This book/CD pack explores all the main components necessary for crafting well-balanced rhythmic and melodic phrases. It also explains how these phrases are put together to form cohesive solos. Many styles are covered—rock, blues, jazz, fusion, country, Latin, funk, and more—and all of the concepts are backed up with musical examples.

The 50 ideas are divided into five main sections:

**THE BASICS**—covers fundamental but all too often forgotten techniques, such as slurs and vibrato, that can breathe new life into your phrases.

**HARMONIC EMBELLISHMENTS**—discusses the melodic potential of harmonic intervals (dyads), chords, and chord partials.

**RHYTHMIC CONCEPTS**—explores various aspects of rhythmic phrasing, such as accents, free-time phrasing, and metric modulation, and how it pertains to melodic soloing.

**MELODIC CONCEPTS**—explores various aspects of melodic phrasing, such as motifs, chromaticism, and sequences.

**SOLO STRUCTURE**—all of the topics discussed in the book come together to help form the big picture.

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Introduction

What constitutes a good phrase? Is it the tone, the timing, the melody, the rhythm, the attitude? Very often the answer is: all of the above.

This book explores all the main components necessary for crafting well-balanced rhythmic and melodic phrases. It also explains how these phrases are put together to form cohesive solos. Many styles are covered—rock, blues, jazz, fusion, country, Latin, funk, and more—and all of the concepts are backed up with musical examples.

Geared for the intermediate through advanced player, the material in this book spans 50 ideas divided into five main sections. The opening section, the Basics, covers many of the fundamental but all too often forgotten techniques that can breathe new life into your phrases and solos. Next comes Melodic Concepts, which explores various aspects of melodic phrasing. The Harmonic Embellishments section discusses the melodic potential of harmonic intervals (dyads), chords, and chord partials, while Rhythmic Concepts explores various aspects of rhythmic phrasing and how it pertains to melodic soloing. In the final section, Solo Structure, all of the topics discussed in the book come together to help form the big picture.

Regardless of your level, feel free to jump in anywhere. For instance, if your melodic chops are up to par but you feel you need rhythmic inspiration, head straight for Rhythmic Concepts. Or, if you have licks and phrases galore but you’re having trouble using them to construct a cohesive solo, go right to Solo Structure.

Each musical example in this book is demonstrated on the accompanying CD backed by a full rhythm section. The featured guitar is mixed hard right so you can isolate the part, play along with the entire mix, or, by adjusting the balance to the left, play along with just the rhythm section. For up-tempo examples (with the exception of Solo Structure) there is a half-speed demonstration immediately following each performance. Before you start, use track 1 to make sure your guitar is in tune.

I think you’ll find these concepts and examples helpful in your melodic-soloing endeavors. Now dig in, work hard, and have fun.

—Tom Kolb
Tuning and Tone

Nothing stops a would-be killer phrase dead in its tracks faster than a poorly tuned instrument or a lousy tone. Always take the time to make sure your guitar is in tune (before trying these examples, check your strings against track 1 of the accompanying CD) and well intonated. Beware of tuning hazards such as gripping the neck too tightly when fretting. If your guitar is equipped with jumbo frets, an overly tight grip can actually make the notes go slightly sharp.

Note: This example does not appear on the accompanying CD

Experiment with different tone settings on your guitar as well as your amp. It's a good idea to familiarize yourself with all of the sounds your equipment is capable of producing, as different styles of music call for different timbres and textures. Remember, your phrases could have the best-conceived melodies and rhythms, but if your tuning is out or tone is wimpy, people won't want to listen to you.
When people sing “Happy Birthday,” they don’t hit every note dead-on. The human voice has a tendency to slur, or slide into pitches from above or below, resulting in a smooth, connected sound we call legato. To imitate this often desirable, vocal-like sound, guitarists use a number of techniques. One of the most popular of these is the slide. Slides can have a smoothing effect when applied to single-note lines and even chords. This southern-rock example employs a series of slides to scatter G major pentatonic notes across the fretboard.

This G-major-scale exercise is designed to strengthen your sliding technique.
Hammer-ons

A hammer-on is achieved by picking one note and then “hammering” another fretting finger onto the same string to sound a higher note. This is one of the first techniques that many guitar players learn. But when the desire for speed picking hits, hammer-ons often get left in the dust. This is a shame because hammer-ons are another great way to achieve a fluid quality. Picking every note is often desirable but can create a “pointy” quality to your lines. Hammer-ons can round out the edges of these points. While you could play this example by picking every note, the inclusion of hammer-ons adds a saxophone-like personality to the phrase.

Proper hammer-on technique calls for a consistent fretting-hand attack and rhythmic accuracy. Here’s an exercise geared for strengthening these two requirements.
Pull-Offs

Like the hammer-on, the pull-off technique—where you sound a string by pulling off with your fretting finger—plays a major role in legato phrasing. Not only do pull-offs come in handy for descending passages, they can add an interesting twist to ascending lines, as evidenced in this blues-rock example.

Here's a pull-off exercise based on the C major scale, incorporating every finger of the fretting hand.
Combining Slur Techniques

The possibilities of legato phrasing on guitar are boundless when its three key elements—hammer-ons, pull-offs, and slides—are combined, as in this moody A Dorian example. Notice that combining these slur techniques affords easy travel up and down a single string.

An effective practice routine for combining hammer-ons, pull-offs, and slides is to play an entire scale, ascending and descending, along a single string, as in this C major exercise. Fretting-hand fingering suggestions are written below the tablature.

In addition to all these fretting-hand maneuvers, you can use right-hand tapping as a legato technique. Aside from pure sound-effect, speed, and stage-flash purposes, right-hand tapping comes in handy for wide-interval maneuvers on a single string, as in this example.
Vibrato

A guitarist's vibrato can be as personal as a fingerprint. Indeed, some players can be recognized in a single note just by their vibrato technique. A weak left-hand vibrato can cause a player to shy away from sustaining notes. Often, these are the guitarists who are found guilty of playing too many notes, with little regard to rhythmic phrasing. Notice how left-hand vibrato breathes life into the sustained notes in this jazz-waltz example. Arguably, the sparse melody would fall rather dead if vibrato were omitted.

\[ J = 126 \, (\text{signature of } \frac{3}{4}) \]

Try this exercise for strengthening your left-hand vibrato. Notice that each finger takes a turn in the action.

\[ J = 69 \]
Quarter- and Half-Step Bends

Few guitar nuances have the blues-injecting potential of quarter-step bends. In fact, many aggressive blues players apply a quarter-step “nudge,” or bend, to the majority of their notes, resulting in assertive, propelling lead lines.

Strategically placed quarter-step bends can add supreme bluesy angst and attitude. For instance, when applied to the $b_3$rd of the minor pentatonic scale, a slight bend pushes the note into the ultra-bluesy territory between major and minor tonality. Another choice note ripe for this treatment is the 4th degree; a slight bend evokes the down-and-dirty $b_5$th. This example based on the A Blues scale (A–C–D–Db–E–G) utilizes both of these techniques with quarter-step bends on the C notes (13) and a quarter-step pre-bend/release on the high D (4th). In addition, equally effective half-step bends and pre-bends fuel the third measure.

The pitch of quarter-step bends can be ambiguous, but half-step bends are much less forgiving. The purpose of the following half-step bending exercises is two-fold: to strengthen your sense of pitch and to build up the bending stamina of every fretting-hand finger.
Whole- and 1 1/2-Step Bends

Whole- and 1 1/2-step bends find their home in blues and aggressive blues rock. Among their most prominent practitioners are Albert King, Eric Clapton, Ritchie Blackmore, and Stevie Ray Vaughan. The next example demonstrates how these techniques can be used to pull a variety of note choices from a compact area of the fretboard.

Use these whole- and 1 1/2-step bend exercises to strengthen your bending fingers as well as your pitch accuracy.
Multiple Bends

The multiple-bend technique—bending to several pitches from one fretted note—is another valuable tool for crafting blues and blues-rock phrases. This example incorporates several multiple-bend moves in a style reminiscent of players such as David Gilmour and Jeff Beck.

The multiple bend is one of the most difficult techniques in the bending family. Again, concentration on pitch is of the essence. This challenging multiple-bend/release exercise should help get you into shape.
Pitch Axis

The term *pitch axis* refers to the note around which a given melody revolves. Often this note is the tonic, or root, of the key, as is the case in this G major example. Notice how the melody rises and falls around the G above the staff.

By no means does the pitch-axis note always have to be the tonic. Analyze the melody in this D minor progression and you will find that the 5th of the key (A) is the central note.
Melodic Motifs

When it comes to developing phrases, few devices have the unifying power of melodic motifs (repeated melodic ideas). This funk-rock example includes five melodic motifs all recruited from the A minor pentatonic scale (A–C–D–E–G). The establishing motif occurs on beat 1 of the first measure—the notes G, A, C, and E in a grouping of four sixteenth notes. The motif is then developed in similar melodic contour in measure 2, and three times in measure 4.

The following jazz-blues example juggles \( B^b \) Mixolydian (\( B^b–C–D–B^b–E–G–A^b \)) and \( B^b \) Mixolydian (\( B^b–F–G–A^b–B^b–C–D^b \)) scales in a solo permeated with six melodic motifs, in groupings of four eighth notes. Notice that each pair of motifs is answered by a secondary “resolving” motif.
Sequencing Scales

In the hands of amateurs, scale sequences (a pattern of notes within a scale that is repeated, starting from another note within that same scale) can sound predictable and boring. But with a little thought and careful disguise they can sound fresh.

In this rock-boogie example, the B minor pentatonic scale (B–D–E–F♯–A) gets the sequence treatment. The example is constructed from two separate phrases. The first opens with a garden-variety groups-of-three sequence but resolves with in an interesting twist. The second phrase is a rhythmically displaced, ascending groups-of-four sequence.

The E Mixolydian mode (E–F♯–G♯–A–B–C♯–D) is the catalyst for the next example. This piece of funky fusion involves four different sequence patterns—diatonic 3rds, sawtooth 3rds (down a 3rd/down a 2nd; up a 3rd/down a 2nd; repeat), groups of four, and groups of five. The impact of the shifting sequences is fortified with the liberal use of rhythmically syncopated starting points.

For more sequence suggestions, see idea #32.
Major Pentatonic Frameworks

Although some may consider it a crutch, relying on the major pentatonic scale (1–2–3–5–6) to suggest the complete major scale (1–2–3–4–5–6–7) can be a resourceful alternative. Check out how often this example uses the B♭ major pentatonic scale (B♭–F–G–B♭–C) as a framework for the Eb major scale (Eb–F–G–A♭–B♭–C–D) to create a subtle, bluesy effect over a I–vi–ii–V progression.

This uptown blues relies on the C major pentatonic scale (C–D–E–G–A) as a framework for C Mixolydian (C–D–E–F–G–A–B♭).
Minor Pentatonic Frameworks

The minor pentatonic scale (1–3–5–7) lies at the heart of many minor scales and modes (natural minor, Dorian, Phrygian, etc.), making it a multipurpose 'framework' scale. Hear how the E minor pentatonic scale (E–G–A–B–D) is used to color the changes in this I–VII–VI–IV–V progression in E minor.

\[ J = 112 \]


\[ J = 132 \]
The Key-Center Approach

Many players learn to solo over changes by using the key-center approach: the process of grouping together as many chords in a progression as possible into one key for the purpose of using a single scale for that group of chords. This system affords great freedom for soloing over progressions, but many players who rely on it fall short of outlining the chord tones of the changes. One very melodic approach is to target a chord tone of each new change as it occurs in the progression. This C major progression offers an example of this approach with chord-tone-conscious phrases crafted from the C major scale.

This example applies the same key-center approach to a minor key. The i–iv–ii–V7–i progression is in the key of G minor, and the lines are derived from G minor and G harmonic minor scales.
Chords/Scales in Major Keys

Once they master the key-center approach, many guitarists move on to the chord/scale relationship method—where a different scale is used for each chord in a progression. This extremely melodic approach is used by many players in their quest for nailing the changes. This solo over an E major progression uses the corresponding mode for each chord to outline the changes: E major pentatonic add4 (E Ionian minus the 7th degree) for the I chord (E), B Mixolydian for the V (B), C# minor pentatonic add9 (C# Aeolian minus the b6th degree) for the vi (C#m), and A Lydian for the IV (A sus2).
Our next progression, in C major, is a bit more involved. It uses corresponding modes for the diatonic changes (D Dorian over Dm7 and Dm9, and C Ionion over C6/9 and Cmaj9) and superimposes modes over the altered chords and the flat-five substitution: the G dominant diminished scale (G–Ab–Bb–B–C♯–D–E–F) for the V7 (G13♭9), the A altered scale (A–B♭–C–Db–Eb–F–G) for the VI7 (A+7♭9), and D♭ Lydian dominant (D♭–Eb–F–G–Ab–B♭–C♭) for the bII7 (D♭9).
Chords/Scales in Minor Keys

The chord/scale relationship method can be applied just as successfully in minor-key progressions. In this i–bVII–iv–V7–i progression in B minor, the corresponding modes of B minor and B harmonic minor supply the note choices for the melodic-rock lines: B Aeolian for the i (Bm), A Mixolydian for the bVII (A), E Dorian for the iv (Em), and F♯ Phrygian dominant (F♯–G–A♯–B–C♯–D–E) for the V7 (F♯7).
This Latin-jazz example is a i–iv–bVI–V7 progression in the key of C minor. C minor pentatonic add9 suggests a C Aeolian tonality over the i chord (Cm7), and F minor pentatonic add9 suggests F Dorian for the iv (Fm7). A burning A♭ Lydian line graces the bVI (A♭maj7), and the G altered scale (G–A♭–B♭–C–D♭–E♭–F) is dispatched over the V7 (G+7).
Besides major- and minor-key progressions, the chordSCALE relationship method is a useful tool in the I7-IV7-V7 progressions in blues music. This uptown-blues example peppers Bb Mixolydian/blues hybrid (Bb-C-Db-D-Eb-E-F-G-A) and Bb blues scale licks over the I7 chords (Bb9 and Bb13), Eb Mixolydian over the IV7 chords (E9), E diminished scale (E-F#-G-A-Bb-C-Db-D#) on the passing 5iv5 (E7), and the F altered scale (F-Gb-G#-A-B-D-F) on the V7 (F7#9).
Arpeggios

Perhaps the most foolproof method for outlining the changes in any progression is using arpeggios. This hard-rock example employs seventh arpeggios and triads constructed from the roots of each chord change, as well as two substitutions: Gmaj7 and Fmaj7 arpeggios over the Em and D chords, respectively. Notice the smooth transition between arpeggios via the closest chord tone.

With a mixture of syncopated sixteenth-note rhythms, this funky fusion example spreads C7 and F7 arpeggios and an Am7 arpeggio substitution over a I7–IV7 progression.
This Latin-jazz example features a melodic mixture of seventh arpeggios and major and minor triads.
Chromaticism

Dressing up your scales and arpeggios with chromatic passing tones can have dramatic results. Witness how a few upper- and lower-neighbor tones add a greater sense of depth to basic E minor and C minor pentatonic scales in this funk-rock example.

Basic arpeggios and triads (in order of appearance, a Dm triad; G9, Em7, A7, and Dm7 arpeggios; and a D♭ triad) lie at the heart of the chromatic bebop lines found in the next example.
Pedal Tones

In much the same way a pitch-axis note can establish the tonic of a key (see idea #10), a pedal tone (repeated note in a musical phrase) can effectively draw attention to any scale degree. This country-rock solo puts pedal tones to work in almost every measure: A (5th of the key) in measure 1, D (tonic of the key) in measure 2, B (6th) in measures 3 and 6, and G (4th) in measure 4.

Next let's look at three pedal-tone exercises, two in C major and one in A minor. In each case the tonic is the pedal tone. Once you get these under your fingers, try them in other keys and on other scales and modes. Also, experiment using other scale degrees as the pedal tone.
Thirds and Fourths

A very musical way to add body to single-note passages is to employ 3rds and 4ths intervals (dyads). Inspired by the R&B lead/rhythm guitar styles of Curtis Mayfield, Jimi Hendrix, and Cornell Dupree, this example weaves a series of diatonic 3rds and 4ths harmonized from the G major scale (G–A–B–C–D–E–F♯).
The next example lays out diatonic 3rds from the G major scale, in second through seventh position on the fretboard. The "home base" intervals represent consonant resting points. Use these as pitch-axis dyads for developing melodies.

Now let's look at the diatonic 4ths equivalent to the 3rds exercise we just played. As before, the home-base zones are notated. 4ths can sound odd when used by themselves, but they work well as passing tones when placed between the cracks of 3rds intervals, as was demonstrated in the first example above.
Sixths

Coupling 6ths intervals into dyad shapes is another marvelous device for beefing up your phrases and riffs. (Steve Cropper’s opening figure in “Soul Man” provides a prime example.) Diatonic 6th intervals are the reverse equivalent to 3rds (a major 3rd inverted is a minor 6th, and a minor 3rd inverted is a major 6th). With a firm grasp of this theoretic principle, you can use 6ths as an alternate choice to 3rds.

This funk-rock example employs diatonic 6ths from A Mixolydian (A–B–C♯–D–E–F♯–G) as well as a few chromatic passing couplets. Be careful not to let the inner strings ring.
This following moody example makes exclusive use of 6ths dyads harmonized from G Dorian (G–A–B♭–C–D–E–F). Note that the use of hybrid picking (pick and fingers) prevents unwanted inner strings from ringing.

In the next example you'll find two 6th examples. The first is a hybrid-picking exercise honed from a seventh-position C major scale. The home-base intervals represent consonant resting points for a C major chord harmony. The second example is pick style and is harmonized from C Mixolydian (G–D–E–F–G–A–B♭). There is an extra home-base dyad (G/B♭) in this one that represents the 5th and b7th of the implied C7 chord harmony.
Octaves and Fifths

Octaves (two-note groupings spaced an octave apart) can add a rich, warm sound to your single-note lines. And since, technically, octave intervals don’t create any harmony, they can be much easier to use than the constantly shifting tonality (major/minor) of diatonic 3rds and 6ths.

The Wes Montgomery–inspired octave lines in the next example wind their way around the D major/D minor, modal-interchange progression. The example can be played using a pick, but to get the Wes sound, use the side of your picking-hand thumb to brush the strings.

Similar to octaves, (perfect) 5th intervals can really fatten up your riffs and fills. This riff-oriented hard-rock example mixes parallel 5ths dyads with a perfect fourth (G/D) and major 3rd (F♯/D) interval.
Chord Melody

Usually considered a solo jazz-guitar technique, chord melody can often be used to enhance single-string solos in any style. This example utilizes chord partials and several series of inverted triads in a 12/8 ballad form.

This rockabilly-blues example weaves single-note and double-stop lines around a collection of dominant 7th, 9th, and 13th chord partials.
Open Strings

You can create an interesting harmonic backdrop for your solos by combining sustained open strings with fretted notes. For example, look at this sixteen-measure A minor progression. The fretted note choices in the first eight measures are honed from a fifth-position A Dorian pattern, with open high E, B, and G strings substituted for fretted notes whenever possible. (Let all notes ring throughout.) Measures 9–13 move to A Aeolian note choices between the third and tenth frets with open strings substituted whenever possible. The final measures go out with an A Dorian descending line and an arpeggiated Am(add9) chord.
Harmonics

You can add a lot of sparkle to your solos by tossing in a few natural harmonics. And, like open strings, harmonics can support your fretted-note passages with a harmonic backdrop.

This modal progression takes advantage of the natural harmonics located at the fifth, seventh, and twelfth frets. Buoyed by harmonics that are carefully laid out for triadic support, the solo moves between G major, B minor, E minor, and D major scales. To create the harmonics, lightly touch the string with your fretting finger directly above the fret indicated, strike the string with your pick, and let the note sustain as long as possible.
Using Rests

You've probably heard it said that the notes you don't play are just as important as the notes you do. In that regard, when you are putting phrases together in the form of a solo, make a conscious effort to leave natural breathing spaces. These breaks in your playing, which come in the form of rests, not only provide breathing space but help to emphasize the overall rhythmic feel. For example, notice how the use of rests in this 3/4 jazz example help to set up the phrases that begin on the upbeat, greatly contributing to the swing factor.

Rests can also be used to build a sense of anticipation. The strategically placed rests in this example add impact to the blues-rock phrases.
Rhythmic accents (emphasizing specific beats or subdivisions of a beat) is something we almost take for granted when comping but often forget when soloing. You can breathe new life into your licks and phrases simply by applying dynamic accents in various rhythmic patterns. The next example features a four-measure, sequenced A Dorian phrase that is repeated verbatim four times: first with no accents, then with accents on the weak beats, then on every third eighth note, and finally on every fifth eighth note. Though the melody remains consistent, each phrase has its own distinct character.
Here are three exercises for developing your rhythmic accenting. The first two involve sequenc ing the A minor pentatonic scale with different accenting patterns. The third is a simple run up and down the A major scale but with an offsetting rhythm pattern that accents every fifth note.

\[ J = 72 \]

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TRACK 58
Another way to accent specific notes in a phrase is by using guitar nuances—techniques that are unique to the guitar. This funk-rock example contains eight phrases that demonstrate six guitar techniques, designed to draw added attention to the lines. The opening phrase (measures 1–2) is played in standard fashion, but its counterpart (measures 3–4) uses right-hand palm muting for a meaty, staccato attack. Measures 5–7 feature three approaches to a similar phrase: the first two demonstrate the drastic contrast in timbre of matching pitches in open and twelfth position, while the third uses hybrid picking for dynamic intensity. Measures 9–12 follow suit with three rhythmically matched phrases displaying different ear-catching nuances: pinch harmonics, tremolo picking, and unison bends.
*m = middle finger
*pl = pick

**Lento**

P.H. tremolo picking
Combining Duple and Triplet Rhythms

They say that variety is the spice of life, and that's certainly true of rhythmic variation in soloing. One very effective way to season your solos is to combine duple (eighth and sixteenth notes, etc.) with triplet rhythms. This E minor solo takes us on a journey through a constantly shifting rhythmic terrain. In the first two measures, straight eighth notes segue into quarter-note triplets. Next comes a collection of syncopated quarter and eighth notes followed by a steady stream of sixteenths. Things really become interesting in measures 5-7 where dotted-quarter and sixteenth-note groupings are sandwiched between quarter-, eighth-, and sixteenth-note triplet figures.
Here are two exercises for strengthening transitions from duple to triplet rhythms and vice versa. The first ascends and descends a fifth-position A minor pentatonic scale pattern; the second uses a seventh-position C major scale pattern.
Sequences with Shifting Rhythms

In the Melodic Concepts section we discussed tips for getting mileage out of common scale sequences (see idea #12). In much the same way you can add rhythmic excitement to your sequences by applying duple/triplet rhythm combinations. Check out this C-major-scale solo over a samba groove. Not only does it juggle a variety of scale sequencing patterns (groups of four, harmonized triads and 7th arpeggios, and diatonic 3rds), it combines them with syncopated eighth notes and quarter-note triplet rhythms.
The next four examples explain the sequence patterns that were used in the above solo. You can also use them to help you develop the concepts in idea #12.

Groups of 4 sequence

\[ j = 76 \]
Harmonized triads

Diatonic 3rds sequence

Harmonized 7th arpeggios (5ths omitted)
Balancing Speed with Lyricism

No matter how slow and soulful or fast and deadly a solo is, staying too long on either end of the spectrum can put the listener to sleep—the best solos are often an artful balance of speed and flash with slow, lyrical lines. Check out this rock-ballad example. The opening phrases contain only a few sustained notes dripping with vibrato. The lines pick up considerable speed in the third measure, then settle down again in measures 4 and 5. The intensity tops out with a flurry of 32nd notes in the next measure, and the solo gradually comes to rest in the final measures.
Rhythmic motifs (repeated rhythmic phrases) are among the most common and successful devices used by soloists in any style. They are especially irresistible when combined with the melodic motif concepts discussed in Idea #11.

This bebop example employs a basic but effective rhythmic motif: two eighth notes. The twist is that the motif keeps popping up on different beats of each measure.

Riding the E minor pentatonic add9 scale, this funk-rock example employs three rhythmic motifs. The first appears in measures 1–2 and is a one-beat grouping of two sixteenths, a sixteenth rest, and a sixteenth note. The second one (measure 3) is a melodic/rhythmic motif made up of a one-beat grouping of two sixteenths and an eighth note. The third motif (measure 4) is two beats in length and is constructed from a grouping of four sixteenth notes followed by a one-beat grouping of two sixteenths and an eighth note.
This C Mixolydian acid-jazz example achieves a hypnotizing effect by staying with the same funky rhythmic motif throughout.
Rhythmic Displacement

Rhythmic motifs can take on a whole new dimension when spread out over two or more measures. This type of repetition often results in rhythmic displacement, where the figure hits different parts of each bar line. This Dickey Betts–inspired example employs a cycled dotted-quarter-note motif (measure 3) that crosses three bar lines before coming full circle to the downbeat of 1 in measure 6.

Four rhythmically displaced motifs are packed into this funk-rock example. A motif with four sixteenths and an eighth note fills the first two measures, followed by a highly syncopated sixteenth/sixteenth rest/sixteenth/eighth motif in measures 3 and 4. Measure 5 hosts a three sixteenths/dotted-eighth figure, while a string of sixteenth-note pairings fenced by sixteenth-note rests occupies measures 7 and 8.
Metric Modulation

Another method for going against the grain of the groove is metric modulation—the superimposing of one time signature over another. Notice how the phrasing in the first eight measures of this jazz-waltz example fits neatly into the pocket of the 3/4 swing feel. In measures 9–12 and 16, however, the cycled dotted-eighth notes create the “two-against-three” feel of 6/8 time. The groove really shifts in measures 13–14 when a 4/4 time signature is superimposed over the 3/4 meter courtesy of a steady stream of 4:3 quarter notes (four quarter notes in the space of three).
The metric modulation tactics in the next example are a bit more subtle. The phrasing approach in this uptown blues is pretty standard with the exception of measures 5–6, where a string of quarter-note triplets followed by half-note triplets suggest 6/4 and 3/4 time signatures.
Free-Time Phrasing

A somewhat less scientific approach to metric modulation is a rubato-related technique known as free-time phrasing. This method has less to do with time signatures than with "timing" your licks and phrases. For instance, look at this melodic-rock example. The 5/4 (five eighth notes in the space of four) phrase in measure 2 is a calculated ascension of the D blues scale targeting the C note in measure 3. Likewise, the 5/4 legato phrases in measures 3 and 4 are both lick-oriented with a destination note in mind (D and Bb, respectively). The 7/6 phrase in measure 6 is a continuation of the C Mixolydian run initiated on beat 3, carefully timed to resolve to D in the final measure.

Inducing a dreamlike atmosphere, the liberal use of free-time phrasing in this 12/8 ballad example accentuates the beauty of the melodic lines.
Finally, here are three exercises designed to help you get a feel for free-time phrasing.

\[ \text{Track 74} \]
Odd-Meter Phrasing

Soloing over odd time signatures such as 5/4 or 7/8 can be extremely disconcerting for those of us accustomed to crafting our phrases for either 4/4 or 3/4 time. One way to deal with soloing in 5/4 time is to split each measure in two, thinking of it as a measure of 3/4 and a measure of 2/4. In this way you can rely on phrases you have developed in 3/4 time for the first part and fill the second with two-beat phrases developed in 4/4 time. The phrasing in measures 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 10, and 11 illustrates this process.
Like the 5/4 example, the 7/8 solo below divides each measure into two more recognizable groupings. If you count the eighth notes as if they were quarter notes, you can divide each measure into 4/4 and 3/4, making phrasing much easier. The method behind the madness of measures 5 and 6 is a triad sequence harmonized from E Mixolydian, which is spread across both measures.
Stealing Rhythms

It's been said that good composers borrow, but great composers steal! One way to apply this bit of wisdom to your phrasing without feeling too guilty of plagiarism is to steal the rhythms from well-known songs but plug in your own melodies. Although the melody is original, this bebop example nabs the rhythms of the heads of five jazz standards: "The Days of Wine and Roses," "String of Pearls," "Theme from the Pink Panther," "Give Me the Simple Life," and "Scrapple from the Apple."
This funk-rock example lays new melodies over the rhythms from four classic-rock riffs: "Walk This Way," "The Sunshine of Your Love," "Frankenstein," and "Day Tripper."
Two-Bar Phrasing

Just as a house can be built from bricks, a solo can be constructed using building blocks of musical information, or phrases. The easygoing jazz-swing solo below uses building blocks made up of two-bar phrases that follow the changes via the chord-scale relationship method (see ideas #16–18). Like bricks are held together with mortar, the phrases in this solo are linked by an ongoing rhythmic theme: each even-numbered phrase (second, fourth, sixth, etc.) reflects the rhythmic contour of its predecessor.
Another popular building block for solos is the four-bar phrase. Four-bar phrasing works particularly well for up-tempo soloing in key-center situations. Here's an example of four-bar phrasing in a rock vein. The 24-bar form begins in E minor, modulates to the relative key of G major, then returns to E minor.

In this solo the overall theme that ties the phrases together has more to do with techniques and fretboard locations than melody and rhythm. Mixing 3rds and 4ths dyads with open strings (see ideas #22 and 26), phrase one transitions to phrase two, which in turn continues the open-string embellishment theme. Phrase two climbs the fretboard and passes the baton to phrase three, which carries on in twelfth position. Phrase four acts as a melodic counterpart to its predecessor before slipping down the neck for the next hand-off. Phrase five reflects occurrences in phrase two, and phrase six goes for broke with a galloping, pedal-tone-oriented (see idea #21) climax.
Breathing Spaces

While soloing many guitarists fall into the trap of playing way too many notes without letup—especially because they don’t face the same breath limitations as wind-instrument players do. Breathing space makes a solo more musical and memorable and lets the audience catch its breath. The breathing spaces, or rests, in the Latin-jazz solo below serve several purposes: they help to accentuate the syncopated rhythms (measures 1, 5, 7, 13, 14, and 20), aid in the development of rhythmic motifs (measures 13–14 and 21–22), allow reprieves after particularly active phrases (measures 11 and 17), and create a sense of anticipation for new developments (measures 9 and 19).
Call and Response in Blues

One of the most popular tactics used in blues soloing is *call-and-response* phrasing. Quite literally a conversational device, the call and response can be used to great effect in drawing in listeners as they anticipate how your musical conversation will play itself out.

Similar to the traditional blues lyrics format, call-and-response phrasing usually comes in groups of three consecutive phrases: introductory phrase, an exact or close repeat of the introductory phrase, and a resolving phrase.

This solo uses call-and-response techniques to navigate two choruses of a 12-bar blues in A. In the first choruse each call/response/conclusion spans four measures, making a total of three sets of call-and-response phrases. The second chorus, however, takes a different approach by extending the phrasing, resulting in one long call/response/conclusion section.

\[
\text{\textbf{Idea #}} \quad \text{\textbf{4}} \quad \text{\textbf{3}}
\]

\[
\text{\textbf{TRACK 82}}
\]
Call and Response in Other Styles

By no means do call-and-response techniques reside solely in the blues idiom. If you listen carefully you'll hear them being used by soloists in virtually every style of improvisational music. This funky rock-fusion solo uses call-and-response strategies to carry on a two-part conversation throughout a classic G Dorian vamp. The discussion begins with a four-measure phrase that is in turn flatteringly imitated by a similar phrase. This pattern continues until measure 15, where the conversation begins to heat up with a call/double response/conclusion maneuver. This new one-upmanship pattern continues to develop until it escalates to a full-on argument by the end of the solo.
Repsetion

The word repetition often has negative connotations, but when used well in a solo, repetition can be quite positive. Many a blues, rock, or jazz artist has brought an audience to its feet by hammering home a burning lick again and again, but crowd pleasing is not the only benefit of repetition. In the breakneck tempos of some forms of country, hard rock, and jazz, for instance, repetition can be a lifesaving device.

Repsetion is the main theme of the following bebop example. We have repetitions of rhythmic motifs containing only one or two notes (measures 1-2, 5-6, 9-10, and 25-26), melodic motifs (measures 11-12 and 29-30), cycled licks (measures 17-18, 20-22, and 23-24), and a common-tone double-stop rtrf (13-14).
Using Dynamics

When engaged in conversation, we often raise or lower our voice to get an important point across. This attention-grabbing tactic can be applied to soloing in the form of dynamics—the raising and lowering of volume. Varying the dynamics of your solos can have powerful emotional effects.

This bluesy 12/8 ballad example travels through four dynamic levels on its emotional ride through an A minor progression. Starting out gently at a soft volume (mp—mezzo piano), it kicks in a bit more at the end of measure 4 (mf—mezzo forte). At measure 9 the volume comes up (f—forte), and along with it the intensity factor. A highly emotional section ensues until measure 15, where a decrescendo (gradual decrease in volume) brings the solo back full circle to the soft level (mp) and intimate atmosphere in which it began.
Pitch Direction

One fail-safe way to build a solo to a climactic finish is to shape the overall melody so that it gradually climbs the pitch ladder. By steadily escalating through a series of peaks and valleys, your solo can create a sense of anticipation and carry the listener to a satisfying conclusion.

Mounting the excitement by stacking a series of four-measure phrases on top of the other like stair steps, this melodic-rock solo climbs the E major scale from the bowels of the fretboard (open low E string) to a cloud-tickling high-A note at the top of the neck (a half step bend from G♯).
Embellishing the Melody

Sometimes the hardest part about soloing is just getting started. If you ever find yourself at this impasse, you might want to try the time-honored art of *melody embellishment*. In other words, begin by stating the main melody of the song, and then develop it with alternate melodies and rhythms.

This smooth-jazz example takes a four-measure melody through the embellishment/development process over the course of sixteen measures. Over a modal-interchange (parallel key) progression in the key of D (I-VII7, or Dmaj9–C9sus4), the melody (measures 1–4) is derived from the D major scale and C Mixolydian. In measures 5–8 the melody is embellished with upper and lower neighboring tones derived from the two scales. Development begins in earnest in measures 9–12, where the melody is harmonized a 3rd higher and enhanced with syncopated, rhythmic flourries. Motifs and sequences drive the vibrant final section (measures 13–16), which quotes bits and pieces of the original melody.
Tension and Resolution

Many improvisers (particularly in jazz and fusion) like to flavor their solos with dissonance by playing outside the key centers or against the chord tones. Used conservatively these passages can provide a welcome contrast to "inside"—or consonant—melodies.

One popular tension/resolution technique is based on functioning V chords (dominant chords that resolve to their respective I chord), but it can actually be used at any time during a solo. The jazz solo below takes full advantage of the ii–V–I changes in measures 1–7 and 16–22, applying well-balanced tension/resolution phrases in all the right places. But instead of rolling with the changes in the major-key section (measures 8–15), the solo sustains the dissonance/consonance theme by substituting C and Bb Lydian modes in measures 11 and 15.
Structuring an Extended Solo

Constructing an extended solo can be compared to telling a good story. First, there’s the opening scene that sucks you in. Then there is the plot development. Plot twists come next, and the tale is brought to a climax and a satisfying conclusion. Let’s look at how this storytelling process works in the solo below, which spans four choruses of a reharmonized, 12-bar G minor blues.

First Chorus: Setting the Scene

The very first phrase can make or break a solo. A wise choice is to start simply so there will be room to develop your initial idea. The last thing you want to do is paint yourself into a corner. With a simple but interesting collection of three notes (A, D, and F), the first phrase in measure 1 sets the scene. Establishing a rhythmic theme that is carried out in measures 3, 5, and 7, the opening phrase also introduces the Dorian tonality that runs through almost the entire chorus: G Dorian in measures 1–4 and 11–12, and C Dorian in measures 5–8. (Eb Lydian and D Phrygian dominant are used in measures 9 and 10, respectively.)

Second Chorus: Developing the Plot

Once the scene has been set, it's time to develop the plot. Think of this second part of the solo as melody embellishment. Staying with the same scales used in the first chorus, the second chorus quotes sections of the original melody (measures 13, 16, 17, and 18), embellishing them with neighboring tones in steadily escalating syncopated rhythms. As the section progresses, more licks and fills are added, increasing the intensity and building a sense of anticipation.

Third Chorus: The Turning Point

Every good story has a turning point, and a good solo does too. Like a song's bridge section, a turning point in a solo adds contrast and depth. The third chorus here shatters the melancholy mood with a few aggressive G blues-scale licks, followed by a series of increasingly complex, rhythmically displaced melodic motifs. Culminating in a final burning run, the latter half of the chorus stokes the fire for the final payoff.

Fourth Chorus: The Exciting Conclusion

All bets have been placed and you’re on the homeward stretch. In this crucial part of the solo, many players fall short of the finish line, having exhausted their supply of dazzling licks and speedy runs. Remember, pacing and planning are essential! If you look back at the first measure of each chorus you'll notice an ongoing theme: the opening note is A—9th of the key. The fourth chorus follows suit but goes a step further by cycling the three notes of the opening phrase (A, E, and D) in a show-stopping display of progressively accelerating rhythms. Now that the fat lady has sung, the solo gradually cools down, revisiting some of the motifs of the third chorus and restating sections of the main melody until finally going out on the unifying A note.
Guitar Notation Legend

Guitar Music can be notated three different ways: on a musical staff, in tablature, and in rhythm slashes.

**RHYTHM SLASHES** are written above the staff. Strum chords in the rhythm indicated. Use the chord diagrams found at the top of the first page of the transcription for the appropriate chord voicings. Round noteheads indicate single notes.

**THE MUSICAL STAFF** shows pitches and rhythms and is divided by bar lines into measures. Pitches are named after the first seven letters of the alphabet.

**TABLATURE** graphically represents the guitar fingerboard. Each horizontal line represents a string, and each number represents a fret.

**HALF-STEP BEND:** Strike the note and bend up 1/2 step.

**WHOLE-STEP BEND:** Strike the note and bend up one step.

**GRACE NOTE BEND:** Strike the note and immediately bend up as indicated.

**SLIGHT (MICROTONE) BEND:** Strike the note and bend up 1/4 step.

**BEND AND RELEASE:** Strike the note and bend up as indicated, then release back to the original note. Only the first note is struck.

**PRE-BEND:** Bend the note as indicated, then strike it.

**VIBRATO:** The string is vibrated by rapidly bending and releasing the note with the fretting hand.

**WIDE VIBRATO:** The pitch is varied to a greater degree by vibrating with the fretting hand.

**HAMMER-ON:** Strike the first (lower) note with one finger. Then sound the higher note (on the same string) with another finger by letting it without picking.

**PULL-OFF:** Place both fingers on the notes to be sounded. Strike the first note and without picking, pull the finger off to sound the second (lower) note.

**LEGATO SLIDE:** Strike the first note and then slide the same fret-hand finger up or down to the second note. The second note is struck.

**SHIFT SLIDE:** Same as legato slide, except the second note is struck.

**TRILL:** Very rapidly alternate between the notes indicated by continuously hammering on and pulling off.

**TAPPING:** Hammer ("tap") the fret indicated with the pick-hand index or middle finger and pull off to the note fretted by the fret hand.

**NATURAL HARMONIC:** Strike the note while the fret-hand lightly touches the string directly over the fret indicated.

**PINCH HARMONIC:** The note is fretted normally and a harmonic is produced by adding the edge of the thumb or the tip of the index finger of the pick hand to the normal pick attack.

**PICK SCRAPER:** The edge of the pick is rubbed down (or up) the string, producing a scratchy sound.

**MOFFLED STRINGS:** A percussive sound is produced by laying the fret hand across the string(s) without depressing, and striking them with the pick hand.

**PALM MUTING:** The note is partially muted by the pick hand lightly touching the strings just before the bridge.

**RAKE:** Drag the pick across the strings indicated with a single motion.

**TREMOLO PICKING:** The note is picked as rapidly and continuously as possible.

**VIBRATO BAR DIVE AND RETURN:** The pitch of the note or chord is dropped a specified number of steps (in rhythm) then returned to the original pitch.

**VIBRATO BAR SCOOP:** Depress the bar just before striking the note, then quickly release the bar.

**VIBRATO BAR DIP:** Strike the note and then immediately drop a specified number of steps, then release back to the original pitch.
About the Author

A veteran of over 6,000 performances and recording sessions worldwide, Tom Kolb has found himself in just about every musical situation imaginable. He currently maintains a busy schedule of live dates and recording sessions with a wide variety of artists (including his own band, the Gurus) in the Los Angeles area and abroad.

An instructor at the world-famous Musicians Institute (G.I.T.) since 1989, Kolb is also the author of the instructional books Modes for Guitar and Classic Rock: Workshop Series (Musicians Institute Press). He has also written countless magazine articles and currently holds position as an associate editor and monthly columnist for Guitar One magazine.

In addition to his playing and writing, Kolb is the featured artist on many Star Licks and Hal Leonard instructional videos, including Fender Stratocaster Greats, Advanced Chords and Rhythms, Modes for Lead Guitar, the Starter Series, '60s Psychedelic Guitar, 50 Licks: Rock Style, Best of Lennon and McCartney for Electric Guitar, Famous Rock Guitar Riffs and Solos, and the Hal Leonard Guitar Method.

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Musicians

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