

Expanded Harmony with Pentatonics

BY THADDEUS HOGARTH

EVERYONE LOVES THE PENTATONIC SCALE, but everyone is bored to tears by the same old application of it. On guitar, by far the most common improvisation/soloing applications of the minor pentatonic scale are the following:

In **Ex. 1**, we play a minor pentatonic scale over a minor 7th chord, both with the same root: a G minor pentatonic scale over a Gm7 chord. This works because the scale very closely resembles the arpeggio of a minor 7th chord.

Ex. 2 deals with Bbmaj7, the relative major, which is three frets or a minor third above. One way to think of this is, if you see a major 7th chord, play a minor pentatonic scale based on a root a minor third below the written chord's root. Same scale, different setting.

Now let's look at some less common, yet simple and creative ways to use this scale, five positions of which are shown in **Fig. 1**. Playing the exact same scale over different chords creates a whole new sonic palette without stepping too much outside funk or R&B and into jazz. The simplicity

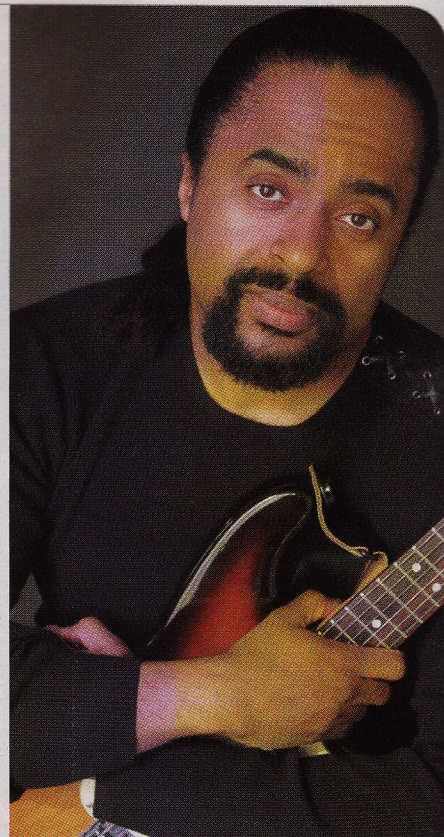
of the minor pentatonic scale ensures an accessibility to the listener, even when it is used to create varied altered tensions. All of the following examples use the G minor pentatonic scale, superimposing it over other chords. Notice how the function of each scale degree changes depending on the chord underneath. To truly appreciate these new colors and flavors, you'll want to record or have a friend strum the underlying chords as you play over them.

Ex. 3: G minor pentatonic scale over a Cm7 chord

The easiest way to think of this technique is to play a minor pentatonic up a perfect fifth (or seven frets) from the root of a minor 7th chord.

Ex. 4: G minor pentatonic scale over an Fm7 chord

Think of this one as a minor pentatonic starting a major second (two frets) up from the root of a minor 7th chord. Used in this way, the sound created works well over Dorian harmonic content, because even though there is no 3, we do get the Dorian-approved 6th degree.



Next month we'll explore even more colorful ways to employ our old five-note friend. Stay tuned! 🎸

Thaddeus Hogarth teaches Funk and R&B Guitar for berkleemusic.com, the online school for the Berklee College of Music.

Ex. 1

Gm7

Ex. 2

Bbmaj7 etc.

Ex. 4

Fm7 etc.

Ex. 3

Cm7 etc.

Fig. 1



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