

Guitar Chords: How To Solo Over Chords With The Minor Pentatonic Scale

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The humble minor pentatonic scale is what most guitar players start with when learning to solo. Trouble is, they don't learn to use the scale to it's best potential.

Here, I'll show you an easy way to use the pentatonic scale to solo over the three most common guitar chord types: Major, minor and dominant 7th chords.

1. Major Chords

A Major chord always has a relative minor chord. The easy way to find the 'relative' minor of any major chord on a guitar is to take the note three half-steps (3 frets) below the root note of the major chord.

For example: a C major chord - the root note is C. On a guitar, the note 3 frets below a C note is A. Therefore, A minor is the relative minor of C major.

So to solo over a C major chord, use the A minor pentatonic scale and you can't go wrong.

Another example: F major chord - three frets below the root of F, you will find D. So you use a D minor pentatonic scale over an F major chord.

Another example: G major chord - three frets below the G root note you'll find E. So... you use the E minor pentatonic to solo over a G chord.

Now, you may have noticed that I listed C, F and G major chords there. Coincidentally, They are the 1, 4 and 5 chords of the 'KEY' of C Major. This applies to all instruments, not just guitar.

More about this later...

2. Minor Chords

These are easy... just use the minor pentatonic of what ever the minor chord is. E.g. Use D minor pentatonic for a D minor chord, an E minor pentatonic for an E minor chord, an A minor pentatonic for an A minor Chord.

Now, did you notice I used D, E and A minor chords as the example? Did you also notice that these chords are the 2, 3 and 6 chords of the 'KEY' of C Major?

More about that later, too...

3. Dominant 7th Chords

You have a couple of choices here. But basically, you would use the relative minor pentatonic, or the minor pentatonic a tone below the root of the dom7 chord.

For example, over G7, you could use either E minor pent (relative minor), or D min pentatonic.

The reason you could use the D minor pentatonic over a G7 chord is because the Dmi chord and G7 chord often go together in chord progressions. Forcing a Dmi sound over a G7 chord gives a G7sus sound.

4. Thinking From a 'KEY" Perspective

OK, what we have looked at is the KEY of C Major. And basically you can use just the A minor pentatonic alone for ALL the chords in C, or you can also use the D and E minor pentatonics to add some color and more conformity to the chords being used at the time.

Remember, these principles apply to whatever chord you are playing at any time, but can also be applied on a KEY basis, which is a more encompassing picture.

The Key of C Major has these chords:

C, Dm, Em, F, G7, Am, Bmin7b5.

Ami pent can be used over them all, or just the C and Am chords.

D min pentatonic can be used over the F and Dm chords.

E minor can be used over the Em and G7 chords.

We didn't mention the 7 chord (Bmi7b5) because it's not used very much. But a good choice is the Dm pentatonic. In fact, though, you can use either of the three pentatonics from the C Major scale - Am, Dm or Em. Try them, see which you like best.

I hope you enjoyed this article.

The idea of using pentatonics for different chords is a powerful one, don't overlook the cool sounds you can create with such a simple device.

Also, in a future article, I'll be discussing 'Pentatonic Substitution' where I'll show you how to use substitute and altered pentatonics for even more sound choices.

Short note about the author

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