

Applying Harmonics

By Jason Kokoszka

Harmonics, with their bell-like tones, can add a special texture to the parts you play regardless of your chosen style. Guitarists and bassists—from Eddie Van Halen to Jaco Pastorius, from Lenny Breau to Les Claypool—have used this technique to great effect. In this issue, the focus will be on playing harmonics in a musical context. For an in-depth explanation of harmonics, check out the Theory Corner for an excerpt of Tobias Hurwitz’s book, *The Total Rock Guitarist*, available through Alfred Publishing.

Below is a solo guitar composition made up almost entirely of natural harmonics. Using a somewhat distorted or overdriven tone and picking near the bridge will help bring out the harmonics you play. Try using phrases from this piece of music in other contexts; it may give you some great ideas for using harmonics!

Guitar

The first four measures feature some rhythmic displacement and syncopation, which reappears in a slightly modified form at the end of the piece. Counting carefully here will make these measures easier to play. In measure 10, notice that there are fretted double-stops. These are the only fretted notes in the entire piece.

Finally, look out for harmonics played in multiple positions. For example, it is possible to play two E-note harmonics with the same pitch at the 5th fret of the 6th string or at the 7th fret of the 5th string. In cases like this, the decision to use one position over another is based on which position is closer to the notes that follow. Practice this and soon you’ll be impressing your friends with your new-found harmonics skills!



The musical notation consists of a treble clef staff in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation includes natural harmonics indicated by diamond symbols on a dashed line. Below the staff are guitar-specific notations for the Treble (T), Acoustic (A), and Bass (B) staves, showing fret numbers and natural harmonics.

5 *8va*-----

1 1 1 1 | 1 3 3 | 1 | 3 3 | 1 1 1 1 | 1 3 3 | 3 | 1 4

Harm.-----

5 | 5 5 5 (5) | 5 7 7 | 5 7 7 | 5 5 5 (5) | 5 7 7 | 5 7 7 | 7 12 | 7

T
A
B

9 *8va*-----

1 1 4 1 4 | 2 2 | 1 1 4 1 4 1 3 | 1 3 3 3 | 1 1 1 4

Harm.-----

9 | 4 3 3 | 7 5 7 7 7 7 7 7 | 7 12 7 | 7 12 7 | 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 12

T
A
B

13

1 1 1 1 1 1 | 1 1 1 1 1 1 | 1 1 1 4 1 4 | 1 4

Harm.-----

13 | 5 5 5 5 5 | 5 5 5 5 | 12 12 7 | 12

T
A
B

Conclusion

If you'd like more information on harmonics, be sure to read the Theory Corner section of this newsletter for some fantastic explanations and examples excerpted from Tobias Hurwitz's book, *The Total Rock Guitarist*, which can be ordered at www.guitarworkshop.com/books. In addition, be sure to check out his rock guitar lessons at www.WorkshopLive.com today!

To learn more about harmonics, guitarists should check out any rock, acoustic or blues lesson having to do with harmonics, which include technique-specific lessons as well as tuning lessons.

Bassists will enjoy the rock bass lessons "Introduction to Harmonics" and "Playing Chord Voicings with Harmonics," taught by Dave Overthrow.

Have fun experimenting with these new sounds—see you in June!