

Reel Patterns

Patterns can get confusing and hard to remember. So many options! To avoid getting stuck playing only one or two patterns, it is helpful to find the essential rhythmic-bones on which many different patterns can be placed.

This section examines four families of patterns and options for end-groves and turn around. Once the basic structure of a family of patterns is learned, it is possible to ornament the pattern structure with triples, pickups, various tonal options and back beats. Learn these four families of patterns and you'll never run out of new ideas for bodhrán patterns.

[Basic Patterns](#)

[Oh! I Know Patterns](#)

[Bop Bop Patterns](#) (aka "double down" patterns)

[Son Clavé Patterns](#)

[End-Groove & Turn-Around Patterns](#)

The Secret to Music I learned from a Singing Coach

In this short video, Enda Scahill focuses on how to become expressive on a tenor banjo. But, the content applies to the bodhrán and any instrument equally well.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0U1pe0Nlg_o

Practice Tracks

Having good quality, reliable practice tracks is a must. This link takes you to Fergal Scahill's Tune-a-Day YouTube Channel. Fergal is a highly accomplished fiddler and part of the successful Trad-Band, We Banjo 3. His Tune-a-Day posts are short (generally 2 minutes) and very effective in conveying a tune. More than 1,000 tunes!!

<https://www.youtube.com/@fergalscahill/search?query=reels>

Basic Patterns

Down Beat Pattern

This pattern is highly effective when the goal is to support a quiet part of a tune or when the goal is to establish tension in order to set up a more energetic portion of a tune.

1	<i>and</i>	2	<i>and</i>	3	<i>and</i>	4	<i>and</i>
D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U
Open	mute	Open	mute	Open	mute	Open	mute

The mute can be tonal or a high pop. However, at a fast tempo getting a high pop or a tone and then following with an open sound, may require a lot of very fast movement. Best to keep this kind of pattern simple.

The Triplet Pattern

1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and				
D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U
bass tone			mute or high tone			bass tone			mute or high tone		

This pattern creates tension by putting a jig pulse under a reel. The key is to emphasize the first hit of each beat. The vibe is a triplet on each beat of a measure. Use it sparingly on moderate tempo reels and never throughout an entire tune!

Oh! I Know Patterns

This pattern is a go-to style for supporting a reel. It provides energy. It's reliable. And it can be ornamented to produce excellent results. The *Oh! I Know Pattern* is identical to the kick drum you will hear on many rock-and-roll tracks.

Essential Structure

1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and
D	-	-	u	D	-	-	-
bass			Mid-tone or mute				
Oh	-	-	I	Know	-	-	-

This basic pattern emphasizes the two principle beats of a reel: 1 & 3.

Oh! I Know Pattern on top of the motor-pattern (aka an ostinato pulse)

1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and
D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U
bass	Mid-tone or mute		bass		Heel Roll		
Oh	-	-	I	Know	-	-	-

Bop Bop (aka Double Down) Patterns

The name comes from the style of jazz in the late 1930s and 1940. Many accomplished musicians wanted to move away from Swing Band style (Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, et. al) They developed a more intricate style of jazz and called it "Bop". That because the composition ended with the band playing a single, hard, stinger note at the end of the tune.... BOP. This style developed into "Be Bop" jazz.

Our bodhrán pattern will take the name, but put Bop Bop at the beginning of each sequence of the pattern.

It is possible to play this pattern as a Double Down stroke – two, consecutive down strokes on beat **1** and beat **1- and**. However, at a fast tempo, it may be impossible to move the tipper fast enough to make it work. So, use a TAP stroke on the **1- and** beat.

Essential Structure

1	<i>and</i>	2	<i>and</i>	3	<i>and</i>	4	<i>and</i>
D	tap	D	U	D	U	D	U
Open or bass tone		Mute or mid-tone or heel roll					

High Pop Emphasis

1	<i>and</i>	2	<i>and</i>	3	<i>and</i>	4	<i>and</i>
D	tap	D	U	D	U	D	U
Open or bass tone		Mute or mid-tone or heel roll					Pop

Measure #1								Measure #2							
1	<i>and</i>	2	<i>and</i>	3	<i>and</i>	4	<i>and</i>	1	<i>and</i>	2	<i>and</i>	3	<i>and</i>	4	<i>and</i>
D	tap	-	u	D	u	d	u	D	tap	-	u	D	u	d	u
Bass tone			mute	Bass				Bass tone				Bass			

This can become more energetic by accenting some of the back beats. If the tempo is not wildly fast, replace the muted UP strokes with high POPs.

Measure #1								Measure #2							
1	<i>and</i>	2	<i>and</i>	3	<i>and</i>	4	<i>and</i>	1	<i>and</i>	2	<i>and</i>	3	<i>and</i>	4	<i>and</i>
D	tap	-	U	D	u	d	U	D	tap	-	U	D	u	d	U
Bass tone			mute	Bass	mute	mute		Bass tone				Bass	mute	mute	

Son Clave Patterns

Don't Look Now. He's Gone

Version 1: Original Son Clavé

Measure 1								Measure 2							
1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and	1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and
Don't			Look			Now!				He's			Gone!		
D			D			D				D			D		
<i>Open or bass tone</i>								<i>Mute or high pop</i>							

Version 2: Motor pattern with Son Clavé on top – heel roll at end

Measure 1								Measure 2								
1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and	1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and	
Don't			Look			Now!				He's			Gone!			
D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	
<i>open</i>	<i>mute</i>		<i>open</i>	<i>mute</i>		<i>open</i>	<i>mute</i>		<i>Heel Roll or Glissando</i>							

Version 3: Motor pattern with Son Clavé on top – triplet & high pops at the end

Measure 1								Measure 2							
1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and	1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and
Don't			Look			Now!				Pine	Ap-	ple	Juice	Now	
D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	-
<i>open</i>	<i>mute</i>		<i>open</i>	<i>mute</i>		<i>open</i>	<i>mute</i>		<i>triplet</i>					<i>pop</i>	-

Turn-Arounds & End Grooves

It's powerful to sometimes break the predictability of a pattern.

Turn-Around Pattern #1

Wait! I Think. Let's Go To The Show

1 st Measure								2 nd Measure							
1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and	1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and
D			U	D			U	D	U	D	U				
Wait			I	Think			Let's	Go	To	The	Show				

Turn-Around Pattern #2
Here It Is. You Know. Time to Get A-Way

Measure 1								Measure 2							
1	<i>and</i>	2	<i>and</i>	3	<i>and</i>	4	<i>and</i>	1	<i>and</i>	2	<i>and</i>	3	<i>and</i>	4	<i>and</i>
D	-	D	-	D	-	D	-	D	-	D	U	D	U	D	-
heavy bass tones to emphasize each beat										Heel roll or glissando					

Turn-Around Pattern #3

This is a commonly used pattern delivers a strong lead-in to close every other measure. Works as a turn-around pattern. This pattern can be used a the main pattern for a reel.

Measure 1								Measure 2							
1	<i>and</i>	2	<i>and</i>	3	<i>and</i>	4	<i>and</i>	1	<i>and</i>	2	<i>and</i>	3	<i>and</i>	4	<i>and</i>
D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	-
Quiet – mid-tones, high pops, mutes or walk down tones										Heavy bass tones					

These three patterns are based on the idea of accenting the 2nd stroke of a 4-beat pattern. Use this concept at any place in a pattern. For example.

1 st Measure								2 nd Measure							
1	<i>and</i>	2	<i>and</i>	3	<i>and</i>	4	<i>and</i>	1	<i>and</i>	2	<i>and</i>	3	<i>and</i>	4	<i>and</i>
D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U
bass	mute	mid-tone						bass	mute	mid-tone					

There is no limit to the ways this pattern can be enhanced by heel rolls, glissando, pops. Experiment. You'll create your own unique patterns. The key concept is accenting the 2nd beat in a line and either leading or following that accept with some sort of tonal ornamentation.