

Fingerstyle 101 Printable E-Book (3)



Table of Contents:

1. Section 3:
 - Improvisation
 - Advanced Songs

Section 3

Improvisation with Fingerstyle Guitar

To compose something decent, you not only need the goodwill of the muse but also at least some insight into harmony and compositional techniques. As improvising is 'instant composing' you will definitely need all these tools. During this series of lessons on improvisation I will always start with a short practical example, analyse it and then give some examples of what we can do with this idea.

So let's start with this one:

Concept - Arpeggiation With Rhythmic Diversity

Here the right hand fingers hold the chord form (Em7) while the Left Hand fingers play a picking pattern. For now, since this is meant to be a simple exercise, the bass note (the open low E) is played on the first beat of each measure to have a marking point. As we get more skill and confidence we will add more bass movement.

The fingers of the left hand are, in essence, fooling around in the chord form, which leads to more independence and certainty (well, after some experimenting). The finger indications (p - thumb, i - index, m - middle and a - ring) are only suggestions. You should feel free to execute them differently.

Advantage

You are always sure the notes will fit into the harmony of the piece as the improvised melody is derived totally

from the chord notes.

Some Chord Theory

After a while, only playing over Em7 chords would become quite boring. That's why we will use Chord Extensions, notes past the 7th degree, namely the 9th, 11th or 13th, which could also be thought as 2nd, 4th and 6th. Adding these extensions, which are built by stacking triads on top of the original Em triad, is a standard practice of jazz musicians and is quite essential to developing the skills to improvise. Diatonic scale of Em:

	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#
Degrees	1	2	b3	4	5	6	b7	8	9	b10	11	12	13

Em7 consists of 1, b3, 5, b7 -- E, G, B, D.

Chord extensions of Em7 might be:

Em9:	1	b3	5	b7	9	E	G	B	D	F#					
Em11:	1	b3	5	b7	9	11	E	G	B	D	F#	A			
Em13:	1	b3	5	b7	9	11	E	13	E	G	B	D	F#	A	C#
Em7/11:	1	b3	5	b7	11	E	G	B	D	A					
Em (9/11):	1	b3	5	9	11	E	G	B	F#	A					

It would be impossible to execute all the notes from an Em13 chord

on the guitar, since it only has six strings and the chord has seven notes. As the 1, 3 and 7 are essential notes to determine the chord family, you might omit the 5, 6 or 9 position.

Now, let's experiment on a two-chord progression, the chords being Em7 and Cmaj7.

Chord extensions of Cmaj7 might be:

Cmaj9:	C	E	G	B	D	
Cadd9:	C	E	G	D		
C6/9:	C	E	G	A	D	
Cmaj7/6:	C	E	G	A	B	
Cmaj13:	C	E	G	B	D	A

Both chords and some of their extended forms are played all over the neck, but are still played off of the chord shapes. I specifically picked these chord shapes for this exercise because of their simplicity as well as their fresh, lush sound. Open and fretted notes are mixed which can lead to some beautiful colourful results. So, let's try this, shall we?

♩ = 80

Em7 Cmaj7

T 3 0 0 3 0 0 0

A 2 0 0 3 2 0 0

B 0 3 2 0 0

P P M I M A A P I M A

Here we've added improvisation to the Em7 1st position form using the Cmaj7 1st position form.

Here's a more realistic version of the basic Em7 without improvising any changes:

Em7

Gtr I

T 3 0 0 3 0 0 3 0 2 0 3 0 2 0

A 2 0 0 3 2 0 0 2 0 0 2 0

B 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Here's a more realistic version of the Em7 - Cmaj7 from further above:

Em7 Cmaj7

Gtr I

T 3 0 0 3 0 0 0 0

A 2 0 0 3 2 0 0 0

B 0 3 2 0 0 0 0

Video Reference: Much more material is covered in our Fingerstyle 101 DVD. Please refer to Chapter 3 "Improvisation" on the DVD for additional information.

Advanced Songs

"Big Love" by Lindsey Buckingham

Warning: This is a hard one and I can't even play it 100% correctly, but it's a great challenge and should help you really speed up your fingerstyle guitar playing.

Ok. Here's the deal. This one is mega hard if you try to play it 100% correctly. However, I love the song and

The image shows a musical score for guitar fingerstyle. It consists of a treble clef staff with notes and a bass staff with tablature. The tablature includes fret numbers (10, 8, 7, 9, 7) and fingerings (A, M, I, P). The score is divided into four measures. The first two measures are identical and feature a sequence of notes: 10, 8, 7, 9, 7. The last two measures feature a sequence of notes: 4, 5, 7, 5, 4. The fingerings are indicated by letters A, M, I, and P. The bass staff also includes fret numbers and fingerings for the last two measures.

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