



# Beyond Standard Pentatonics

By David Marriott, Jr.

When it comes to pentatonic, or five note, scales, most of us know the standard couple of pentatonic scales: the scale known commonly as major pentatonic, or 1-2-3-5-6, and the scale known commonly as minor pentatonic, or 1-b3-4-5-b7. These two pentatonic scales are the most commonly taught, learned and executed, but there are many other worlds of pentatonic scales that we can use.

The first and simplest way to access other pentatonic scales is to simply alter one note by a half step. For this example, let's use the major pentatonic scale and alter the fifth degree of the scale. If we were to raise the fifth degree – A in the key of C – we would have a scale of C-D-E-G-Bb, a scale that would work well over C dominant, or perhaps over an A Phrygian tonality. If we lower the fifth degree of the scale, we would have a scale of C-D-E-G-Ab, a scale that would work



DAVID MARRIOTT, JR. PHOTO BY DANIEL SHEEHAN

well over F melodic minor tonality, or perhaps over Ab major7 #5. Whatever your choice, the work involved in adding these simple variations to your vocabulary is minimal if you are already

familiar with the basic scale from which you are creating your variations.

Another way to connect with less used pentatonic scales is through the world music tradition. According to Wikipedia: Celtic folk music, Hungarian folk music, West African music, African American spirituals, Sami *joik* singing, children's song, the music of ancient Greece and the Greek traditional music and songs from Epirus, northwest Greece, music of southern Albania, folk songs of peoples of the Middle Volga area, the tuning of the Ethiopian *krar* and the Indonesian gamelan, Philippine Kulintang, Native American music, melodies of Korea, Laos, Thailand, Malaysia, Japan, China and Vietnam, Andean music, the Afro-Caribbean tradition, Polish highlanders from the Tatra Mountains and Western Impressionistic composers such as French composer Claude Debussy. These musical traditions have been finding their way into

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jazz improvisation since the 1950s, yet many jazz musicians are slow to investigate these genres and the techniques associated with them. Studying just one of these world music genres will certainly introduce you to pentatonic scales that you aren't familiar with, and that aren't extensively used in Western music.

Lastly, create your own pentatonic scales! It's just five notes, and you've got twelve in the chromatic scale, so choose away – make a game out of it and create a random scale, pulling de-

grees of the scale out of a hat, rolling some dice or having people randomly tell you numbers between one and twelve. Or labor over your instrument and some music paper and come up with something you really like and hear. Regardless of your approach, you will uncover some new sounds, I guarantee it!

There are many great resources out there for developing fluency with pentatonics, most notably Jerry Bergonzi's "Inside Improvisation: Pentatonics" and Ramon Ricker's "Pentatonic Scales

for Jazz Improvisation." If pentatonic scales are new to you, these are great places to start to understand functional uses of this type of scale. But if you've been wailing away using just the two basic pentatonic scales, it's time to get some more juice out of that fruit!

*Practice This! is an educational project organized by David M. Marriott, Jr. for Earshot Jazz. Each new lesson by a different local jazz artist is intended for students to learn from and for non-musician readers to gain insight into the craft of improvising.*

## IMPfest, from page 12

Don Byron, Ravi Coltrane, Uri Caine, Fred Hersch and Drew Gress. A shaper and a doer in New York, notably, Alessi founded and directs the School for Improvisational Music, the non-profit improvisational music workshop in Brooklyn. He is also on the jazz faculty at New York University.

Friday, May 11, 7:30pm

### Ted Poor, Tom Collier and Dan Dean with UW Jazz Students

### Operation ID

Saturday, May 12, 7:30pm

### Vu-Karpen Project Chemical Clock

IMPfest IV Friday and Saturday events include two UW faculty groups, with guest Ted Poor on drums, and two bands including a mix of current and former Improvised Music Project officers (also in emerging local groups and Table and Chairs groups on Wednesday and Thursday). This is one weekend in May with potential to make a big impact. Congratulations to the student organization and faculty adviser Cuong Vu.

*Free IMPFest events in week one at the UW School of Music: Garzone clinic on Thursday, May 3, 12:30pm, room 35, and Garzone saxophone only clinic on Saturday, May 5, 2pm, room 313. Week two: Alessi workshop and open rehearsal Tuesday, May 8, 12:30pm, room 35, and after party at Cafe Racer with Heatwarmer, Saturday, May 12.*

*Admission to the Saturday, May 11, concert is \$5 for students and seniors, \$10 general. Admission to all other concerts is by suggested donation. More information at [improvisedmusicproject.com](http://improvisedmusicproject.com).*

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