

The Major Blues Pattern

One of the most popular chord progressions in contemporary guitar music is called the “three chord” or “twelve bar boogie/blues” progression. The progression is made up of the first, fourth and fifth degree dominant seventh chords of its key; for example, “A7”, “D7” and “E7”. There are many options for choosing a pattern to improvise over these chords. As previously stated, the guitarist can just use the basic blues pattern to solo over these chords. The combination of the tones of the chords, however add many interesting options outside the basic pattern.



Lead patterns can be created or modified by adding the tones of the individual chords in the chord progression.

In the most complex sense, each of the dominant sevenths of the blues progression is in a different key calling for the mixolydian mode of the associated diatonic key of the chord. If improvising with this in mind, the guitarist “thinks” in the proper mode of the individual chords as they change over the course of the progression. The mixolydian mode can be thought of simply as the major pentatonic pattern of each chord with the added flat seventh (whole step below the tonic) and the fourth (half step above the third). Although this seems complex some guitarists use this concept.

A favorite option of many guitarists, however, incorporates the advantages of the added tonality of the chord progression while maintaining the simplicity of the basic patterns. It is created by adding the major third to the basic minor blues pattern creating what can be called “the major blues pattern”. It can be used as a replacement or in addition to the basic blues pattern. The easiest option is to use the major blues pattern with the key chord and the blues pattern with the other two. For example, while improvising over the blues progression in “A”, use “A major blues” over the “A7” and “A minor blues” over “D7” and “E7”. Another option uses the major blues patterns corresponding by root note over each of the chords. This works well especially for “answer back” leads when a guitarist is adding fills behind the vocal line.

MAJOR BLUES PATTERNS

In the following patterns, the major third has been added to the basic minor blues pattern. The minor third functions as the blue note. The same concept can be applied to all pentatonic patterns.

