

SWEEPING THE STEPS!

I'm sure most budding shred guitarists are familiar with sweep picking basic major and minor arpeggio shapes. Whether used independently or to outline chord progressions, sweep picked major/minor arpeggios are an invaluable tool for any metal lead guitarist. However, rather than only just playing the notes of the chord (1-3-5 for major, 1-b3-5 for minor), it can also sound cool to insert some extra diatonic and non-diatonic (chromatic) notes to these triad arpeggios. 'Outside' chromatic notes (not belonging to the key) can help to 'spice up' the standard major/minor arpeggio sound. When combined with sweep picking, using half step chromatic movement in this way can add extra flair and colour to your usual triad arpeggio licks. For this column, I'm going to show you an easy way to do this.

EXERCISE 1

Before we get to the chromatic licks, you should first make sure you're comfortable with these two common sweep picked arpeggio fingerings. With the root note on the fifth string, the first shape is a B minor arpeggio and the second shape is a D major arpeggio (the relative major of B minor).

The image shows two musical exercises in 4/4 time, key of D major. The first exercise is for B minor (Bm) and the second is for D major (D). Both are written in treble clef. The Bm exercise consists of two measures: the first measure has a sweep-picked arpeggio (B2, D3, F#3, B2) with a chromatic line (B2, A2, G2, F#2) on the first string, and the second measure has a whole note B2. The D major exercise also consists of two measures: the first measure has a sweep-picked arpeggio (D2, F#2, A2, D3) with a chromatic line (D2, C#2, B1, A1) on the first string, and the second measure has a whole note D2. Below the staff notation is a guitar tablature (TAB) for both exercises. The Bm TAB shows frets 14, 12, 11, 12, 10, 14, 10, 12, 11, 12, and 14. The D major TAB shows frets 17, 16, 14, 15, 14, 17, 14, 15, 14, 16, and 17. A pick direction indicator 'V' is shown between the two exercises.

EXERCISE 2

Once you have the aforementioned minor and major shapes down, it's actually quite simple to start adding in some chromatic passing tones. For the following exercises, the fundamental idea I'm relying on is to essentially 'fill in the gap' between the two notes on the first string of each arpeggio shape. As such, the overall technique will be to sweep downwards across the strings, alternate pick the short chromatic section on the first string (although you could also use pull-offs), and then sweep back up to the tonic on the fifth string. For the B minor arpeggio, when you get to the F# with your fourth finger on the 14th fret of the first string, instead of immediately pulling-off to the 10th fret, use all four fingers to play a descending line on the 14th, 13th, 12th, and 10th frets (F#, F, E, D). In this instance, the chromatic note (F natural) implies the B blues scale. Applying the same principle to the D major shape, on the first string we descend in half steps (one fret at a time) from the 17th down to the 14th fret (A, G#, G, F#).

Bm D

EXERCISE 3

There are countless variations to be derived from this basic concept. As an example, Exercise 3 involves using a hammer-on followed by pull-offs to play a short chromatic line employing a 16th note quintuplet on the first string. Try coming up with variations of your own. You can also apply this idea to different arpeggio shapes besides the two I've used here.

Bm D

EXERCISE 4

To hear how this sounds in a more musical context, I've applied the previous exercises to a I-III-VII-I chord progression in B minor (Bm-D-A-Bm). The suggested tempo is 160 BPM, so start off slow before increasing the speed (and also watch out for the quick jumps between arpeggio shapes!)

♩ = 160

Bm D

T
A
B

A Bm

As always, you can hear my recordings of these licks by going to www.australianguitarmag.com.au. Overall, I think you'll find that adding in these short chromatic runs will immediately revitalise the more predictable sound of sweep picked major and minor arpeggios.