

SHREDDED METAL

HARMONIC MINOR MADNESS: PART TWO

In the last issue I discussed the Harmonic minor scale and how to play it using three note-per-string groupings across the neck. Just in case you missed it, Harmonic minor is a Natural minor scale with a raised seventh degree. Its formula is 1-2-b3-4-5-b6-7. Due to the tone/semitone minor third interval between the sixth and seventh degrees, the three note-per-string fingerings I examined last time can often be tricky to play at speed. So for this issue I'd like to show you two other ways of playing Harmonic minor, as well as how to apply them.

EXERCISE 1

Written in E Harmonic minor, this fingering starts by descending from the third degree (G). When you get to the E root note, rather than moving to the next string, you slide down a fret to the seventh degree (D#). You now switch to the B string and play the next three notes (C,B,A). This four note/three note finger pattern is really all you have to remember. From here, you just repeat this two-string fingering starting on the third string twelfth fret. Although here I've resolved it to the fifth string E root note, you could also continue onto the sixth string as well. By playing the scale in this way, it eliminates the wide stretch between the sixth and seventh degrees. You end up with a diagonal scale pattern across the neck that is quite easy to play since it is essentially the one two-string pattern repeated.

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The scale is written in E Harmonic minor. The notes are: G4, F#4, E4, D#4, C4, B3, A3. Below the staff is a guitar TAB with six strings. The fret numbers are: 15, 14, 12, 11, 13, 12, 10, 12, 11, 9, 8, 10, 9, 7, 10, 9, 7, 6, 7. The notes correspond to the fret numbers: 15 (G), 14 (F#), 12 (E), 11 (D#), 13 (C), 12 (B), 10 (A), 12 (G), 11 (F#), 9 (E), 8 (D#), 10 (C), 9 (B), 7 (A), 10 (G), 9 (F#), 7 (E), 6 (D#), 7 (C).

EXERCISE 2

This fingering is basically the same as that in Exercise 1, only reversed. You start on the first string with three notes and then play four notes via a first finger slide on the next string. This process is then continued on the third and fourth strings, and the fifth and sixth strings. Practise these patterns ascending and descending. You can play them with alternate picking or hammer-ons/pull-offs.

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EXERCISE 3

This is a fast, alternate picked E Harmonic minor lick using the fingering from Exercise 1. It demonstrates how you can simply take one small two-string lick and just repeat it an octave below on the next two strings. You end up with a long lick that is actually a lot easier to play than it sounds!

EXERCISE 4

This short passage puts the Harmonic minor scale into a musical context. It starts with sweep-picked E minor arpeggios over the Im chord before moving to a sixteenth note alternate picked line using the fingering from Exercise 2 over the V7 chord. Im-V7 is the most common chord progression for Harmonic minor. It's important to note that when using the scale over the Im chord, you shouldn't emphasise the seventh degree leading tone as it will clash with the root note. Alternatively, over the V7 chord you do want to emphasise the seventh degree as it belongs to that chord.

I hope these past two columns have been useful in providing a better understanding of the Harmonic minor scale and how to play it. Try incorporating it into your own metal riffs and solos.