

SHREDDED METAL

SOLOING IN ODD METERS

Using odd time signatures in metal riffs can be an awesome way to come up with unique and original ideas. However, once you have the riff, what do you do if you want to solo over it? For this column I'd like to go through a few tips that will help you with this.

EXERCISE 1

To illustrate some of the points to consider when playing in odd meters, I will look at an excerpt from one of my own compositions. The song is called 'Silence Your Insolence' and it will feature on the forthcoming album of Sydney thrash/death metal band Killrazer. Exercise 1 is the main riff from the middle section of the track. It incorporates double stops and chromaticism with an emphasis on the tritone. As you can see, it also alternates between the time signatures of 7/4 and 6/4. For the first bar of 7/4, the easiest way to think of it is as two bars of 4/4 but with the last beat chopped off. The 6/4 bar is exactly the same as the previous one, only here it drops another beat.

The image shows a musical score for a guitar riff. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked as ♩ = 160. The first bar is in 7/4 time, and the second bar is in 6/4 time. The riff consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, including double stops and chromaticism. Below the staff is a guitar tab with fret numbers and string indicators (T and B). The tab for the first bar (7/4) is: . 2 1 0 3 1 3 0 2 1 0 3 1 3. The tab for the second bar (6/4) is: 2 1 0 3 1 3 0 2 1 0 3.

EXERCISE 2

Exercises 2 and 3 are an approximate transcription of the solo I play over the riff. Loosely in the key of E minor, it begins with two quarter note bends to the tonic. This sets up where beat one of the bar falls by following the rhythm of the underlying riff. This is very important when playing in odd time signatures. You want to rhythmically accent the first beat of the bar so that you solidify the bar divisions. This will not only help you to keep your solo in time, but it will also convey to the listener that you know what's going on timing-wise and that you're not just soloing randomly and hoping for the best! Following the initial bends, I play a series of descending triplets on two strings before moving to a descending string skipping lick in E Aeolian. This lick actually crosses over into the next bar of 6/4 and thus may seem to contradict my previous point. However, when I said you should use accents to delineate the start of each bar, that doesn't mean you have to do it every single time. In reality, it just needs to be enough so that the solo makes rhythmic sense. The rest of this bar consists of an ascending run in E Dorian.

□ V □ V □ V □ V *sim.*

EXERCISE 3

Moving on, the second half of the excerpt once again establishes beat one with two quarter note rhythmic accents. The succeeding legato-style tapping lick continues through to the end of this 7/4 bar, yet for the following 6/4 bar, a completely new lick is introduced – a tapped phrase of septuplets using the whole tone scale and chromaticism. Introducing a new lick like this is another good way to effectively solo in odd meters. The passage concludes with a sustained E half note. How you end a phrase will also help your solo make rhythmic sense. By pausing on the last note for two beats (as would be common even in 4/4 time), it gives you a chance to rhythmically reset before moving on.

Soloing in odd meters can be tricky, yet also very cool. Ultimately, the more you have the underlying riff and time signatures in your musical subconscious, the easier it will be. This comes with practice and experience. You can hear a demo version of this excerpt on the cover CD.