

September '87: SMART FINGERS

Finger exercises can be helpful in many ways. They are not only good for warming up, but also for introducing new techniques into your vocabulary. Diversification is paramount. The more you know, the better. Here is an exercise I call "The Diminished Chord Relay." It involves playing seven diminished chords in rapid succession up and down the fretboard. It's a veritable finger-twister.

First memorize the chord voicings in Ex. 1. Strum #1 once, making sure it sounds good, with no buzzy noises and no open strings. Then with your strumming hand, mute the strings. While the strings are muted, finger chord #2. Once you have it, strum it just as you did the first chord. Move on to #3, #4, and then back to #3, #2 and finally #1, always using the same strum-mute-switch routine. After you've got that down, repeat the exercise a half step (one fret) higher. Be sure to maintain the same intervallic relationship between each of the chords and remember to start out slowly and develop coordination first. It's quality before speed every time.

For variation, try the approach as shown in Ex. 2. Arpeggiate each chord with muted strings. One picking style that works well in this situation is down-up-up-up.

The Diminished Chord Relay is an excellent exercise for developing "smart fingers," as long as it remains challenging to your technique. So when it becomes easy, make it difficult. If it gets boring, make it interesting. And don't forget to listen to the *sound* of the chords. Used creatively, diminished chords can do what no other chords can. Experiment, and find out what that is.

Ex. 1

Ex. 1 shows four diminished chords labeled #1, #2, #3, and #4. Each chord is represented by a treble clef staff and a corresponding TAB staff below it. The chords are: #1 (Bb7b9), #2 (Cb7b9), #3 (Db7b9), and #4 (Eb7b9). The TAB staves show the fret numbers for each string (1-6).

Ex. 2

Ex. 2 shows an arpeggiated sequence of the four diminished chords from Ex. 1. The notation includes a treble clef staff and a corresponding TAB staff. The sequence is: #1, #2, #3, #4, #3, #2, #1. The TAB staff shows the fret numbers for each string (1-6) and includes a "P.M." (palm mute) instruction.