

Pentatonic Madness over chords

Minor Pentatonic - page 1

Let's examine how we can use the pentatonic scale in ways that can give you different and unique sounds. To work on applying the principles and techniques explained below, practice your lead playing and improvisation over jam tracks or looped progressions. As discussed previously, a pentatonic scale is made from five notes, (Penta is Latin for five). We will take Minor Pentatonic first, and then look at different ways of applying the Major Pentatonic scale. The minor pentatonic scale consists of five notes from the Natural Minor scale (root, b3rd, 4th, 5th, and b7th). Natural minor, or Aeolian mode, adds the 2nd and b6 intervals making the scale root, 2nd, b3rd, 4th, 5th, b6th, and b7th).

1. MINOR PENTATONICS OVER MINOR TYPE CHORDS

Let's examine how we can use the Minor Pentatonic scale in other ways over minor chords than just playing the minor pent scale over the root. For example, let's take an E minor seventh chord. An Em7 chord is made from the scale degrees of root, b3rd, 5th, and b7th. So the notes in an Em7 chord would be E-G-B-D. Basically you are adding a D note or b7th to an E minor triad, E-G-B.

Em7 chord – r, b3rd, 5th, b7th E-G-B-D

E minor Pentatonic – r, b3, 4, 5, b7 E-G-A-B-D

E Dorian mode – r, 2, b3, 4, 5, 6, b7 E-F#-G-A-B-C#-D E Dorian adds the 2nd (F#), and 6th (C#) to E minor pent scale

You can utilize THREE minor pentatonic scales over a minor type chord – so for example over Em7 chord play:

1. **the one off the root** – E minor pentatonic E – G – A – B – D
2. **go up a whole step** – F# minor pentatonic F# - A – B - C# - E adds the 2nd (F#) and 6th (C#)
3. **go up a fifth** – B minor pentatonic B – D – E – F# - A adds the 2nd (F#)

Examine the notes that you will play utilizing each minor pentatonic scale over the Em7 chord. As illustrated above all three minor pentatonics that you can utilize over the Em7 chord have all the notes in the E Dorian mode. So this technique gives you a real Dorian sound. Most guitarists would just utilize the minor pentatonic scale over the root, but this technique gives you three super useful scales to play over a minor type chord. The cool thing about using three pentatonic minor scales over a minor type chord or Dorian progression is that you can play the same licks in each shape – changing the key gives each a unique sound over the progression – so you get three different sounds. Try mixing them up and play off each one and get three different tonal variations. Try this technique over other minor chords and in different keys as per the jam track audio cd.

Remember that utilizing the three minor pentatonics off the root, 2nd, and 5th, gives you the Dorian scale. So when playing over all the chords in which the Dorian mode would work, then the three pentatonics over all the chords would work too! You can also use the three over each different minor chord in the progression.

Example 1. **Am7- D** progression – as always your first step should be to analyze the chords to get the roadmap of what to use improvisation and solo wise. The progression is in the key of A minor. It's basically a I minor to a IV major. So by examining the chords let's look at a few options that we can use for solo and improvisation. There are so many things you can do – isn't the guitar awesome!

-use Am pentatonic and blues scales over both chords – remember you can use minor pentatonic and blues any time you are playing in a minor key – that should be your default setting. Use over all chords.

-use the three minor pent scales for the Dorian flavor over all chords since you know Dorian works over all – as explained above. Use three – the ones:

1. off the root – use all your **A minor pentatonic scales**
2. go up a whole step and use all your **B minor pentatonic scales**
3. up a fifth and use all your **E minor pentatonic scales**

-use A Dorian, (same as G major). One modal option over **both** chords is to utilize the A Dorian mode. We know this because you have a minor key progression where the IV chord is major, so that means A Dorian is an option when playing over all the chords and will work real well over both chords – it relates to both chords in the progression.

-use Am, Am7, Am9 arpeggios especially over the Am7 chord

-use D maj arpeggios over the D chord

-use A Phrygian over the Am7 chord (same as F major) – produces an exotic sound characterized by the b2 (Bb note)

-use A Aeolian over the Am7 chord (same as C major)

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Major Pentatonic - page 2

The major Pentatonic scale consists of five notes pulled from the major scale, (Root, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, and 6th). Much like Minor Pentatonic, as discussed in the page above, there are three major Pentatonic scales that can be played over Major type chords. The three scales are based off the root, fourth and fifth of the major chord.

MAJOR PENTATONICS OVER MAJOR TYPE CHORDS:

So let's examine how we can use major pentatonic scales in different ways to get unique tones. For example let's look at the key of G. The I-IV-V chords in the key of G are G, C, and D. So over a Gmaj7 chord you can play all three major pentatonics – G major Pentatonic, C major Pentatonic, and D major Pentatonic. All the combined notes of these three scales gives you a very Major scale sound.

1. **the one off the root** - G major pentatonic – G, A, B, D, E
2. **the one off the 4th** - C major Pentatonic – C, D, E, G, A (adds the 4th, the C note)
3. **the one off the 5th** - D major Pentatonic - D, E, F#, A, B (adds the 7th the F# note)

As illustrated above, if we put all fifteen notes together from the three major pentatonic scales, there is really only seven notes - G, A, B, C, D, E, F# - which are the notes in G major: So you can play similar licks from the three different major pentatonic scales and get three different sounds. This is super useful when soloing and improvising. So look for the three major pentatonic scales when improvising over major type chords – the one off the root, the one off the fourth, and the one off the fifth, (I-IV-V).

NOTE: Here is a tip if you think more along the lines of Minor Pentatonic and see the minor pentatonic shapes and intervals more clearly than major pentatonic. Simply convert major pentatonics to their relative minor pentatonics. I tend to think more minor pentatonic so this conversion helps me see the entire fretboard more easily. For our example above playing off the Gmaj7 chord here are the conversions – think minor pentatonic up a 6th, up a whole step, and up a third.

1. **major pentatonic off the root** converts to the **minor pentatonic scale up a 6th** – E minor pent=G maj pent
2. **major pentatonic off the 4th** converts to the **minor pentatonic scale up a whole step** - A minor pent=Cmaj pent
3. **major pentatonic off the 5th** converts to the **minor pentatonic scale up a third** – B minor pent=Dmaj pent

Ex. Jam track **Dmaj7 vamp** – no chordal movement so it's pretty wide open so get creative. Some suggestions:

- Dmaj scales (will work but I prefer Lydian mode over major 7th chords as described below)
- D major pentatonic (=B minor pentatonic)
- G major pentatonic (=E minor pentatonic)
- A major pentatonic (=F# minor pentatonic)
- D Lydian mode (=A major) Lydian sounds great over major 7th chords as it has that cool sounding #4 note which is D Lydian is a G# note instead of the G natural in a straight D major scale.
- E major scale – playing the major scale up a whole step will give you a very outside sound as it will add a b9, (Eb note), and the Lydian #4 note, (G#note)
- play arpeggios or triads off each I-IV-V – play the D major triad (D,F#,A), the G major triad (G,B,D), and the A major triad (A, C#, E) – all three have the notes in the D major scale. Play all three major arpeggios in different positions on the neck and get different cool tones
- Similar to the point above you can play the major seventh arpeggios off the I-IV-V – all add the major 7th note - play D major arpeggio which adds the C# note, the G major 7th arpeggio will add the F# note, and the real hip one is the A major 7th arpeggio which will add the G# note or #4 – there is that Lydian note again