

John Petrucci *Wild Stringdom*

Warming up, Part 1

Getting Ready to Get Busy



Hi everyone! Right off the bat, let me say that I truly appreciate all the positive feedback I've gotten from you regarding this column during my leave of absence. It feels great to be back at Guitar World.--and now on Guitar World Online. And now that I'll be reprising the column, I thought I'd address some of the topics you wrote to me about.

In the past, I focused on specific aspects of developing one's technique and harmonic knowledge, so this time around I want to cover some fundamental aspects of guitar playing that are just as important as the flashy stuff. For example, there is a lot of information available on how to strengthen one's chops, but very little on how to warm up properly. And though everyone knows that you need to practice to become a better player, very few methods teach you the correct way to practice-how to achieve optimum results in the shortest amount of time. After all, in any discipline, be it music, art or athletics, you have to have the fundamentals wired. If you don't, anything you learn beyond that will just be added onto a shaky foundation.

I feel that it's absolutely essential to warm up before playing a gig or a session! Would a sprinter run a 100-yard dash before stretching? Would a football player subject his body to the grueling sport week after week without being totally limber and loose before every game? No way! The risk of injury-pulling or tearing a muscle (or worse)-is too great.

The same thing applies to playing the guitar. Believe it or not, playing long, intricate or fast passages on the guitar can be very stressful on the tendons and ligaments in your hands. The last thing you want to do is hurt your hands-just ask some of the guitarists whose careers have been cut short by tendonitis.

If my hands are cold or stiff, I find that playing chords-particularly those that require some stretching-really loosens them up. Once my hands are a bit more

limber, I'll play some single-note exercises that are designed to synchronize the left and right hands.

Here's one stretching exercise that I use to warm up before every gig: I start out by playing the B7sus4/E chord shape in the 14th position, as shown in FIGURE 1. Then I simply move that shape down the neck, arpeggiating it in each position I stop at. I start the exercise in the higher register of the neck because the frets are closer together, which makes the stretches more manageable at first. As you move down the neck, the frets are spaced further and further apart, making the chords harder to finger. This enables the left hand to gently and gradually stretch out. FIGURE 2 depicts the whole exercise. Let every note ring out as clearly as possible-no buzzes allowed!

Notice that I don't move the chords down chromatically. Rather, I shift the 7sus4 shape to positions where the voicing sounds good to my ears. I also let the open low E string ring under each chord, which creates a cool modal sound.

To make my warm-ups sound more interesting and musical, I'll often use different chord shapes. One that I particularly like is the Bmadd9 voicing found in FIGURE 3. I use this minor(add9) shape in the warm-up depicted in FIGURE 4, which is very similar to FIGURE 2, but with one twist: in addition to the low E pedal, I add the open high E note to each voicing as well (doing this creates some lush, exotic voicings). You'll have to arch your 1st and 2nd fingers in order to execute the chords cleanly.

FIGURE 1

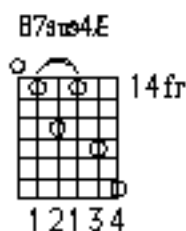
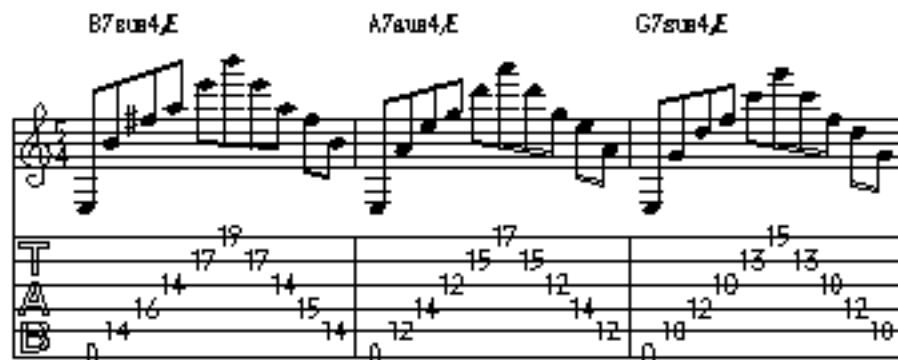




FIGURE 2



AUDIO FILES FIGURE 2 A
[AIFF Audio File](#) (Macintosh)
[WAVE Audio File](#) (Windows) 

AUDIO FILES FIGURE 2 B
[AIFF Audio File](#) (Macintosh)
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F#7sus4,E E7sus4 D7sus4,E C#7sus4,E

FIGURE 3

FIGURE 4

B7sus4,E

Bm add9,E

14 fr
1 3 4 2

Bm add9,E Am add9,E

AUDIO FILES FIGURE 4 A

[AIFF Audio File](#) (Macintosh)

[WAVE Audio File](#) (Windows) 

AUDIO FILES FIGURE 4 B

[AIFF Audio File](#) (Macintosh)

[WAVE Audio File](#) (Windows) 

Gm9,E F#m9,E Em add9 Dm add9,E

Remember, warming up is not about chops! Don't blaze your way through these exercises-you'll only defeat the purpose. Concentrate on playing each chord slowly and cleanly, and don't force the stretches! Your goal is to limber your left hand up, not hurt it. I'll show you some more warm-up exercises next month. See you then!