

Chapter Two: Major Pentatonic

The Major Pentatonic Scale is a more useful way of improvising in a major tonality than a pure major scale. The scale leaves out the perfect fourth and the seventh. The perfect fourth being a semitone above the major third can create a dissonant sound and should be used selectively. Likewise, the major seventh can be considered dissonant with the root note. The Major Pentatonic Scale is a near perfect solution. It is great for improvising over I-IV-V-VI progressions, or any combination of those chords.

The Major Pentatonic has a very sweet open sound suited for country and pop music. Great examples would be the later day Fleetwood Mac, Eric Clapton (Wonderful Tonight), and pretty much anything in the world of country and western. For the rockers out there, if you think of the opening solo in Paradise City you get some idea of how essential this scale is. Lets take a look at this scale. Note the slide on the bottom E string from the fifth to the seventh fret.

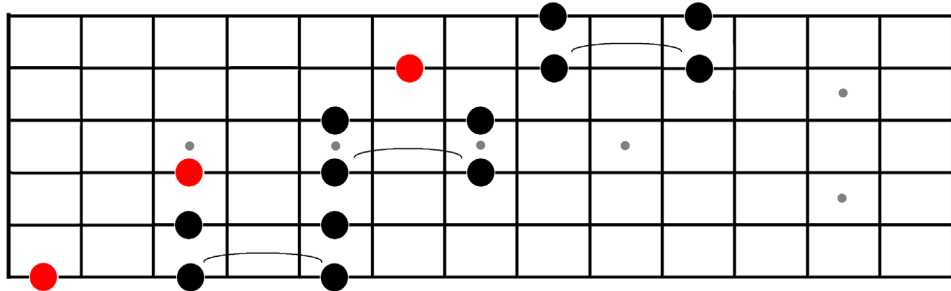
The image shows a musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notes are G, A, B, D, E. Below the staff is a guitar tablature with six strings. The notes are indicated by fret numbers: 3, 5, 7, 5, 7, 5. A slide is indicated between the 5th and 7th fret on the bottom string.

G Major Pentatonic

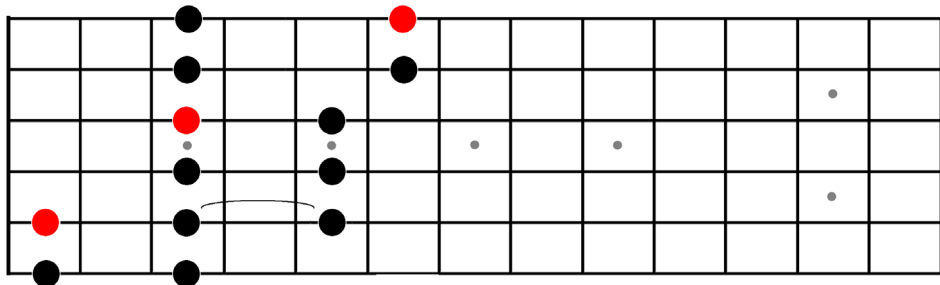
Once again it is important that if you are going to learn to improvise with this scale that you learn how it sounds. So, let us deconstruct this scale and look at the intervals that make up a Major Pentatonic Scale.

Note	Interval
G	Root
A	Major Second
B	Major Third
D	Perfect Fifth
E	Major Sixth

For the Major Pentatonic we are only going to learn two patterns. These patterns are somewhat unusual in as much as there are slides in the scale. This arrangement of the notes allows for a more “musical” approach than the usual caged position.



Pattern 1



Pattern 2

Note that there are three slides in pattern one and one slide in pattern 2. Also note the repetitive nature of the fingering in Pattern 1. It is effectively the same figure played three times in three different octaves. It should be noted that there are other patterns for the major pentatonic that keep to the caged system, however using these “sliding” patterns can create lines that are much more lyrical.

Exercise 1

For this exercise we use the pattern 1 in the key of G. Note that in bar 4 we play G on the 10th fret of the sixth string, which strictly speaking is outside the pattern that we learnt. This is where pattern 1 overlaps into pattern 2. In bar 3 we also play a flat third to create a slightly bluesy sound.

Exercise 2

For this exercise we use the pattern 2 in the key of C. In bar 2 we have two voicings. This is a tricky technique used to create the sound of a pedal steel guitar. The G note is held with the little finger whilst the D note is bent upwards to the E. This effect can sound great in country or blues context.

Exercise 2 musical notation showing a melody in treble clef and guitar tablature in bass clef. The key signature is C major and the time signature is 4/4. The exercise is divided into three measures corresponding to chords C, G, and C. The tablature includes fret numbers (3, 5, 7, 8) and bending instructions labeled "full".

Exercise 3

For this exercise we use pattern 2 again in the key of C.

Exercise 3 musical notation showing a melody in treble clef and guitar tablature in bass clef. The key signature is C major and the time signature is 4/4. The exercise is divided into three measures corresponding to chords C, G, and C. The tablature includes fret numbers (5, 7, 8) and bending instructions labeled "full".

Exercise 4

For this exercise we use the pattern 1 in the key of E. This exercise nearly uses the entire extent of the scale with slides and bends to give very fluid sound.

Exercise 4 musical notation showing a melody in treble clef and guitar tablature in bass clef. The key signature is E major (three sharps) and the time signature is 4/4. The exercise is divided into three measures corresponding to chords E, B, and E. The tablature includes fret numbers (0, 2, 4, 6, 7) and bending instructions labeled "full".

Exercise 5

For this exercise we are in the key of G. The chord progression is a very common sequence featuring the I-IV and V chords. The interesting feature here are the prebends in bar three.

Exercise 5 musical notation. The piece is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The chord progression is G, D, C, G, D, C. The notation includes a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The guitar tablature shows fret numbers and prebend markings (1/2 and full) in the third measure.

Exercise 6

For this exercise we use the same chord sequence as exercise 5. Putting the two exercises together makes a complete guitar solo.

Exercise 6 musical notation. The piece is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The chord progression is G, D, C, G, D, C. The notation includes a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The guitar tablature shows fret numbers and prebend markings (1/2 and full) in the third measure.

Exercise 7

For this exercise we use double notes to create a top line and harmony. The interval of sixths creates a lovely sound useful in country rock or pop.

Exercise 7 musical notation. The piece is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The chord progression is G, D7, G. The notation includes a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The guitar tablature shows fret numbers and double notes in the first measure.

Exercise 8

In this exercise we have a run in G major pentatonic, however we use open strings to create a beautiful ringing open sound.

Musical notation for Exercise 8, featuring a G major pentatonic run with open strings. The piece is in 4/4 time and G major. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is written on a single staff, and the guitar accompaniment is shown on a six-string staff with strings labeled T (Treble), A (Acoustic), and B (Bass). The guitar part uses open strings (0) and fretted notes (7, 8, 5, 7) to create a ringing sound. Chords G, D^{7sus4}, and G are indicated above the staff.

Exercise 9 *Enjoy!*

Musical notation for Exercise 9, first system. The piece is in 4/4 time and D major. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is written on a single staff, and the guitar accompaniment is shown on a six-string staff with strings labeled T (Treble), A (Acoustic), and B (Bass). The guitar part uses fretted notes (8, 9, 7, 9, 8, 10, 10, 8, 9) and an open string (0) to create a ringing sound. Chords G, D, C, and D are indicated above the staff. A 'full' instruction is present above the 10th fret note.

Musical notation for Exercise 9, second system. The piece is in 4/4 time and D major. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is written on a single staff, and the guitar accompaniment is shown on a six-string staff with strings labeled T (Treble), A (Acoustic), and B (Bass). The guitar part uses fretted notes (8, 9, 7, 7, 9, 8, 9, 7, 7, 9, 7, 7) and an open string (0) to create a ringing sound. Chords G, D, C, and D are indicated above the staff.

Musical notation for Exercise 9, third system. The piece is in 4/4 time and D major. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is written on a single staff, and the guitar accompaniment is shown on a six-string staff with strings labeled T (Treble), A (Acoustic), and B (Bass). The guitar part uses fretted notes (5, 4, 5, 7, 9, 7, 9, 8, 7) and an open string (0) to create a ringing sound. Chords G, D, C, and D are indicated above the staff. A 'full' instruction is present above the 10th fret note.

Musical notation for Exercise 9, fourth system. The piece is in 4/4 time and D major. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is written on a single staff, and the guitar accompaniment is shown on a six-string staff with strings labeled T (Treble), A (Acoustic), and B (Bass). The guitar part uses fretted notes (8, 7, 0, 7, 5, 0, 7, 0, 9, 7, 0, 0, 7, 5, 4, 7, 5) and an open string (0) to create a ringing sound. Chords G, D, C, D, and G are indicated above the staff.