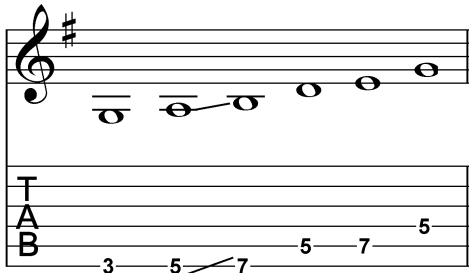
Chapter Two: Major Pentatonic

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.

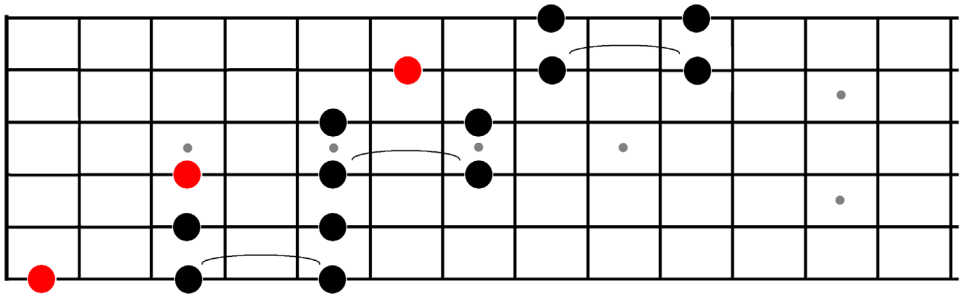


G Major Pentatonic

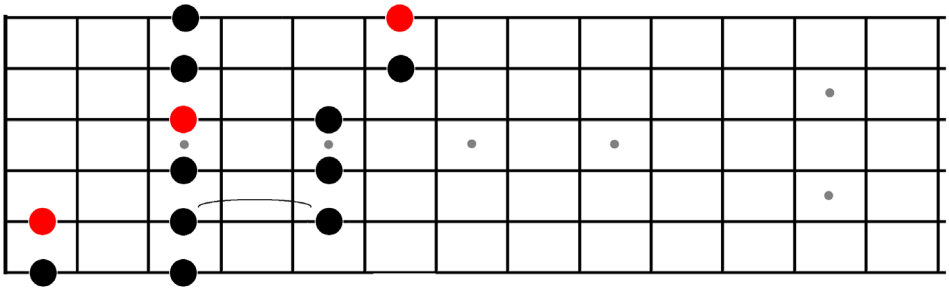
Once again it is important that if you are going to learn to improvise with this scale that you learn how it sounds. So, let us deconstruct this scale and look at the intervals that make up a Major Pentatonic Scale.

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

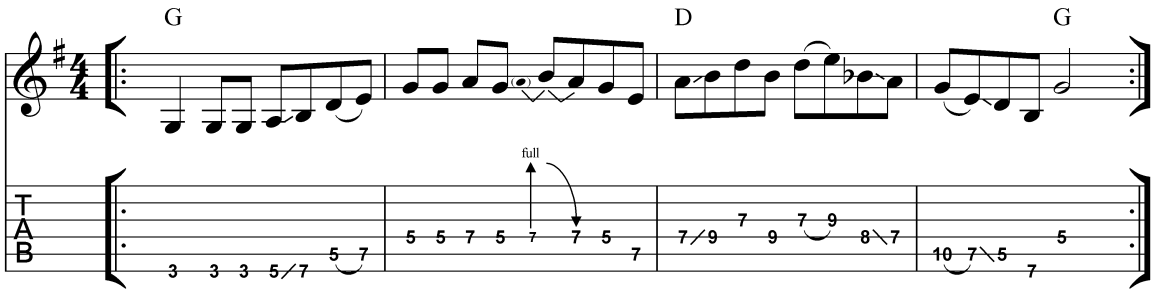


Pattern 2

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.

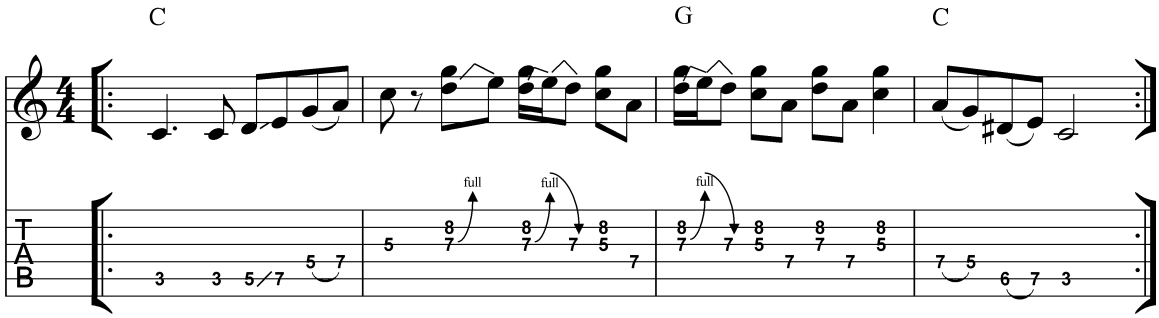
Exercise 1

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.



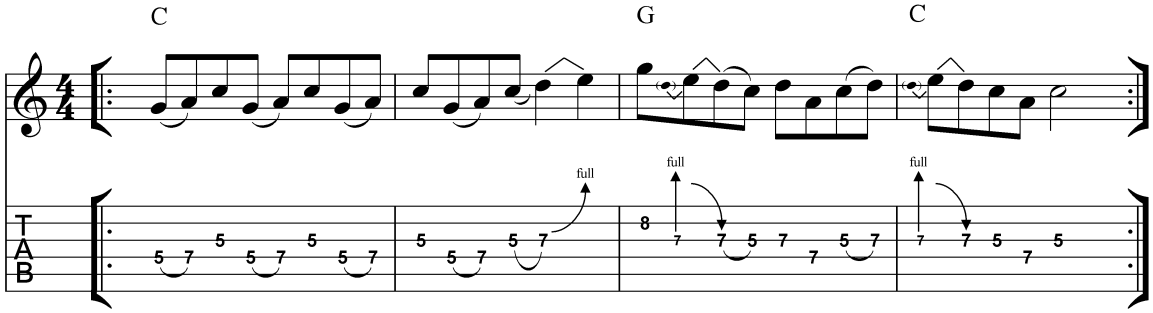
Exercise 2

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.



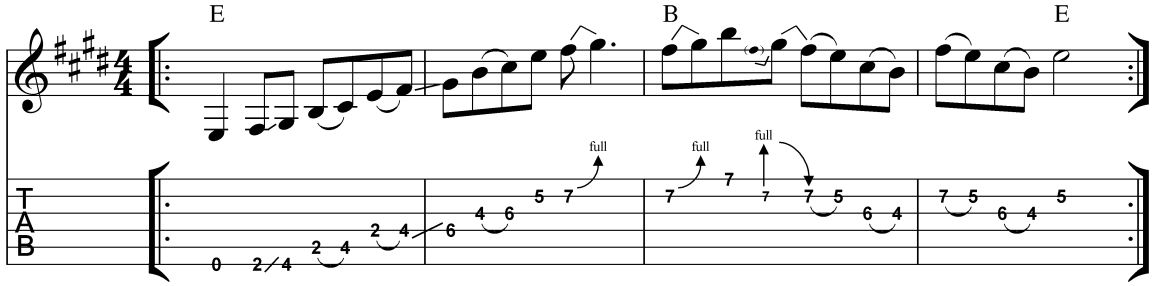
Exercise 3

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



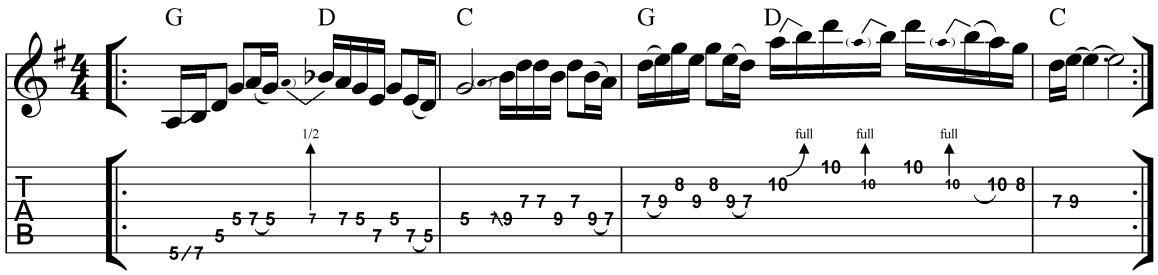
Exercise 4

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.



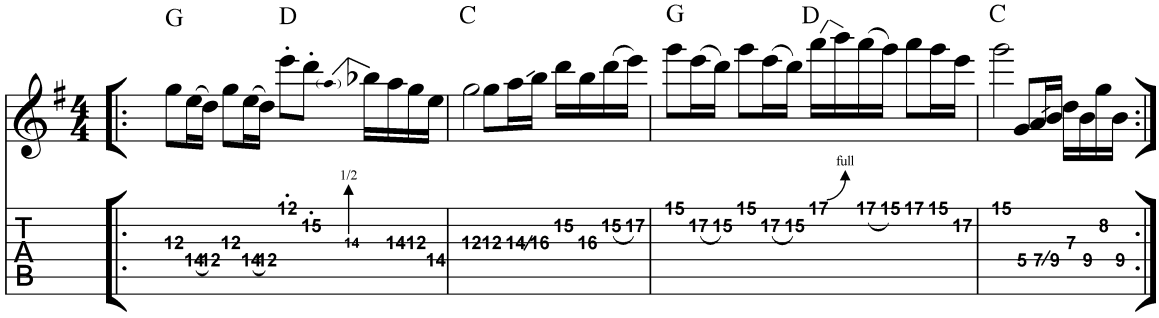
Exercise 5

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.



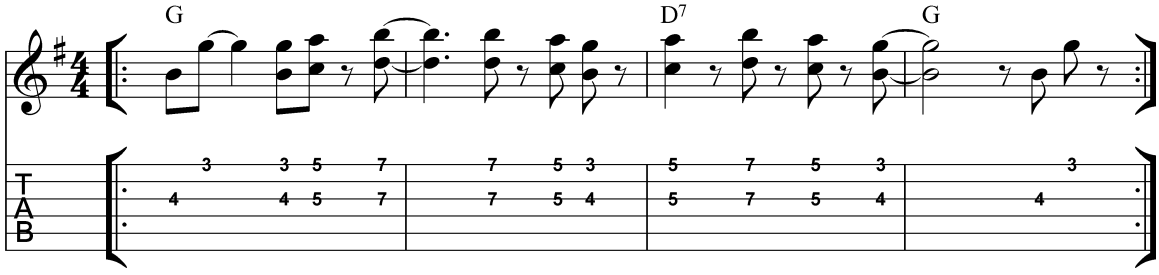
Exercise 6

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



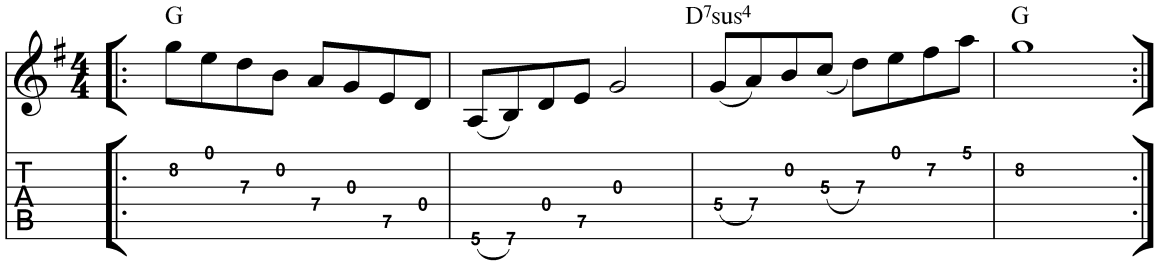
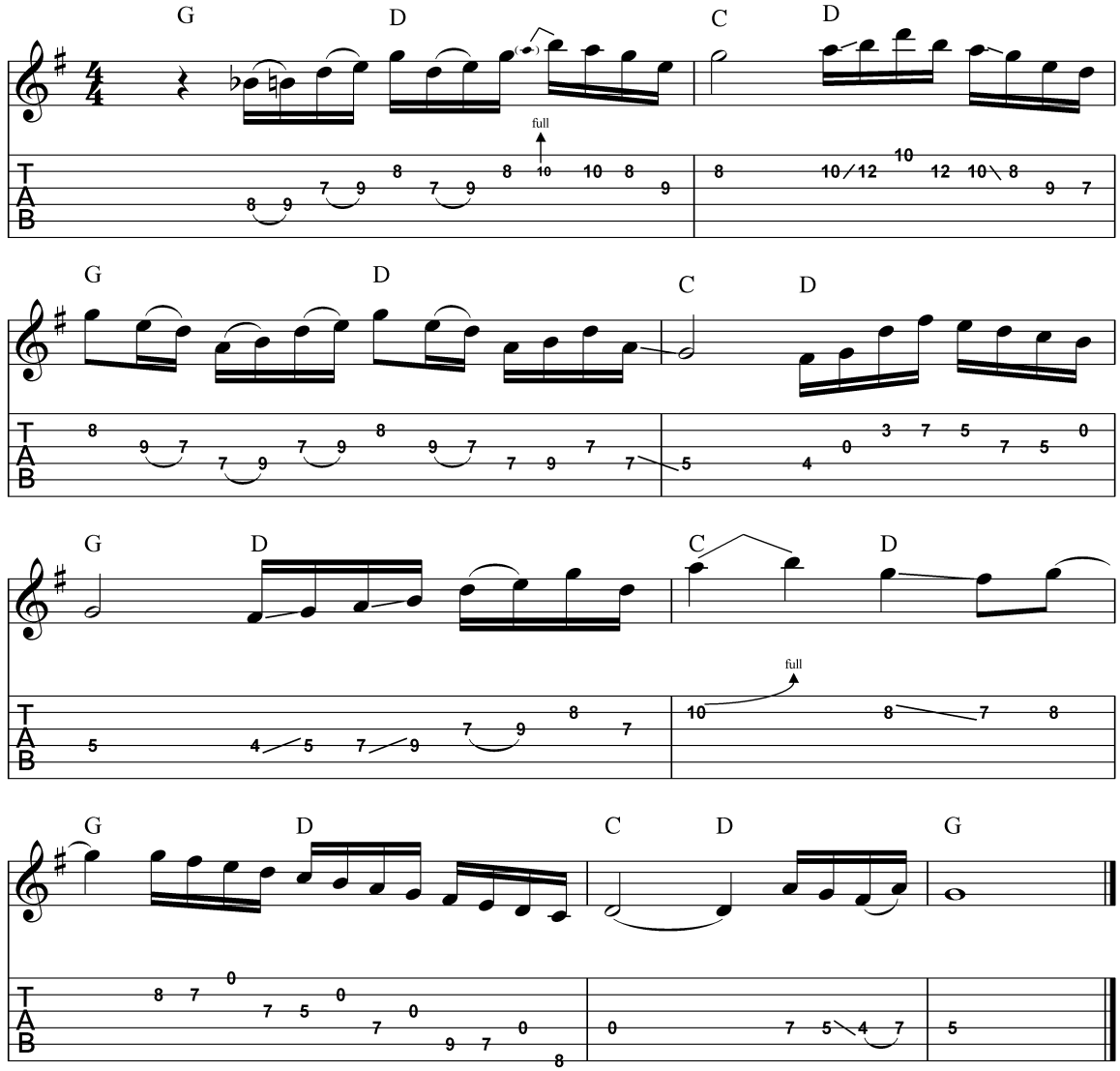
Exercise 7

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 8

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



Exercise 9 ***Enjoy!***