



Introduction to Lead and Improvisation

In contemporary guitar music, “lead guitar” refers to playing melodic musical phrases that are either recognizable riffs (sequences of musical tones played on the guitar) that are an integral part of the song or are “improvised” riffs that are created at the moment of performance. There are many classic songs that have recognizable guitar solos. Most of those were improvised by the guitarist originally based on a general style and an associated set of lead patterns. Most of the great guitarists have distinctive styles based on their “bag of tricks” or “set of riffs” they have put together. The following sections present the basic patterns, tricks and technique of contemporary guitar which you can use to help learn from the masters as well as to develop your own favorite riffs and style.

“**Improvising around a tone center**” is good phrase to describe lead guitar since it is usually played using a set of notes in a particular key of which the tone center is the focal point or root note. Being a tone center also implies that it is at the center of a particular harmonic system which corresponds not only to the pattern but to the chord progression being played as well. The most common systems are the major and minor five tone (pentatonic) systems as well as the major and minor seven tone system (diatonic). The usable tones of each system can be defined as a set of patterns that can be played across the entire fretboard of the guitar based on the tone center. The next sections present an overview of some of the most commonly used of these patterns.

In learning the patterns the **concept of relative major and minor** is important since the same pattern is shared between them. In the patterns in the “gospel”, the relative major root note is indicated by a diamond and the relative minor is indicated by a square.

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|  <i>The square indicates the relative minor or blues root note.</i> |
|  <i>The diamond indicates the relative major root note.</i> |

The concept of style is integral to determine which lead pattern to use. For example, the minor pentatonic patterns are often used with the blues, the major pentatonics are often used in country riffs and the diatonic patterns and modes are often used in jazz.

A section is also included showing the most popular tone centers of contemporary guitar music. These correspond to the most popular keys for lead guitar which are “E major and minor”, “G major”, “A major and minor”, and “D major and minor”. It is also good to know the key of “C major” since many songs are written in this key. Fortunately, it is the relative major to “A minor”. With relative majors and minors, the pattern is the same but the tone center is different. As with several other best keys for lead, “A minor” works somewhat better than “C” because one of the tone centers is an open string.