

Soloing with the Major Pentatonic Scale

Many guitar players use the minor pentatonic scale for solos by default, not realising that a whole new world of possibilities lie within the major pentatonic scale. If you only use one scale within your solos it is not very long before they begin sounding boring. Great players know that you need to mix your ideas up within a performance and mixing them up when it comes to solo time is no exception.

For the theory minded, the major pentatonic scale is just a major scale with the 4th and 7th notes missing. It is the 4th and 7th that tend to clash against the harmony of most songs, so if those notes are not there it gives you freedom to invent melodies that will sound good while allaying the fear of playing wrong notes. The notes of an A major scale read A, B, C#, D, E, F#, G#, and A. If you count along the scale using the A as one you will find that D is the 4th and G# is the 7th, so the notes of the A major pentatonic scale read A, B, C#, E, F#, and A. Many people refer to this scale as the “country scale”, but you will hear players of all styles using it if you listen closely.

Ex 1 shows the A minor pentatonic scale most players tend to play all the time with the root (starting) note at the 5th fret. If you don't know it already then watch the fingering underneath the music and play it slowly at first.

Ex 1

A minor pentatonic

Fingers 1 4 1 3 1 3 1 3 1 4 1 4

T
A
B 5 8 5 7 5 7 5 7 5 8 5 8

Ex 2 shows the same scale moved back three frets into the 2nd position with the same root note of A used. Note that the 4th finger starts the scale pattern this time.

Ex 2

A major pentatonic

Fingers 4 1 3 1 3 1 3 1 4 1 4

T
A
B 5 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4 5 2 5

Any licks you know using the minor pentatonic scale in Ex 1 can be transferred exactly to the scale of Ex 2. Most will fit perfectly immediately, but some might need a different starting or ending note to accommodate the chords so make sure to use

your ear. Note the difference in sound of the same lick played in the different location.

Ex 3 is the A major pentatonic scale played in 4th position using a different fingering pattern. Make sure to take this pattern slowly as it is not easy at first. The finger patterns in Ex 2 and 3 are the two most common ones, but there are many more.

Ex 3

5 A major pentatonic

Fingers 2 4 1 4 1 4 1 3 2 4 2 4

The major pentatonic scale will sound great over any three chord song or blues progression, but you might find it also works well over songs that have minor chords within the song structure like a repeating A, F#mi, D, E7 pattern. To really get the sound in your ear, record the previous chord pattern and begin to solo over the top of the chords playing back. Once you have experimented with that then record a repeating three chord pattern (A, D, E7) and some blues progressions and do the same.

Happy Practising
Kevin.

Kevin Downing is a professional guitarist, teacher, and author. For more great lessons or to study with him in person or over the internet visit www.guitar.co.nz

To see his best selling book *The Secrets of Successful Practising for Guitarists* click here <http://www.guitar.co.nz/products/>

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