All About Vamps

Hawaiian vamps are important to know if you play any traditional Hawaiian songs. A vamp (or “turnaround”) is usually added in between verses to spread a song out.

There can be two different parts to a vamp, and they both work together. Some of my students have a hard time wrapping their head around that, but just keep in mind, they work together and can be played at the same time by two musicians. The two parts are picking vamps and strumming vamps. If you are jamming by yourself, a strumming vamp is probably going to sound fuller. So here we go, the two parts go like this.

**Strumming Vamp:**

The chord progression (the order and length of the chords in a song) of a vamp goes: II V I. That means, if you are playing in the key of C you would count up the C major scale to the 2nd, 5th, and 1st notes. So if you lay out the scale like this with numbers:

```
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
```
```
C D E F G A B C
```

You would get:

```
1 2- 3 4 5 6 7 8
```
```
C D E F G A B C
```
```
1 2 3 4- 5- 6 7 8
```
```
C D E F G A B C
```
```
1 2 3 4- 5- 6 7 8
```
```
C D E F G A B C
```

Those are the names of the chords: D, G, C. To make the chords push each other through the progression it helps to add a seventh to the first two chords (see Resolving 7th Chords). So we end up with D7, G7, C.

The timing for the vamp progression is like:

```
D7 // G7 // C ////
```

Each slash is a count (don’t count the chord name itself, just the slashes following it). So D7 gets two counts, G7 gets two counts and C gets four counts. The first two chords take up a measure (4 counts in a measure: 2+2=4 counts) and C takes up another by itself. A count can be thought of as a tap of your foot. Tap evenly for every number: 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4…

If you aren’t familiar with counting, here is a strum that should help you figure out the chord durations. If you are familiar with counting, stay tuned anyways because this is the easiest vamp strum. For each count (slash –/) strum down (D) and then up (U) holding the appropriate chord. So the strumming for the vamp will go:

```
D7: DUDU G7: DUDU C: DUDUDUDU
```
That is not the only strum for a vamp, but it’s the easiest and most commonly used.

**Strumming Vamp MP3**

**Picking vamps:**

The second (and more optional) part of a Hawaiian vamp is played by picking single notes. These notes work together with the chord and line up accordingly. The easiest vamp goes like this:

A | --------------2---
E |-2-3-2-3-1-3-----
C | ----------------
G | ---------------

**Picking Vamp MP3**

Learn the picking before you read on. If you don’t know how to read tab, go here: [How to Read Tab](#)

In this case, some of the notes in the picking vamp need to be changed to sound right with the current chord. Those notes are F changed to F# because D7 uses F# instead of the a natural F. After that, D7 goes to G7 which uses F natural, so the F# goes back to F. Another thing to keep in mind is that most of the time when picking, you want to emphasize the notes of the current chord.

This is how the two parts stack up against each other:

D7 // G7 // C ///

A | --------------2---
E |-2-3-2-3-1-3-----
C | ----------------
G | ---------------

Use the rhythm of the chords to figure out exactly where the picked notes fall.

Here is an MP3 example of both parts of the vamp along with backing tracks so you can practice picking and strumming.

- **Both Parts MP3**
- **Strumming Vamp Backing Track** (for picking over)
- **Picking Vamp Backing Track** (for strumming over)

Vamps work in all keys, as does all of this info. Some more common picking vamps can be found here: [Picking Vamps](#). And the rest of the strumming vamps can be found here: [Vamp Chords](#)