

3 LEGATO

Legato is a flashy Italian word for 'smoothly', which should give you some clue as to what kind of sound it describes. Picking every note gives a precise, machine-gun-like effect which sometimes sounds a bit too harsh and spiky to do justice to the melody you're playing. The best way of avoiding this is by tackling more notes with hammer-ons and pull-offs, and that's basically what legato playing is all about.

I should point out that the concept of legato doesn't apply only to guitar players; it's a broad musical term, and people who play other instruments use different approaches to achieve the same basic effect. A sax player, for instance, would achieve a legato effect by fingering a number of different notes in succession but sounding all of them with one long breath into the mouthpiece. A violinist would approximate the same thing by performing one long, smooth bow movement while fingering the various notes rather than bowing down for one note, up for the next and so on (the classic sawing motion you see string players indulging in when they get carried away). Your mission in this chapter is to work on emulating that flowing sound.

If you're looking for some specific reference points, think of how Joe Satriani sounds when he plays lots of notes, then think of Steve Morse's sound when he does the same. Joe's playing generally has a smooth, slippery feel to it, whereas Steve's tends to have more attack and a spikier sound. They're obviously both stunning players, so please don't think I'm trying to suggest that one approach is more effective than the other or anything like that, but their contrasting playing styles serve to illustrate how the balance of picked

and legato notes can have a huge effect on the overall sound of your own playing.

Now let's take a moment to look at how legato technique works. Of the two left-hand techniques involved here, the easiest is surely the *hammer-on*. As the name suggests, this involves sounding a note by hammering a fretting-hand fingertip onto the string. Since you're not picking the string, the volume of the resulting note has to be controlled by the degree of force invested in the hammering motion. The more you work on it, the easier you'll find it to get loud, confident-sounding hammered notes. Just bear in mind that you should aim to keep the actual movement of your fingers to a minimum. At first, it might seem easier to achieve volume by bringing your finger back, well away from the fingerboard, and taking a swing at the string from a distance, but this approach will slow you down in the long run, not to mention increase the risk of misfretting the occasional note. It's much better to focus the same amount of force into a smaller, more precise movement. If you've read *Creative Guitar 1* (and I strongly urge you to do so), you'll remember the analogy with Bruce Lee's 'one-inch punch'. Well, this is similar. Try stationing each of your fingers just a few millimetres from the strings and then, as you hammer notes, imagine that you're actually trying to push the strings *through* the fretboard. This might feel a little tense and overly forceful for a while, but it's a good aid in developing an efficient fretting-hand position. Once this starts to feel natural, your hand will be able to relax a lot more.

There are two basic kinds of hammer-on: the easier

are fairly straight, which means that they can splay out more. (Of course, your fingers need to be at least slightly curved or you won't get a convincing snap when you attempt a pull-off.)

An informative if narcissistic experiment is to watch your fretting hand in a mirror. Do your fingers look parallel to the frets or are they at an angle? You'll get the maximum stretching potential when your middle and ring fingers are parallel to the frets and the other two are spread out more diagonally. Naturally, this healthy hand position will degenerate into the infamous baseball-bat grip as soon as you start playing blues licks and bending strings, and that's absolutely fine, but whenever you need to play a stretchy legato passage,

adopting the more classical hand position outlined above will help you a lot.

If you're having trouble with your legato technique, remember that your fingers will learn to find pretty much anything easy once they've gone through the basic motions enough times.

Well, that's probably enough general stuff. Now let's try some examples. Example 3.1 is has an A Aeolian fingering, and you should pick the first note on each string and hammer the remaining two, aiming as always for even timing and dynamics. Meanwhile, Example 3.2 is the corresponding descending pattern, requiring you to pick the first note on each string and pull off to the others.

Example 3.1

Example 3.3

Example 3.3 shows a guitar scale exercise in 4/4 time. The treble clef staff features a melodic line with triplets of eighth notes. The bass clef staff shows the corresponding fretting with fingerings: 8-5-7, 8-5-7, 9-5-7, 9-5-7, 10-6-8, 10-7-8, and 10.

So far, you've been playing the scale in triplets, which feels nice and convenient because it means that there's a strong beat there whenever you have to change strings. Example 3.4, however, groups the notes of Examples

3.1 and 3.2 in 16th notes, the idea being to accent the first note of each beat rather than the first note on each string. This really hones your timing and makes accenting a hammered or pulled note an interesting challenge.

Example 3.4

Example 3.4 shows a guitar scale exercise in 4/4 time. The treble clef staff features a melodic line with 16th notes and accents. The bass clef staff shows the corresponding fretting with fingerings: 5-7-8, 5-7-8, 5-7-9, 5-7-9, 6-8-10, 8-7, 10-8-6, 9-7-5, 9-7-5, 8-7-5, and 8-7.

I've applied the legato treatment to straight scale fingerings, but now let's try it out on some other old favourites. Example 3.5 ascends in diatonic thirds, and the idea is to use pull-offs wherever possible. This gives

rise to some interesting phrasing, as the picked notes tend to fall a 16th note before or after the beat. You might find this reminiscent of many guitarists' phrasing, particularly those from the crazy world of bebop.

Example 3.5

Example 3.5 shows a guitar scale exercise in 4/4 time. The treble clef staff features a melodic line with diatonic thirds. The bass clef staff shows the corresponding fretting with fingerings: 5-8-7, 5-8, 7-5-8, 7-5-8, 7-5-9, 7-5, 9-7-5, 9, 7-5-9, 7-5, 6-9, 8-6-10, 8-7, and 10.

Example 3.6 features that same A Aeolian fingering, but this time it's grouped in ascending fours. Here, you're picking the first note on each string and also any note that falls on a main beat:

Example 3.6

Example 3.6 shows a guitar scale in 4/4 time. The treble clef staff shows a melodic line with eighth notes. The bass clef staff shows the corresponding fretboard positions with fingerings (5, 7, 8) and string numbers (E, B, G, D, A, E).

Now let's go back to that one-string-at-a-time approach. You can apply a pattern of more than three notes to each string so that your chosen scale shape doesn't run out as quickly. You might think of Example 3.7 as a 3–1–2–3–2–1 configuration, and it's typical of the legato runs you might hear in Richie Kotzen's playing:

Example 3.7

Example 3.7 shows a guitar scale in 4/4 time. The treble clef staff shows a melodic line with eighth notes. The bass clef staff shows the corresponding fretboard positions with fingerings (8, 5, 7, 8, 7, 5) and string numbers (E, B, G, D, A, E).

Wasn't that fun? Example 3.8 below shows you the starting points for some variations on this idea. Try applying each different pattern in turn to the entire scale fingering:

Example 3.8

Example 3.8 shows a guitar scale in 4/4 time. The treble clef staff shows a melodic line with eighth notes. The bass clef staff shows the corresponding fretboard positions with fingerings (5, 8, 7, 8) and string numbers (E, B, G, D, A, E).

One way of lightening the workload here is by working on ideas that move up the neck using only a string or two. Example 3.16 shows how you could join up two adjacent positions, moving between them using slides.

Slides have the same kind of fluidity to them as hammered and pulled-off notes, so this is an effective combination of techniques. You'll probably recognise some Satriani-esque traits in here:

Example 3.16

As with the seven-note groups you encountered earlier in the book, these groups of five are best tackled by targeting the first note in each beat and trusting the other notes to distribute themselves accordingly. In this exercise, you're simply alternating between two adjacent scale shapes, but you could

just as easily work your way up the whole neck using all of the shapes.

Example 3.17 is a variation on Example 3.16 with the addition of a few notes to make the pattern fit into a more conventional sextuplet rhythm. Some of the slides occur in more unusual places this time:

Example 3.17

Next, Example 3.18 brings in a second string, so you'll probably want to start by picking the first note on each. When you're comfortable with this, you could try hammering the first B-string note and picking only the

first note on the E string. The logical extension of this is not to pick any notes at all, but I suspect you'll find that the index-finger note starting each E-string sequence is a lot harder to hammer on from nowhere.

Example 3.18

Example 3.18 is a guitar exercise in 4/4 time. The staff shows a melodic line with glissandos (gliss) and a corresponding fretboard diagram below. The fretboard diagram includes fingerings: 5, 7, 8, 7, 5, 8, 6, 5, 6, 8, 10, 7, 8, 10, 8, 7. A dashed line indicates the 8th fret position (8va).

Example 3.19 uses the same principle, but this time a lot more of the neck is covered for a monster A minor lick:

Example 3.19

Example 3.19 is a guitar exercise in 4/4 time. The staff shows a melodic line with glissandos (gliss) and a corresponding fretboard diagram below. The fretboard diagram includes fingerings: 5, 7, 8, 7, 5, 8, 6, 5, 6, 8, 10, 7, 8, 10, 8, 7, 8, 10, 12, 10, 8, 12, 10, 8, 10, 12, 13, 10, 12, 13, 12, 10. A dashed line indicates the 8th fret position (8va).

The next two examples focus on your hammering-on-from-nowhere skills. If you follow the picking and hammering directions accurately, you'll soon get the

hang of things. These exercises sound pleasantly rhythmic at high speeds because the picked notes always occur at the start of a beat:

Example 3.20

Example 3.21

Example 3.22 takes things a little further. Getting used to this way of playing will make you more comfortable when you come to try some of the ideas in the following chapter, 'Tapping'. If your

normal fretting hand is self-sufficient, you can keep your tapping hand positioned over the fretboard, ready to add some extra-high notes whenever the fancy takes you.

Example 3.22

This final example is a tip of the hat to Joe Satriani's 'Power Cosmic'/'The Mystical Potato-Head Groove Thing' arpeggio. In this lick, nearly every note is hammered onto a new string, so you have to be extra

careful with your muting. (As I mentioned earlier, you might find it helpful to cheat by using your right hand to grasp the neck between the nut and your picking hand, thus keeping the open strings in check.)

Example 3.23

The musical score for Example 3.23 is written for a six-string guitar in 4/4 time. The notation includes a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The score is divided into four measures, each containing a series of notes and fret numbers. The first measure starts with a glissando (gliss) marking over the first four notes, which are fretted at 1, 2, 4, and 1. The second measure starts with a glissando marking over the first four notes, which are fretted at 4, 2, 1, and 4. The third measure starts with a glissando marking over the first four notes, which are fretted at 2, 1, 4, and 2. The fourth measure starts with a glissando marking over the first four notes, which are fretted at 1, 2, 4, and 1. The score also includes a series of fret numbers (5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 8, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 8) and a series of 'H' markings (H H H H H H H H H H H H H H H H) indicating harmonic or natural harmonics. The guitar layout shows the strings E, B, G, D, A, E from top to bottom, with fret numbers 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 8, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 8 indicated below the strings.

Hours of fun!