

SHREDDED METAL

OPENING IT UP

Incorporating open strings into your solos can be a great way to, if you'll excuse the pun, open up your playing. They can be used to create repeating and spacious interval style-licks, and they can also help to facilitate new ways of thinking about scales. By having a good knowledge of scale theory, intervals, and scale fingerings, it's possible to come up with many unique and interesting sounding phrases using open strings. I've come up with licks to highlight some of the different and less common ways open strings can be used for metal soloing.

EXERCISE 1

This is a cool lick that involves octave jumps and a repeated open E pedal note over a Im-bV chord progression (a pedal point/note is a repeated or sustained tone). Using alternate picking throughout, it descends with the first three notes of E natural minor, then jumps down and plays the same notes an octave lower. This is then repeated using the last three notes of a Bb major scale. In between you are pedalling the open E string and this helps give you time to jump up and down.

Exercise 1 musical notation in 4/4 time, tempo 160. The piece is in E minor. It features a guitar solo with a repeated open E pedal note. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The solo is divided into three measures. The first measure is over an Em chord and contains a descending eighth-note run: G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3. The second measure is over a Bb chord and contains an ascending eighth-note run: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F#3, G3. The third measure is over an Em chord and contains a single note G3. The guitar tablature below the staff shows the fret numbers for each note. The first measure has frets 15, 14, 12, 0, 0, 0, 3, 2, 0, 0, 0, 0, 15, 14, 12, 0. The second measure has frets 18, 17, 15, 0, 0, 0, 6, 5, 3, 0, 0, 0, 18, 17, 15, 0. The third measure has fret 15. The picking pattern is indicated as $\square \vee \square \vee \text{sim.}$

EXERCISE 2

In the key of E minor, this is a fast alternate picked chromatic run up the neck using the open B string (the fifth in E minor). While it is common to use the open E root note, the open B is the fifth degree of E minor and will also work well since it's a strong chord tone. Using doubled-up triplets, the lick climbs chromatically in minor thirds while pedalling the open B string.

Exercise 2 musical notation in 4/4 time, tempo 160. The piece is in E minor. It features a fast alternate picked chromatic run up the neck using the open B string. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The solo is divided into three measures. The first measure is over an Em chord and contains a chromatic run of eighth notes: B3, C4, D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4. The second measure is over a Bb chord and contains a chromatic run of eighth notes: B3, C4, D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4. The third measure is over an Em chord and contains a single note B4. The guitar tablature below the staff shows the fret numbers for each note. The first measure has frets 8, 5, 0, 8, 5, 0, 9, 6, 0, 9, 6, 0, 10, 7, 0, 10, 7, 0, 11, 8, 0, 11, 8, 0. The second measure has frets 12, 9, 0, 12, 9, 0, 13, 10, 0, 13, 10, 0, 14, 11, 0, 14, 11, 0, 15, 12, 0, 15, 12, 0. The third measure has fret 15. The picking pattern is indicated as $\square \vee \square \vee \text{sim.}$

EXERCISE 3

As long as the key/scale you're in includes one of the open string notes (E-A-D-G-B), you can use that open string in your solo. To illustrate this, I've chosen a rather obscure scale and key – G Phrygian dominant. The notes of this scale are G-A \flat -B-C-D-E \flat -F. Since the B note belongs to the scale, you can use the open B string. B is also the third degree which is a chord tone. This lick uses a descending sequence while pedalling the open B in between each fretted note. Pick the first note and the rest can be performed with pull-offs. At the end it briefly uses the open G string.

♩ = 120 G

T
A
B

12 0 9 0 8 0 9 0 8 0 6 0 8 0 6 0 4 0 6 0 4 0 3 0 | 4 0 3 0 1 0 3 0 1 0 | 1 0 5

EXERCISE 4

To expand upon the previous point, Exercise 4 uses F# Mixolydian (1-2-3-4-5-6-b7). The notes of F# Mixolydian are F#-G#-A#-B-C#-D#-E. Notice that the seventh degree of the scale is E. Thus, the high E string can be used for this ascending lick involving hammer-ons and pull-offs. Since the seventh is not a strong chord tone, it's important to observe how it resolves to here to the root.

♩ = 160 F#

T
A
B

2 4 2 0 4 6 4 0 6 7 6 0 7 9 7 0 | 6 7 6 0 7 9 7 0 9 11 9 0 11 12 11 0 | 14

EXERCISE 5

It's also possible to use multiple open strings in a phrase, although once again it will depend on whether the open string notes belong to the key you're in. The notes of A natural minor are A-B-C-D-E-F-G. Therefore, all the open strings can be used (A-B-D-E-G) since they belong to the scale. In A minor, this lick uses hammer-ons/pull-offs to each open string as it ascends diagonally across the neck using minor pentatonic 'box' shapes.

♩ = 160 Am

T
A
B

3 5 3 0 3 5 3 0 2 5 2 0 5 7 5 0 | 5 7 5 0 7 9 7 0 8 10 8 0 8 10 8 0 | 10

EXERCISE 6

For something a bit different, this last lick has a country/jazz feel. It uses the jazz concept of lower and upper neighbour tones (where you approach a chord tone by playing a chromatic note below and above it). Here, the chromatic tones are fretted, while the chord tones (1-b3-5) are open strings. The use of open strings creates a different sound than if you just fretted the notes and this also gives it a country vibe.

♩ = 120 Em

T
A
B

6 0 4 0 5 0 3 0 6 0 4 0 6 0 4 0 | 6 0 4 0 5 0 3 0 0

□ V □ V *sim.*

Hopefully these licks inspire you to try some open string ideas of your own.