

Pentatonic Substitutions

In this column I am going to cover the pentatonic scales use as an alternate scale choice for various chords. It is common in jazz to hear various pentatonic scales over chords as a substitution to the modal scale that the chord is built on. All you need to know is the relationship between the chord tones and the notes of the pentatonic you play over it. I will use three pentatonic scales, the major, minor and dominant to demonstrate the different options.

EXERCISE 1

The first examples are pentatonic scales you can play over a CMaj7 chord. Each example will have the analysis of how the pentatonic scale relates to the chord written underneath and the name of the pentatonic above. The major pentatonic off the root note outlines the triad and the 6th degree. If we play a major pentatonic off the second degree we outline the guide tones of the Cmaj7th chord as well as the extensions, augmenting the 4th. Turning this pentatonic into a dominant we then replace the 7th with the tonic, this is also useful for Maj6/9 chords. The final pentatonic is the relative minor pentatonic of the D major pent and is an easy substitution to see, it is a minor pentatonic played a semitone below a Maj7th chord.

EXERCISE 2

The second examples are minor pentatonic scales over a CMin7th chord. The first pentatonic off the root outlines each chord tone as well as the 4th. The second minor pentatonic, played of the fifth degree of C outlines the b7th but not the third so this could also be the choice for a C7th chord. The third pentatonic is based off the second and outlines all the natural extensions of a CMin7th it implies a Dorian sound without playing the Dorian scale, it can also be used over a C7th chord.

EXERCISE 3

The first of the third example is a minor pentatonic starting on the b3rd of a C7alt chord. The actual analysis for this note would be #9th, as an alt dominant chord has a 3rd and b7th as well as a # or b fifth and second. The second example is a dominant pentatonic played of the sixth degree of a Cm7b5.

EXERCISE 4

The last example shows how you can apply these substitutions to a chord progression. I have used a standard jazz turnaround (II-V-I-VI) to demonstrate how you could use a minor pentatonic scale to outline each chord simply by starting off the fifth of the IImin7th and moving up a semitone for each chord. Explore these sounds with open ears and apply any patterns you have for pentatonic scales to further develop you own take on the pentatonic substitutions.

C Maj pent

D Maj pent

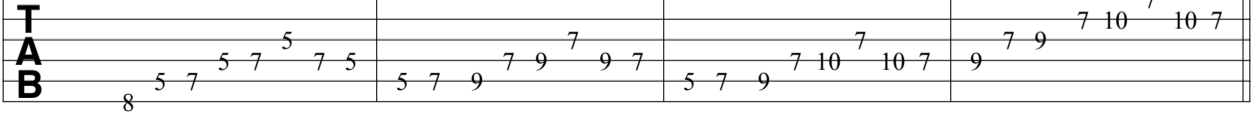
D Dom pent

B Min pent



C maj7

1 2 3 5 6 1 6 5 2 3 #4 6 7 2 7 6 2 3 #4 6 1 2 1 6 7 2 3 #4 6 7 6 #4



C min pent

G min pent

D min pent

4/4

Cmin7 1 b3 4 5 b7 1 b7 5 5 b7 1 2 4 5 4 2 2 4 5 6 1 2 1 6

TAB

3 6 3 5 3 5 5 5 3 5 3 6 3 6 3 5 3 5 2 5 3 5 2

Eb min pent

Ab dom pent

Musical notation in 4/4 time. The first staff shows the Eb minor pentatonic scale: Eb (b3), G (5), Ab (b6), Bb (b7), C (b2), Eb (b3). The second staff shows the Ab dominant pentatonic scale: Ab (b6), Bb (b7), C (1), Eb (b3), F (4), Ab (b6), C (4), Eb (b3). Thick black lines connect the notes of each pentatonic scale across the two staves.

C7alt

Cm7b5

b3 5 b6 b7 b2 b3 b2 5 b6 b7 1 b3 4 b6 4 b3

T
A
B

6 10 6 8 6 8 11 13 6 3 5 4 6 4 6 4

A min pent

Bb min pent

B min pent

C min pent

Musical notation for four pentatonic scales in 4/4 time. The scales are A minor pentatonic, Bb minor pentatonic, B minor pentatonic, and C minor pentatonic. Each scale is shown as a sequence of notes on a treble clef staff with a 4/4 time signature.

5 b7 1 2 4 5 4 2

#2 b5 b6 b7 b2#2 b2 b7

7 2 3 #4 6 7 6 #4

#2 b5 b6 b7 b2#2 b2 b7

Dm7

G7alt

Cmaj7

A7alt

TAB

Guitar tablature for the four pentatonic scales. The first scale (A min pent) is on the 5th fret, the second (Bb min pent) on the 8th fret, the third (B min pent) on the 7th fret, and the fourth (C min pent) on the 10th fret. The notes are indicated by numbers on the strings.