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# SPEED RIFFS AND REPEATING LICKS

What do the solos in “Stairway to Heaven,” “Hotel California,” and “Sultans of Swing” have in common? Besides showcasing expert lead work, these solos incorporate some of the most memorable speed and repeating licks ever played. But now it’s your turn to shine. In this lesson, you’ll learn to play a variety of speed riffs and repeating licks based around a blues-rock feel. We’ll also cover how you can transpose these ideas to any key, and we’ll provide beneficial practice suggestions as well. Get your fingers ready for a workout!

## Sizzling Speed Riffs

This blues-rock speed riff adds a Southern flavor to the mix. Listen to how this sizzling riff makes use of both A Major Pentatonic (A–B–C#–E–F#) and A Minor Pentatonic (A–C–D–E–G) scales. Make sure the hammer-ons and pull-offs are performed evenly in terms of *tempo* (speed) and *dynamics* (loudness and softness). We’ll play it first slowly and then up to tempo.

H = Hammer-on  
P = Pull-off

Ex. 1

T  
A  
B

H H H P P P P H

3 4 2 4 4 4 5 4 2 4 2 2 4 2 3 4 2 2 (2) (0)

2 3 1 3 1 3 3 4 3 1 3 1 1 3 1 2 3 1 1 0

Now, let’s get our rhythmic juices flowing with this funky blues-rock speed riff in C# Major. Again, we’ll play it slowly at first and then up to speed. Watch the quarter-step bends on beat 3. Bends are indicated with an arrow and a “1” for a whole-step bend, “½” for a half-step bend, and “¼” for a quarter-step bend.

Ex. 2

T  
A  
B

P P ¼ ¼ H

4 4 7 6 4 6 4 6 4 (4) 6 4 6

1 4 3 1 3 1 3 1 3 1 3

## Using the Dominant 7 Sharp-9 Chord

Let's work around the 7 sharp-9 chord using riffs, or fills. Check out the following blues funk example in C. In this example, we are alternating riffs with our 5th-string root C7#9 chord. The first riff (beats 3 and 4 of bar 1) includes the low notes G, B $\flat$ , and C. The second riff (beats 3 and 4 of bar 2) features a hammer-on and pull-off phrase on the 4th string. The third riff (beats 3 and 4 of bar 3 and all of bar 4) is longer, shadowing the first riff and including some nice chromatics. Be sure to watch the video for a step-by-step breakdown of this example.

Ex.  
73

C7#9 Riff 1 - - - - - C7#9 Riff 2 - - - - -

3

H P P

T	4	4	x	x	x	4	4	4	4	x	x	x	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
A	3	3	x	x	x	3	3	3	3	x	x	x	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
B	3	3	x	x	x	3	3	3	3	x	x	x	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
							3	1	3	1											

3 C7#9 Riff 3 - - - - - C7#9

T	4	4	x	x	x	4	4														
A	3	3	x	x	x	3	3														
B	3	3	x	x	x	3	3														
							3	1	3	1	3	0	1	2	3	0	1	2			

## Adding Tension to the V Chord

Besides sounding great in conjunction with riffs or fills, the 7 sharp-9 chord is also a remarkable tension chord. It can be substituted as the V chord in a key to produce greater tension than a regular dominant chord. For instance, an E7#9 chord can be used as the V chord in the key of A. To the right are diagrams for the V, or tension, chord E7#9 going to our I, or resolution, chord A7.

Ex.  
74

E7#9<sup>(V)</sup> A7<sup>(I)</sup>

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

Now, let's apply this concept to a different key. In the key of G, you can use a D7#9 as your V chord and G7 as your I chord.

Ex.  
75

D7#9<sup>(V)</sup> G7<sup>(I)</sup>

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