A black and white photograph of a person playing a guitar. The image is slightly blurred, focusing on the hands and the fretboard. The text is overlaid in a bright red, 3D-style font.

Lead Guitar
In 30 Minutes
(or less)

Kenny Mann

LEAD
GUITAR IN
30 MINUTES
(OR LESS)

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INTRODUCTION |

LEAD GUITAR IN ONLY 30 MINUTES?!

You may be thinking to yourself “There's no way I can learn how to play lead guitar in only thirty minutes!”.

I'm here to tell you that you can!

Let's be honest. You won't be able to wail on guitar like Eric Clapton or Jimi Hendrix in only thirty minutes. You won't get to their level without years of dedication and practice, but you can learn about the tools and tricks that they use to create their own lead parts.

The fundamentals of playing lead can easily be absorbed quickly. The title of the book suggests thirty minutes, but it might take you a little less, or a little more. Everyone is different, but the fact remains that you CAN be playing lead guitar faster than you ever thought possible.

I'm going to introduce you to the concepts that you must understand before you start playing. I like to call them “The Three Principles”. Understanding of these basic principles are all that are needed in order for you to begin your lead guitar journey.

Once you have completed this book you'll finally feel comfortable playing lead guitar. You'll be able to develop you new found knowledge and skills and become an increasingly better lead guitarist.

Don't be afraid of playing lead, because it's not nearly as hard or difficult as you might imagine. You shouldn't look at lead guitar as

being hard or mystical. Instead, you should look at it as fun. I hope that this book communicates this idea to you.

WHAT IS CONSIDERED LEAD GUITAR?

Lead guitar is often described as the time when a guitarist steps into the spotlight to play a solo, but a lot of times lead guitar parts can be intertwined with the song itself.

Think of the song “Main Street” by Bob Seger. The lead guitar parts in this particular song would not be considered a “solo”, but more of a melodic hook. It's still a lead guitar part, but it's not a blistering solo such as the one Eddie Van Halen belts out in Michael Jackson's “Beat It”.



Fig. 1: Eddie Van Halen performs on his home made “Frankenstein” guitar.

Lead guitar consists of mostly single note lines or double stops that are the feature of a solo, a melodic hook, or musical interlude. Whatever the case may be, it all falls under the term “lead guitar”.

LEAD VS. RHYTHM

Some bands have two guitarists that have one guitarist designated as the lead guitarist and the other as the rhythm guitarist.

A good example of this would be Guns N' Roses where Slash always performed the lead parts whereas Izzy Stradlin held rhythm guitar duties.

That's not to say that Slash didn't play rhythm, too. When you aren't play leads then either you stand up on stage with your hands in your pocket, or you pick up rhythm guitar duties.

In fact, when both were playing rhythm, Izzy and Slash would often play totally different rhythm parts. That sounds like it could turn into a muddy mess, but both guitarists would play parts that complimented each other.

Other bands with great guitar “teams” include The Rolling Stones and Aerosmith- bands that Guns N' Roses were molded after.

In many cases the roles of lead guitarist and rhythm guitarist are intertwined.



Fig 2: Slash was the lead guitarist for Guns N' Roses.

THE TOTAL PACKAGE

What happens when you are the only guitarist in the band?

Players such as Jimi Hendrix, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Eric Clapton, and Eddie Van Halen were the only guitarist in their respective acts and served as both the lead guitarist and rhythm guitarist.



Fig. 3: Hendrix was “The Total Package” playing both lead and rhythm for the Jimi Hendrix Experience.

WHAT THIS BOOK CAN DO FOR YOU

What I'm going to show you in a nutshell is how to improvise a lead guitar part over any song. It doesn't matter why type of song it is, because the principles of music are the same for all of them.

Sounds great right? But what do I mean by the word improvise? Here's the definition:

im·pro·vise (mpr-vz) 1. To invent, compose, or perform with little or no preparation. 2. To play or sing (music) extemporaneously, especially by inventing variations on a melody or creating new melodies in accordance with a set progression of chords.

As the definition says, you'll be able to play lead guitar over any music in existence. To top it all off, you'll have this skill in 30 minutes or less!

Maybe you're lost as to what notes to play, or perhaps you can't get your fingers to move quite like you want. With "Lead Guitar In 30 Minutes" we'll overcome the common obstacles beginners face when learn how to play lead. In only 30 minutes you'll be playing lead guitar with confidence.

THE THREE PRINCIPLES

There are three things that you must know before you can begin playing lead guitar on your own. These things involve a little theory, but I've done my best to try to keep it simple as possible.

I like to call them the three principles. They are the only things you really need to know in order to play lead. There's other aspects to playing lead out there, but the primary focus of this book is to get you up and running, so we won't spend much time on the advanced aspects of lead.

The three principles you must understand before you begin playing lead guitar are:

- How to locate the notes by name on your low E string
- How to find the key signature of the song that you want to play lead with
- How to apply the proper pentatonic scale pattern (major or minor and *where* to play it)

Now, without further ado, let's learn how to play lead guitar in about 30 minutes...

1

LEARN HOW TO LOCATE NOTES ON THE LOW E STRING

The first principle involves locating the notes by name on the low E string.

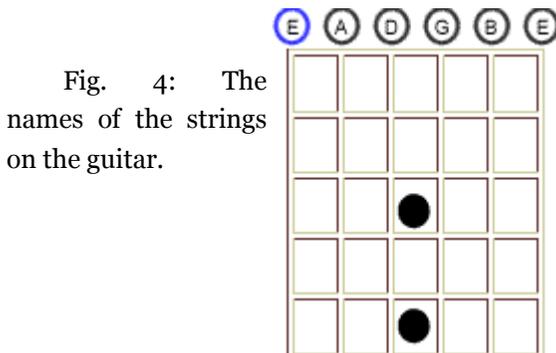
You are not expected to learn all the names of the notes on your guitar's fretboard. That could take months!

There are 21 frets on the average guitar. If you multiply that with the six strings on the guitar then you end up with 126 frets whose name you have to remember.

We're not going to do that, though. We're just going to become familiar with the notes on the low E string.

ABOUT THE E STRING

In figure 4 you'll see the low E string highlighted in blue. We call it an E string because when you play it open it produces an E note. It's the *low* E string because there are actually 2 E strings. The other E string is higher in pitch and is called the high E string.



Now I don't expect you to learn all the notes on the low E string in 30 minutes or less. All you really need to do right now is print out our cheat sheet. It contains notes on a fretboard diagram. By using the diagram you can easily find the notes on the low E string.

Print out the cheat sheet here:

[Lead Guitar Cheat Sheet](#)

It's important that you consider learning the notes on the other strings eventually, but it's not needed for our purposes here. To become a more complete guitarist you'll want to be able to understand the entire fretboard and that includes learning all of the notes. Learning the notes on the low E string is a great first step- plus you'll automatically know the notes on the high E string as well. It's like killing two birds with one stone!

FINDING NOTES ON THE LOW E STRING

In Western music, we all use a music system that has 12 different notes. On the guitar, all of the music that we play is based of of the 12 notes system- our guitar is built with it in mind.

The guitar's fretboard may have 126 or more possible note locations, but they are the same 12 notes over and over.

Notes are give a name after the first seven letters of the alphabet: A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. The musical alphabet differs from the regular alphabet in that the letters only progress up to G and then begin to repeat.

The diagram in figure 5 shows you all of the primary notes on the fretboard of the guitar. You should be concerned primarily with the notes on the low E string (the string farthest to the left in the diagram).

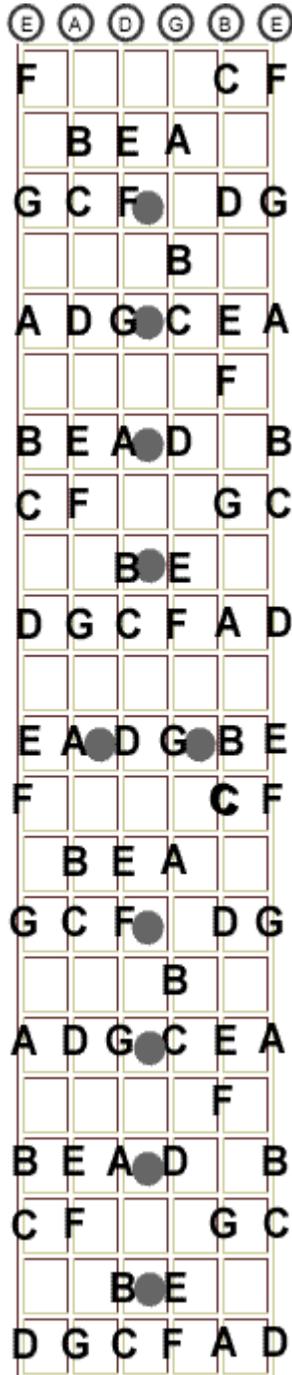
These 7 different notes found on the fretboard diagram are called primary notes. The notes in between them are sharps and flats otherwise called secondary notes.

Secondary notes are simply modifiers. They are modifiers because they take the original primary note and add either a sharp or flat to that note (sharp = #, flat = b).

These secondary notes respectively raise or lower the pitch of a note by a half step. These are used to create the additional five notes necessary to complete the chromatic scale.

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Fig. 5: The primary notes on the fretboard.



The sharp symbol is #, the flat symbol is similar to a lower-case italic b. These accidentals are written after the note name; for example F# represents the note F sharp, Bb is B flat.

These secondary (modified) notes have dual names, meaning one note can be called either sharp or flat. Think of a sharp as meaning "go up one fret" and a flat as "go down one fret".

The 5 secondary notes are called G# or Ab, A# or Bb, C# or Db, D# or Eb, and F# or Gb.

Keep in mind that there are no sharps or flats in between the notes E, F and the notes B, C. Every other primary note has a sharp or flat immediately before and after.

There's a good reason that we have to go through the trouble of learning the location of the notes on the fretboard. We'll use this knowledge to apply principles 2 and 3. We'll use the notes to help us identify the key signature of the song and use them to help us identify the correct scale pattern to use.

It may take a little practice to get up to speed, but once you've got it down, you'll never forget.

Carry the cheat sheet around with you until you can identify the notes without it's help.

You may want to take some time to drill yourself. How quickly can you find the D on the low E string? Using the fretboard diagram you can quickly locate it on the 10th fret. Now how quickly can you

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find the D #? Well, since we know that D is on fret 10, we know that D# will be up one fret from it. That would make D# fall on the 11th fret. Now, keep working on it until you don't need the diagram.

Alternatively you can use the chart in figure 5 to easily find the notes using the fret number. You'll notice that at the 12th fret that the note sequence starts anew.

In the chart, each fret is numbered 0-12. 0 (zero) represents the open E string. The number 1 represents the 1st fret and so on...

Fig. 5: Fret number/note chart

Fret	Note
0	E
1	F
2	F#
3	G
4	G#
5	A
6	A#
7	B
8	C
9	C#
10	D
11	D#
12	E

2

LEARN TO IDENTIFY THE KEY SIGNATURE

The 2nd principle is learning how to identify the key signature of the song you want to play lead guitar with.

Every song has a key signature and it's your job to figure out which of the possible 12 major and 12 minor keys a song is in. This chapter will show you how! It's not very hard once you get used to the idea.

A Key Signature tells us what originating tone a song is to be performed in. It may sound confusing to know that there are 24 possible key signatures. You may not know where to start, but remember that there are 12 different notes on the guitar.

Since there are 12 tones in music, there are 12 **major** key signatures and 12 **minor** key signatures in music. First let's talk about major key signatures...

MAJOR KEY SIGNATURES

Each of the 12 notes in music can represent a key signature. For example: a song in the key of A. That means that the A note is the originating tone and that the A major chord will be the primary (or home) chord.

You can have a song in either the major keys of A, A# (or Bb), B, C, C# (or Db), D, D# (or Eb), E, F, F# (or Gb), G, G# (or Ab).

Imagine tones as blocks:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----	----	----

Fig. 6: Tones as blocks

7 of these are primary key signatures called A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. The remaining 5 key signatures are secondary key signatures. They have dual names, meaning they can be called sharp or flat. A sharp means half a step higher and a flat mean half a step lower. Sharps are represented by a "#" and flats are represented by a "b". The 5 secondary key signatures are called G# or Ab, A# or Bb, C# or Db, D# or Eb, and F# or Gb.

The 12 Major key signatures:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
A	A#/Bb	B	C	C#/Db	D	D#/Eb	E	F	F#/Gb	G	G#/Ab

Fig. 7: Notes as blocks

Major key signatures are often described as having a “happy” sound. Most songs are in a major key.

Each key signature acts the same. There is no real difference in the arrangement of the notes in the context of a song. The difference is what specific notes, scales, and chords will work in the key signature. You have to play the correct notes that correspond with the key signature or the notes will not fit and sound out of place.

MINOR KEY SIGNATURES

There are 12 possible minor key signatures just as there was with the major key signatures. We're working off of the same 12 notes except we call them minor. For example a song in A minor would be labeled as Am.

Minor keys sounds melancholy, or sad.

The major scale used a major chord as the “home” chord, but the minor keys use a minor chord and minor scales to add melody and lead parts.

The different sound between a major and minor key signature is your first clue as to what the key signature is. You'll let your ears tell you if it sounds happy or sad. If it's happy or upbeat tone, then it's most likely a major key. If it has a sad tone to it, then it's most likely a minor key.

If you can tell the difference between a major and minor chord then you'll be able to tell if the key signature is major or minor.

TEST YOUR ABILITY

At the link below is a test for you. It's to determine if you can hear the difference between major and minor chords. Just press the play buttons on the page to hear a chord. Then try to tell if it's a major or minor chord:

<http://guitaralliance.com/hearing-the-difference-between-major-minor/>

Hint: there are 3 major chords and 3 minor chords. If you can't hear the difference, please ask for help in the comments on the page linked above.

TIPS FOR FINDING THE CORRECT KEY SIGNATURE

- Usually the chord that starts a song will tell you what key a song is being played in. Most songs begin and almost always end with the chord that is the same as the key signature. For example if a song begins with an A major chord, then it's most likely in the key of A major--but especially if it ends with an A major chord.
 - While most songs begin and end with the chord that is the same as their key signature, there are exceptions. Sometimes a song will start on a chord that is not the same as it's key signature, but the key signature chord will soon follow it.
 - The chord that is the same as the key signature will usually be played more than any other chord.
-

- If a song doesn't end with the chord that is the same as its key signature it usually leaves a feeling of "hanging". It's like the song isn't complete without the key signature chord at the end. There are songs that end on a chord other than the key signature chord. You can usually spot them a mile away. Some artists use them to create that incomplete or hanging feeling at the end of a song.

YOU'VE GOT TO TRAIN YOUR EARS

Your best bet for learning how to determine a song's key signature is to practice. In fact, it's the only way you'll ever truly know. Your ears have to be trained to know what to listen for.

Try listening to the radio with your guitar in hand and try to figure out the key signature for each song that plays. First listen for a major or minor key and then try to determine the name of its key.

Just use the low E string to find the originating tone. It's the most predominant tone in the song. Then identify the note and determine if it sounds major or minor and then you've got your key signature.

SUMMARY

- A lot of times (but not always) a song will begin and end with the chord that is the song's key signature.
- Another way to look at it is that the chord used most in a song is the same as the song's key signature. There are 12 major keys and 12 minor keys.

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- The best way to develop skills in identifying key signatures is by listening to songs and trying to identify their key signature by ear. Pick up your guitar and try to identify the roots of the chords being played in the song. Use your low E string to find these root notes.
- With a little practice you'll easily be able to identify a song's key signature.
- To play solos over a song you first need to identify it's key signature, then you will be able to pick the appropriate scales to solo with.



3

LEARN WHICH SCALE PATTERN TO APPLY

You're almost ready to play some lead once you've identified the key signature! Now all you need to do is figure out what scale pattern to use to create your leads.

WHAT ARE SCALES?

Scales are the building blocks of music. They are a sequence of notes that provide a road map for just about everything including chord construction, chord progressions, songwriting, and soloing. Understanding scales is about as essential to a guitarist's survival as water is to a fish.

In a way, learning scales is kind of like learning what notes go together well when you're playing in a certain key signature. Knowing the proper scales will give you a foundation to know what lead notes sound good together and which ones don't.

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A lot of people get confused when it comes to scales because most books, magazines, and other instructional material make them out to be more complicated than they really are. In all the world of music there are literally dozens of different types of scales, but learning them all should not be your priority.

Knowing scales does allow you to be able to improvise smoothly and coherently without sounding like a train wreck. Theory is great, but feel is just as important. Developing both is the tricky part. That said, learn your scales. It will help.

In a way, learning scales is kind of like learning what notes go together well when you're playing in a certain key. Knowing these scales will give you a foundation to know what lead notes sound good together and which ones don't.

THE PENTATONIC SCALES

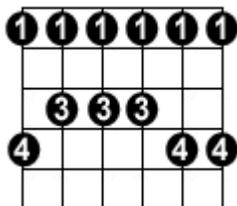
Pentatonic scales are the most widely used scale patterns for lead guitar. They contain 5 different notes that can be repeated over and over on the fretboard. There's a lot you can do with these 5 notes!

In each key signature the 5 notes will differ, but the first note of the scale will be the same as the key signature. For example: a song in the key of A minor will have an A for the first note in the scale.

This is where knowing those notes on the low E string come in handy. If you use the low E string to find the key, you've also found the first note (out of 5) of the scale you will use to play leads with. Now, all you have to do is discover what the other four notes are. We can easily do this by learning the pentatonic fretboard pattern.

In figure 8 you'll see this fretboard pattern.

Fig. 8: The pentatonic fretboard pattern:



I know that I said that the scale has only five different notes. So now you're asking yourself why the fretboard pattern has 12 different notes on it. Just remember that I also said that the same five notes repeat over and over on the fretboard. That's the case here. There are only 5 different notes on the fretboard diagram that repeat over in sequence.

Maybe you need a little help in figuring out what the diagram is actually representing. Let me clarify things for you.

Scale diagrams are like a snapshot of your guitar's fretboard showing 5 frets. The black dots show the scale pattern as it appears on the fretboard. The numbers in the black dots show what fingers you should use to finger that note when playing the scale.

While it may look similar to a chord diagram, it's not played like a chord. You should practice playing it one note at a time. Start with the lowest note on the low E string and play up the scale until you get to the highest note, then go back down backwards.

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This scale pattern is movable. You can move it up and down the fretboard to play in all the possible key signatures, but more on that in a minute.

FINDING THE ROOT FOR MAJOR KEY SIGNATURES

I told you previously that once you knew what key signature the song is in that you'll be just about ready to play lead with it.

Both major and minor key signatures can use the same pattern, but the orientation will be totally different. In fact, the root note is located in different spots.

In a major key the root will be the 2nd note in the scale pattern found on the low E string such as in figure 9.

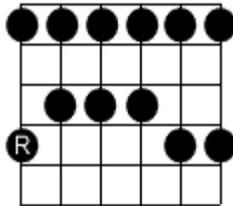


Fig. 9: The pentatonic major scale pattern

So, if you've determined that the key signature is in the key of A, all you have to do is apply the scale pattern in figure 9 so that the root note (marked with an R) falls on the A note. Since the A is found on the 5th fret of the E string, we'll play the scale pattern so that the root falls on that A on the 5th fret of the E string.

FINDING THE ROOT FOR MINOR KEY SIGNATURES

In minor keys, the overall pattern is the same, but the root location is different. This may not seem like a big change, but it totally changes the orientation of the notes and delivers a different sound.

In a minor key we'll use the first note found on the E string as our root note as seen in figure 10.

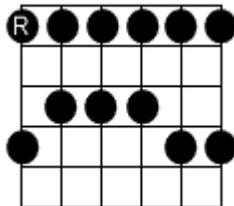


Fig. 10: The pentatonic minor scale pattern

If you've determined that the key signature is in Am then we'll do just what we did for the major keys. We'll apply the pattern so that the root note fall on the same note that the key signature is named after.

In our example of Am the root note also falls on the fifth fret of the E string, but the surrounding pattern will have totally changed.

Take a look at the scale pattern diagram in figure 10 again. Now forget the fancy name and look at the actual pattern. Remember that it is a movable pattern, so we can play this anywhere on the neck of the fretboard depending on what key we want to play in.

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As an example let's say we wanted to practice the scale pattern in the key of G (or Gm). First we would find our root note which would be the G note on the 3rd fret of the E string. We can either play the G note on the 3rd fret or an octave higher at the 15th fret.

Okay, so we've found our root note and are ready to play up and down the scale—each note in sequence from lowest note in the scale to the highest note in the scale and then back down again. In figure 11 you'll see this scale pattern tabbed out.

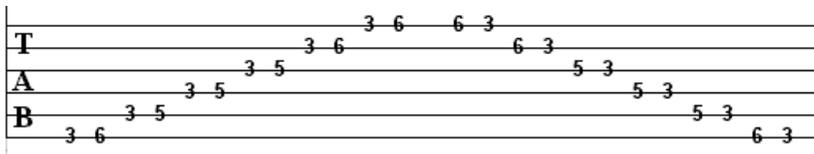


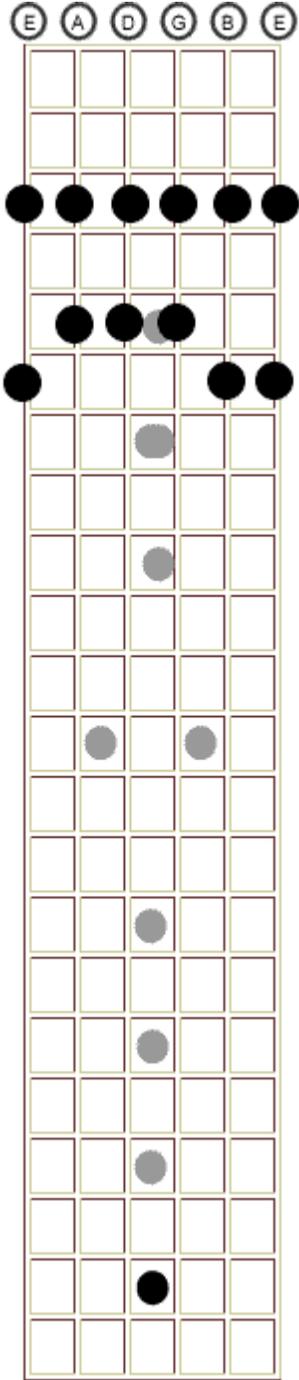
Fig. 11: Gm scale pattern in tab

See, if we know that the root note is on the 3rd fret, we know the rest of the notes in the scale pattern follow in sequence in the scale and then back down again as in figure 12.

Hold your horses! Can you name the *major* key the pattern tabbed out in figure 11 would double as? Go back and take a closer look at figure 9 you're having trouble figuring it out.

Here's a hint: the note on the 6th fret of the E string is B \flat (also know as A \sharp).

Fig. 12: The Gm scale pattern with the 3rd fret of the E string as the root note. The pattern can also be used for the key of B flat major.



PLAYING MINOR OVER MAJOR

Okay, now I'm really going to confuse you here.

Playing notes from the major pentatonic over a major key and playing notes from the minor pentatonic over a minor key will always be pleasing to the ear.

But, did you know that in a many cases you can use the *minor* pentatonic scale in a *major* key, too.

It's true. In blues music the minor pentatonic will almost always be used in *both* major and minor keys. That means that songs in A major and songs in A minor will both use the pentatonic minor.

You'll see this happen a lot in rock music as well. There's something about play the major pentatonic over a major key that makes things a little too “happy” for blues men and angst ridden rockers. Whereas the pentatonic minor provides a “bluesy” sound that is often sought in these genres.

Many times though, a song in a major key can have soloing switches from both the pentatonic major and minor scales. Players such as Eric Clapton often uses this method.

If you are playing a song in a minor key (Examples: Em, Am, Bm) then you'll want to stick with the minor pentatonic that matches the name of the key. In other words: you can't stick the pentatonic major in a song with a minor key. It's not a two way street. It simply doesn't work.

For example, if the song is in Em, you'll want to play from the E pentatonic minor.

Whereas a song in a major key, you can use either the pentatonic major or the pentatonic minor, or both to solo with. Whatever scale you choose to solo with will be your own decision. So how do you decide which scale you'll want to use?

Well first, you've got to know what each scale sounds like over a song in a major key. Follow the link below to hear an example:

<http://guitaralliance.com/playing-minor-over-major/>

Check out the link below for a real world example of how you can use both major and minor pentatonic in a major key. You'll find licks from Eric Clapton's solo in the song "Crossroads":

<http://guitaralliance.com/crossroads-by-cream/>

ALL THE PENTATONICS

Take a look at figure 13. It's our familiar pentatonic pattern in the open position. Can you determine what major key and what minor key that this scale pattern would be used for?

Get your cheat sheet out if you have to. Remember, you need to know the name of the notes on the E string.

Hint: We know that the open E string (the first note in the scale pattern) is an E...

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The figure shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a guitar scale pattern. The notes are G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. Below the staff is a fretboard diagram with strings labeled T, A, and B. The fret numbers are: T (0, 3, 0, 3), A (0, 2, 0, 2, 0, 2), and B (0, 3, 0, 2).

Fig. 13: What major and minor keys does the pattern above fit?

Hopefully you aren't just guessing at this point. You should have deduced that the note on the 3rd fret of the E string is a G. Therefore this pattern would work in both G major and the key of E minor.

Now, let's try another. Take a look at figure 14 and determine what major and minor key the pattern would fit:

The figure shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a guitar scale pattern. The notes are G#2, A#2, B#2, C#3, D#3, E#3, F#3, G#3, A#3, B#3, C#4, D#4, E#4, F#4, G#4. Below the staff is a fretboard diagram with strings labeled T, A, and B. The fret numbers are: T (1, 4, 1, 4), A (1, 3, 1, 3, 1, 3), and B (1, 4).

Fig. 14: What major and minor keys does this pattern fit?

You don't have to be Sherlock Holmes to figure it out. We are just one fret up from the G major/ E minor scale pattern, so that would make this one G# major and F minor (remember that there are no sharps or flats between E and F).

Now, let's take a look at the rest of the possible keys:

T
 A
 B

Fig. 15: The pattern above is for A major or F# minor

T
 A
 B

Fig. 16: A# major (same thing as Bb) or G minor

T
 A
 B

Fig. 17: The pattern above is for B major or G# minor

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T
 A
 B 5 8 5 7 5 7 5 7 5 8 5 8

Fig. 18: C major or A minor

T
 A
 B 6 9 6 8 6 8 6 8 6 9 6 9

Fig. 19: The pattern above is for C# major or A# minor

T
 A
 B 7 10 7 9 7 9 7 9 7 10 7 10

Fig. 20: This one is for the key D major or B minor

T 8 11
 A 8 10
 B 8 11

Fig. 21: Here we have D# major or C minor

T 9 12
 A 9 11
 B 9 12

Fig 22: The pattern above is for the key of E major or C# minor

T 10 13
 A 10 12
 B 10 13

Fig 23: This pattern works for F major or D minor

Lead Guitar In 30 Minutes (Or Less)

The figure shows a musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The scale pattern consists of three measures: the first measure contains the notes F#, G, A, B, C#, D; the second measure contains the notes E, F#, G, A, B, C#; and the third measure contains the notes D, E, F#, G, A, B. Below the staff is a guitar fretboard diagram with three strings labeled T (Treble), A (Middle), and B (Bass). The fret numbers for each string are: T: 11, 14; A: 11, 13; B: 11, 14.

Fig. 24: Here we have F# major or D# minor

The figure shows a musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The scale pattern consists of three measures: the first measure contains the notes G, A, B, C, D, E; the second measure contains the notes F#, G, A, B, C, D; and the third measure contains the notes E, F#, G, A, B, C. Below the staff is a guitar fretboard diagram with three strings labeled T (Treble), A (Middle), and B (Bass). The fret numbers for each string are: T: 12, 15; A: 12, 14; B: 12, 15.

Fig. 25: We have come full circle. This one is G major and E minor (same as figure 13- just an octave above)

SUMMARY

By taking one scale pattern and moving it around the fretboard we have discovered that we can play in a twelve major keys and all twelve minor keys.

We can take the notes found in the scale pattern to create our leads. Each note of the scale pattern will sound great in it's respective keys. You can create endless solos and leads with them by letting your ears be your guide.

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