

# BREAK SHOW

## EXCESS



TAPPING

STEVE VAI'S  
"30-HOUR PATH  
TO VIRTUOSO  
ENLIGHTENMENT"



SCALES



JAMMING

OR  
HOW TO  
DESTROY YOUR  
POP CAREER  
IN ONE  
EASY LESSON



SIGHT READING



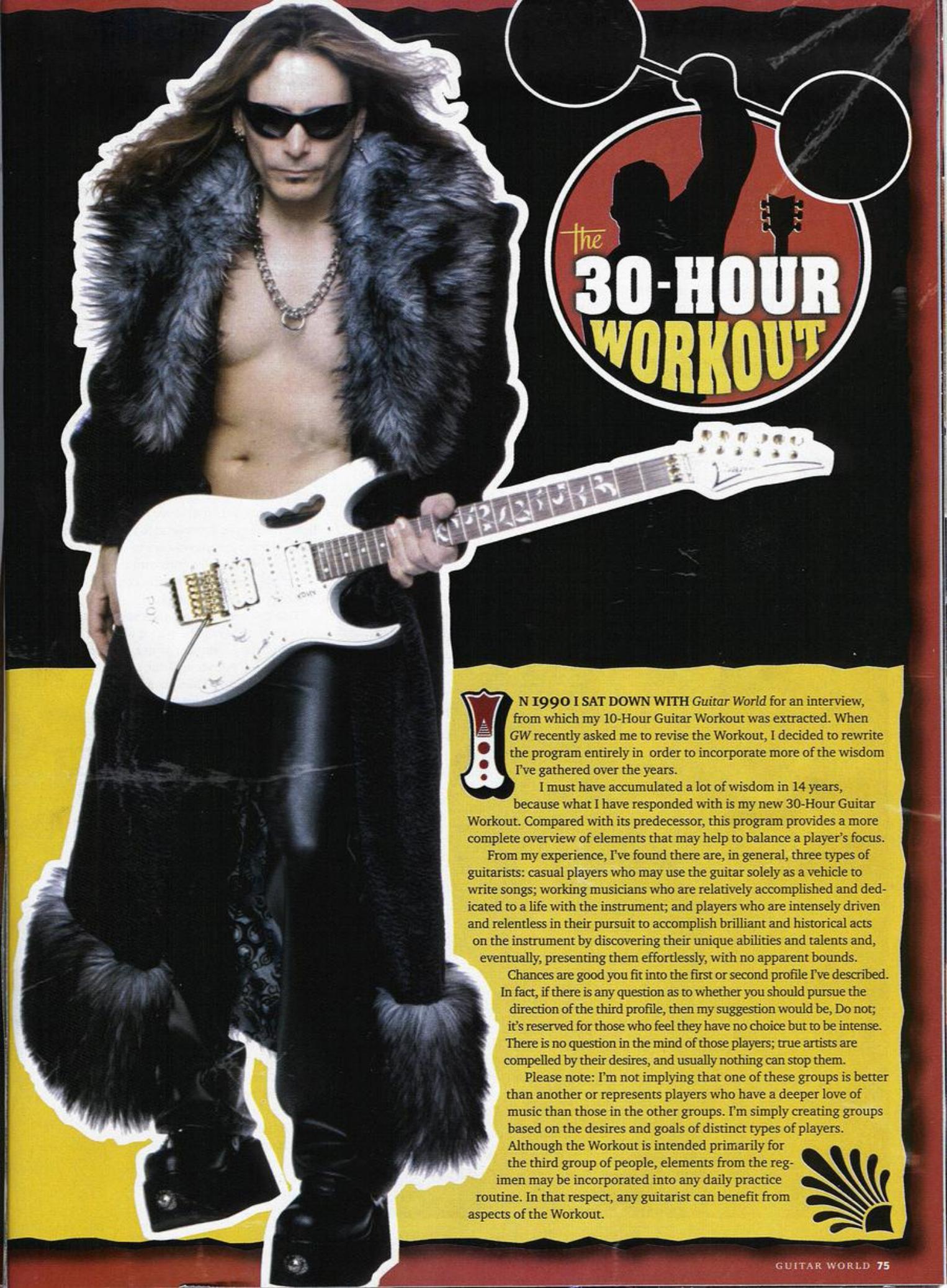
HAMMER-ONS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
NEIL ZLOZOWER



SWEEEPING





# The **30-HOUR WORKOUT**



**N**I 1990 I SAT DOWN WITH *Guitar World* for an interview, from which my 10-Hour Guitar Workout was extracted. When *GW* recently asked me to revise the Workout, I decided to rewrite the program entirely in order to incorporate more of the wisdom I've gathered over the years.

I must have accumulated a lot of wisdom in 14 years, because what I have responded with is my new 30-Hour Guitar Workout. Compared with its predecessor, this program provides a more complete overview of elements that may help to balance a player's focus.

From my experience, I've found there are, in general, three types of guitarists: casual players who may use the guitar solely as a vehicle to write songs; working musicians who are relatively accomplished and dedicated to a life with the instrument; and players who are intensely driven and relentless in their pursuit to accomplish brilliant and historical acts on the instrument by discovering their unique abilities and talents and, eventually, presenting them effortlessly, with no apparent bounds.

Chances are good you fit into the first or second profile I've described. In fact, if there is any question as to whether you should pursue the direction of the third profile, then my suggestion would be, Do not; it's reserved for those who feel they have no choice but to be intense. There is no question in the mind of those players; true artists are compelled by their desires, and usually nothing can stop them.

Please note: I'm not implying that one of these groups is better than another or represents players who have a deeper love of music than those in the other groups. I'm simply creating groups based on the desires and goals of distinct types of players. Although the Workout is intended primarily for the third group of people, elements from the regimen may be incorporated into any daily practice routine. In that respect, any guitarist can benefit from aspects of the Workout.

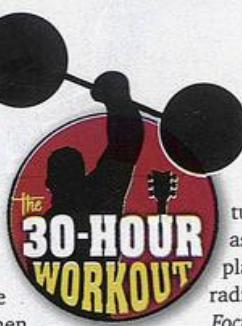


## WORKOUT PHILOSOPHY

I've always believed that everyone has the ability to discover and cultivate his or her own unique voice on an instrument; doing so requires that one listen to one's inner voice and then find the courage to express it. To that end, the Workout is not meant to steer students into sounding like someone else but to equip them with some of the tools that are essential to discovering their own voice, while simultaneously helping them become thoroughly balanced musical beings.

I should note that this program is geared for people that love the challenge of a disciplined curriculum and truly want to master the instrument. The concept behind doing so is easy: start by playing something—a bend, a riff, a scale, a song—very slowly; if you make a mistake, start over; do this over and over, until you can play it flawlessly—and I do mean *flawlessly*—many times in a row. Next, gradually increase the tempo. Eventually you'll be flailing about like a madman.

This doesn't necessarily mean you will become a great musician or songwriter. Those are talents that can't be taught; you're either born with them or need to discover them within yourself.



## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

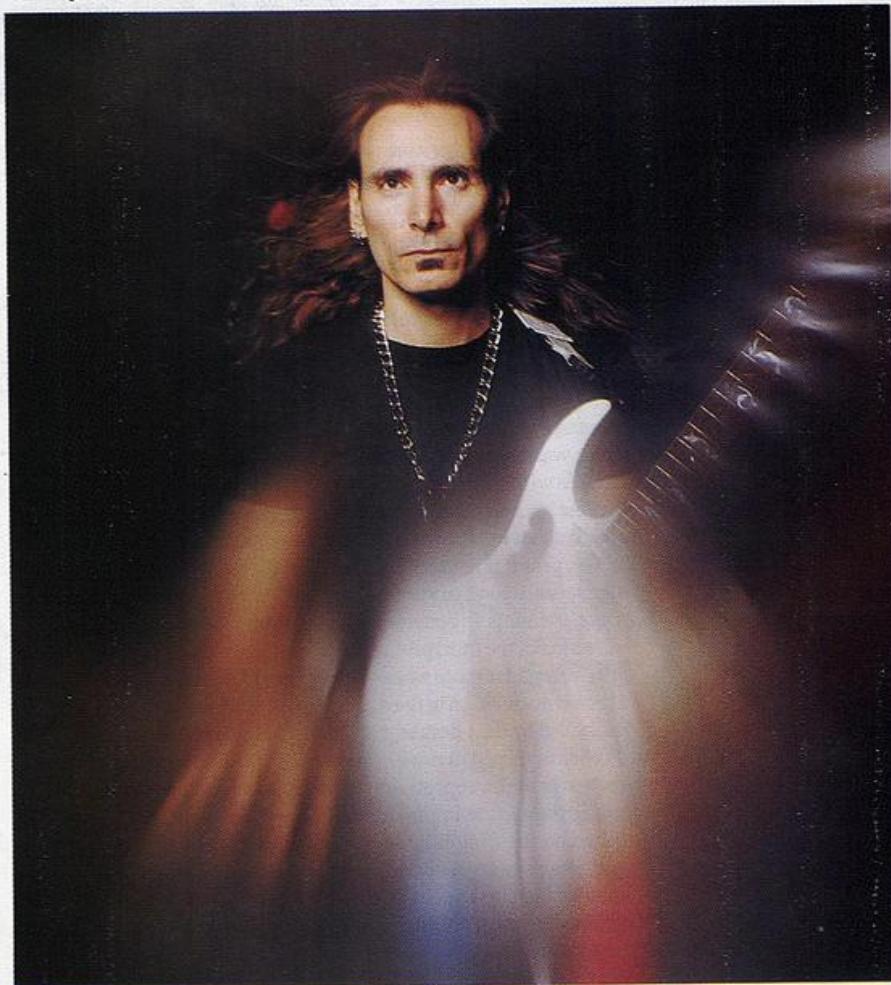
*Tune your guitar.* Never play out of tune unless for a desired effect, such as working on a quartetone scale...or playing alternative rock music for pop radio consumption.

*Focus.* This is the most important element in this program. The way you mentally approach this or any other exercise is more important than putting in the hours and going through the motions. It is tremendously important that you gear up mentally for practice, gig, rehearsal, songwriting—whatever you're going to do. Understand that the attitude and frame of mind you have when entering into a focused endeavor is one of the few things you do have within your power. Remember: *It's all in the mind!* You can basically convince yourself of anything and make it happen.

## CATEGORIES

I've divided the 30-Hour Workout into eight categories:

1. Exercises
2. Scales
3. Chords
4. Ear training
5. Sight-reading
6. Composing/songwriting



7. Music theories

8. Jamming

In addition, I've arranged these categories into three 10-hour-per-day sessions. Bear in mind that the amount of time and focus you put into the program will be directly reflected in your playing.

I feel these categories provide a good mix of the various elements that go into becoming a thoroughly rounded musician. Note, however, that I will only be outlining concepts here; it's up to you to research and discover more on your own. There are plenty of instructional books, CDs and DVDs on the market, and many schools offer home-study courses that teach you all types of finger exercises, chords, scales, theory and so on. In addition, guitar-related information is plentiful on the internet. Of course, I encourage you to explore other categories, ideas and concepts not mentioned here. That's one of the great things about playing the guitar—there are essentially no rules, and a person's ability to be unique is only limited by their courage and imagination.

Although the Workout is geared toward a rock style of playing, you may want to substitute various elements that are more appropriate for the style of music you're interested in. If you decide you don't want to learn conventional things, you may choose to replace one or more of these categories with things that you're more comfortable with. You'll have to come up with them, though.

One last note: When I was a young practicing musician, I would keep a log of all the time I spent on the instrument, with a specific breakdown of everything I did. I guess I was just anal that way. While this approach worked for me, it may not be for everybody. It does, however, help you to chart your progress.

## HOURS 1, 11 AND 21 FINGER EXERCISES

Finger exercises are great for developing dexterity and control. When performing them, pace yourself with a metronome or drum machine and start very slowly. It might help to imagine how you want the notes to sound, then perform them over and over until they sound exactly the way you hear them in your head. I used to do this, and it's a great way to gain control over your playing. I would also experiment with different pick positions, dynamics, and so on. Whatever you do, be sure to focus on every single note you play. I can't stress enough the importance of this.

There are literally thousands of finger exercises, and they can all help you achieve different objectives. In this section, I'll explain the following categories of finger exercises:

- Linear
- Angular
- Hammer-ons and Pull-offs
- Alternate Fingers
- Tapping
- Sweeping
- Multiple Picking



## Angular/Economy Picking Exercises

**FIGURE 9**

**FIGURE 10**

picking: □ V □ V--- □ V----- □ V----- □ V----- □ V--- □ V--- □

**T 4**

**A 4**

**B 4**

fret-hand  
fingering: 4 3 4 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 1 2 1

V □ V--- □ V----- □ V----- □ V----- □ V--- □ V--- □ V

4 3 4 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 1 2 1

**FIGURE 11**

picking: □ V □ V---1 □ V----- □ V----- □ V---1 □ V---1

**T** 4  
**A** 4  
**B** 4

fret-hand fingering: 4 2 4 3 2 4 1 3 2 4 1 3 2 4 1 3 2 4 1 3 2 1 3 1

V □ V---1 □ V----- V □----- V □----- V □----- V □----- V

4 2 4 3 2 4 1 3 2 4 1 3 2 4 1 3 2 4 1 3 2 1 3 1

## Legato Exercises

**FIGURE 12**

**FIGURE 14**

**FIGURE 16**

(repeat for one minute)

**FIGURE 13**

**FIGURE 15**

**FIGURE 17**

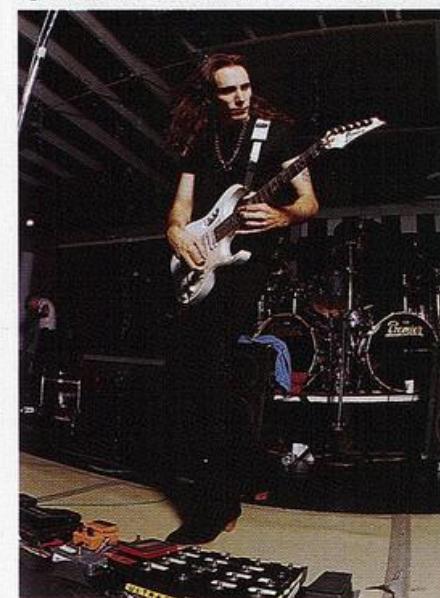
pattern, in this case 4-3-2-1, and work it across the strings in a single position, assigning one finger per string and using *sweep* or *economy picking* (consecutive downstrokes or upstrokes on adjacent strings) wherever possible. I've included picking strokes above the tablature in this exercise to guide you. Each sweep (indicated by an upstroke or downstroke symbol followed by a broken horizontal line and a bracket) should be performed as a single pick stroke, with the pick being dragged across the strings in a continuous movement. Since there are only three groups of four adjacent strings (1-4, 2-5 and 3-6), the entire angular pattern doesn't manifest itself until it's played on one of these string groups.

When performing **FIGURE 9**, I find it helpful to visualize three imaginary strings on either side of the neck, as this provides a point of reference for fingering the first six and last six notes of this exercise. With this approach, the progression of notes seems very natural. When I fret the first note (F) with my index finger, I'm thinking in terms of the complete 4-3-2-1 pattern, with the other three fingers (4-3-2) being on the imaginary strings. Thus, only the first finger is used. As the pattern moves across the strings, all four fingers are eventually brought into play. Likewise, as you run out of strings in bar 3, all fingers but the fourth move off the neck onto imaginary strings.

**FIGURE 10** is an angular exercise based on a 1-2-3-4 fingering pattern. Again, I've included picking strokes and fret-hand fingerings above and below the tablature to guide you.

Using the “imaginary strings” approach should make it a little easier to devise exercises based on other fingering patterns. For example, an angular exercise based on a 1-3-2-4 fingering pattern would begin on the high E string and go 4, 2-4, 3-2-4, 1-3-2-4, as demonstrated in **FIGURE 11**.

Allocate the first 30 minutes of your practice session to linear exercises and the next 30 minutes to angular exercises. Try to come up with your own exercises that suit your



In addition, read music for instruments other than guitar, such as the clarinet, flute and piano. Also, get a jazz "fake" book and read through the chord changes.

## HOURS 6, 16 AND 26 WRITING MUSIC

Writing songs or instrumental pieces is one of the most rewarding things about being a musician. There are many ways you can go about building a catalog of original material. When I was a high school freshman I had an incredible music theory teacher named Bill Westcott. He was tough! One of my assignments was to come in every day with a newly written piece of original music that he could play on the piano. It had to be completely notated and not just show chord symbols and melody, and it had to be written specifically for the piano. Having him play the music for me was not only a treat but tremendously educational.

If you're interested in learning how to notate music properly, the best reference book on the subject is *Music Notation*, by Gardner Read. It's an exceptional book, and it outlines all the essential dos and don'ts. You may be able to find it by calling the bookstore at Berklee College of Music in Boston.

Here are some recommendations for songwriting/composing:

- Turn on a tape recorder and bang out

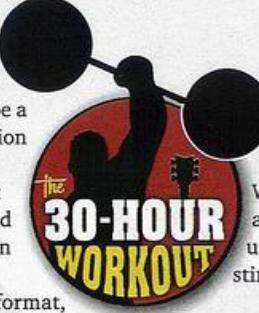
your idea. I can't tell you how important this is if you want to be a songwriter. Moments of inspiration are sometimes few and far between, and they can hit you at the most unlikely times. You need to be ready to capture them when they present themselves.

- Write songs in lead sheet format, with a melody on the staff and chord changes written above the melody. There are books, such as *Music Notation*, that outline the limitations and proper notation for various instruments of the orchestra as well as more unconventional instruments. Get some manuscript or score paper and try composing music for instruments other than the guitar. Study the range, tone, timbre, limitations and notation for one instrument at a time, be it violin, harp or harmonica played through a Marshall stack (or a Carvin Legacy stack).

- Find another musician that you can "gel with" as a cowriter. Ideally, he or she may be someone who possesses certain skills that you lack. If you have the right chemistry, creating music with another person can be a very rewarding experience.

- While lying in bed at night, try to make up an endless melody that contains a variety of instruments. Doing this is truly liberating, because you're creating instantaneously, and there are no limitations to where you can go or what it can sound like.

Remember that people write songs based on anything from events in their life to social commentary to fantasy. When a person taps into that creative portion of their brain, they usually gravitate to things that stimulate them the most.



## HOURS 7, 17 AND 27 MUSIC THEORY

I've always been fascinated by music theory. Although knowledge of it is not a prerequisite for being a great guitar player or musician, I feel that if you're going to learn to speak a language, it helps to know how to read and write it. Many people are intimidated by theory, but it's not that difficult, really; the system is actually very logical and straightforward. What confuses a lot of people, I think, is having to struggle with thinking in unfamiliar keys, such as A flat or F sharp.

Bill Westcott taught me music theory in high school, but it wasn't until I took guitar lessons from Joe Satriani that I learned how to apply a lot of it to my instrument. There are many books that teach music theory basics, including notation, time signatures, key signatures, the circle of fifths, chord theory and modes. I recommend that you take everything you learn in a theory book and figure

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## Sweep Picking Exercises

FIGURE 21

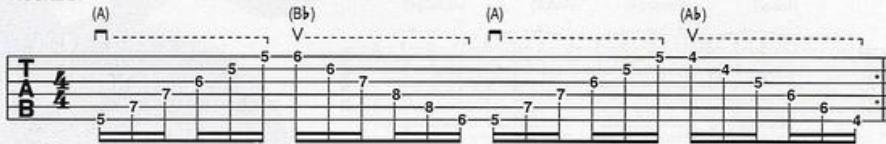


FIGURE 22



FIGURE 23



## Scale Exercises

FIGURE 24 The seven modes of the G major scale (G A B C D E F#)

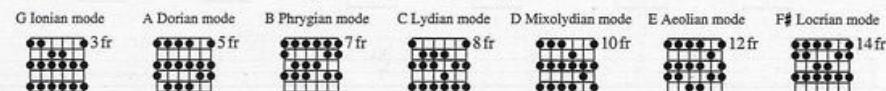


FIGURE 25 G major scale in thirds

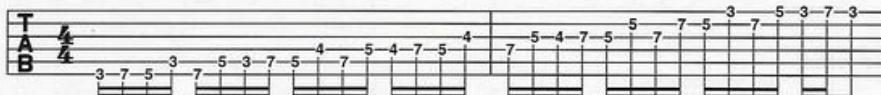


FIGURE 26 G major scale in fourths



FIGURE 27 G major scale in fifths



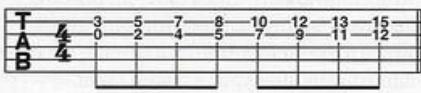
FIGURE 28 G major scale in thirds up the neck



FIGURE 29 G major scale in fourths up the neck



FIGURE 30 G major scale in fifths up the neck



- Double picking (picking each note twice)
- Triple picking (... three times)
- Quadruple picking (... four times)
- Quintuple picking (... five times)

or atmosphere it creates.

Sing the notes you play to help internalize the tonality of the scale, and try to paint a mental picture of what the scale's tonality sounds like to you. This is one of the things you might draw upon when you go to write or improvise music. Beware, however, that when the time comes to take an improvised solo and all you do is flail up and down a scale pattern because you know the notes

will work with the chord, you'll most likely sound like an idiot.

Learn and play as many scales as you can, in every key and position, in one octave, two octaves or three octaves. Start from any note on the low E string, then the A string, etc. Make sure you play each scale forward and backward (ascending and descending).

**FIGURE 24** illustrates fretboard patterns for the G major scale (G A B C D E F#) and its *seven relative modes*, all of which comprise the same seven notes. The only difference in each case is the orientation of the notes around a different tonal center, or root.

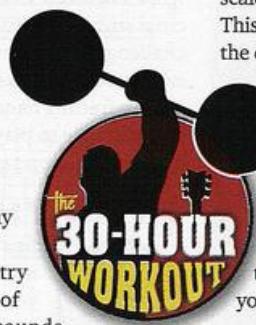
Practice any given scale/mode scale slowly at first and make sure it's perfect. If you make a mistake, start over. Gradually increase the tempo as you complete a cycle. Listen carefully to each note and focus on tone. Before moving to a faster speed, you should be able to run a scale up and down without fudging and notes. Don't cheat yourself! I find it beneficial to watch my fingers in the mirror and try to get them to move gracefully, elegantly, effortlessly or in whatever way looks and feels good.

There are many things you can do with a scale and mode other than just run it across the fretboard. For example, you can play it in intervals, either melodically, as demonstrated in **FIGURES 25-27**, or up and down the neck on two strings at the same time, as depicted in **FIGURES 28-30**. These first three exercises are great for building technique in both hands, while the second three help you learn the scale on each string and gain *ear-training wisdom* by hearing it played in harmony. To get twice the mileage out of these patterns, be sure to run them in reverse order as well.

There are countless variations on these kinds of melodic and harmonic interval patterns that you can practice. For example, you could take the pattern of ascending diatonic fifths from **FIGURE 27** and switch the order of every other pair of notes to create a different and more interesting melodic contour, as demonstrated in **FIGURE 31**. Considering all the different scales, modes, keys, positions, intervals and melodic patterns, the possibilities are immense.

It's also helpful to record yourself practicing scales and then listen critically to your efforts. This will enable you to mold your playing in the direction you want. (I never wanted to sound too polished, and I actually worked on trying to sound gritty and on-the-edge.)

This is obviously a lot to think about when practicing a simple scale, but you don't have to do it all at once. Focus on different elements individually. Eventually they will merge and become part of your second nature.



## PENTATONIC AND BLUES SCALES

The five-note *minor pentatonic scale* and its derivative, the six-note *minor blues scale*, form the foundation of the vocabulary of rock lead guitar playing. The minor pentatonic scale is

## HOURS 2, 12 AND 22 SCALES

Practicing scales has many benefits, but the main focus of this activity should be on memorizing the sound of a scale and the mood

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cleaner with every strum; it will get better.

Next, listen carefully to the groove and try to stay locked in with it. You will not be able to do so unless you can play the material cleanly or without thinking about the changes. In addition, you must be able to separate yourself a bit from what you're doing and just listen to the beat. By doing this while you're playing, you can really focus on locking in with a drummer. Once you're locked in, keep trying to lock tighter and tighter.

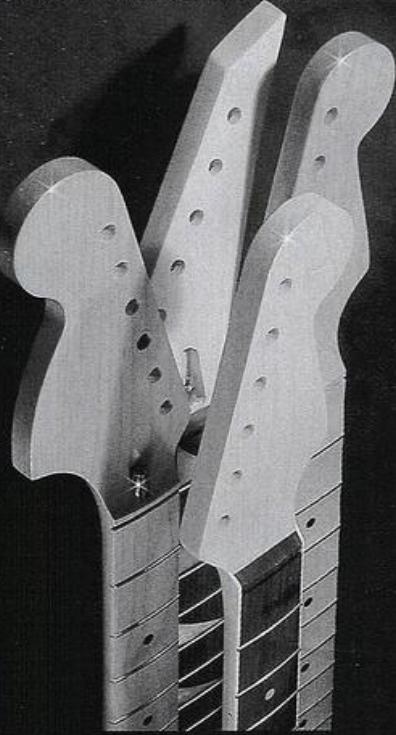
You'll know when you're locked in with the groove because it will start to feel really good. Once you get to this point, you can then experiment by making the groove sound stiff and mechanical, and loose and warm. You can also try to play in front of the beat, behind the beat and so on.

When you're playing along to a metronome or a drum machine, try to "bury" the click track. By this I mean get right on the beat; when you do, the click will sound as if it's disappeared, since your attacks will be so "right on" that they'll cover the clicks. Being able to lock with the beat and groove is one of the most rewarding feelings one can experience as a musician. It's better than the party after the show...unless, of course, you're in Amsterdam.

There are many types of grooves to fool around with (straight rock, r&b, reggae, ska, blues shuffle and so on), but before you do, make sure you can get through them cleanly and lock into them. Play each across a full range of tempos, from very slow to very fast.

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## IMPROVISATION

It's always cool to create your own unique chord library. The following techniques can help:

- Play a conventional or familiar chord, then start alternating one note at a time by moving it up or down a fret. When you come across a chord you like, add it to your personal chord library.

- Take numbers from a series (a telephone number, for instance) and use them as scale degrees for a chord.

- Think of an emotion, a color or a scene from a movie and fool around with the notes in a chord until it sounds like what you're thinking of.

- Use open strings, wide finger stretches, natural harmonics, notes fretted with the fingers on the picking hand and so on. Experiment with all these things to come up with unique chords.

## HOURS 4, 14 AND 24 EAR TRAINING

If you toss aside everything else in this Workout, keep this section. Training your ears is the most important practice in making the crucial connection between your imagination and your fingers. Most people spend very little time developing their ears, but the payoffs from doing so are extraordinary. Some people are born with a natural ear for music, while others need to work on it.

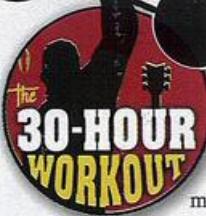
It can be tedious and time consuming, but it's very rewarding. The following are some exercises for training your ears.

- Improvise and sing what you play. A good voice isn't necessary, but you do need to get the pitches accurate. If you can't sing the notes perfectly in pitch, work on it until you can.

- Sing a note and then try to play it by using the previous note as a reference. This is a challenging drill that takes a tremendous amount of discipline. Just imagine, though, how much your ears will improve when you can do this.

- Sing a harmonic to notes you're





playing. Start with something simple, like a fifth, then move to a fourth, a major third, a minor third, a major sixth and so on, until you're able to sing a harmony part (like a minor second) perfectly to an improvised atonal solo.

Understand that this ability could take years to develop.

- Memorize the sound of different intervals. One way to do this is to record yourself playing an interval and, after a few seconds of silence, speaking its name. Fill up a one-hour tape in this way, then listen back and try to name each interval in the silence that follows

the notes. You'll know if you're right when your voice comes in and names it properly.

- Perform this last exercise with chords. Record yourself slowly plucking each note of a chord, and allow a few seconds of space between the notes. After a moment of silence, announce the chord and its component intervals.
- Transcribe everything, from simple guitar solos to complex jazz sax solos.
- Carry manuscript paper with you, and when you have some free time away from your instrument, write melodies using only your ears to guide you.
- Carry songbooks with you and sing the melodies.
- Make up your own ear-training exercises and keep a log of your progress.

## HOURS 5, 15 AND 25

### READING MUSIC

There are a lot of advantages to reading music. Some of these are:

- Learning to play songs you otherwise wouldn't have been able to play
- Being able to transcribe your compositions

- Expanding your musical palate

When I was a student at Berklee College of Music in Boston, I decided I wanted to be the best sight-reader in the world. I spent an entire summer doing nothing but sight-reading almost every waking moment. I remember leaving the apartment only two times for social events the entire summer. I attempted to sight-read everything I could get my hands on—clarinet studies, piano pieces, John Coltrane sax solos, Joe Pass chord charts and even phone books. At the end of the summer I was a mediocre sight-reader at best.

I believe the guitar is the most difficult instrument on which to sight-read because there are limitations and many variables involved. Having said that, I can provide some pointers.

The two most important elements in learning to read music well are being able to identify patterns and to look ahead as you're playing. Work on these principles and things will eventually fall into place. Beyond these tips, I recommend you do the following:

- Buy beginner guitar reading books to get the idea of where the notes fall on the instrument. I have never been a fan of reading guitar tab. Although it can give you a bird's-eye overview of how to play a particular piece, I feel that it eventually becomes limiting.

- Take a song (classical, jazz or whatever you like) and read it through every day until you can play it perfectly. Sight-reading is really about identifying patterns, so this will help. Once you have completely mastered a song and you're capable of playing it flawlessly and with great feeling, go ahead and play it many more times and watch what happens. Build a repertoire of songs and play through each one every day, or on a regular basis at least.

- Sight-read a little bit of something new and terrifying every day. This will aid your ability to look ahead.

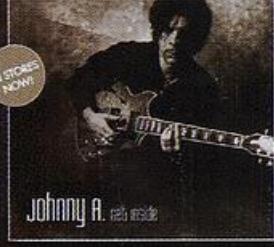
It's been proven that the most effective way to improve your sight-reading ability is to attempt to sight-read something at a strict tempo, such as with a metronome or drum machine. The key is to proceed without stopping or slowing down. If you miss a note, oh well. Keep going, as if you were giving a recital with other musicians. Don't stop and dwell on the note(s) you missed until you've finished the entire piece, then go back and see what you missed. Practice sight-reading a piece of music at a tempo that's not going to make you mess up every two measures. You'll be amazed at how your sight-reading ability will improve when you force yourself not to slow down when you come to a tricky spot.

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purposes and use them interchangeably. Due to the mathematical nature of these types of exercises, they're more easily worked out on paper than in your head (more on notating music later).

## HAMMER-ONS AND PULL-OFFS

The hammer-on is a technique whereby you pick a note (either fretted or open), then sound a higher note on the same string by using one of your fretting fingers to tap the string like a hammer. The pull-off involves picking a note, then sounding a lower note (either fretted or open) on the same string by releasing the first note's fretting finger, pulling the string slightly in toward your palm as you let go of it in order to keep it vibrating.

Hammer-ons and pull-offs seem to happen naturally when playing single-note lines, but there are particularly effective ways to isolate and strengthen these techniques. One efficient way to do this is to practice performing *trills*. A trill is a rapid, continuous alternation between two notes on the same string, performed using hammer-ons and pull-offs in combination.

An effective way to isolate and perfect your hammer-on and pull-off techniques is to practice playing trills for an extended period of time, such as a minute. Begin by trilling between any two notes that are a half step (one fret) apart, using your fretting hand's index and middle fingers, as demonstrated in **FIGURE 12**. Now do the same thing, but add a fret between the two fingers (see **FIGURE 13**). The next step would be to increase the distance between the fingers by another fret, as shown in **FIGURE 14**.

Now go back and play **FIGURES 12–14** again, this time using your index and ring fingers (1 and 3), then trill between your index finger and pinkie (1 and 4). Of course, you could exhaust all other finger combinations (2-3, 2-4, 3-4) and try to put as many frets between the fingers as possible (without hurting yourself!). Each time you go back to these trill drills, try adding some time to each exercise (maybe another 10 seconds or so).

## ALTERNATING FINGERS

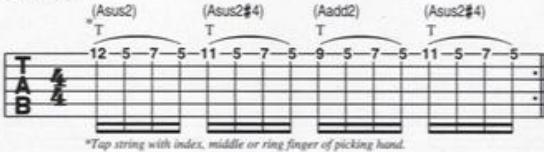
Try playing hammer-ons and pull-offs in various combinations, using different fingers, as in **FIGURES 15–17**. The goal in each case is make all the notes sound even and clear and maintain a seamless *legato* feel.

## TAPPING

If you're interested in two-hand tapping, incorporate this into your hammer-on and pull-off practice time. The techniques are essentially the same for either hand, the only difference being that when you pull-off from a tapped note (a note hammered with one of the fingers of the picking hand), you flick the string slightly sideways, away from your chin. Use your imagina-

## TAPPING EXERCISES

**FIGURE 18**

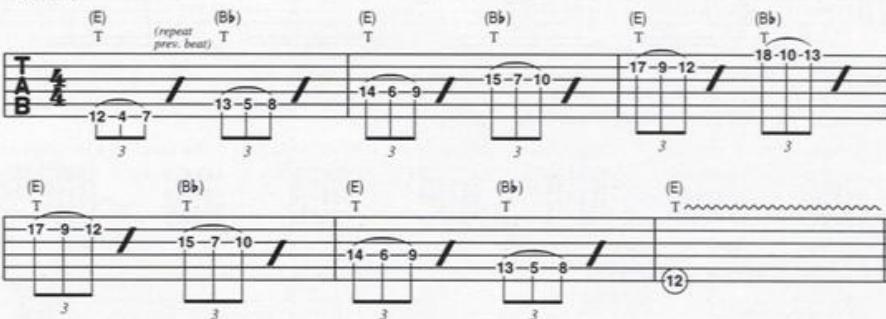


## TAPPING EXERCISES

**FIGURE 18**



**FIGURE 19**



**FIGURE 20**



tion to create tapping techniques that suit your style, and try incorporating all the fingers of your picking hand on the neck.

**FIGURES 18–20** are examples of tapping exercises to get you started. **FIGURE 18** is a simple drill designed to help you master the basic technique of tapping on one string, while **FIGURES 19** and **20** require that you cross strings, resulting in longer and more challenging patterns. In each of these latter two exercises, the key is to move the fingers of your fretting hand quickly from string to string in time to play cleanly the notes pulled off from the tapping finger.

## SWEEP PICKING



As stated earlier, sweep picking is a technique whereby you play one note and then another on an adjacent string in a single upstroke or downstroke. When learning to sweep pick you have to start very slowly and make sure you can hear every single note clearly (unless the effect you're going for is a sloppy one), then gradually bring the speed up. The

key is to let go of each note with your fretting hand immediately after you've picked it in order to keep it from ringing into the next note. Create exercises that outline various chord shapes that you can sweep across.

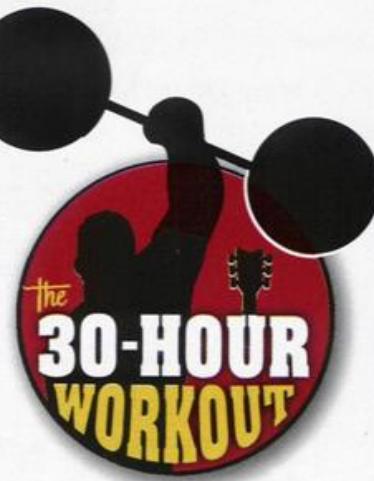
**FIGURES 21–23** are examples of sweep picking to get you started. You'll find it's easier to sweep across an arpeggio shape and not have it sound like a strummed chord if you can finger each string individually with a different fingertip and avoid barring strings with your fingers, which makes it more difficult to mute the notes immediately after you've played them.

## MULTIPLE PICKING



As I mentioned earlier, the best way to develop superhuman chops is to find things that are difficult and even awkward to play and then perform them slowly and perfectly. As an exercise, try playing any given lick or phrase first by alternate picking, then using only downstrokes and, last, using only upstrokes.

You can also devise your own drills when you do any of the following:



out how it applies to the guitar and how you can incorporate it into your own style.

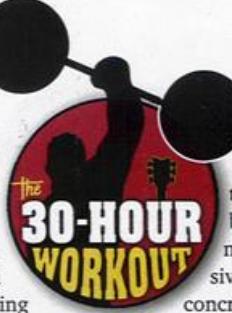
## HOURS 8-10, 18-20 AND 28-30 JAMMING

In this section, I'll explain methods to help you find your unique voice as a guitarist, and explain techniques that can aid your expression on the instrument. These latter items include vibrato, bent notes, harmonics, whammy-bar stunts and dynamics.

Everything I've told you thus far will help you in your quest to become an accomplished guitar player. However, remember that all the

exercises, scales, theory and whatnot are just devices that can help you express yourself more freely on your instrument. Be careful not to get hung up on how fascinating it is to be able to play scales really fast, or to shred yourself into a coma. Use this stuff as a tool, not a prison. Sitting and playing the instrument expressively and with control is the goal here. These days, I don't practice all of the material I've mentioned, but it has all been crucial to my development and to making my ears, fingers and soul work together in expressing the music I have in my head.

I believe that we all have the ability to be unique on our instruments. The trick is to



identify with that uniqueness and cultivate it into a stimulating presentation (or maybe even a historical statement). I have found that listening to my inner ear is the best way to get to the heart of the matter. It's a sometimes subtle, elusive voice, but it's there, and there are concrete ways to tune into it.

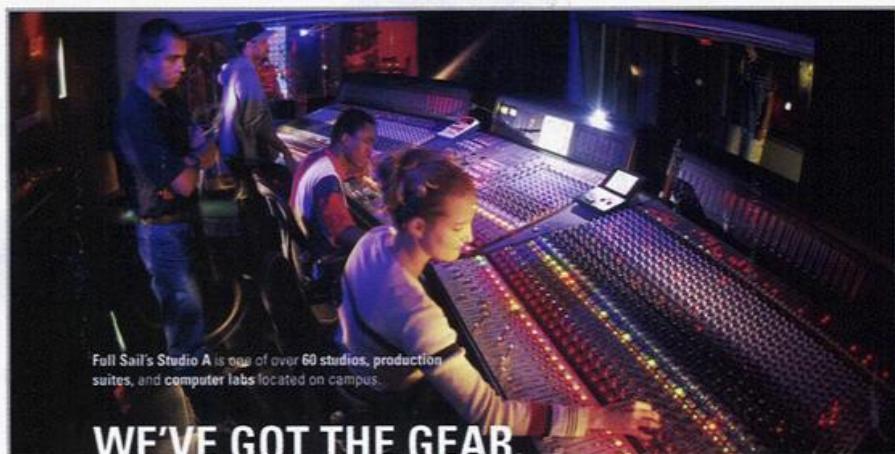
When I sit down to play now, I usually build jam tracks to improvise over and write to. There are numerous ways you can do this. One way is to learn the basics of home recording and invest in a simple rig with which you can record your own tracks to jam over. You can also purchase prerecorded jam tracks on CD, and some electronic devices, like Korg's Pandora, feature built-in vamps you can play with. (I never travel without my Pandora.)

Focusing intensely on anything is a form of meditation and, as such, it has the potential to increase IQ, comprehension, imagination and artistic abilities at any age. The problem is that it's difficult for many of us (including yours truly) to keep the mind focused on anything for a long period of time. This, however, is the only way to get real results. You need to meditate on what you're doing, and when the mind begins to wander, you need to try to pull it back.

To that end, I'd like to present various techniques for you to practice while jamming with a tape or a band, or just sitting in your room. First, however, I would like to make the following suggestions:

- Use a variety of vamps that encompass different genres, grooves, keys and time signatures. By setting up specific parameters (whether stylistic, melodic or rhythmic in nature), you'll push yourself to discover different ways of approaching various techniques. This will help you identify who you really are on the instrument because you'll be forced to reach deep inside yourself and find the things that push your musical buttons.

- When doing any of the following technique exercises, use them to express the way various emotions feel to you: anger, joy, lust, compassion, melancholy, paranoia, euphoria—whatever. Each of these emotions has an audible counterpart. Beware, however, that to successfully transmit these emotions from your psyche to your fingers, you may need to immerse yourself in the emotion itself. This alone can take tremendous focus, but it can also be incredibly revealing. If you feel compelled to focus more on negative emotions, try to keep things balanced—after all, you are what you play, and wherever you take your mind may not only dictate the type of art you create but also brainwash you into becoming that type of person. It's easy to be miserable and intense, but this exercise can help you build yourself into the kind of musician and person you want to be. It's also helpful when you find yourself in a particular funk (due to the ups and downs of life), because it can help strengthen the mental tools you may need to pull yourself in a particular direction.



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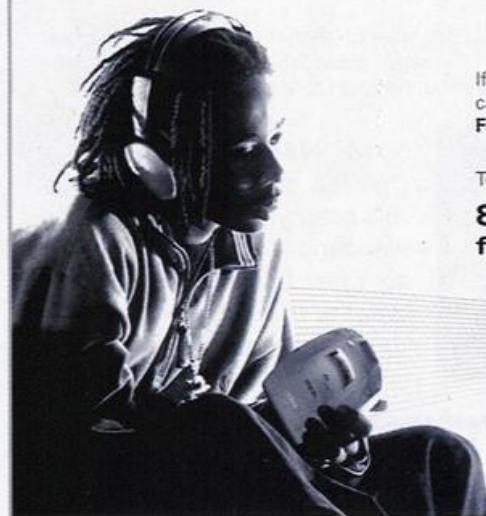
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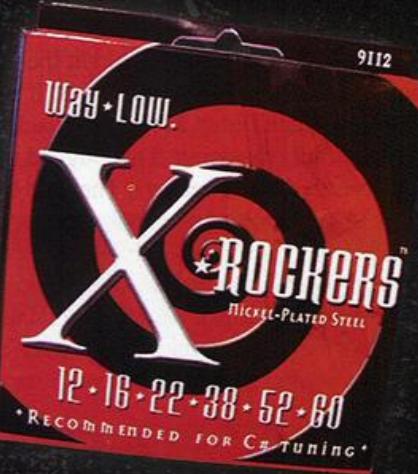
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With each of these exercises, try to push yourself into doing things that you have never done or heard before. You can also try imagining them before attempting them. I would even venture to say that if you really want to develop a unique style, you must stop yourself the minute you hear yourself playing something conventional.

Record yourself playing, then listen back to identify the cool, interesting stuff that's mixed in alongside the crap. The minute you hear yourself doing something different or interesting, take whatever that is and make an exercise out of it. Continue to pull yourself in this new direction. It's like finding a little thread and pulling it into enough material to knit a sweater...or a whole wardrobe, for that matter!

With all this in mind, here are some techniques to focus on:

### VIBRATO

Vibrato is an expression of the soul and a (sometimes painfully obvious) indicator of the amount of control you have over your instrument. There are several different kinds of vibrato that can be used as tools to express your ideas.

Fret a note with your index finger and hold it for a few minutes while effecting a vibrato that morphs from extremely slow to fast to violent and brutal. Make sure your intonation is good or you'll sound like a hack. Try different oscillations, from a subtle rise and fall in pitch to a very wide modulation, and don't let your finger slip off the string. Exaggerate all of your actions.

Now do the same thing with each finger of your fretting hand.

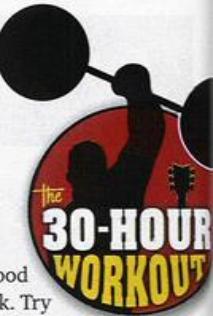
Next, hold two notes at a time and shake them in a similar manner. Then try doing this with three notes, then four and so on.

Apply vibrato to a note that you've already bent upward a half step, a whole step or two whole steps. Many players feel they can be more expressive with vibrato by applying it to a note that's already bent for the simple reason that it can go below the main pitch as well as above it.

Try doing this with every finger on every fret of the guitar. Doing so will teach you to take a different approach and grip in order to apply vibrato on different strings in different areas of the fretboard. You'll find that as you move away from the 12th fret (the midpoint between your guitar's bridge and nut), the strings feel stiffer and are harder to wiggle.

### BENDING NOTES

Bending strings well is an art unto itself, one that requires a high degree of aural and tactile sensitivity, mental and physical discipline and technical control over your instrument. Few things sound worse than a guitar



The  
**30-HOUR  
WORKOUT**

player that has no control over his pitch when bending notes; it's as if someone is singing off-key. Yet, when executed well, a bent note on the guitar is one of the most musically expressive sounds, one that enraptures the listener and causes goose bumps. A bent note just has so much more attitude and feeling than its unbent counterpart.

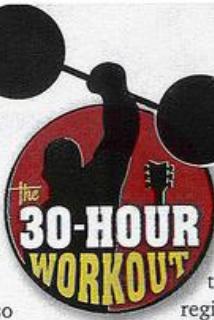
Sit for an hour and do nothing but bend notes. Bend them up as far as you like, but make sure you zero in on the "target note" that you want to hit. Listen carefully and critically to your pitch and strive for impeccable intonation. (This is comparable to what a violinist, singer, trombonist or slide guitar player must do all the time.)

Practicing *unison bends* is an effective way to train your fingers and ears to work

together to bend in tune. To play a unison bend, fret a note on the B string with your index finger while placing your ring finger on the G string two frets higher. Strum both strings together, then quickly push the G string note away from your palm to raise its pitch up a whole step so that it perfectly matches the pitch of the unbent note on the B string.

In addition:

- Try bending two strings at the same time (double-stop bending).
- Start with a note in a bent position and bring it either down or up, or up and then down. Push yourself to try different things.
- Play bent notes together with unbent



notes on different strings. This is a very slick country guitar technique that developed out of a desire by players to emulate the weeping sound of the pedal steel.

- Make sure to practice bending as much in the upper register and on the high strings as you do in the lower register and on the low strings. Can you bend an F# note at the second fret on the high E string up to A? Maybe if you're Zakk Wylde!

## HARMONICS

Do nothing but focus on playing harmonics for an hour. Experiment with different types and techniques, including the following:

- Play open-string, or "natural," harmonics by lightly touching any string with your fretting hand at various points along the string and picking it.

• Sound "artificial" harmonics by fretting a note with the left hand and picking the string with a downstroke while also "pinching" it between the pick and right thumb. Move the pick along the string in the area over the pickups as you do this to find various "sweet spots."

- Try tapping notes over certain frets while fretting a note.

• Be adventurous and try to discover different techniques for sounding harmonics. (Playing with distortion and with your guitar's bridge pickup on helps bring out harmonics.)

## WHAMMY-BAR STUNTS

The whammy bar is my favorite "crutch." If your guitar's whammy bar is set up anything like mine, you can pull up on it to make notes go sharp as well as push down on it to make notes turn into sheer blubber. I can abuse the hell out of my whammy bar and it usually comes right back in tune. The setup is very important. Try the following experiments:

- Play melodies by fingering only one note and using the whammy bar to raise and lower its pitch.

• Play various kinds of harmonics and experiment with pulling and pushing the whammy to produce "outer space" sounds.

• Try to create everything from nice, subtle vibrato on single notes and full chords to violent sonic brutality and sheer warbling cacophony. (I seem to have made a career out of doing this.)

I could go on forever, but I encourage you to create your own techniques. Your only real guideline here is to do whammy bar things exclusively for a long period of time without stopping. Sooner or later you'll come across little treasures.

## DYNAMICS

One of the things that make the guitar such an expressive instrument is its wide dynamic (volume) range. Few people utilize the full dynamic range of the instrument. You can hit the thing extremely hard and forcefully, and then immediately switch to a style that is caressing and tender. Not many players can do

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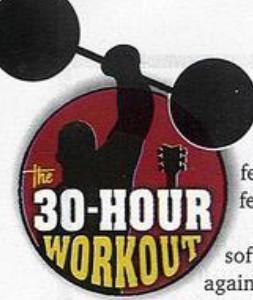
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both of these things effectively in the period of three seconds, so try to become one of the few who can. Here are a few ways to practice:

- Gradually go from soft to hard, and then back again.
- Create a strumming pattern that has sharp hits, light strums and medium rhythmic things all in one or two bars.
- Play as loud and as hard as you possibly can without stopping for as long as you're able to. Then do the exact opposite.

Again, I could go on forever, but I think you get the point.

To close out this section, I've pulled together a number of ways you can set up parameters to force you into making new discoveries on the guitar. Try to do each of the following for an hour without stopping:

- Solo on one string only.
- Solo with double-stops only (two notes played together), then try doing the same thing with three-, four-, five- and six-note chords.
- Solo on two adjacent strings only, then solo on two strings that have one, two, three or four idle strings between them.
- Record a vamp that has a single bass note repeating under it, then improvise over the vamp while limiting yourself to one particular mode or synthetic scale.
- Play a chord, listen to it, then close your

eyes and imagine a scene that the chord evokes. This can be done with a melody line, too.

• Pick one note and play it as many different ways as you can for an hour. Make it sound like music.

- Come up with at least one new thing a day that you've never played before.
- Improvise with only one hand (your fretting hand), using only hammer-ons and pull-offs to articulate notes. Make sure the notes sound good and clear, and not sloppy.
- Play as fast and as cleanly as you can without stopping.
- Play as slow and tender as you can.
- Try fooling around with alternate tunings. Include radically different tunings that seem to make no sense.
- Try to evoke colors with chords.
- Lay your guitar on the floor and touch it in many different ways, trying to create unique sounds.

## HOURS 31-40

### REST

Don't hurt yourself. If you need to take a break, then take one. You needn't feel guilty if you miss a practice session. (Well, maybe a little guilty.) When you're young and have time to kill, it's easier to put in the hours.

Keep in mind that your fingers have many tiny and intricate muscles that, like any other muscle, need rest to recuperate and heal

after a workout. Evaluate your own pain threshold, and don't be afraid to rest if your fingers really feel like they need it. Few of us practice for 10 hours a day, and you should give yourself ample time to achieve the stamina to play for such a long period of time.

I seem to have been blessed with great finger genes. My fingers are long and nimble, and they can take tremendous abuse. Back when I was putting in many hours of practicing, I could go for 15 to 20 hours at a stretch, without any wrist, finger or forearm pain. A little muscle fatigue was about all I experienced. On the occasions that I felt pain, I just worked through it. Today, however, *I do not recommend this!*

I encourage every guitarist reading this Workout to be on the alert for signs of common musician ailments, such as tendonitis and carpal tunnel syndrome. They can be very dangerous if not addressed.

Two last notes on the subject. First, if you want to maintain calluses on your fingertips, you need to protect your hands from getting wet for any long period of time. Second, protect your ears more cautiously than your penis. If you're doing loud gigs, put cotton or earplugs in them. (This may be the best advice you get from this article!)

### PLAY WITH OTHERS

Share the experience of making music with others. If that's all you do, you're doing pretty good.

(continued on page 159)

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I have not incorporated this concept into the body of the 30-hour cycle, but for me it's the most rewarding aspect of being a musician. Making music, like making love, can be a very sharing, tender, touchy-feely, emotional experience. It can also be a sheer expression of other things.

My favorite types of musicians to play with are those who know how to *listen* and *interact* accordingly. To communicate musically, you must have the ability to allow others into your expressive psyche. To really let others in can be an intimate experience. By the same token, you need to have the ability to listen to others around you and interact accordingly. Mutual respect and a nonjudgmental attitude are some of the elements necessary in cultivating the right chemistry to make that magic.

Some of my favorite times in my life are the years that I attended Berklee. I learned a lot about myself during that period. The school was filled with young, budding, ambitious musicians, and the group of students I hung out with became much like family. There were different musicians from all around the world there, playing all sorts of instruments, and they

were eager to explore, share and communicate through music. Nothing can beat that kind of attitude and those kinds of moments, no matter how many hours you spend practicing in your room. There were some tremendous players there, and I bonded with people who have become lifelong friends.

When I was in high school, I was in a band called Rayge, and we played cover tunes by Led Zeppelin, Kiss, Queen, Deep Purple and others. We eventually started to do a lot of original music as well. Our attitude in those days was one of brotherhood. We went through many life experiences together, but the most important thing was the band. None of us were selfish about sharing music when we hit the rehearsal basement or the stage. We went through many "coming of age" experiences together, and at times those experiences were joyous, and at other times tragic. Regardless, we always had the band and each other.

What I'm getting at here is how important it is to play selflessly with others. Doing so will give you the opportunity to respect others, experiment, open your ears, react and, of course, throw up on the gym floor after the gig at the high school dance.

## DISCOVERING YOURSELF

This Workout and its method may be highly criticized in the future for being "over the top," but I don't think there is any other way to become a virtuoso. This is not a class on guitar playing or songwriting (although it may help in those areas) but a path of discovery

for the strong-willed player.

The commitment it takes to become an elite virtuoso guitarist is not unlike that required to become a champion in any other field. You must think, breathe, eat and live the instrument at virtually every waking moment (and even while sleeping, when possible). You must transcend the games your mind will play on you and the excuses it will give you to lay off and take the easy road. You must continually bring the focus back to the instrument. You may find yourself being harshly criticized by other music community people, or friends, magazines and those that hang around on Sunset Boulevard obsessing over the nuances of the latest trends. This is precisely the time when you need to fearlessly stick to your vision. There are tests all along the way.

Realize that it's all in the mind, and never accept failure when dealing with things that are within your ability to control.

Keep a positive outlook on things, and don't let your intensity turn you into a prick. Always compliment and support your fellow musicians. We all have dreams and hopes. By encour-

aging, complimenting and supporting those around us, we gain self-dignity, respect, friends, a healthy overview of our own work and an appreciation for the efforts that others put in during their struggles.

It's okay to get discouraged at times, but it's not okay to quit. Quitting is never an option for a true artist. It's just not in their makeup. Think of music and the guitar when you're not even around an instrument. If you're in a quiet setting, imagine that you're playing and try to see your fingers moving while you listen to what's happening in your head. You can get better at this as time goes by. It's unbelievably rewarding and it can help you improve drastically because you're not confined by your physical limitations. I used to do this all the time, and I still do. I imagine things on the instrument that I can't do, and then I work on them until I can do them effortlessly.

There are those who believe that God is manifest in everything, in the form of light and sound. Some believe that that light and sound need to be discovered by each of us personally and alone. This could be why we are so fond of music. Creating music just by "willing" it in your head may eventually lead to just listening to it happen in your head. Who the composer is and where the music takes you are for you to discover.

## DISCLAIMER

Becoming a rock star, a movie star, a powerful executive, an elite athlete or a rich-and-famous anything is easy compared to controlling the mind so that it remains focused without interruption on the music within. I do not claim to have that much control, but I'm working on it. Some people have an abundance of natural talent and are more gifted in some areas than others. I'm not naturally gifted; I had to work very hard to develop my chops and techniques. I know lots of players that are better shredders, cleaner players and better sight-readers than me. I've had students that showed an extraordinary ability to develop amazing technique but had redundant, dull ideas. Conversely, I've had students that found it very difficult to play anything accurately, but their ideas and sense of melody were inspired. And then there are those freaks that have it all.

I think being a musician and being able to play an instrument is about the coolest thing in the world. Creating music (and especially playing the guitar) is most rewarding when it's based on pure passion. It's our birthright to play an instrument and to create.

Of course, you can toss the whole concept of this article and just do it your own way. However, some things won't change. The amount of focus, passion and time you put in are going to be reflected in your art. Whatever the case, I hope you find your soul in it all. That's the payoff. ■

