

Sweep Picking

Sweep picking is a technique used to create grand sweeping runs across arpeggios. Sweep picking can be used in virtually any style from Country through to Jazz and Rock. Check out Steve Vai or Django Reinhardt. Django would play impossibly fast runs using sweep picking that blew away his audiences and even today they would tax even the most accomplished players.

We will deal with both major and minor sweeping patterns, starting with simple patterns and building up across five strings. The most important thing to take into account is the right hand picking technique. Alternate picking is not used, instead, depending on the direction, all down strokes or up strokes are used to create a fluid run of notes.

Exercise 1

First we will take a look at a single major arpeggio, sweeping down and then up.

The image shows the musical notation for Exercise 1. It consists of a treble clef staff in 4/4 time with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The notation shows a sweep down from the 11th fret to the 9th fret, followed by a sweep up from the 9th fret to the 12th fret, and then a final sweep down from the 12th fret to the 9th fret. Above the staff, square symbols indicate downstrokes and 'V' symbols indicate upstrokes. The guitar tablature below shows the fret numbers for the strings: Treble (T), Middle (A), and Bass (B). The sequence of frets is 11, 9, 10, 9, 12, 9, 10, 9, 11.

Exercise 2

This exercise is the same as exercise 1 except that it is A minor.

The image shows the musical notation for Exercise 2. It consists of a treble clef staff in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation shows a sweep down from the 10th fret to the 8th fret, followed by a sweep up from the 8th fret to the 12th fret, and then a final sweep down from the 12th fret to the 8th fret. Above the staff, square symbols indicate downstrokes and 'V' symbols indicate upstrokes. The guitar tablature below shows the fret numbers for the strings: Treble (T), Middle (A), and Bass (B). The sequence of frets is 10, 9, 10, 8, 12, 8, 10, 9, 10.

Exercise 3

This exercise extends the major arpeggio by one note making the sweep over five strings.

Exercise 3 musical notation and guitar tablature. The notation is in treble clef, key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), and 4/4 time. The melody consists of eighth notes and quarter notes with slurs and accents. Above the staff are fingering numbers (1-4) and breath marks (V). The guitar tablature shows strings T, A, and B with fret numbers 9, 10, 11, and 12.

Exercise 4

And similarly for A minor.

Exercise 4 musical notation and guitar tablature. The notation is in treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#), and 4/4 time. The melody consists of eighth notes and quarter notes with slurs and accents. Above the staff are fingering numbers (1-4) and breath marks (V). The guitar tablature shows strings T, A, and B with fret numbers 8, 9, 10, and 12.

Exercise 5

This exercise is based on an E minor chord with the root on the 5th string.

Exercise 5 musical notation and guitar tablature. The notation is in treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#), and 4/4 time. The melody consists of eighth notes and quarter notes with slurs and accents. Above the staff are fingering numbers (1-4) and breath marks (V). The guitar tablature shows strings T, A, and B with fret numbers 7, 8, 9, 10, and 12.

Exercise 6

This exercise is similar to Exercise 7 however is the major inversion.

Musical notation for Exercise 6, showing a treble clef staff with a key signature of three sharps and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth notes and quarter notes. Above the staff are square symbols for picking and 'V' symbols for vibrato. Below the staff is a guitar tablature with strings T, A, and B labeled. The fret numbers are 7, 11, 9, 9, 9, 7, 12, 7, 9, 9, 9, 11, 7.

Exercise 7

This exercise demonstrates another common technique that can be used for sweeping arpeggios. If we take exercise 3 and add another note on the top by tapping the high A note on the 17th fret and pulling off back to the twelfth fret.

+ = tap

Musical notation for Exercise 7, showing a treble clef staff with a key signature of three sharps and a 4/4 time signature. The melody includes a tapping technique indicated by a '+' symbol. Above the staff are square symbols for picking and 'V' symbols for vibrato. Below the staff is a guitar tablature with strings T, A, and B labeled. The fret numbers are 12, 11, 9, 10, 9, 12, 17, 12, 9, 10, 9, 11, 12, 11, 9, 10, 9, 12, 17, 12, 9, 10, 9, 11, 12.

Exercise 8

This next exercise is the same as exercise 5 however we extend the arpeggio even further by sliding the tapped note up another third and then back again using your tapping finger. This takes a little practice but looks and sounds very impressive. It is easier to play with quite a lot of distortion on your sound to make the strings more sensitive.

+ = tap

Musical notation for Exercise 8, showing a treble clef staff with a key signature of three sharps and a 4/4 time signature. The melody includes a tapping technique indicated by a '+' symbol. Above the staff are square symbols for picking and 'V' symbols for vibrato. Below the staff is a guitar tablature with strings T, A, and B labeled. The fret numbers are 12, 11, 9, 10, 9, 12, 17/21, 17, 12, 9, 10, 9, 11, 12.

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