

Bending Scales

BY THADDEUS HOGARTH

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED HOW PLAYERS such as Robben Ford, Oz Noy, Joe Bonamassa, and Larry Carlton execute their lines in such a fluid way, with great time and silky soulfulness, while bending strings at the same time? Well, here is a method that, when practiced from the ground up, will help you to incorporate some fluid bends in your blues, soul, rock, or funk solos.

We will work with the minor pentatonic scale as the foundation for an exciting method for incorporating signature bends into your playing. We do this by taking certain degrees of this scale and bending (from a fretted note to a target note) to create new scales that can spice up our soloing lines. When scales are practiced in this way as a routine, with incorporated bends and using a metronome, in time they become the foundation and vocabulary for your improvisation ideas and executing them on the fly eventually becomes second nature.

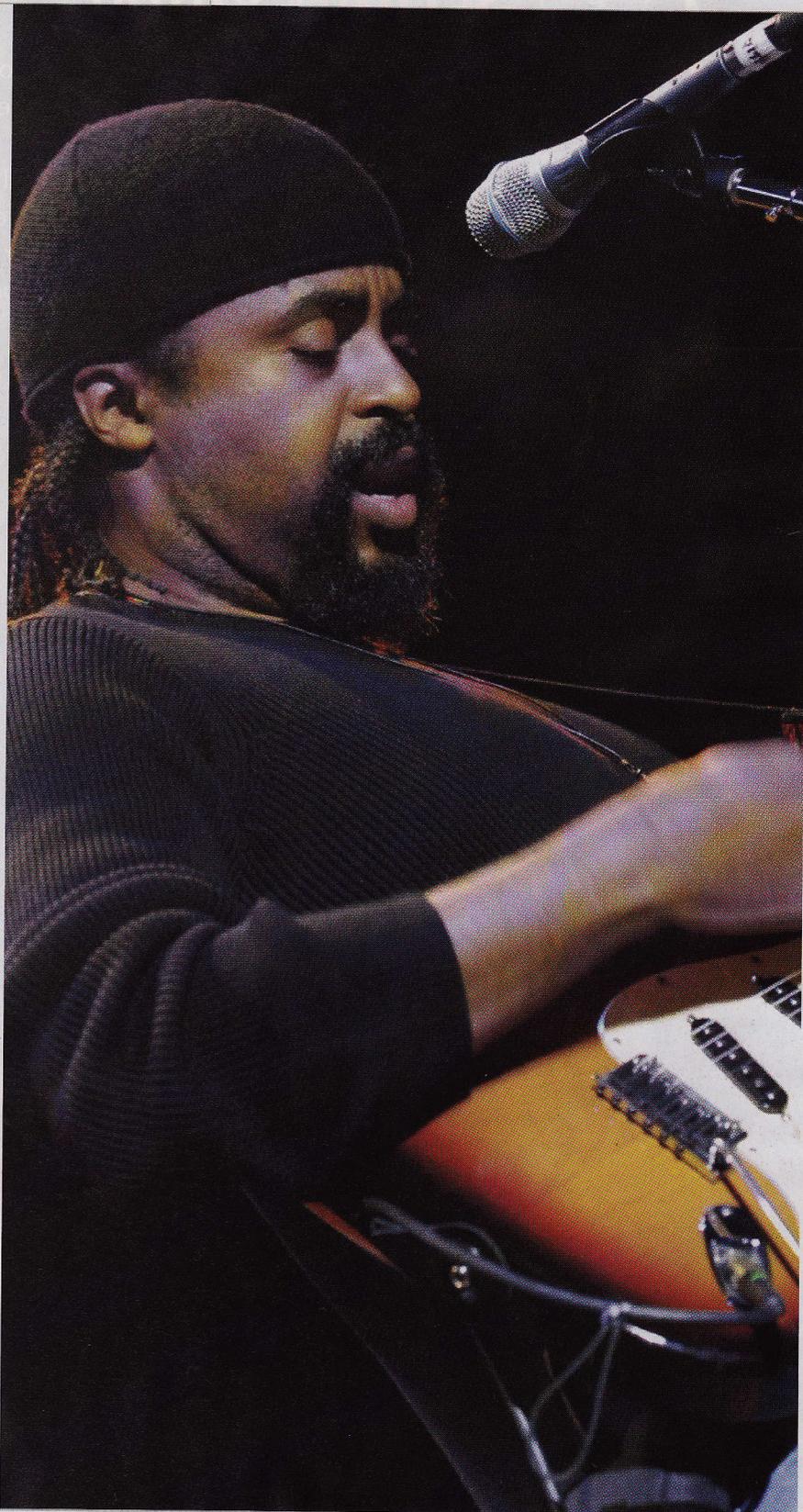
Before we start, here are some string-bending basics that you'll want to keep in mind:

1) For the most part, bend the top three (G, B, and E) strings by pushing upwards against the fretboard toward the ceiling, essentially straightening your fingers.

2) For the bottom 3 strings (4, 5, and 6), pull them against the fretboard down towards the floor, essentially curling your fingers.

3) Always bend with as many fingers as you have available. Use your pinky, supported by all other fingers when bending over larger intervals.

You should not feel any discomfort. Be aware of your personal physical limits to avoid any injury. If you are having difficulty



with bends, try a lighter gauge string.

Let's begin by learning or reviewing all positions of the minor pentatonic. Many of us already know the scale in **Ex. 1**, but it's important to know it *really* well. Now we are going to take the basic pentatonic scale and, in **Ex. 2**, create a blues scale using a bend from the 4th degree to the $\flat 5$ degree. Lines from this scale are useful over minor blues progressions or grooves, or dominant 7 grooves or progressions.

Go for a fluid sound on your bends.

When ascending, play degree 4 then bend the note and attack it again at the top of the bend ($\flat 5$) to ensure good intonation and time. Descending, you should do a bend release, by fretting but not playing the note (4) until you have bent it to the target note ($\flat 5$) then releasing and letting it slide down to the 4 as you attack. As you become more comfortable with the time and intonation, you need not attack the target note either ascending or descending. This will give you a silky scoop up and down from the note.

You can check intonation against a fretted $\flat 5$ to make sure you are not over-bending.

Once that feels comfortable, try all the positions of this scale in **Examples 3a-3e**. The roots for a G minor pentatonic/G blues scale are circled and the scale degrees you bend to are hollow. By using this as your practice guide, you should eventually be able to start on any note, any string, and—making that note a root—play this bending blues scale to the highest and lowest degree without changing position.

Ex. 1 G Pentatonic

Ex. 2 G Pentatonic w/4 \rightarrow $\flat 5$ Bend

Ex. 3a

Ex. 3b

Ex. 3c

Ex. 3d

Ex. 3e

Ex. 4 Gm7 or G7

Ex. 5 Gm7 or G7

After memorizing this scale, try writing some lines or licks using it in context. You can use **Examples 4** through **7** as jumping-off points.

Now that you have a handle on the concept of using the pentatonic scale as the foundation for this method, here is another scale created from bending a different degree of the pentatonic. I call this scale the $\flat 3$ -3 scale. Here we take the flat 3 and bend up to the natural 3. Try it both ascending (**Ex. 8**) and descending (**Ex. 9**). This creates a sound that is useful over progressions or grooves that have a dominant 7th flavor, but the simplicity of the scale makes it very accessible to the listener. Like we did before, work through all the positions of this scale, following the diagrams in **Examples 10a-10e**.

Ex. 6 Gm7 or G7

Ex. 7 Gm7 or G7

Ex. 8

Ex. 9

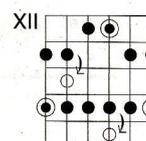
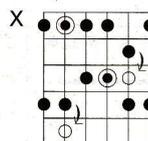
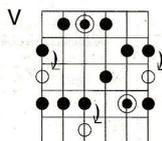
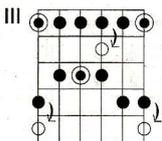
Ex. 10a

Ex. 10b

Ex. 10c

Ex. 10d

Ex. 10e



Check out **Examples 11** through **15** using this scale in context. With this scale you also have the option to use $\flat 3$ as a grace note, fretted momentarily only to execute the bend.

There are many more of these scales built from bending the degrees of the pentatonic. If you really want to take things to another level, try combining these two scales! 

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Ex. 11

G7

Ex. 12

G7

Share Your Chops!

YouTube yourself playing this lesson, post the link at the GP forum, and you may end up in the magazine.

guitarplayer.com

Ex. 13

G7

Ex. 14

G7

Ex. 15

G7