From the book:

GuitarOne Presents
FRET BUZZ
by Troy Nelson and Dale Turner
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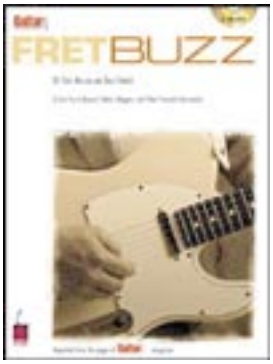


Pedal Steel Licks

Add some Country flair to your phrases.

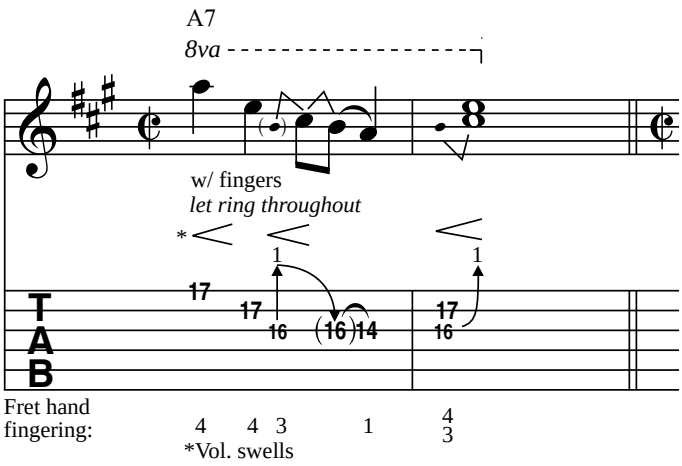
Read more...

by Dale Turner

Want to add some country color to your palette of electric guitar approaches? By combining bends with stationary notes, playing fingerstyle with a clean, bright tone, and manipulating your guitar's volume control (or better yet, using a volume pedal), you can emulate a classic country instrument: the pedal steel guitar. Pedal steel-styled phrases are most effective on a guitar equipped with a "hard-tail" bridge (i.e., non-tremolo or "fixed" bridge). Otherwise, your bending action will force all the other strings to go flat, creating ghastly intonation problems. A light string gauge (.008-.038) to facilitate some of the necessarily unorthodox string bends is also recommended.

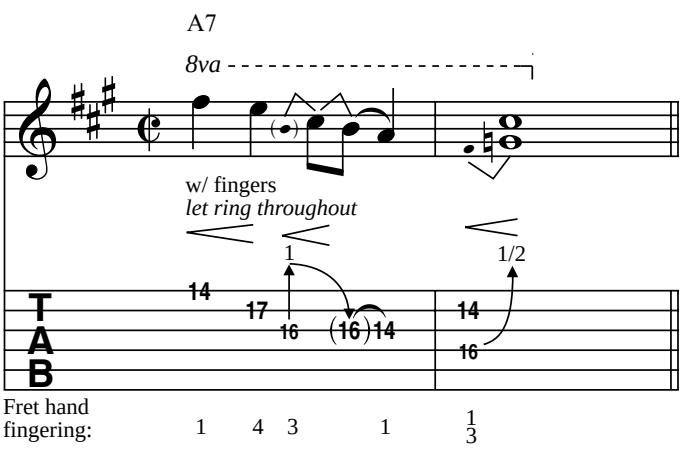
AUDIO CLIP - 1A

Fig. 1A



AUDIO CLIP - 1B

Fig. 1B

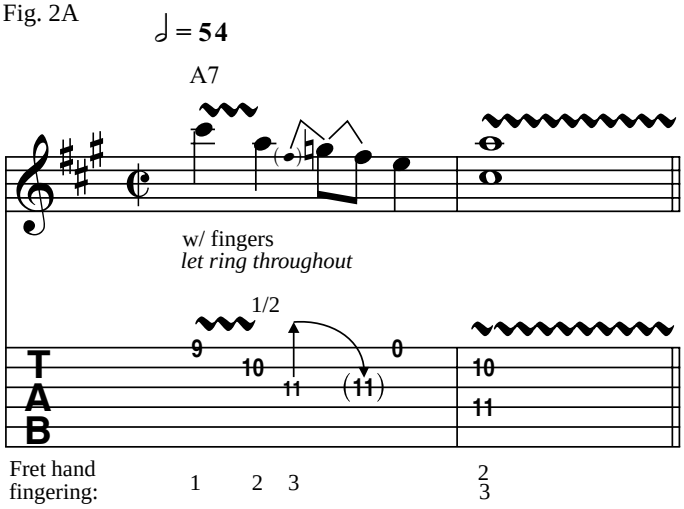


#1A–B

This first pair of pedal steel phrases uses pre-bends—bending a note before striking it, then releasing it after it's struck to create a "backwards" bend. Each phrase is performed in identical rhythmic fashion and intended for use over an A7 chord. Because these licks require a volume swell, peaking at specific points (on beats 1 and 3), you may need to spend a few minutes practicing your timing. Try striking the strings—with your guitar's volume shut off—a millisecond before you turn up your guitar's volume to swell the envelope of sound. Judicious use of reverb and/or delay will also help to smooth out the fluctuations in volume.

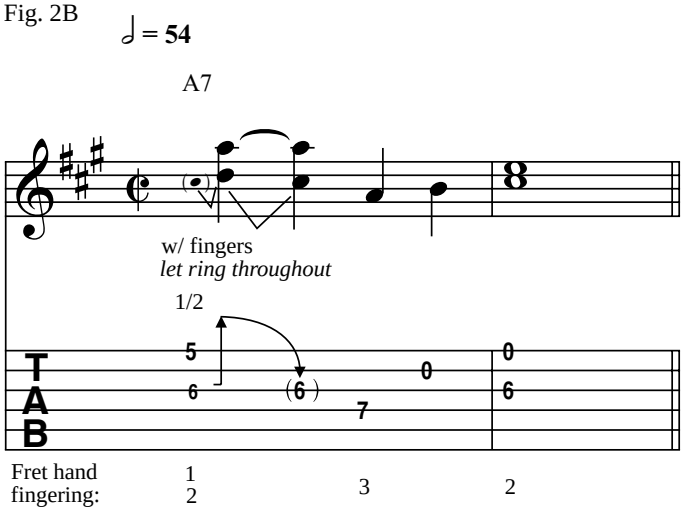
AUDIO CLIP - 2A

Fig. 2A



AUDIO CLIP - 2B

Fig. 2B

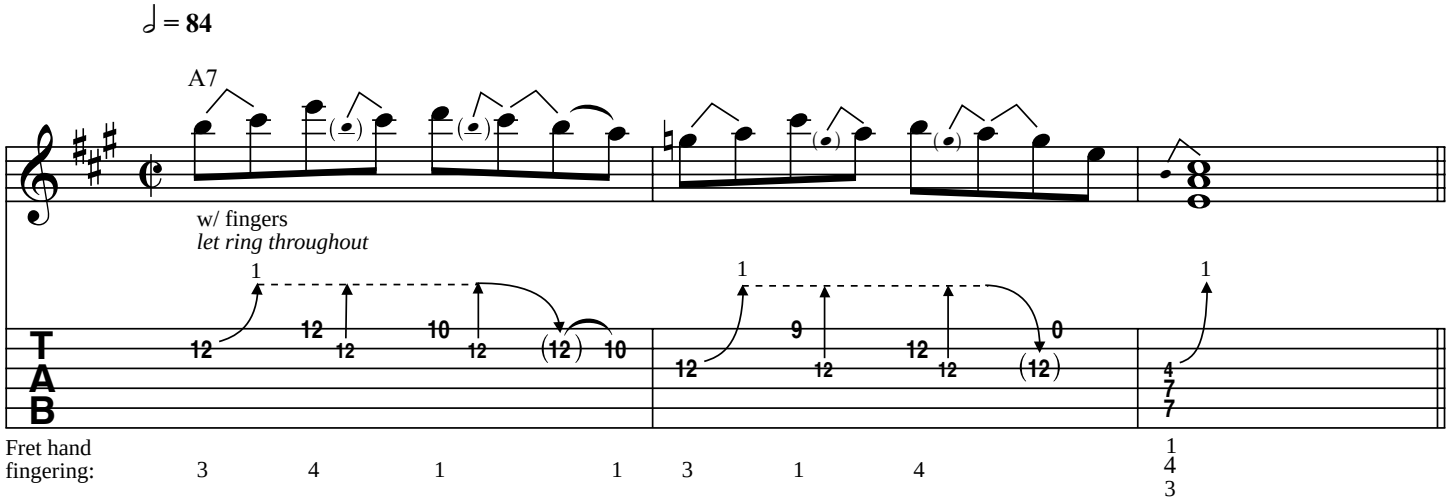


#2A–B

As with the previous examples, these next two pedal steel passages work well as brief melodic phrases to punctuate a verse, lead into a chorus, or bring a song to a close. Presented in a familiar rhythm, these two figures also blend open strings into the mix, helping to outline chords (the cumulative effect of all the notes ringing together). In fact, given that both phrases are capped off with moves that clearly define an A triad (A–C#–E), each may be performed unaccompanied.

AUDIO CLIP - 3

Fig. 3



#3

By using held bends in conjunction with single-note lines, barn-burning pedal steel licks can result. Similar to pre-bends, "held bends" typically involve striking a note on a lower string, bending it to a particular pitch, then holding that bend while notes on higher strings are sounded. This final phrase showcases this bending approach, and is punctuated with another patented pedal steel move: a whole step bend on the 3rd string (B to C#)—while notes (A and E) are fretted on lower strings—to create a major chord (A).