bad Penny" (*Stage Struck*), **Ex. 4d** brings it all together in *D* minor with Gallagher's custom blend of blues and jazzy Dorian elements over a repeated two-bar *Dm-F-C-Dm* progression. Hoot mon!

# 8

## GET "PING"-Y WITH IT

Everybody has their own name for them—squeals, squawks, squawks—but R.G. preferred to call this method of producing choked artificial harmonics “pinging,” and the man certainly loved to ping! (Alex Lifeson of Rush cites an early tour opening for Gallagher as his introduction to artificial harmonics.) The idea is to graze a harmonic node (a dead, non-vibrating spot on the string located at equal divisions of its length) with a combination

of pick and index fingernail, or pick and thumb meat. **Ex. 5a** shows where to elicit five “pinged” harmonics from a single fundamental *A* note (bar 1). To get the first harmonic, the octave (*8va*) *A* in bar 2, ping directly over the 22nd fret, then add vibrato to keep things moving. Jump another 12 frets to the north circa the virtual 34th fret to ping the third harmonic, the two-octave (*15ma*) *A* in bar 3, then continue to ping towards the bridge to get the fourth (*C#*, the 3), fifth (*E*, the 5), and sixth (*G*, the 6/7) harmonics in bar 4. All should sound two-octaves-plus above the fundamental. Okay, let’s put ‘em

to work. Fish ever-so-slightly to the south with your picking hand before pinging because **Ex. 5b** (derived from Gallagher’s “Bad Penny” solo) begins with a defined *15ma* *G*-to-*A*-to-*G* bent-and-released harmonic, moves to an *E*-Dorian-based pull-off and hammer-on, then segues to less defined semi-harmonic pings applied to a swampy, descending blues line. **Ex. 5c** finds Gallagher adding a then-revolutionary (ca. 1976’s “Moonchild” from *Calling Card*) tapped bend to his *A*-minor-based Irish stew. Now go back and ping your way through all of the previous examples!

Ex. 5a

Ex. 5b

fundamental    \*1st harm.    \*\* 3rd harm.    \*\*\* 4th, 5th, and 6th harm.  
 8va ..... 15ma .....  
 = ca. 100    Dm    F    C    Dm  
 15ma ..... loco

P.H.    P.H.    P.H.    P.H.    P.H.    P.H.    semi-P.H. ....

10    20    32    34    34    6-10    8-6-5-6    5-7-5-5    3-5-0

\*ping at 22nd fret.    \*\*ping at virtual 34th fret.    \*\*\*ping towards bridge from virtual 34th fret.

Ex. 5c

= ca. 96  
 w/double-time feel

G    Am

semi-P.H. ....    hold grad. B .....    Tap pre-bend at 17th fret.

3    2    3-5-7    5    7    (9) 17(19)    5-7    5    4-5-7-4-5-4    7    5-4-7-5-4-7-4-5-4-7 (7)

# 9

### LEARN A MUST-KNOW INTRO

"A Million Miles Away," a plaintive minor-key classic and mainstay in Gallagher's live set, begins with an evocative eight-bar chordal intro that recalls the acoustic work of Davey Graham, Bert Jansch and John Renbourn, all of whom R.G. has cited as influential. Built

from a combination of ringing hammer-on and pull-off maneuvers that use partial chords interspersed with single-note lines, the passage in **Ex. 6a** is also reminiscent of Jimmy Page's work on Led Zeppelin's "Black Mountain Side" and "Over the Hills and Far Away," hardly surprising given that Page cites many of the same influences as Gallagher. Other highlights include Gallagher's semi-pinged A-minor scale run in bar 4, the bent and

released behind the nut natural harmonic in bar 6, and the transition to a full-blown Strat solo as the band enters in bar 8. This version comes from *Irish Tour 1974*, but keep in mind that Gallagher never played it (or anything) the same way twice. **Examples 6b** and **6c** map out the verse and chorus progressions that follow Gallagher's short intro solo, which is played over a static *Em* vamp. To recreate it, let's...

**Ex. 6a**

Measures 1-3 of Ex. 6a. Chords: G5(7), A7(sus4), Dm(7). Tempo: ♩ = ca. 56. Includes markings for 'w/bass fill', 'Lr.', 'f (dist.)', and 'hold B'. Bass line includes fret numbers: (2), 0, 3, 1, 3, (3), 13-10, 12, 13-(15), (15).

Measures 4-6 of Ex. 6a. Chords: A7sus4, D5, G5(7), A7(sus4), Dm(7). Tempo: ♩ = ca. 56. Includes markings for 'semi-P.H.', 'loco', and 'Bend and release (3) behind nut.'. Bass line includes fret numbers: 0-2-3, 0-2-0, 2, 0, 3, 0-2-0, 3, 2-3-0, 2, 3, 5, 7, 5, 7, 5, 7, 3, 0-2-0, 3-0.

Measures 7-9 of Ex. 6a. Chords: G5(7), A7(sus4), Dm(7). Tempo: ♩ = ca. 56. Includes markings for 'w/bass fill', 'Lr.', 'f (dist.)', and 'etc.'. Bass line includes fret numbers: (2), 0, 3, 1, 3, (3), 13-10, 12, 13-(15).

**Ex. 6b**

♩ = ca. 56 Dm F B $\flat$  A Dm  
Verse Play three times

**Ex. 6c**

♩ = ca. 56 F Dm B $\flat$  A Dm  
Chorus

**A Million Miles Away** Words and Music by Rory Gallagher Copyright © 1974 by Strange Music Ltd., Universal Music Publishing MGB Ltd. Copyright renewed. All Rights in the U.S. Administered by Universal Music - Careers. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted by Permission of Hal Leonard Corporation.



# 10 ADD SOME AMAZING PHRASING ...

by using Examples 7a through 7d to pick up where we left off

in Ex. 6a. Choose one, then attach part or all of the remaining four examples (compiled from various live versions of "A Million Miles Away") in any order to complete an entire eight- to ten-bar intro solo. Be sure to observe the numerous rests during and between the licks—these spaces play a huge role in Gallagher's phrasing. **Ex. 7a** remains in the tenth position and adds E, the 2/9, to the upper third of the standard D blues box, while **Ex. 7b** drops into seventh position for some of Gallagher's trademark volume swells. Next, it's back to tenth position for the purely D pentatonic minor action in **Ex. 7c**. Finally, we wrap with **Ex. 7d**, a four-bar phrase that spans the tenth to open positions and covers just about every Gallagher-ism discussed thus far. Ping at will.

Gallagher's untimely passing elicited a wave of tributes and commentaries from guitarists as diverse as Jimmy Page and The Edge, but it may have been rock and roll filmmaker and obvious fan Cameron Crowe who put it best when he wrote, "It was all about him playing the guitar—it got into your soul." Be sure to visit the official Rory Gallagher Web site to stay abreast of the latest Gallagher news, recordings, gear, and tributes courtesy of brother Donal and his helpers. Rory lives! ■

Ex. 7a

♩ = ca. 56 Dm(7)

Ex. 7b

♩ = ca. 56 Dm(7)

w/volume control

Ex. 7c

♩ = ca. 56 Dm(7)

hold B - - - - R

hold B - - - - -

Ex. 7d

♩ = ca. 56 Dm(7)

1

4

D5