

Modern Theory

with Reg Barber

In this issue we will look at some improvising approaches that will help you use arpeggios in your solos. The three approaches outlined in this column should make it easy to incorporate arpeggios into your solos straight away, and give you ideas on how to create solos that work in any style or genre you are trying to emulate. As discussed last issue to become better at improvising you it helps to have an understanding of music theory, a good ear, and muscle memory through repetition of technical exercises. A system of self-evaluation is also important if you want to improve quickly or get yourself out of a rut, so being able to record yourself and then listen back to what you have done is invaluable. The more you get your head around all of these areas the better you will become at improvising and creating solos that are musical, not just a bunch of technical exercises and scale passages.

Hopefully by now you have broken your practice time into four parts that equally cover all of these areas. You should be dedicating a quarter of your practice time to technique practice. I like to break solos down into different soloing types – modal, arpeggios, pentatonic, triads and double stops. If you combine these different soloing approaches into a solo you end up with more than enough variation to keep the longest of solos interesting. If you transcribe and break down any solo, from any genre, you will find that usually what is considered a great or classic solo is a combination of these different soloing approaches.

Theoretically speaking an arpeggio is the notes of a chord played individually. An arpeggio outlines the single notes of a chord as a melody and is a very useful way of outlining a chord progression or an extended chord such as a 13th or suspended chord, especially in a situation where you are the only guitarist in a band. The challenge is how to incorporate arpeggios into your playing, especially given that often when we solo we think about what key we are in and which scale shapes fit the entire chord progression we are playing over. Hopefully one or all of the following approaches will help you to use arpeggios in your solos.

EXERCISE 1

The easiest way to get started using arpeggios is to use an arpeggio as the intro to your solo. Start your solo with an arpeggio of the first chord in the progression you are playing over. For example if you are soloing over an Am - Em – C – G progression outline the A minor chord by playing a phrase that only uses the notes from an A minor chord. Then finish of your solo with a scale passage, and you have a solo that incorporates two soloing approaches and maintains interest. This is a very easy way to begin incorporating solos into your playing. Exercise 1 is an example of this approach, try and do the same thing over your own songs or over a different chord progression, record what you do and listen back to it. The more you do this the easier it will get to incorporate arpeggios into your soloing and hopefully it will open up a whole new world of possibilities.

EXERCISE 2

One useful and very musical way of using arpeggios is to outline a chord progression with inversions of different arpeggios. An inversion is where the notes of a chord are played out of sequence. For example, instead of the arpeggio starting on the root note of the chord and playing the notes in order as root, 3rd, 5th and 7th, you may start on a note other than the root

note. If you start on the third note of the chord this is referred to as first inversion, if you start on the fifth this is a second inversion. Exercise 2 uses different inversions that outline the chords in the progression perfectly.

EXERCISE 3

Exercise 3 builds on the concept outlined in exercise two and when played at a faster tempo it sounds like the sweep picking arpeggios most people associate with arpeggio soloing. When used sparingly it can add excitement to your solo, but example three is probably not a great example of this technique being used sparingly.

Standard tuning

♩ = 120

S-Gt

Am Em C G

mf

1 2

T
A
B

8 12 15 13 12 13 12 12 15 15 13 15 13 12 14

9 9 10 10 12

Standard tuning

♩ = 120

S-Gt

The score is for a guitar in standard tuning (E2-A2-D3-G3-B3-E4) in 4/4 time. The tempo is 120 beats per minute. The melody is written in a treble clef and consists of two phrases. The first phrase starts with a first-finger trill on the 12th fret of the high E string, followed by eighth notes on the 13th, 12th, and 12th frets. The second phrase starts with a second-finger trill on the 12th fret, followed by eighth notes on the 13th, 12th, 13th, 13th, 15th, 15th, and 15th frets. Chord markings Am, Em, C, and G are placed above the first four measures. The bass line is written in a bass clef and consists of eighth notes on the 12th, 13th, 14th, 13th, 12th, 12th, 12th, 12th, 13th, 13th, 12th, 13th, 13th, 15th, 15th, 15th, and 16th frets. The dynamic marking *mf* is placed above the first measure of the bass line.

Am Em C G

mf

T
A
B

Standard tuning

♩ = 120

S-Gt

Am Em C G

mf

T
A
B

8-12,15 12 12 15,19 15 12 15,19 15 15 19,22 19

9 10 13 14 12 16 12 13 17 17 16 20