

## MIXING IT UP

Over the many years that I've been writing this column, one scale that I've never taken an in-depth look at is the Mixolydian mode. This is because it's a major-type mode featuring a major third degree. As such, it sounds a bit too 'happy' to ever be used in traditional heavy metal (which is what I primarily focus on in this column). It's very unlikely that you'll hear it in a brutal thrash or death metal song! Never-the-less, the mode is very common in hard rock music. From AC/DC to Guns 'N Roses, Mixolydian riffs and chord progressions can be heard in abundance. In shred/instrumental rock guitar music, two notable songs based on the Mixolydian mode are Joe Satriani's 'Summer Song' and Steve Vai's 'Erotic Nightmares'.

### EXERCISE 1

Mixolydian is the fifth mode of the major scale. This means that you play the same notes as a basic major scale, but start and end on the fifth degree (so the fifth step becomes the root note). This results in the Mixolydian mode – a major scale with a flattened seventh degree (1-2-3-4-5-6-b7). Rather than the super bright and happy major scale sound, the b7 'takes the edge off', so to speak (and this is why it works so well for classic hard rock). Exercise 1 illustrates two patterns for playing the Mixolydian mode – on one string, and a basic 'box' pattern. Practice improvising over a static tonic chord (A in this case), and emphasise the b7 degree to really get a feel for the sound. These exercises (as with the others) are written in the key of A, but you should move them around the neck and make sure you can play them in all twelve keys.

A

T  
A  
B

### EXERCISE 2

Of course, knowing how to play a scale is fairly pointless unless you know what to use it over. The most common Mixolydian chord progression is I-bVII (A-G, E-D, etc.). As an example, the first half of Exercise 2 is a basic I-bVII-IV (A-G-D) Mixolydian chord loop that you could jam the mode over. You can also write riffs based off of scales and modes – and accordingly solo over them using said mode. The second half of Exercise 2 is an example of a riff based on the Mixolydian mode. This riff is in the style of the Frank Zappa classic 'My Guitar Wants to Kill Your Mama' (as an aside, check out the awesome cover of this track on the first G3 live album).

Exercise 3 is a short piece in 4/4 time with a tempo of 150 bpm. It features a sequence of chords: A, G, D, A, G, D. The guitar tablature shows the following fret numbers: 0 0 0 0 3 2 0 0 3 2. The piece concludes with a melodic phrase: 3 5 4 5 4 2 0 2 0 3.

### EXERCISE 3

I've included two more Mixolydian patterns to practice. The first is a standard three note-per-string fingering – perfect for fast shred or legato lines. The second pattern is a sort of 'Mixolydian pentatonic' shape that I like to use. Here, the second and sixth degrees are omitted, leaving a scale formula of 1-3-4-5-b7. This is essentially a Minor pentatonic scale but with a raised/major third. It works great since it targets the really pertinent notes of the mode. Practice these patterns ascending and descending, and then try improvising with them.

Exercise 4 is a repetitive pull-off style lick in A Mixolydian mode. The guitar tablature shows the following fret numbers: 9 7 5 8 7 5 7 6 4 7 5 4 7 5 4 7 5 3 5. The piece concludes with a melodic phrase: 9 5 8 5 7 6 7 5 7 5 9 5.

### EXERCISE 4

As an example, this is a repetitive pull-off style lick using the aforementioned 'Mixolydian pentatonic' pattern. The lick could be used over either the chord progression or the riff from Exercise 2 (and as you can hear by going to [www.australianguitarmag.com.au](http://www.australianguitarmag.com.au)).

Exercise 5 is a repetitive pull-off style lick in A Mixolydian mode with a tempo of 150 bpm. The guitar tablature shows the following fret numbers: 9 5 8 5 9 5 9 5 8 5 9 5 9 5 8 5 9 5 9 5 8 5 9 5 9 5 8 5. The piece concludes with a melodic phrase: 8 5 9 5 8 5 7 6 5, with a 'full' pull-off indicated on the 8th fret.

Although not as 'heavy' as the minor modes, Mixolydian still has a pretty cool, hard rocking sound. Check it out!