

Quick Notes: "Rag Doll" by Aerosmith

Tempo: 96 bpm

Aerosmith are known MORE for their choruses than anything. As a matter of fact, most of their songs are mostly choruses. In this one, the main riff that kicks everything off is what is played during the verse theme.

Here's the main theme:

The image displays four systems of guitar tablature for the main theme of "Rag Doll" by Aerosmith. Each system consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) with fret numbers and slurs. The first system includes red fingerings: (1) for the 3rd fret, (1) for the 1st fret, (1) for the 3rd fret, (1) for the 4th fret, and (1) for the 3rd fret. The second system has a 'P' (pick) marking above the first measure. The third system has a 'P' marking above the first measure. The fourth system has a 'P' marking above the first measure. Slurs and slide markings ('sl.') are used throughout to indicate phrasing and technique.

If you look closely you'll see how insanely repetitive it all is! I love that about Aerosmith. What you have, in a nutshell, is a bluesy style run from E5 (x2) – B5 (x2) – E5 (x2) – F#5 (x2)

The only real change in anything is the last measure to the above right. Instead of using the 13th fret, Perry played the 9/11 all through it and then played a rather cool slide toward a D5 (5/7)

That sets us up for the chorus, which is also very repetitive. Now, I mention in the video that you "shouldn't" try to play the following as a scale pattern idea. That might not have been the best choice of words, but my fingers just don't work like that. Not that fast anyway. If YOURS do, by all means – play what is natural.

In my case, I found it easier to use just 1 or 2 fingers. That's how I'll label this part.

Remember when I mentioned alternate picking? All you're doing there is starting with either a down or up pick (I recommend down) and then switching it back and forth. (ie "alternating")

If you do this, even if it takes some time (it did for me) then this riff run is MUCH easier. There's one little issue, though. You really have to get those notes in there without trying to play them as slides. That's what you MIGHT face if you use my fingering suggestion here. If that is the case, either:

1. Brush up a bit (slowly) on alternate picking
2. Go ahead and "match" your fingers to the notes shown. This is a traditional way of playing, but I'm not traditional. In other words, if you see a "1" play it with your 1st finger. If you see a "4" play it with your 4th finger. That doesn't work too well for me, but it might you.

This is what I think is easiest IF you can get the alternate picking down:

(repeat all twice!)

1 2 1 2 1
d u d u d u d u d u

I labeled the alternate picking for you in downs and ups. Now, the 2nd finger on the D string starts and moves THROUGH 2 – 3 – 4 all by itself. This might not be easy for you, but it's much easier for me. You can basically think of it as one big slide, but IF you are alternate picking, the notes will ring out as though they aren't being slideeedddee. (I just made that word up – slid? Slidden? Sli...oh you know what I mean)

After the above is played twice, you then have this:

C 1st Verse

That 2/4 time change will stick out like a sore thumb with the backing track. That's a quick D5 to a full A Major chord. You would then go back to the main theme, which is what is played in the verse.

I will make a point about the verse theme. If memory serves me correct, I think it's either slightly shortened OR it moves to that F#5 (9/11) slightly faster, but if you know the song, you know that part. The backing track is a build toward that, and Tyler makes it very noticeable. That's part of the fun of these backing tracks. It's like you're there.

You do something slightly different after the second chorus (the alternate picking part) it moves toward F#5, which begins the solo. You can check that out if you want, but the overall “shape” of what you played during the verse is the same. It moves from F#5 a bit higher to A5, which is the same shape but on 12/14/12/16 instead.

The slide part, for me, is just not something I'm very good at. But, I did it – sort of – to show you that I'm no virtuoso at all. Slide isn't my thing, even though I love the way it works.

The original song has Perry playing an actual lap slide/pedal slide guitar and THAT is much (much) easier. If you want to try to play the slide part, a lighter “works” - for a basic practice concept. It should be noted that the slide uses open E (E, B, E, G#, B, E) and unless you got some fancy pantsy super cool nice guitar, you'll probably go out of tune. I sure did. But, it's playable. Since you're bringing the A string UP to B, the D string UP to E, and the G string UP to G#, watch your strings. If they are old or rusty they might break.

I use those fat bottom (girls) I mean strings with the skinny lighter high strings. My E, A, and D strings are pretty chunky, but my B and E strings are rather light in gauge. That's because they were on sale. (Seriously)

Anywho, here's the slide part – good luck:

The image contains two guitar tablature diagrams. The top diagram shows a slide on the 12th fret moving to the 11th, then back to the 12th, and finally sliding to the 6th, 7th, and 6th frets. The bottom diagram shows a slide starting on the 7th fret, moving to the 5th, 6th, 7th, 9th, and 12th frets, with various techniques like 'let ring' and 'sl.' indicated.

Musical notation for a guitar solo section. It consists of five staves. The first staff has a wavy line above it. The second staff has a wavy line above it. The third staff has a wavy line above it. The fourth staff has a wavy line above it. The fifth staff has a wavy line above it. The notation includes various fret numbers (12, 13, 14, 9, 10) and slide instructions (sl., skl.).

This is the chorus, which IS easier:

Musical notation for a guitar solo section. It consists of five staves. The first staff has a wavy line above it. The second staff has a wavy line above it. The third staff has a wavy line above it. The fourth staff has a wavy line above it. The fifth staff has a wavy line above it. The notation includes various fret numbers (7, 10, 6) and slide instructions (sl.).

Musical notation for a guitar solo section. It consists of five staves. The first staff has a wavy line above it. The second staff has a wavy line above it. The third staff has a wavy line above it. The fourth staff has a wavy line above it. The fifth staff has a wavy line above it. The notation includes various fret numbers (3, 0, 7, 10) and slide instructions (sl.).

Musical notation for a guitar solo section. It consists of five staves. The first staff has a wavy line above it. The second staff has a wavy line above it. The third staff has a wavy line above it. The fourth staff has a wavy line above it. The fifth staff has a wavy line above it. The notation includes various fret numbers (5, 7, 3, 0, 10) and slide instructions (sl., skl.).

A good rule of thumb (though I'm honestly not qualified to give much slide instruction) is to try to get the notes ALMOST in between the next note higher. In other words, when you see a "7" the slide needs to be just a bit past "7" - but not on "8." Think of it as a 1/4 bend and that might help. Oh, and if you're using an electric, you might consider turning your toggle switch toward the floor to get the higher end strings to come through. I don't do any real mixing when I stack tracks, but you can practice your slide part over the main guitar part if you want.

Conversely, the slide guitar demo has my main guitar playing in the background. I thought that would be better and help you decide what you might want to play.